

Elisa Zocchi

THE SACRAMENTALITY OF THE WORLD
AND THE MYSTERY OF FREEDOM

Hans Urs von Balthasar,
Reader of Origen

ADAMANTIANA 16



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AND THE MYSTERY OF FREEDOM



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



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ELISA ZOCCHI

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Preface

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This work would have been much different without the months spent at the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family in Washington DC, where I had the opportunity to develop part of my research. The guidance, support, and encouragement of Prof. Rev. Paolo Prospero, without whom this research would have been impossible, have been and continue to be a precious gift. I extend my gratitude to Prof. Nicholas J. Healy and Prof. David C. Schindler for the conversations, and the time they dedicated to my thesis.

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friends in Gavirate, for their faithful presence and because “un paese ci vuole ...”; and to Elena, Paola, and Agnese, for always being there even from afar. I thank all my friends at the John Paul II Institute and Catholic University of America for the long days and nights in Mullen Library; especially Julia Bolzon and Suker Li for their undeserved friendship. This book has involved much travelling; a special thanks goes to all the old and new friends, too many to mention, who have offered me their sofas and attentions during my many days on the road. Finally, Gerard, thank you for having undertaken the difficult mission of editing the first draft of this work and loving me throughout a PhD, a long-distance relationship, an international marriage, two immigration processes, and innumerable relocations. You made it all worth it.

Chicago, Spring 2020

Elisa Zocchi

*These things ('the former things') have 'passed away',
for the One who sits upon the throne says, 'Behold, I make all things new'.*

*Not: Behold, I make a totally new set of things,
but: Behold, I refashion and renew all that is.*

*And our faith tells us that this 'new' reality was already present in the 'old',
in our drama, though in a hidden form.*

*It is true to say, of course, of this process of re-creation,
that 'God will wipe away every tear from their eyes,
and death shall be no more,*

*neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more,
for the former things have passed away'.*

*And it is also true, as Paul says, that 'this slight momentary affliction
is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison'.*

*But nonetheless it is the tears that actually elicits the wiping away:
it is the slightly momentary affliction that prepares and
actually brings about the weight of glory.*

(Hans Urs von Balthasar, Theo-Drama 4)

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INTRODUCTION

Hans Urs von Balthasar's attitude toward the Church Fathers is usually presented as utterly positive. Nor is this unreasonable: his words concerning the first thinkers of Christian doctrine are mainly appreciative; he dedicated many books, essays, and chapters to their legacy, and he never hid a deep love for their thought and lives. A research project addressing Origen's presence in the thought of Balthasar might therefore seem mainly a task of collecting positive quotations. But the truth is more complicated. Against this understanding, Edward T. Oakes insists that it is a mistake to think of Balthasar's approach to the Fathers as an uncritical general appreciation.¹ His argument is based on Balthasar's criticism in some early essays, where the Fathers are not invoked as the solution to each and every problem, but as a host of possible interlocutors who, like any other, require critical engagement. Following Oakes suggestion, I will present Balthasar's attitude toward Origen as dynamic and multifaceted. I maintain that his attitude can be schematically understood with the help of five categories: silence, critique, enthusiasm, appreciation, and inspiration. To explain and approach each category, I draw a correspondence between it, and a certain work (or works) within Balthasar's corpus. Silence: *Geist und Feuer*. Here Balthasar comments on a selection of Origenian texts, but remains conspicuously silent on certain topics. Critique: *Wendung nach Osten; Patristik, Scholastik und wir*. Here Balthasar presents his critiques of certain tendencies in Origen's thought. Enthusiasm: *Le Mystérion d'Origène*. This essay is the best example of Balthasar's loving ressourcement of Origen. Appreciation: *Herrlichkeit; Theodramatik*. In his major theological works Balthasar shows his scrupulous appreciation of Origen's thought, assimilating certain of the Alexandrian's ideas in a mature way. Inspiration: *Was dürfen wir hoffen?* In his last works on eschatology Balthasar is evidently inspired by Origen, without, however, directly following him.

Demonstrating Balthasar's multifaceted attitude toward Origen, against the charge of uncritical retrieval, is the first aim of this research, what I call the philological aim. The second aim is hermeneutical: to show that Balthasar's study of

1 OAKES, *Pattern of Redemption* 102–130. We use the appellation “Fathers of the Church” in a broad sense; Origen himself is not officially denominated as such by the Catholic Church, but his contribution to theology and doctrine has been broadly acknowledged by many recent theological and ecclesiastical authorities. On this I follow ΦÉΔΟΥ, *Fathers of the Church* 11–16.

Origen was not a disinterested, ahistorical reading, but connected to issues facing 20th-century Catholic theology. The third aim is theoretical: to present some examples of continuity and discontinuity between Origen's doctrines and Balthasar's assimilation thereof, as opposed to the idea of a sterile *ressourcement*. To present this third aim in its totality would require a greater theological perspective than the scope of this book allows; it is my hope that, building on my realization of the first and the second aims, other scholars might expand upon the third. The present research enacts a continuous oscillation between (a) the analysis of formal questions about Balthasar's use of the Fathers, and (b) reflections on his assimilation of Patristic content. The object of research itself imposes this methodology: Balthasar reflects on the role played by the Fathers in theology, while also assimilating some of their concrete theological achievements into his own project. The first aim has scarcely been addressed by scholars, who tend only to present Balthasar's positive evaluation of the Fathers. The second aim has never been the object of a scholarly work, despite being hinted at in general considerations.

Before delving into the investigation per se, it is necessary to face a common critique of Balthasar's approach, specifically regarding what I have called the "hermeneutical" aim. Is it legitimate to "use" authors of the past for the purpose of coping with present issues, or, even more poignantly, for shaping one's own theoretical system (third aim)? Is this unwarranted anachronism? We come here to the *vexata questio* of any historical reception, of any interpretation and use of an author in the context of a specific time and place. The question is often posed against Balthasar in an antagonistic fashion, especially following recent presentations of his thought as aggressive and characterized by an arrogant God's-eye attitude.² Thomas Böhm, for example, is strongly critical of Balthasar's "ahistorical" method, accusing him of misunderstanding Origen's Logos theology.³

Two points can be underlined. First, Balthasar was not a naïve, hurried reader, as many nowadays mischaracterize him. He knew Greek (indeed better than de Lubac, who is curiously deemed less controversial on this issue) and had a broad, well-rounded knowledge of Origen's works. None of these works is overlooked in *Spirit and Fire*; neither are they absent from his many personal notes on Origen. Secondly, Balthasar was engaged in a lively debate with contemporary scholars: his notes contain many pages on Harnack, Cadiou, de Faye, Koch, Völker, Lieske, etc. Certainly, Balthasar underlines some aspects and topics more than others, but this is not atypical. Indeed, as I will show, there is a precise context alongside which Balthasar's account of Origen must be read: specifically vis-à-vis problems/questions emerging in school-theology and the Catholic Church in the first half of the 20th century, primarily in France and Germany during the 1920's. Without

2 KILBY, Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction.

3 BÖHM, Deutung der Kirchenväter 64–75.

the Church and theology of these years in mind, no understanding of Balthasar's intention is possible, or acceptable. He is not interested in simply repeating Origen's doctrine, nor in providing the most accurate interpretation of each part and particle of his thought. His goal was rather to reach what he calls the "living face" of Origen, that "still makes sense today."

A second problem arises here: does Balthasar force Origen to say something the Alexandrian would never have wanted? Is he twisting Origen to fit his purposes? In response, I would say that Balthasar's approach resembles the work of the farmer who, without having planted his own seeds, can still, in the right season, harvest ripe grain. He does not always focus on the roots of the grain with a technical eye, which might be criticized, but what Balthasar *does* see is the splendour of a grain that yields good fruit. He recognizes that this fruit can be refined, milled, and put to use in a new context—the season of sowing has passed, but a new spring awaits. For Balthasar, reading the Fathers is therefore not *only* about retrieval and preservation:

Preservation and translation could not be the whole task. The tree of tradition must put forth new branches; why should the one who gives form to what has been handed down from the past never do anything more than express his own thought through other people's voice? (...) How much in theology still needs to be given a new form, in order to lead today's man anew to the most vital dimension of God, of Christ, of the Church!⁴ The greatest figures of Christian salvation history are honoured only by the one who does today what they did then, or what they would have done if they had lived today.⁵

In this sense, Balthasar is neither simply a historian, nor simply a theologian. He is, however, a historian in being a theologian, and a theologian in being a historian; in the same way, Origen himself was an exegete because of his being a theologian, and a theologian because of his being an exegete. Or, if we want to push the parallel even further, we could say that both were philosophers because of their being Christian; Christian because of their being philosophers.

4 MW 15. ZSW 14: "Aber Bewahren und Übertragen durfte nicht alles sein. Der Baum der Tradition muss neue Zweige ansetzen; warum sollte der Gestalter des überlieferten Gutes nur immer durch fremde Stimme das Eigene äußern? (...) Wie viel an Theologie wäre neu zu gestalten, um den Menschen von heute neu an das Lebendigste Gottes, Christi, der Kirche heranzuführen!"

5 RB 34. SB 22: "Nur der ehrt die Größten der christlichen Heilsgeschichte, der heute das tut, was sie damals getan, oder was sie täten, wenn sie heute lebten."

SECTION 1: ORIGEN AND THE 20TH CENTURY

I. Balthasar among Many: Origen's Reception

1. The many "essences" of Origen

In his catechesis on the Church Fathers, Benedict XVI dedicated two days (25 April and 2 May 2007) to Origen of Alexandria. The Pope Emeritus called Origen a "determining figure of the whole development of Christian thought", "author of an irreversible turn in theology", and exemplary of "a perfect symbiosis of theology and exegesis", finally inviting theologians to engage with the teaching of this "great master of faith". The interest in Origen in the Catholic theological world can be traced back many years before this official papal invitation. Jean Daniélou, Karl and Hugo Rahner, Henri de Lubac, and Hans Urs von Balthasar, together with the most relevant contemporary Catholic theologians, would surely have endorsed the words of Benedict XVI. They dedicated years of their life to the study of the Alexandrian, publishing numerous essays and books on his life and works. Their writings, despite having often been criticized for lacking philological accuracy, and daring to advance loose and novel interpretations, must be acknowledged as milestones not only in Origen's reception history, but also in the permeation of patristic thought into contemporary theological and philosophical discourse.

The interest of these theologians was piqued at a particularly favourable time of classical scholarship on Origen. In the first half of the century, many scholars were publishing books featuring bold claims and proposing innovative perspectives on the exegesis of Origen. Somehow, each author proposed a new "essence" of Origen, a reading informed by one specific element of his doctrine. The 20th century seems to have been the century of the "true essence" of Origen: the quest for general comprehension was replaced by many particular interpretations, each proposing to "unlock" the Alexandrian. It is important to introduce those who advanced these interpretations shortly, not only because many of these names will emerge throughout the research, but also to help us understand that, when it came to the peculiar problems of 20th century theology and spirituality, Balthasar was engaged with more voices than Origen's. In fact, he consciously situated himself among other interpreters, while yet remaining distinct in his aims

and, consequently, his results.¹ In 20th century scholarship two totally divergent lines of interpretation can be tracked. On one side, scholars like Harnack, de Faye, Koch (and later on von Campenhausen) tended to think of Origen as a threat to ecclesiastical authority in light of his being mainly a Greek philosopher. On the other side, Völker, Lieske, Daniélou (and later on Crouzel, Harl, and Gruber) accused these scholars of de-Christianizing Origen, falsely construing his Christianity as an eclectic Neoplatonism.

One significant interpretation of Origen was generated by the reading of Adolf von Harnack, a Protestant theologian active in the first half of the century. For Harnack, early Christianity was a “religion of the heart” that suffered decomposition via the infiltration of Hellenism.² In the first volume of his *Dogmengeschichte*, he situates Origen’s thought in the framework of cosmological speculation. This sparked a divergent attitude towards the Alexandrian; one that classified him as a Greek philosopher rather than a Christian theologian. For Harnack, the true essence of Origen was Hellenism, not Christianity. The rationale behind this conclusion was his sense of a strong separation between reason (philosophy) and spirituality (Christianity). If Christianity is exclusively about the heart, as Harnack proposes, then Origen’s attempt to study its “principles” and explain it with the tools offered by philosophy will appear un-Christian. Regarding the question of Origen’s contribution to theology, Balthasar deems Harnack’s evaluation to be wholly negative, amounting to “nothing or almost nothing. For Harnack Origen is the decisive importation of that what is worldly and Greek into the spirit of the Gospel from which the Catholic Church never again freed itself.”³ Support for this interpretation was implicitly given by the work of GCS at the Berlin Academy, whose editors (Koetschau, Klostermann, Preuschen, Baehrens, and Rauer), together with the founders Harnack and Mommsen, were more philologists than theologians.⁴

- 1 For a general overview on Origen’s scholarship in the first half of the 20th century see: MURILLO, *Revival of Origen Studies* 250–263; ALEXANDRE, *Redécouverte d’Origène* 51–93. I will focus here on the authors who published before or at the same time as Balthasar’s studies on Origen, i. e. scholars that Balthasar quotes in his books or in his personal notes on Origen.
- 2 VON HARNACK, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* (3 vols.); eng. trans.: *History of Dogma* (7 vols.). On this, see especially LUTZ-BACHMANN, *Hellenisierung des Christentums* 77–98.
- 3 SF 5. GF 18: “Nichts oder fast nichts, lautet Harnacks bekannte Antwort. Origenes ist für ihn die entscheidende Importation des Weltlich-Griechischen in den Geist des Evangeliums, von der die katholische Kirche sich niemals mehr befreit hat.”
- 4 In 1891 von Harnack, together with Theodor Mommsen, began the immense work of publishing critical editions of Greek Christian authors: *Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller*, known (and from here on mentioned) as GCS. It was first published in Leipzig by the Royal Prussian Academy, then in Berlin by Berlin-Brandenburg Academy, and today

Scholars who diminish or ignore Origen's theological statements about the Trinity and Incarnation generally tend to follow this line of thought. Eugène de Faye, for instance, in the three volumes of his *Origen and His Work*, accepts Jerome's condemnation of Rufinus' translations. He therefore deals only with the fragments of *De principiis* and *Commentary on Romans*, excluding the majority of the Homilies and commentaries on biblical books.⁵ This, in turn, brings him to read Origen through a Neoplatonic and Gnostic (rather than Christian or mystical) framework. For de Faye, Origen's interpretation of Scripture is a façade, covering his philosophical system: Origen *speaks* in Christian terms, but *means* to defend Neoplatonic concepts. Similarly, Hal Koch, in his *Pronoia und Paideusis*, proposes an interpretation of Origen based on the pedagogical function of punishment.⁶ Considering Origen's doctrine of freedom, Koch deems punishment to be educational rather than vindictive. This educational aspect brings Koch to envision the Origenian cosmos as a progressive development towards self-realization, speaking openly of "pädagogischer Idealismus."⁷ In his private notes Balthasar often refers to Koch's thesis as "Hegelian" and close to a certain "*Idealismus*."⁸ From this hermeneutical line will then develop the thought of von Campenhausen, who sees in Origen a clear example of opposition between ecclesiastical authority and heterodox teachers.⁹ His theological system can hardly be considered Christian, given its Gnostic-Neoplatonic tendency. A similar line is taken by von Ivánka, who lauds Origen as the greatest Greek thinker of his age after Plotinus, but dismisses him as a Christian theologian.¹⁰

A watershed publication in Origenian scholarship was Völker's study on Origen's idea of perfection, *Das Vollkommenheitsideal des Origenes*.¹¹ Völker insisted on the importance of considering both Greek and Latin texts, when used with care. This was the first in a long series of works focussing on Origen's ethics and spirituality; an answer to the tendencies of the aforementioned authors. Völker sees Origen as an authentic mystic and ascetic: his entire life is read as an attempt to harmonize philosophy with the original Christian message. For this reason,

by de Gruyter Verlag (Berlin) with the title *Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte*, under the direction of Christoph Marksches.

5 DE FAYE, *Origène: sa vie, son œuvre, sa pensée*; eng. trans.: *Origen and His Work*.

6 KOCH, *Pronoia und Paideusis*.

7 *Ibid.* 74. 160. 325.

8 Balthasar's personal notes on Origen in preparation to SF. I express much gratitude to the Balthasar 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*.

9 VON CAMPENHAUSEN, *Griechische Kirchenväter*; eng. trans.: *The Fathers of the Greek Church* 59.

10 VON IVÁNKA, *Der geistige Ort von "peri archon"* 481–502. See the discussion on von Ivánka in CROUZEL, *Origène et la philosophie* 183 ff.

11 VÖLKER, *Das Vollkommenheitsideal des Origenes*.

Völker underlines Origen's fight against the passions, the role of Jesus as a moral example, and the relation between mysticism and prayer. Völker's book, however, while appreciated by many, had several weaknesses. It was criticized by, among others, Aloisius Lieske.¹² For Lieske, Origen's ethics stand on the sacraments alone, and therefore on a genuine doctrine of grace, which Völker fails to acknowledge. Lieske finds a flaw in Völker's reduction of mystical union to personal piety, which isolates it from the theological conception of reality being taken up into union with Christ. For Lieske, Völker's proposal of a Logos-theology is interpreted in a non-sacramental, Protestant manner. Against this reading, Lieske proposes a Logos-theology based on Origen's doctrine of grace, paying great attention to the sacraments. Hugo Rahner likewise criticized Völker for downplaying the catholic, sacramental, and fundamental aspect of Origen's doctrine of action and moral elevation. Rahner devotes several essays to this very topic, attacking Völker's presentation of a morality based on humanity per se.¹³ For Hugo Rahner, morality in Origen springs from God's grace, acting through the sacrament of baptism, and preserved by human acts. Baptism is the central mystery of divine grace: moral life flows only from its gift. Hugo's brother, Karl, was also interested in the Fathers.¹⁴ In 1932 he published *Le début d'une doctrine des cinq sens spirituels chez Origène*, initiating a revival of interest in the doctrine of the spiritual senses, followed by *Cœur de Jesus chez Origene?* (1934). In 1939 he edited and translated Viller's *La spiritualité des premiers siècles chrétiens* into German, with the title *Aszese und Mystik in der Väterzeit*.¹⁵ This was no simple translation: surpassing the 189 pages of the French edition, the German counts 322 pages. Karl Rahner, usually considered a speculative theologian, reveals here a deeply spiritual heart. The text begins by claiming that Origen, despite being a man of contradiction, never forgot the "golden rule" stated in *De principiis*: as believers, we should only accept that which does not contradict the Church and the Apostolic tradition. Despite focusing on his ascetism, Rahner argues that Origen's thought cannot be detached from his entire philosophical and theological system. Even Origen's mistakes have to be read through this lens: "A man who opened many new paths must be forgiven if he sometimes unintentionally took a wrong turn."¹⁶

12 LIESKE, *Die Theologie der Logosmystik bei Origenes*.

13 RAHNER, *Taufe und geistliches Leben* 205–223; *Gottesgeburt* 333–418; *Menschenbild des Origenes* 197–248. On Hugo Rahner and Origen see FÜRST, Hugo Rahner 220–238.

14 RAHNER, *Doctrine des cinq sens spirituels* 113–145; *Cœur de Jésus* 171–174; VILLER/RAHNER, *Aszese und Mystik in der Väterzeit*. On this see especially PERRONE, *I due fratelli Rahner e Origene* 69–96.

15 VILLER, *La spiritualité des premiers siècles chrétiens*.

16 RAHNER, *Aszese und Mystik* 74: "Einem Mann, der so viel neue Wege gebahnt hat, muss man verzeihen, dass er einige Male ungewollt fehlging."

Despite being published after Balthasar's works, it is important to mention Henri de Lubac's and Jean Daniélou's books on Origen. Henri de Lubac's *Histoire et Esprit* (1950) begins with a chapter presenting a long list of critics of Origen: de Lubac, however, defends the Alexandrian, focusing particularly on his exegetical work. His goal is to demonstrate that Christian allegory does not undermine the historical meaning of Scripture, as had been argued by many enemies of Origen's allegorical exegesis. De Lubac tries to show that "this whole symbolic construction, with its 'allegorizations,' its interiorizations, its spiritual consequence, does not evacuate history. It is not even indifferent to it, as Philo's allegorism could be. It is built, in principle, on the ground of history."¹⁷ Jean Daniélou's *Origène* similarly focuses on Origen's exegesis, presenting him as an example of fruitful typological reading of the Old Testament. These two books should be read in the context of Daniélou's article *Les orientations présentes de la pensée religieuse*, where he warns of a rupture between theology and ecclesial life. One of the necessary conditions for overcoming this rupture is, he argues, the "ressourcement" of the Bible, the Church Fathers, and the liturgy. The Fathers "are not just genuine witnesses to a past state of affairs; they are still the most timely nourishment for people today."¹⁸ In this spirit, the work of *Sources Chrétiennes* can be read as a theological counterbalance to the GCS. From this second group of thinkers rose, among others, Henri Crouzel who, like Völker, Daniélou, and de Lubac, shed light on Origen's apparent contradictions and, against the first group of scholars, insisted on the importance of the divine image, presenting Origen as a Christian mystic.¹⁹ In the appendix to his *Origène et la philosophie* (titled *Origène est-il un systématique?*) Crouzel deals with his systematizing adversaries, claiming that it is not possible, in the case of Origen, to speak of a "system." Origen's thought is rather dynamically alive and flexible: Origen the mystic and Origen the thinker must always be intimately united, never merely juxtaposed. Crouzel is even stronger against the first wave of thinkers: Lutheran scholars of Origen completely misunderstand him, because they see Christianity as a combination of Luther and Paul, omitting its strong Greek component. Crouzel is clear: Origen's thought is full of antitheses balanced in a particular equilibrium; once this is forgotten, his entire thought is destroyed.

Von Balthasar's reading of Origen clearly emerges out of this scholarly context. Particularly important for us is his review of Lieske's book, which he calls

17 DE LUBAC, *History and Spirit* 281. *Histoire et Esprit* 246: "Toute cette construction symbolique, avec ses 'allégorisations,' ses intériorisations, ses prolongements spirituels, n'évacue pas l'histoire. Elle n'y est même pas indifférente, comme pouvait l'être l'allégorisme de Philon. Elle s'édifie, en principe, sur son sol."

18 DANIÉLOU, *Orientations présentes* 9.

19 CROUZEL, *Théologie de l'image de Dieu; Connaissance mystique; Origène et la philosophie*.

a “complement to the present representations of Origen.”²⁰ Lieske does not completely change Völker’s “*individualistisch-mystisch*” approach, but completes it with a more articulated vision of grace. For Balthasar, Lieske is especially good at understanding that “one cannot approach the system of thought of Origen (*Denkgebäude des Origenes*) neither with pure philosophy nor with a pure theological-systematic mystic of experience (*Erlebnismystik*).”²¹ This review anticipates Balthasar’s reading of Origen, which will not focus exclusively on philosophy or Christianity, but rather on the coexistence of the two. Balthasar particularly appreciates Lieske’s work because, he notes, it is based on the “*realen Abbildlichkeit des geschöpflichen Geistes*.” This focus on the *Abbildlichkeit* of the Logos permeates Balthasar’s approach to Origen from beginning to end. It is interesting to note two elements in the conclusion of Balthasar’s review. First, what he thinks Lieske could have studied further: “Maybe [Lieske] could have given more attention to the historical situation in which Origen, coming after a long list of defenders of the immaculate Church, for the first time vigorously points to the imperfection of the visible Church – without however repudiating her as Church.”²² This note recalls the imperfection of the Church, and thus the imperfection of human being. This aspect of finitude and sinfulness will become pivotal for Balthasar. The same is true of the second element, suggested in the conclusion of the review. Here, Balthasar appreciates Lieske’s capacity for reading “the mortal fluctuation between Plotinus and Gospel, between impersonal and personal Logos, between theology of multiplicity and purely intentional unity of the divine persons, between visible and invisible Church, between truly sacramental symbolism and gnostic intellectualism. Exactly this underlying ambiguity (*grundlegende Zweideutigkeit*) becomes crystallized with the time in the entire Eastern Theology as the dazzling and the binding (*das Berückende und Verbindliche*). It would be desirable for the author to also show the great figures of the later time with his subtle *Gestaltungskunst*.”²³ This *grundlegende Zweideutigkeit* is fundamental to understanding Balthasar’s approach to Origen.

20 VON BALTHASAR, Review to Aloisius Lieske 150–151.

21 Ibid. 150.

22 Ibid. 151: “Vielleicht hätte noch stärker auf die historische Situation hingedeutet werden können, in der Origenes nach einer langer Reihe von Verteidigern der reinmakellosen Kirche zum ersten Male energisch auf die Mangelhaftigkeit der sichtbaren Kirche hinweist, ohne diese doch als Kirche zu verleugnen.”

23 Ibid.: “... das verderbliche Schillern und Schwanken zwischen Plotin und Evangelium, unpersönlichem und persönlichem Logos, Zeugungstheologie und rein intentionaler Einheit der göttlichen Personen, sichtbarer und unsichtbarer Kirche, echtem sakramentalen Symbolismus und gnostischem Intellektualismus. Gerade diese grundlegende Zweideutigkeit hat sich ja in der Folgezeit in der gesamten östlichen Theologie als das Berückende und Verbindliche erwiesen. Es wäre sehr zu wünschen, dass der Verfasser auch die grossen Gestalten dieser späteren Zeit mit seiner feinen Gestaltungskunst vorführe.”

2. Origen in Balthasar's Corpus

The decision to study Balthasar's account of Origen is supported by the many appearances of the Alexandrian in Balthasar's immense body of work, including two major works dedicated to Origen's thought. Chronologically, the first of these is the essay *Le Mystérion d'Origène*, published in *Recherche de Science Religieuse* in two parts in 1936–1937.²⁴ Balthasar's goal here is to constellate Origen's main theological ideas around the notion of mystery, using an historical rather than dogmatic method.²⁵ Origen's is not the Dionysian mystery, but the mystery of the incarnate God, the "mystery of the super-worldly Logos-WORD which fills the face of the earth only to be itself baptized in this fire."²⁶ After an introduction, the text is divided into three sections: *Mystery and theology*; *Mystery and incarnation*; *Mystery and sacrament*. The first section, through an explanation of the role of analogy and image in Origen, presents the general idea of mystery in Origen, developed as the veiledness and un-veiledness of the divine presence. The second, following Lieske, analyzes Origen's logos-theology and the "objective structure of the mystery" in the "three sensible manifestations of the Logos: Incarnation, Church, Scripture."²⁷ In the third section, Balthasar demonstrates the sacramental value of each of the three sensible manifestations of the Logos, affirming thereby the identity between the structure of the divine mystery and the structure of the sacraments. Finally, he examines the sacraments considered by Origen: baptism, Eucharist, and marriage.

Balthasar's second work on Origen is the anthology *Origenes: Geist und Feuer. Ein Aufbau aus seinen Schriften*, published in 1938. The anthology is divided into four sections: *Soul, Word, Spirit, God*. Each section is divided into many sub-sections, containing texts from almost every extant work of Origen, for a total of 1034 texts.²⁸ "In *Origenes: Geist und Feuer*", Balthasar wrote in retrospect, "we find the most logically consistent theology of the patristic age, with over one

24 The text will be edited again in 1957 without modifications, except for the title: *Parole et Mystère chez Origène*.

25 MO (I) 513; PMO 9: "La méthode est donc bien historique et non pas dogmatique."

26 SF 3. GF 14: "Hier züngelt und leckt die Flamme empor zum Mysterium des überweltlichen Logos-WORT, das der Erdkreis nur darum erfüllt, um ihn selbst in Seinem Feuer zu taufen." On the use of the term WORD capitalized, BALTHASAR, SF 22, explains that, "not wishing to coin a new word for the untranslatable term Logos, we decided to represent it simply with WORD. The capital letters remind us that our expression isn't intended as a translation but only as a reference to a more comprehensive concept."

27 MO (I) 558; PMO 72: "Mais revenons à la structure objective du Mystère. Nous avons distingué trois manifestations sensibles du Logos: Incarnation, Église, Écriture."

28 Excluded are obviously the texts Balthasar could not have known: *Peri Pascha*, *Dialogue with Heraclides*, and the new *Homilies on Psalms*, discovered after *Geist und Feuer*. Robert J. Daly included, in the English editions, some fragments of these texts in a final section,

thousand texts, purified from gnostic additions, an almost inexhaustible source of spiritual and theological stimulus for all later Christian thinking.”²⁹ This selection of texts “to which I could give no other title than *Origenes: Geist und Feuer*, was intended to allow his inner image to appear afresh in all its bold sublimity, and this book, which has received little recognition, seems to me even today the weightiest of all I have published.”³⁰ The reasons for this title are multiple, even if Balthasar never specifically explained his decision. Fire: the fire of divine love and divine redemption, the fire that burns and by destroying purifies the soul. But fire is also the warmth of the human soul, which becomes colder when it falls away from God, according to Origen’s peculiar cosmology. Spirit: God is for Origen spirit (*πνεύμα*), but spirit is also a constitutive part of the tripartite human nature (*νοῦς*). One striking passage from Origen is helpful in understanding the title of the anthology, even if Balthasar does not himself cite it to this end. In fragment 46 of the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, Origen explains the passage “my beloved is white and of fire”, noting that the bridegroom is “white” because he is true God, and “of fire”, because of his incarnation.³¹ Fire represents the embodied form of God in Christ (but, for Origen, in the Scriptures and the Church), while spirit is the purest form of the Father. This passage seems to justify Balthasar’s logocentric, but always Christological, perspective on Origen. A last important suggestion for understanding the title of the anthology is provided by Balthasar himself in his 1976 interview. On this occasion, Balthasar mentions the title *Geist und Feuer* as being representative of his entire spirit and mission as a theologian. He connects it with another title, *Glaubhaft ist nur Liebe*: “No truth of revelation, from the Trinity to the Cross to the Judgment, can speak of anything but the glory of the poor, divine love, which of course is something entirely other than what we take love to be here below; namely, spirit and fire. ‘He who nears me nears fire’.”³²

“Appendix: the Paschal mystery”, mainly from the *Peri Pascha*, discovered in 1941 in the Toura papyrus.

- 29 MW 26. ZSW 24: “In *Origenes, Geist und Feuer. Ein Aufbau aus seinen Schriften* ist mir über tausend Texten die konsequenteste Theologie der Väterzeit zum Wort Gottes auf-erweckt, gereinigt von gnostischen Zutaten, ein beinahe unerschöpflicher Quell spiritueller und theologischer Anregung für alles spätere christliche Denken.”
- 30 MW 11. ZSW 10–11: “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 gewichtsvollste von allem, was ich vorlegen konnte.”
- 31 Fr. 46 in: LIMONE/MORESCHINI, Origene: Sul Cantico dei Cantici 226.
- 32 Interview with Hans Urs von Balthasar 593. ZSW 131–132: “Keine Offenbarungswahrheit, von der Trinität bis zum Kreuz und bis zum Gericht, kann von etwas anderem reden als von der Herrlichkeit der armen göttlichen Liebe, die freilich etwas ganz anderes ist, als wir uns hier unter Liebe vorstellen. Nämlich Geist und Feuer. ‘Wer mir naht, der naht dem Feuer’.”

Spirit and Fire is, first and foremost, a description of the divine love for humanity. This statement of 1976 is an interpretative key that helps unlock the missionary rationale behind Balthasar's Origen anthology and, we could say, the Origenian project at large. Of course, Balthasar wanted readers to see Origen as a lover of the Word, but even more so a lover of divine love, of the loving divine initiative in the creation of life. Finally, Origen is present in the two monographs that Balthasar respectively dedicates to Maximus the Confessor (*Kosmische Liturgie. Maximus der Bekenner. Höhe und Krise des griechischen Weltbilds*, 1941) and Gregory of Nyssa (*Présence et Pensée. Essai sur la philosophie religieuse de Grégoire de Nysse*, 1942). Balthasar always refers to these works as part of a trilogy, together with *Le Msysterion d'Origène*, dating from his years in the Jesuit school of Lyon.

Balthasar's interest in the Fathers is also expressed elsewhere in his writings. In 1939 he wrote two essays wherein the Greek Fathers play a fundamental role. In the first, *Wendung nach Osten*, he shows his interest in the phenomenon of *ressourcement*: why, he asks, should we look back to the Fathers, and, in particular, the eastern Fathers? To answer this question, he traces a double stream of eastern spirituality flowing from Origen: the gnostic-spiritualistic stream, and the symbolic-liturgic stream. In this article he also explains that *Spirit and Fire* intends to reveal these two streams in Origen, whom he considers the source of both. *The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves* (1939) poses the same question in more polemical terms: why does theology feel the need to return to a previous era, whether Patristic or Scholastic? In this essay, Balthasar analyzes the essence of Christianity in these two ages, in connection with his own time. He is openly critical of nostalgic longing for lost golden ages, and censures specific modern fixations, such as eastern spiritualism, which becomes central when he turns to Origen.

Origen's presence in Balthasar's corpus is not limited to the specific works on the Fathers. Without considering the "minor" occurrences of Origen's name in Balthasar's immense body of work, it is here worth mentioning that Origen appears as the subject of elaborated considerations in two fundamental sections of Balthasar's speculative theology. In *The Glory of the Lord 1 – Seeing the Form* Balthasar focuses on the classic *topos* of the "spiritual senses", a doctrine whose progenitor is Origen. His presence in the volume is therefore fundamental: spiritual sensitivity plays a pivotal role in Balthasar's aesthetics, as demonstrated by recent scholarship.³³ In the second volume of *Theo-Drama, Man in God*, Balthasar launches an inquiry into the dramatic relation between man and God, with Origen coming into focus for his peculiar account of freedom. Concerning these strategic citations of Origen, we should ask: why aesthetics? Why freedom? If it is easy to answer the second question, considering Origen's well-known doctrine

33 McINROY, Balthasar on the Spiritual Senses.

of freedom, it is less obvious why Balthasar should cite Origen when writing a systematic account of aesthetics. How could an author usually cast as a despiser of the body provide help in the foundation of a theological aesthetic? It must be admitted that Origen is not present in *The Glory of the Lord* as a major locus of what Balthasar calls theological aesthetics. Balthasar explains the reason for this omission:

While often in Christian world-views great aesthetic values are certainly incorporated, they do not always crystallize into an original, theological aesthetic. It may be that the aesthetic moments are simply borrowed from an alien world-view or that they have not fused with the proper theological vision into a complete unity – this is, it seems, the case with Origen and in some respects with Gregory of Nyssa.³⁴

We will see in what sense, for Balthasar, Origen's elements of a theological aesthetic are "borrowed from an alien world-view", specifically Platonism.³⁵ Balthasar, however, does not limit himself to this consideration. Here lies a further claim of my research. I will argue that Origen's sacramentalism is, for Balthasar, revealed by an aesthetic that, while coming from Platonism, still "fits" the Christian idea of sacrament.

34 GL 2, 21. H 2, 19: "Für Auslassungen großer Namen war als weiterer Gesichtspunkt entscheidend, dass oft in christlichen Weltbildern große ästhetische Werte sich zwar verkörpern, aber nicht zu einer originalen theologischen Ästhetik kristallisieren. Sei es, dass die ästhetische Momente stark einem fremden Weltbild entlehnt werden oder mit der eigentlich theologischen Schau nicht zur vollen Einheit verschmelzen – dies wohl bei Origenes und in einiger Hinsicht auch bei Gregor von Nyssa."

35 Balthasar, in this second volume of *The Glory of the Lord*, seems more brutal in his judgment of Origen, especially when seen in relation to other authors. GL 2, 23: "Glory is here God as God, all else is a veil which bears and mediates him. If one sets 'God's revelation' at the center, then the shimmering radiance of glory falls on the mediation itself: either purely dynamically as in Origen (where the decisive moment is always when the body is transfigured and the letter yields to the spirit, time to eternity) or in a more static way, so that God is rather discerned as he is displayed in the orders of the world and salvation, as one more deeply veiled in his manifesting, the Unmanifested (Denys), or as the one who has found the culmination of his self-being in the other, in man, in Jesus Christ: here we find Maximus, Nicholas of Cusa, Soloviev, and in all essentials Thomas Aquinas." H 2, 21: "Herrlichkeit ist hier Gott als Gott; alles Übrige ist tragender, vermittelnder Schleier. Stellt man ins Zentrum 'Gottes Offenbarkeit', dann fällt auf die Vermittlung selbst der Glorienschimmer: entweder rein dynamisch wie bei Origenes (wo immer der Augenblick, da der Leib verklärt, der Buchstabe zu Geist, die Zeit zu Ewigkeit wird, entscheidet) oder mehr statisch, so, dass Gott je in der Welt- und Heilsordnung ausgelegt angeschaut wird, als der im Erscheinen Tieferverhüllte, Nichterscheinende (Dionysius) oder als der, der den Gipfel seines Selbstseins im Andern, im Menschen, in Jesus Christus gefunden hat: hier stehen Maximus, der Cusaner, Solowjew und wesenhaft wohl auch Thomas von Aquin."

Finally, Origen's name plays an important role in Balthasar's eschatology, specifically in *Dare we Hope?* and the many essays and articles connected to it. Origen's doctrine of *apocatastasis* (if it is indeed a "doctrine"), while not often mentioned in Balthasar's early works on the Alexandrian, is fundamental in shaping his hope for universal salvation, shared by many 20th century theologians.

3. Existing Literature and my Contribution

Fortunately, Balthasar's relation to the Fathers has not been neglected by scholarship. An overview of the major scholarly works will help us anticipate some important considerations regarding Balthasar's methodology; it will also serve to consolidate and organize the existing material. Each scholar mentioned below has helped Balthasar's approach to the Fathers emerge as a multifaceted paradigm. It is my intention to take these many facets and bring them together, in order to shape an understanding of Balthasar's relationship to Origen that is as comprehensive as possible.

Recent years have witnessed an exponential growth in publications concerning the *Nouvelle Théologie*; in particular, many scholars have interpreted the *Nouvelle Théologie* (in particular de Lubac) as a return to Neoplatonism. Examples are Wayne Hankey, John Milbank, Guy Mansini, and Hans Boersma.³⁶ Von Balthasar's fascination with Origen is interesting to consider in light of this tendency: as I will show, his reading of Origen does not reflect an uncritical return to Neoplatonism. But, at the same time, Balthasar can be seen as a defender of what Boersma calls "sacramental ontology" within the *Nouvelle Théologie*.

The most important scholarly work on Balthasar and the Church Fathers is Werner Löser's *Im Geiste des Origenes. Hans Urs von Balthasar als Interpret der Theologie der Kirchenväter*. Löser, not only a fine scholar but also a great friend of Balthasar, lays out Balthasar's interpretation of the Church Fathers in general, tracing their influence on his thought. The section on Origen, while short, is dense and has been a guideline for this research. The title is apt: Origen is neither the most cited author in Balthasar's corpus, nor the pivotal reference when it comes to specific doctrinal or metaphysical solutions. Nevertheless, it was "Origen's spirit" that led Balthasar's own theological mission. In his own words: "Were

36 HANKEY, Neoplatonism 143, for example claims that "those who were seeking an alternative to Thomism, whose scientific divisions of this kind they associated with its Aristotelism, generally saw Platonism as involving the desired integration for the sake of theology understood as mystical itinerarium." MILBANK, *Suspended Middle* 26, attributes to de Lubac a thoroughly Neoplatonic ontology. MANSINI, *Theological Significance* 597, speaks of "re-Platonizing of theology". BOERSMA, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology*, presents sacramental ontology specifically as a return to Neoplatonism.

I to be asked which of my books gives me greatest joy, which I still take up from time to time, the answer would be: without doubt my Origen anthology, *Origenes. Geist und Feuer*, for in Origen I discovered that brilliant sense of what is Catholic, which I myself would like to attain.”³⁷ Balthasar applies to Origen the same methodology he applied throughout his entire life as a scholar—i. e. the method of *Gestalt*. Balthasar’s goal is to penetrate Origen’s thought “jusqu’à cette intuition fondamentale et secrète”, to understand its innermost essence, the profound unity that holds together even those doctrines deemed unacceptable.³⁸ “For the truth of all great things rests less in the what than in the how; the spirit of the whole gives sense and unity to the whole.”³⁹ Following Löser’s suggestion, especially in the second part of the research, I will reveal the presence of Origen, affecting Balthasar’s personal theological path. Origen’s is not as an overwhelming presence, but rather the silent presence of a friend, whose companionship is felt across the whole.

When it comes to Origen in particular, secondary literature has largely recognized his importance for the thought of Balthasar, notwithstanding the lack of a comprehensive work on the issue. A general overview is provided in an article in the Italian edition of *Communio* by Elio Guerriero.⁴⁰ This essay has more of a summative character, due especially to the fact that no complete Italian translation of *Geist und Feuer* is available. A similar character defines the work of Francesco Franco, *La passione dell’amore: l’ermeneutica cristiana di Balthasar e Origene*. Franco criticizes Löser for dedicating only a few pages to Origen, and so underestimating the fundamental importance of the Alexandrian for Balthasar. Löser did not, claims Franco, properly familiarize himself with the texts of *Geist und Feuer*, still less with Origen himself. Franco, for his part, pursued this task with zeal, tracking Origen’s spirit across Balthasar’s major works. From his presentation one can clearly see the accord between Origen and Balthasar. At the same time, however, Franco’s work lacks a true analytical, historical, or philological approach, being rather a general presentation of themes and issues Balthasar found in Origen, supported by a massive number of quotations.

The attention given by scholars to Balthasar and the Fathers often takes the shape of choosing one Father or another as more representative of the Swiss theologian. An example of this attitude can be found in a recent work: Kevin Monaghan’s *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar: An Irenaean Retrieval*.

37 MW 108–109. ZSW 92: “Würde ich gefragt, an welchen von meinen eigenen Büchern ich am meisten Freude habe, welche ich vielleicht zuweilen 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.”

38 PP ix.

39 SF 4. GF 15: “Denn die Wahrheit aller großen Dinge ruht weniger im Was als im Wie; der Geist des Ganzen gibt dem Ganzen Sinn und Einheit.”

40 GUERRIERO, Von Balthasar e Origene 123–134.

Mongrain wants to show how the many texts of Balthasar can be univocally read in light of Irenaeus of Lyons, characterized as his most important source. I do not intend to deny the importance of Irenaeus for Balthasar; nor is it my intention to substitute Irenaeus with Origen as "most important". My disagreement with Mongrain is, in this sense, double. Not only do I not believe Irenaeus to be a more important reference than Origen, but, more broadly, I do not believe Balthasar's theology to be a *retrieval* at all. It is impossible to reduce the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar to a simple retrieval of one (or even many) Church Father(s), or, more generally, to any one figure in the history of theology. Balthasar's relation with the Fathers is more complex than a simple retrieval, and I submit that his relation to Origen of Alexandria is a particularly clear and useful example of this complexity. Balthasar approaches the Fathers in order to elaborate their thought for contemporary use. This does not amount to a disinterested retrieval, but rather demands a critical confrontation with, and novel elaboration of, Patristic doctrine(s).

Balthasar's concern for the modern implications of ancient theology is affirmed by Brian E. Daley S. J., the English translator and editor of the *Kosmische Liturgie*. As Daley states in his introduction to the English edition of *Cosmic Liturgy*, Balthasar is so interested in the three Fathers "precisely because he sees there many elements of the theological synthesis he hopes to offer to his own world. The questions he asks of Maximus are modern questions, set by the peculiar situation of French and German Catholic theology in the mid-twentieth century. (...) Von Balthasar's concern was to find in the Catholic dogmatic tradition an intelligent and convincing answer to the seductive call of German Idealism to let the concrete reality of creation dissolve into being nothing more than the phenomena experienced by the thinking human subject."⁴¹ Daley's position is that this approach works better in the *Kosmische Liturgie* than in Balthasar's other works on the Fathers: "Maximus does lend himself to this kind of reading much more than do Origen or Gregory of Nyssa"⁴² because he was more interested than the others in questions of ontology and Christology. For Daley, Maximus's theological method "shows more obvious links to both Thomism and German Idealism than does that of the earlier, more exegetically and pastorally oriented representatives of the Origenist tradition."⁴³ Daley makes a good point: Maximus does indeed seem a better "fit" for Balthasar's response to the issues of his century. "Even in his reading of Maximus, von Balthasar's questions are the questions of Hegel, and he answers those of a Christologically focused version of the *philosophia* and *theologia perennis*: the real distinction between essence and existence, the analogies of being and of faith, the resolution of the inherent tension between finite and in-

41 DALEY, Introduction to CL 16–17.

42 Ibid. 18.

43 Ibid.

finite being in the personal unity of Christ.”⁴⁴ However, Balthasar himself suggests a different approach:

This work wants to initiate a fertilization of the unborn patristic ideas for our contemporary situation. Such a fertilization will not take place through an enthusiastic and abstract exaltation for the Fathers, rather only through a sober and patient immersion in their thought. (...) In this depth, and only so, it will become visible the similarity of our and their struggles, so that some issues of existential philosophy stand directly face to face with Gregory of Nyssa, some issues of German Idealism send back clearly to Maximus the Confessor, while the fundamental questions of contemporary Catholicism receive from Origen an almost prophetic clearness.⁴⁵

It is true that Maximus is the preferable companion for resisting German Idealism: as will be shown, Origen is far too close to the Hegelian *Aufhebung* to serve as a strong weapon against it. On the other hand, Gregory of Nyssa is a better ally against the essentialism of Neo-Scholasticism. Nevertheless, Balthasar believes that Origen anticipates all the *Grundfragen des heutigen Katholizismus*. Origen is, for Balthasar, more reliable in raising fundamental questions than in providing infallible solutions. As we will see, Balthasar considers some of Origen’s answers “dangerous”. Nevertheless, we are not exonerated from trying to uncover *why* Balthasar insists so often upon adopting Origen as a companion in facing the fundamental *questions* of Catholic theology. Because of this distinction between answers and questions, Balthasar’s approach to Origen might remain relevant to our present age; while many of our answers might differ from those given in 1938—as they were already for Balthasar different in the post-conciliar Church—the questions endure. We choose therefore to inquire into Balthasar’s work on Origen mainly because of his continuous invocation of the Alexandrian’s “spirit”, despite other criticisms: if other Fathers are closer to Balthasar’s own theological project, why does Balthasar so stubbornly point to *Geist und Feuer*, and to Origen, when asked about his favourite personal work, and his favourite Father?

44 Ibid. 16–17.

45 KL v–vi: “Sie möchte eine Fruchtbarmachung des ungehobenen patristischen Gedanken-gutes für unsere heutige Situation anbahnen. Eine solche wird nicht durch schwärmerische und abstrakte Begeisterung für die Väter erzielt werden, sondern durch nüchterne und geduldige Vertiefung in ihr Denken. (...) In dieser Tiefe, und erst in ihr, die Gemeinsamkeit unseres und ihres Ringens sichtbar wird, so dass etwa Probleme der Existenzial-philosophie unmittelbar Aug in Aug zu Gregor von Nyssa stehen, Probleme des deutschen Idealismus ebenso unvermittelt zu Maximus Confessor zurückweise, während die Grundfragen des heutigen Katholizismus von Origenes her eine fast mahnende Deutlichkeit erhalten.” This passage, present in the *Vorbemerkung* to the first edition, is not present in Daley’s English translation of the second edition.

This critical reservation has been noted by scholarship, as we see for example in Deirdre Carabine. She suggests that Balthasar's "adoption of certain Patristic themes is always qualified, always transformed so that any dubious Neoplatonic or Dionysian elements are filtered out."⁴⁶ Carabine shows how Balthasar's own theology is a constant confrontation with patristic topics: *katabasis*, *anabasis*, and divine incomprehensibility. This can be seen especially in his approach to the Cappadocians. Along this line, Carabine's most interesting thesis is that, in the Fathers, Balthasar found the inspiration for a "revitalization of theology from an aesthetic perspective."⁴⁷ This is particularly true for Origen, as I will show in the section on the spiritual senses: Balthasar's interpretation of Origen in the light of these senses can be read as an anticipation of his proposed theological aesthetic in *The Glory of the Lord*. As Carabine suggests, "*Herrlichkeit* itself can be regarded as a commentary on this text which echoes Origen's expression of the self-revelation of God as the visibility of doxa: 'so that we who were unable to look upon the glory of that marvelous light, when placed in the greatness of his Godhead, may by his being made to us brightness, obtain the means of beholding the divine light by looking upon the brightness (Prin I, 2, 8).'"⁴⁸

A similar thesis is advanced by Charles Kannengiesser.⁴⁹ In a short essay he explains the difference between Balthasar and the other theologians who were reading the Fathers in the first half of the century. Kannengiesser differentiates Balthasar from de Lubac by pointing out the systematic organization and philosophical nature of the former's approach. Balthasar's inquiry was not documentary or pedagogical, as it was for Congar and Karl Rahner, who "had at heart the demonstration of the theological theses, ecclesiastical or anthropological, which necessitated a substantial investment in the study of the Fathers." On the contrary, Kannengiesser shows that Balthasar's spontaneous attitude "turned towards modernity in crisis in its essential principles, rather than toward competing pedagogical models in the narrow framework of clerical formation." Finally, Kannengiesser tracks a difference with Daniélou in terms of temperament: "Fr. Daniélou spent the resources of his patristic knowledge in all directions, on all fronts of the war of ideas where an indefatigably lively faith would challenge the ideologies of the day. Von Balthasar focused his contemplative eye on trying to merge the demands of modernity, as he experienced it, with the spiritual and metaphysical treasures of the Fathers whose meaning he kept probing."⁵⁰ Kannengiesser believes, therefore, that Balthasar's turn to the Fathers provided him with resources for develop-

46 CARABINE, *The Fathers* 77.

47 *Ibid.* 75.

48 *Ibid.* 78.

49 KANNENGIESSER, *Schule der Väter* 78–84; *Listening to the Fathers* 59–63.

50 *Ibid.* 60.

ing an answer to the eschatological crisis described in works like *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele*.

When thinking of common elements between Origen's and Balthasar's theology, eschatology often comes first to mind: "apocatastasis" and "hope for universal salvation", despite considerable differences, arise from a similar intuition. This issue is addressed Werner Ivan Laak's work, *Allversöhnung: die Lehre von der Apokatastasis; ihre Grundlegung durch Origenes und ihre Bewertung in der gegenwärtigen Theologie bei Karl Barth und Hans Urs von Balthasar*, the fruit of his Staatsexamensarbeit in 1981.⁵¹ Laak's major interest is Origen. He dedicates over 90 pages to Origen, 50 to Barth, and (only) 35 to Balthasar. Laak reconstructs the historical background of each authors' "doctrine" of universal salvation, providing useful tools for future theological reflection; however, his work lacks a comprehensive engagement with the different intentions of the three authors, and omits a careful consideration of the reception of Origen in Barth and Balthasar. Another essay on a specific affinity between Origen and Balthasar is Samuel Fernández's article, "Imagen y verdad en Orígenes y su recepción en Balthasar".⁵² Fernández analyzes the relationship between truth and image in Origen, showing how only through the latter can we reach the former; this thesis lies at the core of Balthasar's theological aesthetics, as Fernández acknowledges.

To conclude, we can turn to another statement from Brian E. Daley.⁵³ In his essay on Balthasar's reading of the Church Fathers for the *Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, Daley underlines the importance of judging Balthasar's works on the Fathers in the context of Balthasar's theology. This concern for contextual judgment can be found in Crouzel's review of *Parole et Mystère chez Origène*: the study, he concludes, is based on justified intuitions rather than precise and meticulous research.⁵⁴ Without forgetting Balthasar's genuine attention to the historical and philological research, these statements are accurate (although often too synthetic): Balthasar's works on the Fathers cannot be fully understood without considering his historical background, and his implicit goals in these works. Like Crouzel, who admitted the validity of the intuitions despite the unusual method, Polycarp Sherwood, when evaluating Balthasar's *Kosmische Liturgie*, describes Balthasar's procedure as "disconcerting to many competent students of Byzantine theology, as transgressing the bounds which are habitually set to their studies." Sherwood himself explains that Balthasar "sees the task of the theologian [to be] audaciously creative, as that of the one who would bring into coherent overall view the objective values of our post-Cartesian world that bears

51 LAAK, *Allversöhnung. Die Lehre von der Apokatastasis*.

52 FERNÁNDEZ, *Imagen y verdad* 375–385.

53 DALEY, *Balthasar's Reading* 187–206.

54 CROUZEL, *Review french edition of Geist und Feuer* 95–96.

so deep an imprint from both German Idealism and from modern science.”⁵⁵ Balthasar’s work on Origen, as those on the other Fathers, cannot be understood without the awareness of his “transgression” of the bounds that habitually surround patristic studies. I, however, disagree with the tone assumed by scholars who, by identifying Balthasar’s preference for contemporary theology over pure patristics, disqualify his understanding of Origen in and of itself. Even if it is true that the nature of his interest brings Balthasar to focus on specific aspects of Origen’s thought, his contribution to the understanding of these aspects cannot be ignored or diminished. An example is raised by Daley himself, who draws attention to Balthasar’s sacramental understanding of the world, derived from his engagement with the Church Fathers: “an understanding that does not just press through worldly images but recognizes the presence of transcendent holiness in sensible things.”⁵⁶

55 SHERWOOD, *Survey of Recent Work* 433–434.

56 DALEY, *Balthasar’s Reading* 190–191.

II. Balthasar's Silences

1. *Spirit and Fire*: Why an Anthology?

In his introduction to *Spirit and Fire*, Balthasar explains that there are two possible ways to approach a thinker like Origen. The first is to “*christianize Origen* in a mechanical way. You switch off pre-existence and restoration, moderate here and there some extravagant views, and end up with a flat, dull product which is full of nice, harmless things, but in which no one senses any longer the breath of genius.”⁵⁷ The second possibility would be the production of an “edition of the complete works of the master, as is now being done so very well by the commission on the Church Fathers of the Prussian Academy of Science”, a project that Balthasar treats with “great admiration and gratitude”. Ultimately, however, “even that is only a means; they provide an opening for the modern-day thinker, invitations – but you don’t see anyone accepting these invitations.”⁵⁸ Balthasar decides, indeed, to accept this invitation—not by neutrally repeating Origen or by fitting him into a systematized Christian schema, but by facing the challenges of his own age, i. e. 20th century Europe, and by looking into what Origen still has to say to the hearts of 20th century Christians:

So, we have decided to make a selection, from all of his works, of *what still makes sense today*, and in such a way that out of the interconnection of these central passages *the true face of Origen* could shine forth as from a mosaic. For basically, *what still makes sense today is also the living heart that did so then and always*, so that when we are in contact with this no essential misrepresentation need to be feared.⁵⁹

57 SF 4. GF 15–16: “Manche vor uns haben versucht, Origenes auf dem besagten, mechanischem Wege zu ‘ver-christlichen’. Man schaltet dann Präexistenz und Wiederbringung aus, mäßigt da und dort noch einige extravagante Ansichten und behält ein stumpfes, antlitzloses Gebilde voll braver Harmlosigkeit in der Hand, in dem aber auch niemand mehr den Atem der Genialität verspürt.”

58 SF 4. GF 16: “Ein anderer Weg ist die Ausgabe vollständiger Werke des Meisters, wie sie in mustergültigster Weise von der Kirchenväter-Kommision der Preussischen Akademie besorgt wird. Es ist selbstverständlich, dass diese ungeheure Arbeit die grösste Bewunderung und Dankbarkeit verdient, da erst sie dem Forscher ein untrüglich zuverlässiges Arbeitsmittel an die Hand gibt. Aber eben doch nur ein Mittel. (...) Sie sind Anlässe für die heutigen Denker, Einladungen – aber man sieht nicht, dass ihnen jemand gefolgt wäre.”

59 SF 5. GF 17: “So beschlossen wir, aus allen Werken eine Auswahl des heute noch Gültigen zu treffen, in der Weise, dass aus dem Zusammenhang der Kernstellen wie aus einem Mosaik das wahre Antlitz Origenes’ sich ergeben soll. Denn im Grunde ist das ‘heute noch Gültige’ auch das damals und immer Lebendige, so dass, wenn nur diese getroffen worden ist, eine wesentliche Verzeichnung kaum zu befürchten steht.”

It is clear that Balthasar is interested in “what still makes sense today”; that is, what remains trans-historically fruitful. For him, this coincides with the same “living heart” of the truth. By virtue of this consideration he selects pertinent ancient texts to be (re)considered in modern times.

2. The Structure: Inclusions and Omissions

The organizational structure of *Spirit and Fire* can help us anticipate Balthasar's general approach to Origen, for it is founded on the phases and development of spiritual life.⁶⁰ This “spiritual life” develops in the tension between two poles: gno-sis-spiritualism and liturgic-symbolism. Showing this tension is the goal of *Spirit and Fire*. To this end, the anthology is divided into four sections: *Soul*, *Word*, *Spirit*, *God*.

The first section is *Soul*. Here, Balthasar starts with a description of the actual human condition, rather than the prelapsarian state of pure spirituality. For Origen, the $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$ is mobile: it can become increasingly spiritual by moving towards the spirit, or it can move towards the flesh, weighing itself down. These transitions take place in the worldly life of the soul, which is always embodied. The section *Word* describes the different ways through which the divine Word comes to man: *Word with God*, *Word as Scripture*, and *Word as flesh*. The latter is one of the longest chapters of the whole anthology, in fact much longer than those which precede it. The third section, *Spirit*, grows out of the second: the soul cannot reach the spiritual level by its own strength. It is only by virtue of the Word (Scripture, Christ and Church) that the spiritual condition can be achieved. The “spirit” of the third section is not the specter of a spiritualized reality but the inner fulfillment of the worldly condition, thanks to the encounter with the divine Word. This is the meaning of Balthasar's use of the term *Aufhebung* to describe Origen's system: the condition of the soul, embodiment, is not erased, but fulfilled. The last section, *God*, contains Origen's reflections on the final judgment and restoration, when the soul will be united with God after its earthly pilgrimage.

The anthology seems to present a formal mirror-structure: if *Soul* and *Spirit* describe man, *Word* and *God* describe the divine. Given that *Spirit and Fire* describes the development of spiritual life, it becomes clear that, for Balthasar, the ascent happens through an interplay, a dramatic relationship. Origenian cosmology has often been described as the journey of man back to God.⁶¹ Balthasar expresses this in many ways. (i) The title of the Prologue, *Of tents and wells*, represents the itinerant status of the human soul: Origen describes Israel as living in

60 SIMONETTI, *La Teologia dei Padri* 375 n. 67.

61 SIMONETTI/BOITANI/BONFRATE, *Il viaggio dell'anima*; SCOTT, *Journey Back to God*.

tents and not in houses, a community still on its way to perfection.⁶² (ii) The first sentence of the prologue, “The distinctive characteristic in Origen’s thought is the Eros of an unquenchable *thirst* for wisdom”⁶³, establishes the love of wisdom as the mobilizing power of the ascent, together with (iii) our natural desire, as referred to in the opening text of the section.⁶⁴ What launches man upon the journey is his desire for the *summum bonum*: namely, to be with God.

The entire anthology can therefore be seen as the record of Origen’s narration of the story of the soul’s return to God. Within this record, it is striking to note what Balthasar *excludes*. By his own admission, he remains silent on several Origenian doctrines by omitting the relevant texts from *Spirit and Fire*. This, however, is far from a naïve silence; not only because in his introduction Balthasar provides a rationale for his choices, but also because many of his reflections on Origen shed light on these silences: “(i) The idea of pre-existence, (ii) inner-divine trinitarian speculation and (iii) the doctrine of the sacraments are the only thoroughgoing thought-motifs which will not be treated thematically.”⁶⁵ Due to these silences Balthasar is often criticized for lacking historical accuracy. Even though the vast majority of Origen scholars agree that Balthasar painted a faithful image of the Alexandrian, many still point to these omissions as evidence that his methodology was unscientific.⁶⁶ My goal is not to justify the silences—if his aim was to present a perfect and complete image of Origen, Balthasar should have approached these more technically. On the contrary, the real challenge is to understand the goal of *Spirit and Fire*, and, consequently, the methodology best suited to this goal. As Löser brilliantly points out, the apparent non-scientific character of the anthology stems from Balthasar’s “theological-phenomenological” approach.⁶⁷ Phenomenological, because when describing a Church Father, Balthasar believes historic elements are insufficient: there remains a vital essence that needs to be

62 Origen, HNm 17,4.

63 SF 25. GF 45: “Der unterscheidende Zug im origenistischen Denken ist der Eros unersättlichen Weisheitsdurstes.”

64 Origen, Prin II 11,4, in the translation of Daly, SF 37: “And just as the eye naturally seeks the light and vision, and our body naturally desires food and drink, so does our spirit have its own *natural desire* to know God’s truth and the causes of things. But we have received this desire from God not just so that it never should or could be gratified; for otherwise ‘the love of truth’ would seem to have been planted in our spirit by the Creator in vain.”

65 SF 15. GF 32: “Präexistenzidee, innergöttliche Trinitätsspekulation und Sakramentenlehre sind die einzigen durchgehenden Denkmotive, die nicht thematisch behandelt werden.”

66 Three reviews of *Geist und Feuer* move in this particular direction, while appreciating the work of Balthasar for its divulgatory mission: KARPP, Review to Geist und Feuer 206–207; PUECH, Review to Geist und Feuer 214–215; HARL, Compte-rendu. Origène. Esprit et Feu 568–589. Harl is the strongest in underlining the lack of scientific method in Balthasar. Puech and Karpp, and also Crouzel, acknowledge that this was not indeed the intention of the author: CROUZEL, Review french edition of Geist und Feuer.

67 LÖSER, Im Geiste des Origenes 99.

drawn out. Theological, because his interest is to show “the real face of Origen”, i.e. his original vision of Christianity. This can be seen in three particular aspects that Löser underlines as most important in Balthasar’s work: the positivity of the finite world, the *Gestalthaftigkeit der Geschichtlichkeit*, and the Catholicity (universality) of salvation.⁶⁸

In light of these considerations, we can venture to comment on the “silences”. The third, the doctrine of the sacraments, is maybe the easiest to understand: although Origen spoke of baptism, Eucharist, marriage, and confession, he did not formulate a clear and unambiguous doctrine, as perhaps none of the Church Fathers did (at least in the contemporary sense). Nevertheless, Balthasar’s entire approach to Origen is sacramental. The silence on the sacraments does not hide an Origenian doctrine under the carpet—rather, it lets this doctrine emerge in another, more articulate way. This silence is therefore due to the main goal of Balthasar’s work on Origen: inquiring into his importance for contemporary Christian theology.

As for the second silence, Origen’s speculations on the Trinity, Balthasar confronts it in an important passage of *Spirit and Fire*. He declares that “subordinationism in Origen has a stronger salvation-history aspect and thus can be better brought into harmony with Nicaean theology. (...) For what was still lacking in Origen’s inner-trinitarian theology he makes up for with his magnificent salvation-history trinitarianism.”⁶⁹ Even this second silence can be understood in relation to the goal of bolstering a contemporary Christian theology: if Origen’s subordinationism is unacceptable, we can still understand it in light of his salvation history, an issue of deep interest to 1930’s theology.

Now we come to the first, and most complicated, silence: “we decided, after some hesitation, not to include the well-known principal texts on the myth of the pre-existence of souls.” When Balthasar does include texts alluding to this myth, it is either because they are important for other reasons, or because “they allow a glimpse into the massive cosmic consciousness of Origen.” The same precaution applies to texts dealing with trinitarian subordinationism: “what they say brings no enrichment to our contemporary image of the world and of God.” Balthasar is aware of the impossibility of ignoring these doctrines when presenting Origen’s world synthesis, precisely because of that unity that he himself recognizes in the Alexandrian. Indeed, these doctrines are “inseparably mingled with the basic structure of Origen’s world synthesis.” To be clear, Balthasar does not insist that these elements are incommensurable with Christianity. Rather, he is strategically

68 Ibid. 11.

69 SF 14. GF 31: “Die Subordination hat bei Origenes ein stärker heilsgeschichtliches Gesicht und lässt sich so besser mit der nicänischen Theologie vereinbaren. (...) Was also an innertrinitarischer Theologie bei Origenes noch fehlt, das ersetzt er durch seinen großartigen heilsgeschichtlichen Trinitarismus.”

excluding from his anthology elements that do not help him in his goal, which is not to present Origen's doctrine in detail, but rather to "try to demonstrate [Origen's] significance for the history of theology", specifically the theology of his own time.⁷⁰ In Balthasar, the enrichment of our contemporary image of the world, and of God, openly prevails over an exhaustive exposition of Origen's thought. Still, many scholars will be reluctant to accept the deliberate omissions, especially regarding the pre-existence of souls, a pillar of Origen's cosmology. In fact, his cosmology might lose coherency without it—especially if we consider the idea of apocatastasis, which also plays an important role for Balthasar.

At the end of this panoramic presentation of the three Balthasarian "silences", we can venture an interpretative hypothesis concerning their true nature. Balthasar, for his part, cites the "out-dated nature" of the specific doctrines to justify their exclusion. However, their frequent appearance elsewhere in his work is glaring. If it is true that they are not treated thematically in *Spirit and Fire*, one cannot avoid noticing how often the thought of Balthasar returns to these issues in a non-thematic way. While the doctrine of the preexistence of the soul is not thematically present, freedom of the soul is a pivotal topic in Balthasar's reading of Origen, especially in *Theo-drama*. Origen's notion of the Trinity is never systematically presented by Balthasar, and yet his hermeneutical approach is based on a "großartigen heilsgeschichtlichen Trinitarismus". A doctrine of the sacraments is not found in Origen, and yet we suggest that Balthasar's interpretation of the Alexandrian is framed by sacramentalism. Therefore, I argue that these three elements are only silenced because of the "out-dated" nature of specific Origenian statements, taken out of context. In reality, if these statements are understood in the complex totality of Origen's thought, they open for Balthasar the door to Origen's fundamental importance for 20th century theology. This thesis will be more fully elaborated in the second section of my research.

To conclude our discussion of Balthasar's silences, we should mention the author who Balthasar most often quotes in relation to this issue: Adolf von Harnack. Harnack considered Origen a Greek philosopher and, as such, *not* a Christian theologian. While Balthasar's position is not comparable to Harnack's, the latter's

70 SF 13–14. GF 30–31: "Wir haben, nach einigem Schwanken, darauf verzichtet, die bekannten Haupttexte zum Mythos der Seelen-Präexistenz zu bringen. Wir setzen dessen Bekanntheit vielmehr voraus, aber scheuen uns nicht, Texte einzufügen, die offen auf diesen Mythos anspielen, doch aus anderen Gründen wichtig sind: sei es, dass sie einen Blick gestatten in das ungeheure kosmische Bewusstsein von Origenes (...) sei es einfach, weil an diesen Texten die Haltung der *ascensio* oder der Geheimnisbegriff ablesbar wird. Daher wurden auch die *ex professo* subordinationistischen Trinitätstexte ausgeschaltet. Sie bilden in ihren Aussagen keinerlei Bereicherung unseres heutigen theologischen Welt- und Gottesbildes. Dass aber diese Unterordnung trotzdem an vielen Stellen indirekt durchbrach, weil sie mit der Grundstruktur des origenistischen Weltaufbaus unlöslich verquickt ist, war unvermeidbar."

relevance for our inquiry cannot be ignored. Balthasar himself seems to address this question: "We do not say with Harnack that Origen led theology down a false path from which it never found its way back. But we believe that through his massive influence elements came into theology which, in this form, are not to be found in the Bible."⁷¹ Even if Balthasar is milder than Harnack in his critique of Origen's (neo)Platonism, Harnack's influence cannot be ignored. Though not an enemy of Christianity per se, Platonism introduced elements that could not easily be fit into the biblical narrative; elements, one could say, that were extrinsic to the narrative of pure revelation. Balthasar's position is particularly complicated on this issue. He seems to oppose Catholicism and Hellenism in a very rigid manner, for example when claiming that "only in penultimate things is Origen heterodox; in ultimate things he is catholic"⁷² and that "the Christian character of doctrine was not adversely affected in its deepest core by Hellenism, however deeply influential it might have been. Hellenism might have been the means of expression, the clothing, the body of the Gospel, but its soul was not touched."⁷³ This last line comes from the essay *The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves*, where Balthasar seems to confirm a dualism of form and content in Origen: "An ultimate cleft, often scarcely specifiable in words, will divide content and expression. Behind the Neoplatonic term we sense the Christian pathos."⁷⁴ In this simplified contraposition of Christianity and Hellenism, Balthasar seems to reduce the latter to a formal expression, an accidental container, whose essential content is found in the former. We can say that, while not fully adopting Harnack's anti-Hellenism, Balthasar still develops his thought inside Harnack's framework, especially by claiming that the potency of the Christian core was able to survive *despite* the Hellenistic tendency. This attitude is confirmed by a remarkably similar statement in a later work:

Origen, of course, thought in a Hellenistic environment, his idea of the world was Gnostic, his psychology Stoic and Platonist, he adhered to the allegorism of Philo, as well as, though less explicitly, to current ideas of the same sort. All this, however, does not constitute the

71 SF 13. GF 29: "Wir sagen nicht, wie Harnack, dass die Theologie durch Origenes auf einen Irrweg gelockt worden sei, von dem sie nie zurückgefunden. Aber wir glauben, dass durch seinen ungeheuren Einfluss Elemente in die Theologie eingedrungen sind, welche in dieser Form sich in der Bibel nicht finden."

72 SF 20. GF 40: "Nur in zweitletzten Dingen ist Origenes 'heterodox'. In letzten ist er katholisch."

73 FSO 373. PSW 86: "In einem innersten Punkte wurde die Christlichkeit der Lehre durch keine noch so tiefgreifende Hellenisierung berührt. Dieses mag Ausdrucksmittel, Kleid, Leib des Evangeliums geworden sein, seine Seele wurde davon nicht berührt."

74 FSO 373. PSW 86: "Eine letzte, oft in Worten kaum fassbare Kluft trennt hier Inhalt und Ausdruck. Wir spüren hinter dem neuplatonischsten Wort das christliche Pathos."

real object of his impassionate thought, nor, in consequence, the original and captivating quality of his theology.⁷⁵

We can clearly see Balthasar adopting a contraposition between form and content when thinking the relationship between the Christian message and Greek philosophy. However important the latter might be for understanding Origen, the *real* object of his thought—what makes him so original and fascinating to Balthasar—is his passionate love for the Christian event. Balthasar's dualism seems therefore to put philosophy second in line. He is not, however, univocal on this matter: in *Spirit and Fire* the issue is formulated in a different shape. Considering Origen, he claims that no great system allows form and content to be separated:

It is not easy to be a Hegelian in logic without also being one in the philosophy of history and of government. One can't accept the Critique of Pure Reason and reject the Critique of Practical Reason. Indeed, you really can't even accept the first movements of the Ninth Symphony and forget about the last. For the truth of all great things rests less in the what than in the how; the spirit of the whole gives sense and unity to the whole. And all the members first take part in the truth of the indivisible idea.⁷⁶

The unity of form and content in Origen emerges clearly from *Spirit and Fire*, where the anthologized texts do not completely ignore the excluded doctrines, but try to frame them in a broader context. We see how the (neo)Platonic form is not utterly condemned, but rather included in the unity of the whole: "it would be hopeless to try to separate in a purely material way the heterodox from the orthodox in Origen; thus it is unavoidable that both will be represented in our picture."⁷⁷ How then can we understand Balthasar's apparently contrasting statements on form and content in Origen? How can one harmonize such a strong

75 ET 1, 246. ST 1, 265: "Natürlich denkt Origenes im hellenistischen Umraum, sind ihm ein gnostisches Weltgebäude, eine stoisch-platonische Psychologie, ein philonischer Allegorismus und dergleichen mehr unreflex geläufig, aber dies bildet weder den Gegenstand, den sein leidenschaftliches Denken umkreist, noch in folgedessen das Originelle und Fesselnde seiner Theologie." In the footnote to this statement, Balthasar claims that there are not enough scholarly works on this central thesis, quoting only Lieske and de Lubac.

76 SF 4. GF 15: "Man kann schwerlich in der Logik Hegelianer sein, ohne es auch in Geschichts- und Staatsphilosophie zu sein. Man kann nicht die Kritik der reinen Vernunft annehmen und die Kritik der praktischen Vernunft ablehnen. Ja, man kann wohl nicht einmal die ersten Sätze der neunten Symphonie bejahen und den letzten liegen lassen. Denn die Wahrheit aller grossen Dinge ruht weniger im Was als im Wie; der Geist des Ganzes gibt dem Ganzen Sinn und Einheit. Und an der Wahrheit der unteilbaren Idee nehmen erst alle Glieder teil."

77 SF 5. GF 17: "Nun bemerkten wir oben schon, dass es aussichtslos wäre, bei Origenes das Heterodoxe vom Orthodoxen in rein materialen Weise zu scheiden, es ist also unvermeidlich, dass in unserem Bilde beides vertreten sein wird."

claim about the unity of form and content, with the apparent division of the terms/pathos opposition? Balthasar provides a double answer. The most articulate response emerges in the analysis of those elements that, coming from Platonism, flew directly into Christianity—the elements I call “appreciations”. In fact, despite his apparent criticism of Platonism as such, Balthasar appreciates exactly those elements in Origen that were born in Platonic thought. This already suggests that a form/content dualism does not reflect Balthasar’s true position: there is no dualism of form and content, but rather a constant tension, evident in the thought of Origen himself. In fact, it is exactly this tension that so fascinated Balthasar. Another answer is already present in the introduction to *Spirit and Fire*. This is well known among Origen scholars as Balthasar’s controversial idea of the “three strata” in Origen’s thought—not a division of topics, but rather three cross-sections at different depths.

3. The Three Strata of Origen

The first stratum consists of the “heterodox opinions which, obviously influenced by Platonic myths, never found a home in the church and finally were openly and energetically rejected by her.”⁷⁸ This includes the “subordination of the three Divine Persons”, the idea that “the Logos incarnated himself on all the stages so that he, just as he was human to humans, was also angel to angels” and the “in-principle equality of essence in humans and angels.”⁷⁹ This first stratum roughly coincides with Balthasar’s silences. He states that “our selection will take up from the first stratum only what is needed to make this unity visible.”⁸⁰ The “unity” is exactly what we have seen, i. e. the unity of form and content in Christian doctrine. Balthasar decides to omit those doctrines whose form does not *fully* match the Christian content or, better, those doctrines that do not make the unity *visible*. It is important to underline that Balthasar never condemns these doctrines as utterly wrong or contrary of the Christian faith—rather, they are more difficult to fit in, they need more intellectual work. We can here venture the hypothesis that Balthasar’s silences are *pedagogical* and *hermeneutical*, rather than substantial.

78 SF 6. GF 19: “Zur ersten Gruppe wären dann jene ‘heterodoxen’ Ansichten zu zählen, welche, offenbar durch die platonischen Mythen beeinflusst, nie in der Kirche heimisch wurden und schließlich von ihr offen und energisch abgestoßen worden sind.”

79 SF 7. GF 19–20: “(...) die Unterordnung der drei göttlichen Personen (...). In dieser Gruppe gehört auch der Gedanke, dass der Logos Sich auf allen diesen Stufen und Sprossen inkarniert habe, dass Er, wie den Menschen Mensch, so den Engeln Engel (...) und die grundsätzliche Wesensgleichheit von Menschen und Engel.”

80 SF 13. GF 30: “Unsere Auswahl wird demnach von der ersten Schicht nur das aufnehmen, was notwendig ist zur Sichtbarmachung dieser Einheit.”

The second stratum “is more a question of attitude than of content” and “has become invisibly all-present in Christian theology” under different names.⁸¹ One example is the “Platonism of the Fathers”: “And to the extent that one can find in Plato the model of the fall and the rising again as well as the thoroughgoing separation of idea and appearance, some Platonic elements actually do get into the Fathers.”⁸² Nevertheless, the descriptor “Platonic” is not quite right, thinks Balthasar, because in using this label one easily forgets that the schools, at Origen’s time, were already “irrevocably mixed”. That is, what Origen experienced was not “pure” Platonism. Another trope in the second stratum is the “Father’s flight from the world.”⁸³ Balthasar rejects this construal as well, mainly because of Origen’s defense of the resurrection of the body and his guarded appreciation of the material world. Rather, the major feature of this second stratum is the idea of “the way to God as a (re-)ascension”. In this sense there has been talk of the “pronounced *theologia gloriae*”, the notion of “*ascensiones in corde*”.⁸⁴ This second-stratum-Origen is the metaphysical thinker, the more archetypal Father, the man who wanted to understand the Christian event without giving up the power of human thought and, therefore, philosophy. In the introduction to *Spirit and Fire* Balthasar is fairly positive about this second stratum: “This ascension-model has often been confused with Pelagianism and a self-empowered piety of works. Falsely, we believe, for according to Origen every step upwards entails being lifted and drawn.”⁸⁵ Here, an important qualification should be made: it is hard to see how this second stratum truly has more to do with attitude than content. As Balthasar himself will claim, it is indeed an attitude related to a belief *in* something; namely, that the human soul is a *göttlicher Funke*, a scattered fragment of the divine essence. This lends a titanic dimension to the idea of asceticism, transcending the very frame of creation. The real question becomes, therefore, whether the rational creatures are created *ex nihilo* or *ex Deo*. If the answer is *ex Deo*, it is almost impossible to save this “Platonism of the Fathers” from a Neoplatonic drift, and this time (for Balthasar) with a negative connotation.

Before moving to the third stratum we must reflect further on the first two. The existence of two “Platonic” levels discloses Balthasar’s ambivalence, but also

81 SF 7. GF 21: “Sie ist eine Haltung mehr als ein Inhalt (...) und sie ist es, die in der christlichen Theologie unsichtbar-allgegenwärtig wurde.”

82 SF 7. GF 21: “Und sofern bei Plato sich das Schema des Falls und Wiederaufstiegs sowie durchgehende Scheidung von Idee und Erscheinung finden, gehen in der Tat einige platonische Elemente in die Patristik ein.”

83 SF 8. GF 21: “Man hat ferner von Weltflucht der Väter gesprochen.”

84 SF 8. GF 22: “Man hat von der ausgesprochenen *theologia gloriae* der Griechen überhaupt und Origenes’ insbesondere gesprochen.”

85 SF 9. GF 23: “Man hat dieses Aufstiegsschema oft mit Pelagianismus und eigenmächtiger Werkfrömmigkeit verwechselt. Zu Unrecht, glauben wir, denn nach Origenes ist jeder Schritt empör ein Gehoben- und Gezogenwerden.”

his honesty. Balthasar does not refuse Origen's Platonism in and of itself, but neither does he see it as always congenial to the Christian goal of Origen's teaching. Separating these two levels shows that there is more at stake than a mere referendum on the possibility of Christian Platonism. What matters is, rather, an insight into the relation between human reason and divine revelation—the latter does not cancel the former; nor can reason ignore the implications of revelation. Rather, the objective event of revelation allows Origen to verify the affinity of the two, leaving Balthasar, as every other theologian, to accept or reject his synthesis.

The third stratum, the most interesting for Balthasar, “just like the first has not been taken up by the tradition (...) because, as the uniquely personal, mysterious and inimitable aspect of this great spirit, it wasn't the kind of thing that could be handed on.”⁸⁶ Balthasar describes this stratum as the “passion, the breath of genius”, “the most vital core”, “the passionate and tender love for the WORD.”⁸⁷ This third stratum is characterized by three elements. (i) Origen's scriptural mysticism. Balthasar explains that allegory will later become a technical skill, but for Origen it truly was a relation with the living God: Scripture is a sacrament of the presence of the WORD. (ii) “The truth of the spiritual communion of the WORD”: for Origen, everything was grounded in the knowledge of the absolute Being, which is at the same time Word and nourishment for the spirit. This was no metaphor, but a true matter of fact. (iii) The innermost “passion of the WORD”⁸⁸. This includes Origen's reflection on the divine descent and kenosis, i. e. the divine love for humanity that takes place not only in Christ's sacrifice but in the entire history of salvation. Origen is, for Balthasar, the first to express insight into the mystery of the self-emptying of God, a kenosis endured for love's sake.

This threefold division helps us understand the apparent form/content dualism. From Balthasar's perspective, the first and second strata can be considered the form of Origen's thought, while the third stratum is the content—the innermost essence—and so the main aim of his work. One might ask: is there truly a division here? Balthasar gives a clear answer, which seems to represent a valid position in contemporary discussions about reason and revelation. As the division into three strata implicitly shows, the goal (Origen's desire to explain the Word of God) cannot be achieved without a form, without tools of expression. But, at the same time, some tools might be better than others, depending on historical context. It is in history that one discerns which tools are favourable, and it is in

86 SF 10. GF 24: “Es gibt aber noch eine dritte, unterste Schicht in Origenes, und diese ist wiederum, wie die erste, von der Tradition nicht aufgenommen worden (...) weil sie als das unverlierbar Persönliche, das Geheime und Unnachahmliche des großen Geistes dem eigentlichen Tradieren unzugänglich war.”

87 SF 10. GF 25: “Die Leidenschaft, der Atem der Genialität”, “der lebendigste Kern”, “die leidenschaftliche als zarte Liebe zum WORT.”

88 SF 11. GF 26–27: “Die Wahrheit von der geistlichen Kommunion des WORTES.”

history that these are developed and refined. For this reason, there is, in Origen, no dualism of form and content, but rather an attempt to understand and divulge the event of revelation (or better, the whole history of salvation) with the best (philosophical) tools available. Origen's mission was not merely to understand the mysteries of Christianity for himself, but to teach them in the most effective way, as his various homilies show. The third stratum of Origen can therefore be compared to what D. C. Schindler calls "the third Plato", who goes back to the cave after witnessing the truth, so as to enlighten his companions.⁸⁹ If we consider Origen in the context of the third Plato, we can safely call him a true Platonist. Origen's homiletic and apologetic works are not to be thought of as subordinate to the metaphysical core found in *De principiis*. Rather, they reveal the deep unity of Origen's corpus: philosophy was used to shed light on the mysteries of revelation, and revelation made possible the flourishing of metaphysical reflection.

At this point, especially if we accept the idea of a "third Origen", it is clear that Balthasar emphasizes the Christian aspect of the Alexandrian and, consequently, favours a Platonism enlightened by Christianity over a Christianity virtuously explained by Platonism. Balthasar explains that the third stratum is "not obscured by the medium of any philosophy".⁹⁰ This, I argue, is due to the polemical nature of his interpretation. Surrounded by so many thinkers interpreting Origen as a Platonic philosopher *instead of* a Christian (see Harnack), it is not surprising that so many young thinkers (de Lubac, Cruzel, Balthasar) felt the need to rediscover the Christian aspect. Despite this general tendency, with a few exceptions, Balthasar sees in Origen no real conflict between Christian and philosopher. To understand this, we must force ourselves out of the dualistic habit of thinking, which Balthasar himself falls into at times. We should avoid thinking of two poles—Christianity and Platonism, theology and philosophy—as static lights, with the goal of proving which is more luminous. Origen's thought is not intended as a dogmatic theological system: it is a spontaneous and genuine attempt to rationally inquire into the Christian event; that is, into the living encounter with a divine person, who gives himself personally. The whole life of Origen is the journey of interpreting the Word of God. Furthermore, he sees genuine theology as nothing less than the explanation of the Logos (WORD): Scripture, Christ, Church. It is evident that Origen's "favourite" economy of the Logos is Scripture: exegesis is for him the living encounter with the person of Christ who, standing between the Old Testament and the Book of Revelation, sheds light on the ancient

89 SCHINDLER, Plato's Critique of Impure Reason, explains that the idea of a 'third Plato' came from his reading of the introduction to *Spirit and Fire*; TYSON, Reasoning within the Good 325. I am indebted to Professor David C. Schindler for several suggestions and fruitful discussions, especially in shaping the chapter on freedom.

90 SF 10. GF 25: "Von keiner Philosophie als Medium getrüben Einssein mit dem Gott-WORTE."

mysteries and provides the key to opening the future. If it is true that the end is like the beginning, as the truly Greek Origen claims, it is evident that something happened in the midst of cosmic history, a singular something that illuminates both the beginning and the end.

We can therefore see the second and third stratum from a new perspective. If the second stratum is rightly associated with the human attempt to return to God, the third is clearly, for Balthasar, the acknowledgment of the divine movement toward man. One might see here a return to dualism, but, on the contrary, it is by delving into the second stratum that the third emerges. The human attempt to reach God is driven by desire, by love for God: "Because of this love many things were transformed for Origen from an everyday into an infinitely mysterious mystical reality."⁹¹ Exactly in this ascending love, "the miraculous happens: the meaning of the second stage seems to be suspended and reversed."⁹² In striving towards God, we discover that God is already coming towards us. Is this dualism? We need to engage with Balthasar's entire reading to address this question, to see whether he puts these two tendencies in polar opposition or not. Only at the conclusion of our inquiry will we be able to provide an answer.

Without justifying them completely, we can now better understand Balthasar's silences. Besides the general diffidence towards (neo)Platonism in German theology, we have found a more radical cause beneath Balthasar's decision, i. e. the desire to focus on the deeper root of Origen's project: his love for, and of, the Word. If it is true that in *De principiis* Origen claims that Scripture's goal is to reveal the ineffable mysteries of the human condition—rather than grant direct access to intra-trinitarian dynamism—it is consequently true that some of Origen's intra-trinitarian considerations might not fully match the theological quest of Balthasar's time. We can therefore confirm the hypothesis that Balthasar's silences are more *pedagogical* and *hermeneutical*, than substantial. The goal of Balthasar's book is "to make the unity visible", specifically the unity between the second stratum (attitude) and the third stratum (content). In other words, the unity between the ascending human movement and the descending divine movement. Given this goal, the silences are easily understood: the missing texts are not irrelevant to understanding Origen, but merely tangential to Balthasar's end-game. He is not denying the importance of Origen's assumed subordinationism, nor his arguments for pre-existence *tout court*, but rather doubts their relevance vis-à-vis (i) a contemporary presentation of the thought of Origen, (ii) a contemporary harvesting of Origen's fruit in history and (iii) a theological reflection on Origen's

91 SF 10. GF 25: "Aus dieser Liebe heraus verwandelten sich für Origenes manche Dinge aus Alltäglichkeit in eine unendlich geheimnisvolle, mystische Wirklichkeit, fast nur ihm allein zugänglich."

92 SF 10. GF 25: "In dieser Innerlichkeit glühender Liebe geschieht nun das Wunder: der Sinn der zweiten Stufe erscheint wie aufgehoben und umgekehrt."

achievement. *Spirit and Fire* spins around the two poles of form and content, the second and third strata: “The whole tone should lie with the second and the third strata: the setting out of the formal theological attitude on the one hand, and of the innermost personal essential heart of the thinker and mystic on the other hand.”⁹³ This consideration opens two important questions. The first: is it true that the silenced doctrines cannot be part, even today, of a possible answer to metaphysical aporias? The second: is the resulting thinker still Origen? Can we really ask an ancient author to help us face contemporary issues, while, at the same time, silencing some of his major doctrines, without which his entire system might collapse?

The first question is open for dogmatic theologians to answer. We could say, however, that Balthasar’s methodology is an example of how to skillfully read a Father in conversation with modern theological questions, apparently far from the patristic field. As for the second question, we can answer that, although an anthology might not represent the *whole* Origen—as in the antique, Alexandrian Origen—it does present an Origen *for today*. To present an author does not, for Balthasar, mean exhibiting all the elements of that author’s system, but rather tracing those elements that are fundamental to understanding the essence of the author. If we consider Origen’s goal, which, by his own admission, was to interpret and share the Word of God, and to be a loyal man of the Church, we can better understand Balthasar’s silences.

93 SF 15. GF 32: “Der ganze Ton sollte auf der zweiten und dritten Schicht liegen: Herausstellung der formalen theologischen Haltung einerseits, des innersten persönlichen Wesenskerns des Denkers und des Mystikers andererseits.”

III. Balthasar's Enthusiasm for Origen

Discerning the essence of Origen was the main goal of Balthasar's anthology *Spirit and Fire*. This, as we saw, was not an objective presentation of Origen's doctrines, but an open declaration of admiration. This admiration was expressed by Balthasar on many other occasions as well:

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.⁹⁴

I discovered Origen and recognized in astonishment that he was the most sovereign spirit of the first centuries, who has set his mark for good or ill on the totality of Christian theology. Even today [Spirit and Fire is] the weightiest (book) of all I have published.⁹⁵

Origen remains for me the most inspired, the most wide-ranging interpreter and lover of the Word of God. I never feel so at home elsewhere as I do with him.⁹⁶

Origen is a cathedral with many points of view, towers, statues, columns, intersections; everything is a hint, an unfinished line, a wave of thoughts rushes on the other.⁹⁷

Balthasar's interest in the Fathers is not limited to Origen. Gregory of Nyssa is the most resonant with Balthasar's love for the world, as seen in the monograph *Présence et Pensée*. It is Maximus the Confessor, with his focus on the analogical structure of the world, who appears to be most consonant with Balthasar's overall theology, as evident in the monograph *Kosmische Liturgie*. Why, then, was it Origen who made Balthasar feel more "at home"? The answer to this question lies in the aim and purpose of Balthasar's work on the Fathers, presented in the introduction to the first edition of the *Kosmische Liturgie* quoted above.⁹⁸ If Gregory of Nyssa can help Balthasar with some issues in existential philosophy, and Maximus

94 MW 89. ZSW 76: "Origenes (für mich, wie einst für Erasmus, wichtiger als Augustinus) wurde zum Schlüssel für die ganze griechische Patristik, das Frühmittelalter, bis ja hin zu Hegel und Karl Barth."

95 MW 11. ZSW 10–11: "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 gewichtsvollste von allem, was ich vorlegen konnte."

96 ZSW 103–32: "Origenes bleibt für mich der genialste, der weiträumigste Ausleger und Liebhaber des Wortes Gottes. Nirgends ist mir so wohl wie bei ihm." See also n. 38.

97 Evagrius Ponticus 32: "Origenes ist ein Dom voller Perspektiven, Türme, Figuren, Säulen, Überschneidungen; alles ist Hinweis, unausgezogene Linie, eine Welle des Gedankens überstürzt die Andere."

98 See n. 51.

the Confessor with tackling German Idealism, Origen is the Father that, more than any other, is able to address every major issue of Catholicism in Balthasar's time. This does not, however, mean that Balthasar is ignorant of temporal and conceptual distance: "The Fathers are far, because the situation of the Fathers in their times was completely different, even opposite, to ours, because no element of patristic thought can be brought over in our time without modification; rather, everything of that lively ground has to be adapted and newly shaped."⁹⁹ Balthasar is not proposing a naïve retrieval. What theology needs is to assimilate tradition and dare to modify the ancient doctrines, the old ways, in order to meet the challenges of today. This kind of relationship has been well expressed in the introduction to *Présence et Pensée*, when facing the question "Why study the Fathers?": Balthasar presents a metaphor that, while not completely unproblematic, helps us to understand his attitude:

We remember it, as a man remembers the profound intuitions he had as an adolescent. If he cannot relive them just as they were, because his situation, his life, indeed, the whole world have changed for him, he can at least fortify himself with the thought that that purity of inspiration, that burning and impatient resonance of his whole being is his very self!¹⁰⁰

The Fathers, for Balthasar, are the "Church's intimate youthful diary". He is conscious that one cannot use them to answer modern questions by way of simple transposition, just as one cannot simply expand upon the pages of a diary begun in one's adolescence: "Youthful fire is not meant to warm up those who are old."¹⁰¹ There is an aspect of this "fire" that we will never be able to make our own. For this reason, we should read our history as a living witness of what we were, conscious that, although our youth is gone forever, it remains "mysteriously present at the wellsprings of our soul in a kind of delectable eternity."¹⁰² Balthasar is interested in understanding how the essence of a Father reveals itself in a new age. What theology requires, he claims, is not pure historical research or enthusiastic revival

99 KL v-vi: "(Die Väter sind) ferner, weil die Situation der Väter in ihrer Zeit eine völlig andere, ja entgegengesetzte war als die Situation, in der wir stehen, weil darum kein Stück patristischen Denkens unverwandelt in unsere Zeit herübergeholt werden kann, sondern alles von den lebendigen Gründen her angeeignet und neugeprägt werden muss."

100 PT 13. PP xi: "Nous nous souvenons d'elle, comme l'homme se souvient des profondes intuitions de l'adolescent: s'il ne peut le revivre telle qu'elle, parce que la situation, la vie, le monde entier ont changé pour lui, il peut du moins se fortifier à la pensée que cette pureté d'aspiration, que cette vibration ardente et impatiente de tout son être, – c'est lui-même!"

101 PT 13. PP xii: "Le feu des jeunes n'a pas pour but de réchauffer les vieux."

102 PT 13. PP xii: "Lison l'histoire, notre histoire, comme le récit vivant de ce que nous fûmes jadis, avec ce double sentiment que tout cela est passé pour toujours et que malgré tout, cette jeunesse et chaque instant de notre vie reste mystérieusement présent au fond de notre âme en un sort d'éternité délicate."

(for example of the Fathers), “but rather a kind of Christian humanism that goes to the sources to find what is living and truly original (and not to a school of thought lost since dried up) in a spirit of joy and freedom able to weigh the true value of things.”¹⁰³ It is exactly this approach that motivated Balthasar’s intimate acquaintance with the Fathers, which de Lubac could describe as “connaturality”; this was an attitude that allowed Balthasar to criticize certain of their solutions, and to reject uncongenial doctrines, without diminishing their genius.¹⁰⁴ He does not accept the entire corpus of Origenian doctrines, but his thinking is permeated by the Origenian spirit, by Origen’s passionate love for the Scripture—the Word of God—and its historical manifestations. Balthasar does not look to Origen for answers, so much as for the spirit he adopted when engaging the fundamental issues of ancient Christianity, testing its resonance with modern sensibilities. The purpose of this research is to delve into this statement, to understand how Origen was read by Balthasar in relation to his own century, and to reveal how his ideas could still, *mutatis mutandis*, help us face the problems of our own time.

The idea of a “spirit of Origen” in Balthasar is suggested by the Swiss theologian himself in an interview in 1976 with Michael Albus—almost 40 years after completing his works on the Fathers.¹⁰⁵ It is striking to notice that the title of this interview, probably chosen by the editor, is *Geist und Feuer*: it is with the title of his Origen anthology that Balthasar wants to be associated. When asked about his *Hauptwerk*, Balthasar does not, in fact, propose a book from his major trilogy. “Perhaps the shortest books provide a better view of the whole than this meandering work. But it can also appear in books where I allow others to speak, for instance Origen or Bernanos. They stand closer to me than much that I have written myself.”¹⁰⁶ Balthasar here suggests that his theological spirit is con-

103 ET 1, 159–160. ST 1, 170: “Was not tut, ist weder enthusiastische Erneuerung von irgend etwas (zum Beispiel der ‘Väter’) noch bloße historische Forschung, sondern jene christliche Humanität, die in den Quellen das lebendige, ursprünglich Quellende sucht (gegenüber einer vertrockneten Schule), in einer gewissen heiteren Freiheit, die zugleich um das wahre Gewicht der Dinge weißt”

104 DE LUBAC, *Un Témoin du Christ* 200. *Ibid.* 239–240: “No matter what subject he is treating, and even if he never mentions any of their names, it is very clear that von Balthasar was formed in the school of the Fathers of the Church. With many of them he is on more than familiar terms; he has in many ways become almost like them. For all that, he is no slavish admirer: he recognizes the weaknesses of each and the inevitable limitations that result from the age in which each lived. With his customary frankness he criticizes even those he admires and loves most. But their vision has become his own. It is principally to them that he owes his profound appreciation of the Christian attitude before the Word of God.”

105 ZSW 103–132. First published in: *Herder Korrespondenz* 30 (1976) 72–82; eng. trans.: *Spirit and Fire. An Interview with Hans Urs von Balthasar*, in: *Com(US)* 23 (2005) 573–593.

106 *Spirit and Fire. An Interview* 576–577. ZSW 108: “Vielleicht ist in den kleinen Werken mehr Ganzheitliches enthalten, als in diesem Bandwurm. Aber es kann auch in Büchern

densed in the books he wrote about others, more so than in his works of original theology. This is confirmed by the fact that, when asked for a “Bilanz seines Lebens”, Balthasar gave no specific answer, but indicated three titles from his corpus: *Geist und Feuer*, *Das Ganze im Fragment*, *Glaubhaft ist nur Liebe*. None of these is part of the trilogy, and all are relatively short. More than the specific content of these books, Balthasar is suggesting that the titles express the pivotal themes of his lifelong theological effort: the first indicates the divine love for man; the second indicates that the totality of what God wanted to communicate to the world became one man, one Church—an all-embracing fragment.¹⁰⁷ Origen plays here a fundamental role: the words describing the Alexandrian are also the words Balthasar uses to describe himself: “I would like to place myself under these two words, which essentially characterize him.”¹⁰⁸ This statement suggests to us that, in reading Origen with Balthasar, we will not only better understand the Alexandrian, but also Balthasar himself. Moreover, it gives us an interpretative key to help unlock Balthasar’s unique reading of Origen. The most important element of Origen’s thought is, for Balthasar, the divine love for man; “namely Spirit and Fire.” According to Balthasar, before any other element of Origen’s thought, before any specific doctrine, comes the description of the divine love for man, to which man responds with an analogous spirit (knowledge) and fire (action). For this reason, Balthasar considers Origen the ideal Christian, possessing the spirit he himself desired—a man enamored with the divine love, manifest in spirit and fire, answering to this love with the spirit of knowledge and the fire of love.

stecken, in denen ich andere reden lasse, z. B. Origenes oder Bernanos. Die stehen mir zum Beispiel näher als manches von mir selbst Geschriebene.”

107 Spirit and Fire. An Interview 592. ZSW 131: “Das Ganze, was Gott zur Welt zu sagen hat, ist in einem Menschen, in einer Kirche gesagt worden. Aber so, dass das Fragment nun eben katholisch ist, das heißt allgemein und umfassend, und durch den Heiligen Geist sich ausweitet bis zum All, bis Gott alles in allem ist.”

108 Spirit and Fire. An Interview 592. ZSW 131: “Ich möchte mich unter diese beide Worte stellen, die ihn wesentlich kennzeichnen.”

IV. Why *Origen*? The Issues behind Enthusiasm: against Neo-Scholasticism

1. School Theology

My entire period of study in the Society was a grim struggle with the dreariness of theology, with what men had made out of the glory of revelation. I could not endure this presentation of the Word of God. I could have lashed out with the fury of a Samson. I felt like tearing down, with Samson's strength, the whole temple and burying myself beneath the rubble. But it was like this because, despite my sense of vocation, I wanted to carry out my own plans, and was living in a state of unbounded indignation. There was no one who could have understood me.¹⁰⁹

When thinking of his Jesuit studies in Feldkirch, Pullach, and Lyon, Balthasar refers to himself as “longing in the desert of Neo-Scholasticism.”¹¹⁰ The young scholar, coming from the lively realm of *Germanistik*, suddenly found his enthusiasm flagging. What sort of theology had Balthasar encountered?¹¹¹ In the first half of the 20th century, the Jesuit schools followed the line suggested by the encyclical *Aeterni patris*: theological schools must follow Aquinas's doctrine. What emerged

109 VON SPEYR/VON BALTHASAR, *Erde und Himmel* 195. The English translation is from HENRICI, *A Sketch of von Balthasar's Life* 13.

110 MW 89. ZSW 76: “(...) in der Wüste der Neuscholastik”. To reconstruct Balthasar's Jesuit education is no easy task. On the Jesuit Gymnasium of Feldkirch, the most exhaustive work is LÖCHER, *Feldkirch und seine Jesuitenkollegien*. On the school of Pullach, the only consistent source is OSWALD/BLEISTEIN, *Schule des Denkens*. On the Jesuit theologate in Lyon: AVON/HOURS/FOUILLOUX, *Les Jesuites a Lyon*. The greatest Balthasar's biographer, Manfred Lochbrunner, reported many sources and informations in all his works, the latest of which: LOCHBRUNNER, *Balthasariana*.

111 The most recent work on Balthasar's early years is PETERSON, *The Early Hans Urs von Balthasar*. This monograph, useful for a scholarly reconstruction of the many elements at play in Balthasar's education, draws however a political picture of Balthasar as intellectually involved in the National Socialist Party, which does not really correspond to the interests that the young Balthasar was developing in the Jesuit schools. For an articulated critique of Peterson's methodology and motivations see Jonathan King's review in *Modern Theology* 33 (2017) 308–311. As King, *ibid.* 311, points out, Peterson's goal is simply to prove that Balthasar was a racist, a fascist, and an anti-Semite; to achieve this goal, Peterson advances “blatant misrepresentations” and “suspicious omissions”, using many “sleights of hand.” This dubious methodology “calls into question the trustworthiness of his entire effort.” A better symphonic reconstruction of Balthasar's early writings is NICHOLS, *Scattering the Seed*. Despite the many sources, little attention has been given to the historical background and reasons that inspired Balthasar to shape his theology in these early years. It is a goal of this work to contribute to Balthasar scholarship in this sense, through the individual example of his work on Origen.

and crystallized in this context was “Neo-Scholasticism”, also called Neo-Thomism, Third Scholasticism or Suárezian Thomism.¹¹² Despite the clear pontifical indication, an impulse toward liberal modernism can be traced in figures like George Tyrrell (1861–1909) and Alfred Loisy (1857–1940), who stated that the true essence of Christianity was in accordance with modern society.¹¹³ Tyrrell, against the strict prevalence of rationalistic Scholasticism, emphasized the value of personal experience and the sharp distinction between faith and dogma. Following a similar line, Loisy applied the historical method to Scripture, not to be read as container of doctrines and dogmas, but as an historical document. Tyrrell was suspended as a priest and excommunicated in 1906, Loisy in 1908. Pius X officially condemned modernism, “the synthesis of all heresies”, in 1907’s encyclical *Pascendi dominici gregis*. It is evident that the climate in the Jesuit schools in the following years was fearful of anything that might be accused of “modernism”. The safest and most common way to avoid problems was to follow manualistic programs, to leave aside the question of a “history of salvation”, and to follow closely the doctrinal dogmas of neo-Thomism.

The most important figure of German Neo-Scholastic theology is Joseph Kleutgen (1811–1883), who endorsed pure, rationalistic thought, and based himself on the systematic thought of Suárez, assuming the latter’s faithfulness to the thought of the Doctor Angelicus. Kleutgen’s election as prefect of studies and professor of dogmatic theology at the Gregorian University in Rome was interpreted as a sign of clear papal approval.¹¹⁴ Balthasar’s education was perfectly in line with this kind of neo-Thomism. Having concluded his novitiate in Feldkirch, Balthasar moved to the Jesuit school in Pullach, where he completed his three years of philosophical education (1931–1934). The school was established “not only to shape pastoral guides, confessors and catechists, but also to influence [the priests] on the scientific level: we wanted to create a scientific center.”¹¹⁵ Balthasar studied there during the time that Karl Rahner, future professor, calls “quietly Neo-Scholastic,”¹¹⁶ “a thinner and paler Neo-Scholasticism of Suárezian coinage.”¹¹⁷ In Pul-

112 SCHMIDINGER, *Streit um die christliche Philosophie* 23–28.

113 The bibliography on modernism is immense; for an overall presentation of the modernist crisis, see VIDLER, *A Variety of Catholic Modernists*; DALY, *Transcendence and Immanence*; JODOK, *Catholicism Contending with Modernity*.

114 HENNESSEY, *Leo XIII’s Thomistic Revival 185–197*.

115 AMSJ, *Akten Berchmanskolleg: Brief von Augustin Kardinal Bea an Josef de Vries vom 28.11.1967*; quoted in: *Schule des Denkens* 14.

116 RAHNER, *Tradition im Wandel* 156. Rahner tracks three phases in the history of Pullach: a first, distinguished by a quiet Neo-Scholastic Philosophy; a second phase of transcendental philosophy of being (with Heidegger and Marechal as theoretical inspirer) of Lotz, Sieverth, Müller and De Vries; and a third phase of philosophical pluralism.

117 RAHNER, *Zur Rezeption des Thomas von Aquin* 50: “Sie basiert auf einer philosophischen Grundlage, die natürlich mit dem Thomismus etwas zu tun hatte. Aber zumindest bei uns

lach, Balthasar studied a Thomism “far from the spirit of Thomas himself”,¹¹⁸ what Etienne Gilson has called “a sort of flat rationalism, used only in the schools, that satisfies that sort of deism which, in the end, many want to teach.”¹¹⁹

Coming from the study of *Germanistik*, this manualist education seemed dull and dry to Balthasar. His teachers were the authors of the *Institutiones Philosophiae Scholasticae*—Karl Frank, Maximilian Rast, Johannes B. Schuster, Alexander Wilwoll: solid Neo-Scholastics. They were, however, moderately open to modern problems: an example being Bernard Jahnsen. He was interested in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, but had a “peculiar love-hate (*merkwürdige Hassliebe*)” relationship with the modern philosophers, who “did not have enough strength to influence decisively the Neo-Scholastic philosophy [of Pullach].”¹²⁰ As Rahner underlines, “one cannot say that these [professors] ignored the contemporary philosophers outside Neo-Scholasticism. However, this philosophy outside of the church was for them ultimately alien. It was used apologetically, and judged defensively, from the perspective of the ivory tower of Neo-Scholasticism. No Przywara or Maréchal, not even a Blondel or Sertillanges could modernize these quiet Neo-Scholastics.”¹²¹ Balthasar experienced this approach as “a truth that is mere-

in Deutschland war sie ein wenig ‘Suárezianisch’ bestimmt. Während also bei den Jesuiten in Rom der ‘Thomismus der 24 Thesen’ gemäß der Studienkongregation von 1914 doziert wurde, wo zum Beispiel die Realdistinktion zwischen esse und essentia eine fundamentale Rolle spielte, lehrte bei uns eine genauso selbstverständlich und indiskutabel mit allen kirchlichen Lehren konforme, dabei aber doch etwas dünne und blasse Neoscholastik Suárezianischer Prägung, deutlich erkennbar zum Beispiel in der ‘Philosophia Lacensis.’”

118 WILLIAMS, *The Future of the Past* 349: “Its target was a monolithic neo Thomism which had become as remote from contemporary concerns and the needs of the twentieth century church as it was arguably distant from the spirit of Thomas himself.”

119 Gilson, letter to de Lubac, 8 July 1956, in: DE LUBAC/GILSON, *Lettres de M. Etienne Gilson* 23. On 21 June 1965 Gilson wrote to de Lubac, in: DE LUBAC, *At the Service of the Church* 126: “The tragedy of modernism was that the rotten theology promulgated by its opponents was in large part responsible for its errors. Modernism was wrong, but its repression was undertaken by men who were also wrong, whose pseudo-theology made a modernist reaction inevitable. (...) I see redemption only in a Thomist theology as you perceive it, in the company of St. Augustine, St. Bonaventure, and the great theologians of the East.” DE LUBAC, *Mémoire* 127: “Le drame du modernisme fut que la théologie gâtée dès ses adversaires était, pour beaucoup, responsable de ses erreurs. Il avait tort, mais la répression fut conduite par des hommes qui n’avaient pas raison, et dont la pseudo-théologie rendait une réaction moderniste inévitable. Je ne vois de salut que dans une théologie thomiste telle que vous la comprenez, avec saint Augustin, saint Bonaventure et les grand Orientaux.” See also BALTHASAR, *Henri de Lubac*.

120 RAHNER, *Tradition im Wandel* 157.

121 *Ibid.*: “Man kann nicht sagen, dass diese Philosophen ihre Zeitgenossen außerhalb der Neuscholastik einfach nicht kannten. Aber diese Philosophie außerhalb der Kirche blieb ihnen doch im letzten fremd und wurde apologetisch und defensiv aus dem Elfenbeinturm dieser Neuscholastik heraus gewertet. Kein Przywara oder Maréchal, nicht einmal ein Blondel oder Sertillanges modernisierten diese beruhigte Neuscholastik.”

ly handed on, without being thought anew from its very foundations” and has therefore “lost its vital power.”¹²² Especially disappointing for Balthasar was the preference for manuals above the Scriptures. In his opinion, “to honor tradition does not excuse one from the obligation of beginning everything from the beginning each time, not with Augustine or Thomas or Newman, but with Christ.”¹²³ To be clear, Balthasar was disappointed not only by Pullach, but also later by Lyon: “really nothing was heard of a nouvelle théologie in the lectures. (I am surprised by this myth dreamt up nowadays for poor old Fourvière!).”¹²⁴ Despite what is usually assumed about the *ressourcement* of Lyon, the official line of the college was that of Pullach. The state of patristic studies at the time was determined by the problems examined: it was reserved for an élite of *savants*, and only used apologetically.¹²⁵ The best example of this mentality is the *Enchiridion Patristicum* of the Jesuit Marie Joseph Rouet de Journal.¹²⁶ This text, with its 24 editions from

122 RB 33. SB 22: “Eine Wahrheit, die nur noch tradiert wird, ohne von Grund auf neu gedacht zu werden, hat ihre Lebenskraft eingebüßt.”

123 RB 34. SB 22: “Die Tradition ehren entbindet nicht der Pflicht, alles immer von vorn anzufangen, nicht bei Augustinus oder Thomas oder Newman, sondern bei Christus.”

124 Prüfet alles 9: “In den Vorlesungen war von einer nouvelle théologie überhaupt keine Rede (ich wundere mich noch heute, dass für dieses arme Fourvière ein solcher Mythos erfunden werden konnte!)” On this aspect, it is emblematic the title of the chapter of Voderholzer’s biography, “Fourvière: the myth and the reality”: VODERHOLZER/MILLER, Meet Henri de Lubac 47–49.

125 Theologians like Möhler, Newman, and Scheeben initiated a new approach to the Church Fathers. However, the Fathers were commonly used in an apologetic function, and no real dialogue was established. Because of the lack of translations into vernacular languages, the texts were usually difficult to find. The most studied author remained Augustine, as shown by LAMIRANDE, *Léclésiologie de Saint Augustin* 1–124. For a presentation of the patristic studies in the 19th and beginning of the 20th century: SIMONETTI, *La teologia dei padri* 359–389, specifically 368 and 372 n. 41. Specifically on Origen, Simonetti explains that he was totally left out of the first part of the 19th century partly because of Harnack’s thesis of the Hellenization of Christendom, and partly because of the Church’s condemnation. On this phenomenon, the most famous study is probably the first chapter of DE LUBAC, *Histoire et Esprit*. In the first years of the century the situation began to change thanks to PRAT, *Origène*, and to DE FAYE, *Origène*, followed by many others.

126 *Enchiridion Patristicum*. *Loci ss. patrum, doctorum, scriptorum ecclesiasticorum, quos in usum scholarum collegit M. J. ROUET DE JOURNAL*, Friburgi Brisgviae 1911 (Barcinone 24, 1969). The preface expresses very well the spirit of patristic studies in the first half of the century: “Hoc igitur commodi ab isto libello expectatur, ut praestantiora patristicae traditionis documenta discipulis praesertim, dum scholas audiunt aut relegend, in promptu sint tamquam in summulam quamdam collecta; quae, licet apertum prorsus dogmatum historiae campum relinquat nec minutas singulorum scriptorum referat opiniones, tamen propter accuratum locorum delectum eorumque chronologicam dispositionem facili conspectu illustriores quosque catenae traditionis, ut aiunt, annulos exhibeat.” As for Origen, he was presented as an example of the classic themes of the world’s corruption and of the divine immutability; the most quoted texts were *De principiis* and *Contra Celsum*, while for

1911 to 1969, was used in the Jesuit seminaries, probably also in Pullach and Lyon. The Fathers were therefore used primarily for apologetics, mined for passages to defend one position or another. Patristics was far from Dogmatics: these were two totally different branches in the formation of the clergy.¹²⁷

2. The Church in the World

The problem, at least for Balthasar, did not lie in school theology alone. What he felt missing was not only a pedagogical model for clerical formation. He also detected a crisis in the mentality of a doctrine strongly separated from the pastoral and missionary vocation of the Church, construing it as an ivory tower surrounded by a lifeless desert. The desert-feeling that Balthasar experienced in school was indeed fully consonant with the situation of the Church “outside”: theologians were, at the time, very distant from popular spirituality. Life and doctrine had become separate fields. The aforementioned fight against modernism culminated (but did not end) with the *Pascendi*, the clearest example of an antimodern position defended by the Church, showing an inability to establish real dialogue with modern philosophy, science, politics, and social sciences. Daniélou addressed these problems in an article that would become the manifesto of the *Nouvelle Théologie*, lamenting the status of theology and expressing the need for a new approach.¹²⁸ What was missing for him was unity, not only between thought and life, but also between exegesis and history. Balthasar shared this concern, decrying the separation between theology and spirituality, or, as he entitled an essay in 1948, between theology and sanctity.¹²⁹ Balthasar underlines how, in the history of Christianity, the greatest thinkers were often saints, men of great spirituality; in his own day, on the contrary, theology and spirituality had each become a world of their own, with hardly any contact. Balthasar’s essay is exemplary of his exegetical method: he articulates a problem of his time, the separation of theology and spirituality, and presents the Fathers as an example of nondualism. As for Origen, Balthasar addresses the distinction between commentaries and homilies, the former more speculative, the latter more pastoral. If we look deeper however, Balthasar claims, this distinction vanishes, since Origen’s concern was always one:

the commentaries and homilies only one text each was present. No hint of anthropological, ethical or spiritual topics was present.

127 On the role of patristic studies in the time before the Second Vatican Council, see RIZZI, *I Padri della Chiesa* 87–100.

128 DANIÉLOU, *Les orientations présentes*.

129 VON BALTHASAR, *Theologie und Heiligkeit*, in *ST* 1, 195–225. Previously in *Wort und Wahrheit* (Wien 1948) 3, 881–896; eng. trans.: *Theology and Sanctity*, in *ET* 1, 181–209.

explaining the word of God, “which is as much a word of life as a word of truth.”¹³⁰ The last section of the essay is entitled *The bride and the bridegroom: philosophy and theology*, he argues, must enjoy a nuptial relation, an image representing the relation that Christ has with his Church. For Balthasar, what was missing in the Neo-Scholastic approach was the agapic-erotic dimension of theology that, for him, mirrors the agapic-erotic dimension of the relation between man and God.¹³¹ In this text Balthasar expresses an idea that will become a recurrent *topos* of his theology, the contraposition between “sitting theology” and “kneeling theology”. This was not just an conceptual distinction, but also an attack on a specific mode of theology, as suggested by the fact that de Lubac, who proofread the article, thought it too risky to be published: some passages might have seemed to take aim at a certain Thomism. For this reason, the article was corrected by Daniélou, who “eliminated the critical passages against Neo-Scholasticism while holding the core message: the unity of life and thought.”¹³²

This unity is the principal message of Balthasar’s “programmatic” work *Razing the Bastions. On the Church in This Age*. This essay, despite being written in 1952, fits perfectly with the situation Balthasar encountered during his studies with the Jesuits. Balthasar sounds almost autobiographical when he writes that “in young people the Church’s sidelines-position and self-preoccupation have aroused a feeling of discomfort; indeed, this ancient Church which, out of its vast storehouse of the wisdom born of old age, continues to teach and admonish, evokes in the young a sense of unreality. Especially in the countries that experienced the World Wars and the intellectual collapse of beloved and trusted traditions. (...) The language of young people changes quickly, becomes rough and ‘basic’; impatience is written on their brow, they want only to be a springboard for what is to

130 ET 1, 183. ST 1, 197: “Man mag zwischen den Kommentaren und den Homilien des Origenes einen Unterschied feststellen und in jenen mehr das wissenschaftliche Interesse, in diesen mehr die pastorale Bemühung vorherrschen sehen; die Nuance ist doch für den Tiefblickenden kaum merklich; in beiden Formen geht es um Auslegung des Wortes Gottes, das immer ebensowohl ein Wort des Lebens wie ein Wort der Wahrheit ist.”

131 In this essay, Balthasar starts to develop his reflection of the Trinity as mystery of love, which will become the center of his entire theology in the years to come. Once again he differentiates himself from the weak Trinitarian theology developed by Neo-Scholasticism, not centered on the exchange of love but only on the supremacy of the Father. For him the saints “have no desire to know God as simply *ens a se*, but solely as the Father of Christ; the Spirit, too, not as an abstract world of universal laws and prescriptions, but as the Spirit of the tongues of fire, the Spirit who breathes where he wills”: ET 1, 205. ST 1, 221–222: “Sie wollen Gott nicht als bloßes *ens a se* kennen, sondern einzig als den Vater Jesu Christi, und den Geist nicht als seine abstrakte Welt allgemeiner Gesetze und Geltungen, sondern als den Geist der Feuerzungen, der weht, wo er will.”

132 The episode is reported by LOCHBRUNNER, *Balthasariana* 11.

come, and they are open and ready for this.”¹³³ Referring to the problems of secular society, Balthasar speaks of the Church in strong words, claiming that she was taken by surprise, insufficiently equipped: “Perhaps she continued all too long after the Reformation to hand on the old intellectual framework of the middle ages in her Counter-Reformation.”¹³⁴ The 19th century had been the century of new discovery and scientific enrichment, “but most of the Church’s representatives remained immersed in their old tradition, vigorously restoring it once again at the end of the century, unconcerned with the expanded field of view.”¹³⁵ In front of a Church closed from, and attached to, certain positions, there are two ways to proceed, Balthasar argues: to wait until the Church is destroyed from the outside, or to renew it from the inside, building upon its original foundation. Thus, to “raze the bastions” does not mean to bring chaos, but to make the core of the Christian message visible and accessible to the world. There is no polemical attitude here, but a deep love for the missionary vocation of Christianity.¹³⁶ To raze the bastions is to show a clear, unmistakable, and uniquely Catholic face. It can therefore never be thought of as a diluted message, or a weak defense of ideals. Balthasar is clear: the bastions can fall only if the core is strong enough to endure without them, only if Christians are able to defend it with their lives, to announce their message aloud to all. The greatest need of the Church is living examples of a living doctrine: to tear down the physical walls means to build a new kind of wall around the core—a wall built of saints and missionaries, who are willing to bring the Gospel to the world at large. Sanctity, and the mission of bringing

133 RB 18–19. SB 8: “Dies Abseitsstehen, Mit-sich-selber-beschäftigetsein hat bei den Jungen, die sich jedenfalls auf Wandlungen gefaßt machen und sie mitzuvollziehen gewillt sind, ein Gefühl des Unbehagens, ja der Unwirklichkeit gegenüber der alten und mit soviel Altersweisheit dozierenden und fordernden Kirche geweckt. In den Ländern zumal, die die Kriege erlebten und geistige Einstürze geliebter und geglaubter Traditionen, gilt das Überlieferte nicht erst durch seinen Inhalt, sondern schon durch seine Form, durch die Tatsache, dass es Gewesenes vertritt, als verdächtig. Die Sprache der Jungen verändert sich rasch, wird barsch und ‘basic’, Ungeduld ist ihr an die Stirn geschrieben, sie will nur noch Absprungbrett sein in das Kommende, zu dem sie offen und bereit ist.”

134 RB 17–18. SB 7: “Vielleicht hat sie nach der Reformation allzulang in ihrer Gegenreform die alten gedanklichen Rahmen des Mittelalters weitertradiert.”

135 RB 18. SB 7: “Die meisten Vertreter der Kirche blieben in ihre eigene Tradition versenkt, restaurierten sie am Ende des Jahrhunderts mit großem Nachdruck noch einmal, ohne sie um die Weitung des Blickfelds zu kümmern.”

136 KRENSKI, Hans Urs von Balthasar 93–94, asks how it is possible that, despite all these problems, neither Lubac nor Balthasar assumed a critical attitude toward the Church. The reason is for him to be found in their “fast mystischen Optimismus” (KEHL, Hans Urs von Balthasar 40) and in their education in Catholic families where the common good was the main interest; they were both sure that there could be no theology “die nicht ihre eigentliche Bewährung am Widerstand der innerkirchlichen Beharrungskräfte zu bestehen hätte.” See SB 13.

God's splendor into the world, is not a task for priests alone, but also for laypersons. In line with Daniélou's article, Balthasar presents four problematic aspects of 20th century theology: (i) the lack of a strong Trinitarian doctrine; (ii) the lack of a fertile Christology; (iii) the divorce between theology and spirituality; (iv) the absence of a mystical interpretation of the Scriptures. It should not surprise one to see here some of the most relevant aspects of Balthasar's own theological program; moreover, we should notice how each of these aspects is illuminated by his relation with the Fathers. In fact, it was when facing the long list of problems attending a certain modern, Neo-Scholastic theology that the group in Lyon, Balthasar included, started to look back to the Fathers:

Fortunately Henri de Lubac was in residence, and he referred us beyond scholasticism to the Church Fathers, generously making his notes and excerpts available to us. So it came about that while others were playing soccer, I studied with Daniélou, Bouillard and a number of others (Fessard was no longer there), and I wrote books about Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and Maximus.¹³⁷

3. *Sources Chrétiennes*: the Return to the Fathers

In 1944, Origen's *Homilies on Genesis* appeared in a French edition, with the original text, followed in 1947 by the *Homilies on Exodus*, and in 1950 by the *Homilies on Numbers*. In the midst of World War II, where the needs of Europe seemed more practical than spiritual, a group of scholars from the Jesuit school of Lyon decided to begin a collection of patristic texts. In occupied Paris, in 1942, *Sources Chrétiennes* was launched with Gregory of Nyssa's *Contemplation sur la vie de Moïse*, by the initiative of Victor Fontoynt, Jean Daniélou, Henri de Lubac, and

137 VON BALTHASAR, Prüfet alles 9: "Zum Glück und zum Trost wohnte Henri de Lubac im Haus, der uns über den Schulstoff hinaus auf die Kirchenväter verwies und uns allen seine eigenen Aufzeichnungen und Exzerpte großzügig auslieh. So kam es, dass ich, während die andern Fußball spielen gingen, mit Daniélou, Bouillard und ein paar wenigen andern (Fessard war schon nicht mehr da) hinter Origenes, Gregor von Nyssa und Maximus saß und auch je ein Buch über diese verfaßte." Another student at Fourvière reports a similar memory. TILLIETTE, Henri de Lubac Achtzigjährig 187 n. 12: "(De Lubac) was not an instructor in the scholasticate, but rather 'below' on the Catholic University faculty. Despite his exhaustion he never returned with the funicular, but rather climbed laboriously back up by way of the narrow, steep streets. 'Above', nevertheless, he conducted a sort of clandestine teaching ministry; professors and students both visited his room regularly. He himself was never concerned about having 'disciples' – 'One is your Master' – but rather about inspiring them to be diligent theologians. Their studies were supposed to give form to their existence and train them to be witnesses to Christ. (...) the old patristic sources began to bubble up again and poured forth in many streams (...) From one single central vision his work developed in every direction, just as a free-standing tree spreads out its branches."

Claude Mondésert.¹³⁸ This initiative was not merely a matter of philological interest. While the war was destroying Europe, the decision to publish the works of early Christian thinkers clearly expressed a need, in a broken society, to regain the unity given first and foremost by an interest in the nature of human being, an interest in human spirituality and our relation to the supernatural—in what could be called “classic humanism.”¹³⁹ Among the scholars involved, the most relevant for Hans Urs von Balthasar is Henri de Lubac.¹⁴⁰ The reason is not simply biographical (he was Balthasar’s teacher in Lyon): de Lubac was the first to actively engage with the Fathers in order to face issues of his time. The clearest example is *Catholicisme: les aspects sociaux du dogme*. Here, de Lubac underlines the social aspect of the Church’s mission. Given the universal redemptive plan of God, the Church must bring its message to everybody. The Church is the sacrament of Christ in the world, and it is therefore her task to unite humanity; this universal mission can be seen in the sacraments, vehicles of union with the one body of Christ, which will not be complete until all are united as members.¹⁴¹ *Catholicisme* was not only a treatise on the social life of the Church, but an example of how the Fathers were a fruitful resource for contemporary theology. On the very first page, de Lubac mentions Irenaeus, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Cyril of Alexan-

138 The real birth can be traced back to 1932 in the initiative of P. Victor Fontoynt SJ; interrupted because of the difficulty of communication during the war, the project began again in 1942 under the direction of de Lubac and Daniélou. On the history of *Sources Chrétiennes*: AAVV, *Les Pères de l’Église au XXe siècle*; GUINOT, Éditer et traduire les écrits des Pères dans *Sources Chrétiennes* 221–248. The spirit behind *Sources Chrétiennes* is well expressed by DANIELOU, *Les orientations présentes* 10: “For us the Fathers are not only the reliable witnesses of things that now belong to the past. They are also the most timely nourishment for men of today, because in them we find precisely a certain number of categories that are those of contemporary thought, and that scholastic theology had lost.”

139 On the theological background of *Sources Chrétiennes*, see PROSPERI, *The Birth of Sources Chrétiennes* 641–662. I am thankful to Father Paolo Prosperi for the numerous conversations, immense support, and inspiration, in the research for this work.

140 For further considerations on de Lubac’s influence on Balthasar, see HENRICI, *Hans Urs von Balthasar* 169–174; VODERHOLZER, *Die Bedeutung der so genannten “Nouvelle Théologie”* 208–212.

141 It is interesting for our work to notice that, when expressing the eschatological argument of de Lubac’s thesis, BALTHASAR, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac* 37, refers to Origen and “what is of lasting significance in Origen’s conception: that Christ and the blessed attain their ultimate beatitude only when the entire Body of Christ, the redeemed creation, is gathered together in the transfiguration, is given its due place in its spiritual meaning” (translation slightly modified). BALTHASAR, *Henri de Lubac* 32: “Der origenische Gedanke, der so starken Widerhall durch die Geschichte fand, dass Christus und die Seligen ihre letzte Seligkeit erst finden, wenn der ganze Leib Christi, die erlöste Schöpfung in der Verklärung beisammen sein wird, wird in seiner bleibenden geistigen Bedeutung gewürdigt.”

dria, Maximus the Confessor, and many others; the bibliographical backbone, as a whole, is rich in Church Fathers. At the time it must have been paradoxical, if not shocking, to read the name of Origen beside the names of more reputable Church Fathers, and to see him quoted against contemporary issues and “heresies”. Such was de Lubac’s methodology. Since he was not looking for a new authority to follow blindly, he could cite even a figure as controversial as Origen. The use of the Fathers taught by de Lubac was neither authoritarian nor simply apologetic. His suggested method was simple, yet new for the time: “the greatest figures of Christian salvation history are honoured only by the one who does today what they did then, or what they would have done if they had lived today.”¹⁴² To read the Fathers, he argues, means to engage dialogically with them, in order to answer to the problems of one’s own time. To be clear, the chief goal of de Lubac was not to solve theological problems per se, at least not directly, but first and foremost to enhance Christian spirituality. He read the Fathers because of their direct and clear approach to Scripture and the Christian event, recognizing that this clearness of approach can indeed help to solve (almost) any theological problem. De Lubac’s use of the Fathers was integrated into a wide-ranging movement of cultural and spiritual transformation, the so-called *ressourcement*.¹⁴³ The Fathers provided the opportunity to move from a moralistic, individualistic faith into one of deep communion, a faith directed to all persons, and therefore able to face every aspect of society.¹⁴⁴ For de Lubac, the Fathers were the clearest example of how the need for a solid doctrinal structure cannot be separated from personal development and the goal of sainthood for all.

The importance of this work for Balthasar is clear: “in *Catholicisme*, knowledge of the tradition was no dry, historical hair-splitting but something as natural as the movement of one’s own limbs.”¹⁴⁵ *Razing the Bastions* does not advocate mere

142 RB 34. SB 22: “Nur der ehrt die Größten der christlichen Heilsgeschichte, der heute das tut, was sie damals getan, oder was sie täten, wenn sie heute lebten.”

143 On de Lubac and the so called *Ressourcement*, see FLYNN/KELLY/MURRAY, *Ressourcement*; WOOD, *Ressourcement* 93–120. Some specific works on *ressourcement* and Balthasar are: VODERHOLZER, *Die Bedeutung der so genannten “Nouvelle Théologie”*; NEWSOME MARTIN, *A Roman Catholic Theology of Ressourcement*; MOGA, *Hans Urs von Balthasar und sein “ressourcement”* 373–386.

144 On the connection between de Lubac’s interest in patristic exegesis and his political theology, see HOLLON, *Everything Is Sacred*. Hollon argues that de Lubac’s strength was to be able to trace a connection between the status of exegesis and the social role of the Church. The purpose of his book is to examine patristic and medieval retrieval in the *Nouvelle Théologie* within the context of de Lubac’s efforts to ground a robust Catholic engagement with the secular world.

145 MW 37. ZSW 33: “All dies soll nicht zu einer Abwertung christlicher Innerlichkeit führen, immer nur die dumpfe menschliche Subjektivität in die klare Fülle der Kirche aufbrechen, die die Eine Braut ist, an deren Geheimnis jeder Liebende teilnehmen muss. Diesen

destruction: to raze down the walls of the Church is possible only if Christians hold close to the core of Christianity, only if they are firm enough to forgo walls and act as personal witnesses to that living heart. Opening up, and speaking a language intelligible to the modern world, was only half the battle. For Balthasar, the most necessary task was to reflect on the specifically Christian element, our deepening into Christ, by virtue of which one can begin to diffuse the essence of faith beyond the bastions. In this cultural background, meeting de Lubac was, for Balthasar, (as for Daniélou, Fessard, Bouillard, and many others) revolutionary. While de Lubac was a teacher of fundamental theology at the Catholic University of Lyon, he only occasionally taught courses at the Jesuit scholasticate. In 1934, however, he took up residence in the college: this simple event “was to have extremely important consequences for the history of theology.”¹⁴⁶

4. The Origin of *Ressourcement*: Henri de Lubac’s *Surnaturel*

It would be naïve to assume that de Lubac’s proposal to read the Fathers could be completely detached from the central issue he himself was concerned with, namely, the question on the supernatural. If de Lubac brought Balthasar both to the Fathers, and to questions of the supernatural, it is now my aim to show how these two issues overlap. After this demonstration, it will be possible to understand how, and in what sense, Origen could inspire Balthasar *himself* to take a stance in the famous debate viz. natural desire for the supernatural—even before it became a prominent issue.¹⁴⁷

It is necessary to recognize an important premise. While historiography on *ressourcement* considers de Lubac the first major reader of Origen, if we consider the years of publication, we can see that Balthasar crystallized his thought on Origen in 1936: ten years before *Surnaturel* and two before *Catholicisme*. Of course, I am not denying the role of de Lubac; Balthasar learned through and by him, and I will show how Balthasar’s concerns are inherited from a certain Lubacian perspective. However, the answers and attitudes of the two theologians are not identical. They share common ground, but Balthasar maintains a certain originality, owing to the presence of other authors and elements in his life; for example, his graduation in German Studies; Erich Przywara, Karl Barth and the issue of *analogia entis*; a different attitude toward Platonism; a different manner of dealing with

Katholizismus der Fülle fand ich im flutenden Reichtum von Henri de Lubacs Catholicisme, den ins Deutsche zu übertragen mir sofort als dringendes Gebot erschien.”

146 VODERHOLZER/MILLER, Meet Henri de Lubac 48.

147 On de Lubac’s reading of Origen: BOERSMA, Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology 160–168; FÉDOU, Henri de Lubac Lecteur d’Origène 133–146; HARMON, Historicism versus History and Spirit 29–58.

the Neo-Scholastic tradition in general, and the thought of Thomas of Aquinas specifically, etc. All these elements led Balthasar to read Origen as he did and, I would stress, are not less important than de Lubac's influence. Just as it would be naïve to restrict Lubac's influence to a "tool" of transmission (of the Fathers), since he also transmitted other concerns and questions (e.g. the nature-grace issue), so too would it be foolish to neglect the many questions that arose in Balthasar's confrontations with other authors.

De Lubac dedicated himself to solving the issue of the supernatural. His question was clear: how are the natural and supernatural levels of existence related to one another? Are they unbridgeable, or is there in man something that connects him to the divine ground of his being? Is the final end imposed from the outside, or is there something in human nature called to it? *Surnaturel* sought to find an answer to these questions in dialogue with the official reading of the Church, i.e. that of Thomas and his commentators, especially Cajetan and Suárez.¹⁴⁸ De Lubac believed these two to be responsible for a certain distortion of "the real Thomas." He especially blamed the doctrine of the *duplex ordo*, which diminished the dignity of the natural condition, for the Church's inaction in the midst of the many problems of the century.¹⁴⁹ De Lubac's answer was clear: there is in man a natural desire to see God. There is not an abyssal division between natural and supernatural ends, wherein the supernatural end is added on top of an already-perfected nature, as the classic doctrine of the *duplex ordo* maintained. According to de Lubac, human nature is open to the supernatural, and this openness is not a simple non-repugnancy, as taught by the doctrine of pure nature, but a desire, a tendency-towards.

The doctrine of pure nature, supported by the Church as an answer to the heretical doctrine of Baius in 1567, had indeed been effective as an answer to the heresy, but was too readily construed as the only possible way to conceive the relationship between nature and grace.¹⁵⁰ Baius' condemnation was supported by the doctrine of pure nature, leading the latter to be seen as an absolute position of the

148 De Lubac's philosophy instructors, Gabriel Picard and Pedro Descoqs, were Suarezians. De Lubac's study of Thomas was mediated by Gilson's *Introduction au système de S. Thomas d'Aquin*, published in 1922 and "kept in a locked cabinet of 'modern philosophy' books in a common room which was opened during holidays": de Lubac, letter to Michel Sales, quoted in: CHANTRAINE, Henri de Lubac 2, 137.

149 The bibliography on *Surnaturel* is immense. A few recent references are: CHANTRAINE, *Surnaturel et destinée humaine* 299–312; CHOLVY, Henri de Lubac et le surnaturel 797–827; BOERSMA, Nature and the Supernatural in *La Nouvelle Théologie* 34–46; HEALY, *The Christian Mystery of Nature and Grace* 181–204.

150 Baius, a Belgian theologian close to Lutheran theology, supported the idea of an utterly corrupted post-lapsarian human nature, incapable of standing without divine grace, which becomes a part of the *debitum naturae*. The Church saw in Baius's position a clear negation of the gratuity of the divine gift and condemned his ideas, in order to avoid any sort of

Church. The doctrine, meant to defend the gratuity of divine grace, caused for de Lubac a radical estrangement between nature and grace. Its basic assumption follows two Aristotelian principles: the principle that “nature does nothing in vain” (a natural need to reach God would oblige God to fulfill it) and the principle of the difference of natures (a natural element cannot find its goal in a supernatural element, since their natures are incompatible). For this reason, tradition recognized the idea of a twofold finality (*duplex ordo*): an inferior natural beatitude and a superior beatific vision. A second element contributed to the rising appreciation of the concept: Baius set himself against Thomas. It was thus easy to recruit Thomas, the “true voice” of the Church, into the ranks of the defenders of pure nature. In his reading of Thomas, however, de Lubac finds evidence of a natural desire for the supernatural; the Angelic Doctor was not, it seems, univocal in dealing with this issue. While Thomas himself seems to endorse the idea of natural desire, his readers, Cajetan and Suárez, excluded this side of Thomas’ theology.¹⁵¹ De Lubac shows, against these two, that there in fact exists an intimate link between the two levels, natural and supernatural, and that this is part of human nature. Herein lies the core of Christianity, the paradox of a finite nature open to the infinite:

Paradox of the human spirit: created, finite, not only it is of double nature, but it is itself nature. Before being a thinking spirit, it is spiritual nature. Irresoluble duality, as also indissoluble union. Image of God, but drawn from nothingness. Before loving God, then, and in order to be able to love him, it desires. Made for God, the spirit is attracted by him.¹⁵²

intrinsicism. As an indirect consequence, however, the doctrine of pure nature began to be overemphasized.

- 151 Cajetan reads Thomas’ *desiderium naturalis* as *potentia oboedientialis*, as a non-repugnancy to divine grace. Human nature is therefore pure, free from natural desire, and man can reach, by his own strength, only a natural level of justice or goodness, never the supernatural goal. For Suárez, the supreme beatitude is not a *debitum naturae*, but comes *ex gratuita dilectione et voluntate Dei*. Suárez seems, however, to forget another Thomist doctrine: the natural desire for the *sommmum bonum*. While for Suárez the two moments correspond to two different *natures* of humanity, for Thomas (in de Lubac’s reading) these two are only *statures*, conditions, not ontological modifications of nature. There is, for Thomas, only one human nature, just in different states before and after sin. This also avoids falling into Baius’s mistake, who believed grace to be *only* medicinal because he claimed that nature was corrupted in its roots. Thomas’s idea of grace, on the contrary, includes an *elevating* aspect. This will become fundamental in Balthasar’s reading of Origen: there is not only a pedagogical, medicinal aspect of grace, because there is not a difference in *nature* between pre-lapsarian and post-lapsarian moments; rather, they are two states of the same nature.
- 152 DE LUBAC, *Surnaturel* 483: “Paradoxe de l’esprit humain: créé, finit, il n’est pas seulement doublé d’une nature, il est lui-même nature. Avant d’être esprit pensant, il est nature spirituelle. Dualité irresoluble, autant qu’union indissoluble. Image de Dieu, mais tiré du néant. Avant donc d’aimer Dieu, et pour pouvoir l’aimer, il désire. Fait pour Dieu, l’esprit est attiré par lui.”

De Lubac's work is an attempt to hold together natural desire and the gratuitous character of grace through the category of paradox. This category is, for de Lubac, the only way to retain the ontological integrity of any mystery of faith—e. g. the relation between nature and grace. The basic Lubacian assumption is that human nature is spirit, and “the spirit is desire for God.”¹⁵³ In this, we can hear the echoes of the Greek Father's doctrine of the *imago Dei*, which de Lubac prefers over the Aristotelian doctrine of nature. While, for the Stagirite, “nature was a center of properties and a source of activity, strictly delimited and enclosed within its own order”, for the Fathers “there was no *nous* without an ever-gratuitous and ever-precarious participation in advance in the unique *pneuma*.”¹⁵⁴ For de Lubac, man is not simply one nature among others, but a personal spirit created in the image of God: “the human being obtained the dignity of the image in his first creation.”¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, if completely extrinsic to human nature, grace would be an arbitrary decision of God, choosing to save one and not another—this is impossible for de Lubac to accept. It is clear that *Surnaturel* is not driven by an utterly philological interest in Thomas, but rather an interest in the dramatic condition of modern humanity. De Lubac's concern offers an example of the way in which the Church Fathers can act as a resource for the 20th century. This, in turn, helps us understand the context within which Origen was taught to Balthasar, exposing certain underlying ambitions.

5. The Drama of Atheist Humanism

De Lubac entered the society of Jesus in 1913. One year later he was enrolled in the army, which he left after an injury on the battlefield. He returned to his studies in a Europe rising from the ashes of the First World War, and witnessed the consequences of postwar atheism permeating the continent after the collapse of the old order.¹⁵⁶ This phenomenon was, for de Lubac, no abstract speculation: he could see, having fought in the war, the physical toll of collapse, and the concrete results of atheist humanism. The death of God, instead of liberating an oppressed humanity, had annihilated it. When perceiving the world from an atheist perspective, de Lubac believes we jettison all value and meaning. What shocked him even more, however, was the Church's inability to provide a compelling answer

153 Ibid.: “L'esprit est donc désir de Dieu.”

154 Ibid. 435: “Pour les Pères, il n'y avait point de *nous* sans une participation anticipée, toujours gratuite et toujours précaire, à l'unique *pneuma*. Pour Aristote, la nature était un centre de propriétés et une source d'activité strictement délimitée et enfermée dans son ordre.”

155 Prin III 6,1: *Imaginis quidem dignitatem in prima conditione perceptit.*

156 DE LUBAC, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*.

to the problem of atheism. Not only did the progress of science and positivism undermine the Church's authority and originality; it was the Church herself, for de Lubac, that was unable to face the problem. Investigating the reason behind this impotence, de Lubac found Blondel and Rousselot. Blondel, drawing on post-Kantian philosophy and the Church's mystical tradition, wanted to describe how divine truth might be a spiritual possession for humanity. *L'Action* recognizes the inherent connection of the natural and supernatural orders by showing that the movement of man's natural will leads to the supernatural. Blondel deems the supernatural indispensable, but, at the same time, inaccessible to man. He called this approach the "method of immanence" because, instead of looking for evidence in the external world (for example in miracles), it proceeds from the interiority of human being.¹⁵⁷ In a similar vein, Rousselot proposed a renewed

157 It is clear that de Lubac owes much to Blondel's work. DE LUBAC, *At the Service of the Church* 185: "You see, Monsieur, how I let myself speak to you with all the freedom of a disciple. It is in fact the study of your work that made me begin, some eleven years ago, to reflect on these problems, and I believe that I have remained faithful to its inspiration." *Mémoire* 189: "Vous le voyez, Monsieur, je me laisse aller à parler devant vous avec l'abandon d'un disciple. C'est en effet l'étude de votre œuvre qui m'a fait, voici onze ans, commencer de réfléchir à ces problèmes, et je crois être resté fidèle à son inspiration." De Lubac writes this in 1932, admitting that he started thinking about the problem of supernatural eleven years before *Surnaturel* – its presence in Balthasar's work on Origen is therefore due to these elements. In this letter, DE LUBAC, *At the Service of the Church* 184, states that "this concept of a pure nature runs into great difficulties, the principal one of which seems to me to be the following: How can a conscious spirit be anything other than an absolute desire of God?" (id., *Mémoire* 188: "Par ailleurs, cette conception d'une pure nature se heurte à de grosses difficultés, dont la principale me paraît être celle-ci: comment un esprit conscient peut-il être autre chose qu'un désir absolu de Dieu?"). A last piece of evidence for the relevance of Blondel in de Lubac's *Surnaturel* is given by some informal Sunday evening group-discussions organized by Fr. Joseph Huby, teacher at Fourvière, that de Lubac attended, where the investigation on the supernatural began. It was Fr. Huby who encouraged the young French theologian "to verify whether the doctrine of Saint Thomas on this important point was indeed that was claimed by the Thomist school around the sixteenth century, codified in the seventeenth and asserted with greater emphasis than ever in the twentieth." In this occasion, de Lubac "even made a plan, which was much too broad, for *Études sur le Surnaturel chrétien*": *At the Service of the Church* 35. On the importance of Blondel for de Lubac, see RUSSO, Henri de Lubac; PORTIER, Maurice Blondel 57–92. Portier not only describes Blondel's relation to the *Nouvelle Théologie* but also to Modernism and to the *Action française*; he was indeed accused to be part and supporter of all these raising intellectual groups of '30 France. On the historical occasion of de Lubac's relation to Blondel, see HENRICI, *La descendance blondélienne parmi les jésuites française* 305–322. Henrici explains here that de Lubac, who studied in the "traditionally Neo-Scholastic school" of Fourvière, followed spiritually the group of professors whom Henrici calls "*relectures jésuites*" (ibid. 309). For an overview on the political background of the controversy, see DRU, *From the Action Française to the Second Vatican Council* 226–245; KOMONČAK, *Theology and Culture at Mid-Century* 579–602. It is interesting to notice that in the same year of Lubac's letter to Blondel, Balthasar read his text, *Lac-*

interpretation of Thomism: not as rationalism, the will being the highest faculty capable of beatific vision, but rather as intellectualism. For Rousselot, the intellect is the only tool capable of discerning itself through the process of entering into an object. Rousselot wanted to show that, for Thomas, knowledge meant union between subject and object, rather than correspondence.¹⁵⁸ Pivotal notions for both authors are human nature and natural desire.¹⁵⁹ The Church's immobility was, for de Lubac, connected with the immobility of human nature in the doctrine of the *duplex ordo*, which implied a closed nature, perfect in itself, and able, through its own reason, of reaching theological truths. This doctrine of pure nature was, for de Lubac, especially evident in the extrinsicism of Dominican neo-Thomism. De Lubac's conflict with Neo-Scholasticism can be detected already in 1929, in his inaugural lecture in Lyon on fundamental theology. Here he accuses Neo-Scholasticism of conceiving dogma "as a kind of thing in itself, as a block of revealed truth with no relationship whatsoever to natural man, as a transcendent object whose demonstration (as well as the greater part of its content) has been determined by the arbitrary nature of a divine decree."¹⁶⁰ De Lubac's concern was neither only theological, nor only pastoral. For him, the two aspects were fully entangled: he found in an anthropological issue the cause of political and pastoral problems. If divine grace has nothing in common with man's natural condition, it cannot fascinate or persuade anyone amid the horrors of war. In 1943, 30 years after entering the Society of Jesus, de Lubac carried his draft of *Surnaturel* around with him, all the while being hunted by the Gestapo.¹⁶¹ Surrounded by the chaos of the Second World War, and sensing the crisis of atheist humanism, Lubac found the roots of the Church's inability to give birth to a new Christian humanism in the missing concept of natural desire, a concept incidentally eliminated by the strong

tion; LOCHBRUNNER, Hans Urs von Balthasar und seine Theologenkollegen 42: "Mit der Leidenschaft und Siegesgewissheit ist diese universale Tatphilosophie entworfen, wie sie nur ein junges Gemüt konzipieren konnte." Balthasar, DWH 114, claimed that *L'Action* gave to Catholic thought "a decisive new beginning." See BLONDEL, *L'Action*; eng. trans.: Blanchette, *Action*.

158 De Lubac's reading of Aquinas was in these years also deeply influenced by Rousselot, as BALTHASAR, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac* 13, himself mentions. On this, see KIRWAN, *An Avant-garde* 110. Rousselot offered a history of the notion of desire for God in his studies on Thomas: ROUSSELOT, *L'intellectualisme de saint Thomas; Pour l'histoire du problème de l'amour au Moyen Âge*.

159 For more references on the background on de Lubac's notion of desire of God see KIRWAN, *An Avant-garde* 111–121. It emerges clearly from Kirwan's references to letters and notes found in the Jesuits Archives of Vanves, that already in the 1920s de Lubac was reflecting on the supernatural, especially in relation to Rousselot, Blondel and Maréchal.

160 DE LUBAC, *Apologétique et théologie* 361–378; eng. trans.: *Apologetics and Theology* 91–104. On de Lubac's education in Neo-Scholasticism, see ROWLAND, *Neo-Scholasticism of the Strict Observance* 29–56.

161 DE LUBAC, *At the Service of the Church* 35; *Mémoire* 34.

defenders of pure nature. Herein lies the goal of de Lubac's work on the supernatural: to return value and dignity to man and the world, devastated by nihilism and materialism. Human dignity was the first concern of de Lubac, as evident in the first lines of *Catholicisme*: "The supernatural dignity of one who has been baptized rests, we know, on the natural dignity of man, though it surpasses it in an infinite manner."¹⁶² De Lubac demanded more serious theological engagement with the problems of secular society; without it, theology would become nothing but an apologetic, far removed from the original Christian faith. According to de Lubac, the concept of "pure nature", despite being useful on a hypothetical level, is implicated in the secular crisis because it forgets the deep relation between Christ and the natural order: the mystery of incarnation revealing the real meaning of human nature. Too worried with specialist problems, theology had become like a museum "of which we are the curators, a museum where we have inventoried, arranged and labeled everything; we know how to define all the terms, we have an answer for all objections, we supply the desired distinctions at just the right moment. Everything in it is obscure for the secular, but for us, everything is clear, everything is explained. If there is still mystery, at least we know exactly where it is to be placed, and we point to this precisely defined site."¹⁶³

6. *Nouvelle Théologie* and *Humani Generis*

Confirming that de Lubac's suggestion had touched upon a relevant issue, Rome and its leading theologians responded forcefully not only to *Catholicisme* but, moreover, to all that passed under the name of *Nouvelle Théologie*. This "movement" can be divided into two main groups, each based in a scholasticate: the Dominicans at Le Saulchoir, and the Jesuits in Fourvière. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, the Dominicans of Le Saulchoir in Belgium were calling theology to embrace history and return to an authentic reading of Thomas Aquinas.¹⁶⁴ Their "manifesto" is considered to be Marie-Dominique Chenu's *Une École de théologie: Le Saulchoir* (1937), which caused many controversies; subsequently Chenu was forced to resign from his position as rector of Le Saulchoir.¹⁶⁵ The Jesuits of Fourvière, active mainly in the 1940s in what became the *ressourcement* of the Church Fathers, were more relevant to Balthasar's education.

162 DE LUBAC, *Catholicism* 25. *Catholicisme* 3: "La dignité surnaturelle du baptisé repose, nous le savons, tout en la dépassant infiniment, sur la dignité naturelle de l'homme".

163 Id., *Internal Causes* 223–240.

164 JOSSUA, *Le Saulchoir* 99–124.

165 CHENU, *Une École de théologie: le Saulchoir*.

The Dominican Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange was the first, in 1946, to use the expression *nouvelle théologie*.¹⁶⁶ Upon asking “La nouvelle théologie, où va-t-elle?”, he gave a brutal answer: straight into modernism.¹⁶⁷ Pope Pius XII issued a similar warning in his address to the Jesuits visiting Rome, who had been invited there to respect the authority of Thomas, to avoid any creation of a “new theology,” and to preserve the unity of the doctrine.¹⁶⁸ A few days later, Michel Labourdette, editor of *Revue Thomist*, accused Jean Daniélou and the ideas of *Sources Chrétiennes* of undercutting the transhistorical nature of Christian truths.¹⁶⁹ Labourdette also accused Balthasar’s “aesthetic” ideas, because he thought they would render theology as mutable as architectural styles.¹⁷⁰ Despite the accusations,

166 On Garrigou-Lagrange, see PEDDICORD, *The Sacred Monster of Thomism*; NICHOLS, *Reason with Piety*. It is important to note that Garrigou-Lagrange from 1913 “would remain in pursuit of Blondel both publicly and privately for the rest of his life”: BLANCHETTE, *Maurice Blondel* 257. On Blondel and the Jesuits in Lyon, see FOUILLOUX, *La seconde “École de Lyon”* 163–273.

167 GARRIGOU-LAGRANGE, *La nouvelle théologie* 126–145. The term was coined in 1942 by Msgr. Pietro Parente in an article, “Nuove tendenze teologiche”, on the *Osservatore Romano* (9–10 February 1942), attacking Le Saulchoir, specifically Chenu and Louis Charlier. The bibliography on *Nouvelle Théologie* is immense. In the past few years there has been an increase in interest in the history of the movement, as well as on the theological proposal advanced by the nouvelle theologians. An accurate historical reconstruction, supported by archival research and attention to the historical sources, is the work of METTEPENNINGEN, *Nouvelle Théologie – New Theology*. The author regards *nouvelle théologie* as a link between Modernism and Vatican Council II: the nouvelle theologians inherited the concerns and questions of Modernism but rejected its answers. At the same time, rejecting the model of Neo-Scholasticism, they opened the door to many formulations that would take shape in Vatican II. Another example of accurate historical reconstruction is the recent work of KIRWAN, *An Avant-Garde*. Particularly inspiring for this research has been the work of BOERSMA, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology*. Boersma reads the effort of the nouvelle theologians in light of their rediscovery of a sacramental approach to ontology, exegesis, and ecclesiology. The author proposes this sacramental attitude as a resource for contemporary theology, especially vis-a-vis the ecumenical dialogue. Many interesting contributions concerning Rahner, de Lubac, and Ratzinger (just to quote some names relevant for this study), together with Balthasar himself, are collected in FLYNN/KELLY/MURRAY, *Ressourcement*. On the relation between *Nouvelle Théologie* and Thomism, see NICHOLS, *Thomism and the Nouvelle Théologie* 1–19.

168 17 September 1946, in: AAS 38 (1946) 381–385. DE LUBAC, *At the Service of the Church* 60, recalls that “none of the members of what was called the Fourvière school ever used that expression, and it was precisely Father Garrigou-Lagrange who had launched it in a recent article.” In the same book, *ibid.* 250–257, we find a careful memorandum of daily notes made by de Lubac, which presents the whole querelle in chronological order.

169 LABOURDETTE, *La théologie et ses sources* 353–371. On these facts, see DE LUBAC, *At the Service of the Church* 194.

170 Daniélou answered immediately with the mentioned *Les Orientations présentes de la pensée religieuse* and with another direct article: DANIELOU, *La théologie et ses sources* 385–

de Lubac felt safe: no superior had mentioned a concrete accusation against him, and Alfredo Ottaviani, assessor of the Sacrum Officium, reassured him that the Pope's address was not meant to stop his work. So, De Lubac carried on, publishing his most important book on Origen: *Histoire et Esprit, l'intelligence de l'Écriture d'après Origène*. "The book came out unscathed by the adventure" and was "moreover very sympathetically received."¹⁷¹ In the midst of the positive reactions to this work, in early 1950, de Lubac received a letter from the General Superior of the Jesuits, announcing the withdrawal of his authorization to teach in Fourvière (a strange request, since he was not an official teacher there). In June 1950, five professors were expelled from Fourvière (Dalaye, Bouillard, Durand, Ganne, and de Lubac), accused of "pernicious errors on essential points of dogma."¹⁷² Without really understanding the reason for this expulsion, de Lubac moved to Paris, where he lived a hermit's life in an old building in the backyard of the Jesuit school on Rue de Sèvres. The controversy reached its highest point on the same day he arrived in Paris, when the encyclical *Humani Generis* was published in *La Croix*. Promulgated on 12 August 1950 by Pius XII, *Humani Generis* is an explicit condemnation of the errors of modern culture: relativism, materialism, and evolutionism.¹⁷³ *Humani Generis* is usually, maybe too easily, read as an open assault on de Lubac's arguments in *Catholicisme* and *Surnaturel*. It is true that many paragraphs turn our minds to Lyon: the reformation of ecclesiastical authority (§ 11), the return to the Fathers of the Church (§ 14), symbolic/spiritual exegesis (§ 23), the gratuity of the supernatural order and on the beatific vision (§ 26). De Lubac however, when reading "a phrase bearing on the question of the supernatural", found it "rather curious to note that this phrase, intending to recall the true doctrine on the subject, reproduces exactly what I said about it two years earlier. So I could presume with some probability that the expression had been substituted, perhaps at the last moment, for another one by someone who was familiar with

401. Labourdette answered again with a few more accusatory articles. The official and last answer from the Jesuits can be considered de Lubac's article of 1949: DE LUBAC, *Le mystère du surnaturel* 80–121.

171 DE LUBAC, *At the Service of the Church* 66; *Mémoire* 68: "Malgré quelques chicanes qu'on lui chercha, le livre devait sortir indemne de l'aventure. Il fut d'ailleurs très sympathiquement accueilli."

172 It is fundamental to understand here that the greatest accusation against de Lubac came not from Rome, but from the Jesuit order itself, as de Lubac writes in a letter to his Provincial superior: DE LUBAC, *At the Service of the Church* 295: "Since today, the Father General himself has become my accuser in the matter of faith, silence is no longer possible." *Mémoire* 295: "Puisque aujourd'hui le Père général lui-même se fait mon accusateur en matière de foi, le silence n'est plus possible."

173 Pius XII, *Humani Generis* (12 August 1950), in: AAS 42 (1950) 561–578.

my article and favourably disposed toward me.”¹⁷⁴ For this reason, de Lubac did not perceive *Humani Generis* as antagonistic—on the contrary! Nevertheless, a few months later, three of de Lubac’s books (*Surnaturel*, *Corpus Mysticum* and *De la Connaissance de Dieu*) were removed both from the official bookstores and from the Jesuit libraries, together with the issue of the journal containing his essay *Le Mystère du Surnaturel*. The atmosphere surrounding the group in Lyon is well expressed by a letter that Balthasar wrote to de Lubac after the encyclical:

Dear friend, I can barely believe what You have written to me. It is upsetting, totally incomprehensible. Yet, this is the form of martyrdom that seals Your work. You are already the victor, nothing will stop the continuous influence of Your thoughts. (...) Do not lose courage, keep on working, as if nothing had happened. So many friends surround You and want to help You. I do what I can to make You known in the German countries. If You have time, write me more: who has to leave Fourvière? Rondet? Bouillard? I am afraid that Karl Rahner is very discouraged now, he, who is almost our only hope. He has to be supported – You have to help one another. (...) I pray for you. Be serene. Yours, Balthasar.¹⁷⁵

In the papal encyclical, Rome reacted not only against certain statements concerning natural desire, but also against a certain use of the Fathers, and against symbolic exegesis. This reaction confirmed what had become increasingly evident: the connection between an interest in the Fathers, *ressourcement*, and cer-

174 DE LUBAC, At the Service of the Church 71. Mémoire 72: “Le seul passage où je reconnais qu’il doit s’agir implicitement de moi est une phrase portant sur la question du surnaturel; or il est assez curieux de constater que cette phrase, voulant rappeler à ce sujet la vraie doctrine, reproduise exactement ce que j’en disais deux ans plus tôt dans un article des Recherches de science religieuse. Aussi j’ai pu supposer avec vraisemblance que la formule avait été substituée, peut-être en dernière heure à une autre, par quelqu’un qui connaissait mon article et m’était favorable.” De Lubac refers to *Humani Generis* as the ‘lightning bolt’ that ‘killed the project’ of a ‘theology less systematic than the manuals, but more saturated with tradition, integrating the valid elements in the results of modern exegesis, of patristics, liturgy, history, philosophical reflection’. Quoted also in BALTHASAR, The Theology of Henri de Lubac 10–11; Henri de Lubac 14: “Mit *Humani Generis* schlägt der Blitz im Lyoner Scholastikat ein, de Lubac wird zum Hauptsündenbock gestempelt.” Elsewhere, however, de Lubac claimed that *Humanis Generis* was not against him and, on the contrary, expresses the need for a renewal that was actually supportive of his own conclusion: DE LUBAC, Augustinianism and Modern Theology 274–275. I would not, with BOERSMA, Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology 29 n. 135, call this “ingenuity”, but rather an even deeper understanding of the difference between the real and condemned addressee of the encyclical letter, and the position of de Lubac. It is not of secondary importance that, as I will show, de Lubac some years later will write articles and books in order to clarify his position, and to clearly state in which sense his ideas should be read. For the question of de Lubac’s relation to *Humani generis*, see also VODERHOLZER/MILLER, Meet Henri de Lubac 64–75; SCHINDLER, Introduction to The Mystery of the Supernatural xxii–xxiii.

175 The letter is quoted by KRENSKI, Das Gottesdrama 91–92.

tain theological and pastoral questions that de Lubac and many others were raising. The Fathers were read by de Lubac because of their unity of theology and life; this unity could, he maintained, remain exemplary almost twenty centuries later.

7. Balthasar's Perplexity with *Surnaturel*: the Discovery of a Different Concern

Balthasar's general position is fully consonant with de Lubac's idea of paradox; this should not be a surprise if we remember the title of Balthasar's first work on Origen: *Le Mystère d'Origène*. It is the category of mystery that colours Balthasar's approach to Origen and it is exactly this category, so relevant and yet so often ignored in Origen scholarship, that grounds both his distinctive interpretation of Origen, and his reclamation of Origen for 20th century Catholic theology. If we read Balthasar's declaration on *Surnaturel* however, a small disagreement emerges:

With *Surnaturel*, a young David comes onto the field against the Goliath of the modern rationalization and reduction to logic of the Christian mystery. The sling deals a death blow to this giant, but Goliath's acolytes seize upon the champion and reduce him to silence for a long time. *Not entirely without justification*. The work, pieced together from many disparate preparatory studies, *is not completely rounded out*.¹⁷⁶

Without going into the details of the reactions to *Surnaturel*, I believe Balthasar's statement to reveal the birth of a new concern regarding his age. This concern becomes further evident in the different accents that the two authors, Balthasar and de Lubac, give to the question of natural desire. The reason for this difference of concern is to be found in *Surnaturel's* idea of grace.¹⁷⁷ For de Lubac, grace is not added to nature; man is inherently open to the supernatural. Balthasar's problem with *Surnaturel* lies in a possible consequence of this idea: if man's inner orientation to grace is "natural", and the concept of pure nature is unusable, grace is

176 VON BALTHASAR, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac* 63 (emphasis added). Henri de Lubac 52: "Mit *Surnaturel* tritt ein junger David gegen den Goliath der neuzeitlichen Rationalisierung und Logisierung des christlichen Mysteriums an. Die Schleuder trifft tödlich, aber die Akolythen des Riesen bemächtigen sich des Helden und machen ihn auf lange Zeit mundtot. Nicht völlig zu Unrecht. Das Werk, aus mehreren und etwas disparaten Vorarbeiten zusammengestückt, ist nicht völlig rund geworden." For Balthasar's critique to de Lubac, see especially SCOLA, Hans Urs von Balthasar 47–48.

177 It is curious here to recall an episode narrated by Edward T. Oakes who, referring to a dialogue with Balthasar, declares in FLYNN/KELLY/MURRAY, *Ressourcement* 16: "In my first interview with him in 1983, when I was beginning research on my doctoral dissertation in Basel, he told me, *Ich habe keine Gnadenlehre*: 'I have no doctrine on grace'."

at risk, “because we have fused the gratuity of creation and the gratuitous grace of God’s self-revelation of the divine intimacy, which is still undeserved even according to the presuppositions of creation.”¹⁷⁸ In a certain sense, Balthasar deems *Surnaturel’s* distinction between the supernatural finality of nature and the free offer of actual grace too subtle: “Do not one and two coincide conceptually? And if one thinks theologically from the starting point of the unity of God’s salvific plan, is not the whole an indivisible act of God’s freedom that – *in ordine executionis* – can only be conceptually analyzed into two moments?”¹⁷⁹ This passage contains what I called a “difference in accent” between Balthasar and de Lubac. Balthasar’s starting point is the unity of God’s salvific plan. While de Lubac inquired into human nature (whose dignity was mined, in his opinion, by the doctrine of *duplex ordo*) Balthasar, coming after de Lubac, judged it necessary to explain nature in light of grace. For de Lubac, who came to his understanding out of the French *mystique*, the distance between nature and supernatural is overemphasized in the doctrine of *duplex ordo*. In response, he invites us to remember that there is in man a *vocation* to the *supernatural*. For Balthasar, on the other hand, the problem lies not in the sharp difference between the two orders, but in our forgetfulness of the goodness of the natural order *itself*, insofar as it is *natural*. De Lubac had underlined the positive relation between nature and grace because of a preceding (Aristotelian) authority’s strong separation of the two; now it was Balthasar’s turn (after and thanks to de Lubac) to pose a question of his own, looking for the cause of a certain forgetfulness viz. the positive element in the natural as such.

Exemplary of the difference between de Lubac and Balthasar, and strictly intertwined with the question of grace, is the way in which each thinker approached Platonism. If de Lubac tends to draw on the Neoplatonic tradition by underlining the upward direction of human desire, Balthasar is critical of a certain Platonic spiritualism because of its possible antirealism, preferring therefore to underline the downward direction of the divine initiative. This initiative takes the shape of what Balthasar describes as a “call”: “In the face of the divine call, it is the potential to be called on which man has no power. If he is, in spite of everything, capable of perceiving and responding to the call of God, this capacity must be conferred on him at the same time as the call; only the divine word of grace confers on him the

178 Balthasar’s critique comes from Karl Rahner. TKB 298: “While most Catholic theologians who cavilled at de Lubac’s intention misconstrued and distorted his starting point, Karl Rahner it seems was the only one to subject his thought to a competent, careful, informed critique.”

179 VON BALTHASAR, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac* 72 n. 1. Henri de Lubac 61 n. 1: “Fallen nicht 1 und 2 begrifflich zusammen? Und wenn man theologisch, vom einheitlichen Heilsplan Gottes aus denkt: ist nicht das Ganze ein unteilbarer Freiheitsakt Gottes, der nur – in ordine executionis – in zwei Momente – (1+2) → 3 – auseinandergefaltet gedacht werden kann?”

grace of response.”¹⁸⁰ If it is true that we are open to divine grace, Balthasar maintains that this potency arises from the call itself. His only problem with de Lubac is the latter’s insistence on calling our desire for God “natural” in the sense of “essential”, which might be read as forcing God to bestow grace; in fact, many did read it this way. This problem, it must be said, was acknowledged by de Lubac.¹⁸¹ In 1949, following the suggestions of his superiors, de Lubac published an article, *Le Mystère du Surnaturel*, in order to repeat and better explain some of the problematic points of *Surnaturel*.¹⁸² This was not a rectification of 1946’s positions, but a sort of continuation of it. Here, and again in 1965’s book with the same title, officially answering to Garrigou-Lagrange’s criticisms, he reaffirmed that “the gifts of grace and of glory (...) could never be confused with the gifts of nature.”¹⁸³ He

180 Id., *Der Zugang zur Wirklichkeit Gottes* 32–33: “Gerade diese Naturpotenz der Anrufbarkeit besitzt nun der Mensch dem göttlichen Anruf gegenüber keineswegs. Soll er trotzdem fähig sein, den Anruf Gottes zu vernehmen und ihn zu beantworten – einen Anruf, der aus keiner geschaffenen Naturordnung stammt, sondern aus den Tiefen des Ewigen und Absoluten –, dann muss ihm diese Fähigkeit mit dem Anruf zusammen verliehen werden; erst Gottes gnädiges Wort begabt ihn mit der Gnade der Antwort.”

181 That this critique was somehow right is admitted by de Lubac himself. DE LUBAC, *At the Service of the Church* 62 n. 5: “What Father Rahner argued in opposition to me, or rather thought he argued in opposition to me, corresponded rather closely, moreover, to what I myself was thinking, aside from a mixture of Heideggerian vocabulary that did not seem to me necessary or even opportune in a study of Scholastic tradition.” *Mémoire* 63: “Ce que le P. Rahner m’opposait, ou plutôt croyait m’opposer, correspondait d’ailleurs à peu près à ce que je pensais moi-même, mis à part un mélange de vocabulaire heideggérien qui ne me paraissant pas nécessaire, ni même opportune dans l’étude de la tradition scolastique.” I believe this admission to be strong enough to suggest that Rahner’s concern was shared by de Lubac. The formulation of *The Mystery of the Supernatural* (1965) seems to me more clear, probably thanks to de Lubac’s reflection on the critiques themselves. Already in 1949 he had published the article ‘Le mystère du surnaturel’, thought not to be a repetition of, but rather a complement to, *Surnaturel*, in order to give a “very salutary” clarification thereof. Here de Lubac explains that God could have indeed created a nature without a supernatural goal. It is in light of this explanation that Balthasar himself can say that in de Lubac’s (mature) doctrine there is “no trace yet of supernatural grace in the created spiritual nature, which is exactly why he was not interested in Karl Rahner’s ‘supernatural existential’”: VON BALTHASAR, *Theology of Henri de Lubac* 71. The critiques of *Surnaturel* are still the object of animate discussion among scholars. Many, like Milbank, believe that in *Surnaturel* desire is already a seed of grace (despite not considering this problematic). Despite agreeing with Milbank about the complex and risky formulation of natural desire as immanent seed of grace in *Surnaturel*, I do not agree with his claim that “it is by no means clear from his later writing that de Lubac really abandoned his earlier position”: MILBANK, *The Suspended Middle* 38.

182 DE LUBAC, *Le mystère du surnaturel* 1949. A few years later de Lubac published a book with the same title: *Le mystère du surnaturel*; eng. trans.: *The Mystery of the Supernatural*.

183 Id., *The Mystery of the Supernatural* 89. *Le mystère du surnaturel* 121: “Les *dona gratiae et gloriae* ne sauraient jamais être confondus avec les *dona naturae*.” De Lubac did not want this work to look like a correction of *Surnaturel*, prompted by *Humani Generis*. It is, how-

clearly claims that natural desire does not, in any way, anticipate grace. This clarification was not only fundamental on a doctrinal level, but especially on a pastoral one—as would become clear at the Second Vatican Council.¹⁸⁴ In these later works, de Lubac explains that his definition of the supernatural does not confuse gratuity, creation, and revelation; he speaks of ‘twofold gratuitousness,’ ‘twofold gift,’ and ‘twofold initiative.’ This distinction was already implicit in *Surnaturel*, but “not completely rounded out” and so possibly misleading. Creation is the *datum optimum*, while grace is the *donum perfectum*.¹⁸⁵ Our natural desire is only natural, is not yet at the level of divine grace; it is an opening, not a possession: “*La nature créée n’est point un germe divin.*”¹⁸⁶ Spirit is not a divine seed, it is an image, an original element shaped in the image of God: “The spirit does not desire God as an animal desires its prey. It wants to have it as a gift. It does not strive to possess the infinite: it would like a freely granted communion with a personal being.”¹⁸⁷ This is the center of the Lubacian paradox: the supernatural vocation of humankind does not necessitate its effective realization: human desire is a “suspended

ever, hard to understand de Lubac’s real position on the condemnation. A recent contribution traces these difficulties back to the “nuanced tradition upon which he was relying and the manner in which his thought has already undergone three stages of development with respect to this tradition” and indicates therefore “where a proof or disproof (of de Lubac’s understanding of natural desire) might be found”: WOOD, Henri de Lubac 1209–1241.

184 This position could be found also in the late de Lubac, who himself realized that after the Council what was at risk was the supernatural transcendence of the faith. This seems to be what DE LUBAC, *The Mystery of the Supernatural* 15, meant when saying that “theological theories are not innocent when dealing with human life and action.” It was maybe even for this reason that in 1980 he wrote *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*, where he defends the real *distinction* between nature and grace: DE LUBAC, *A Brief Catechesis* 41–42: “The supernatural (...) is that divine element which man’s effort cannot reach (no self-divinization!) but which unites itself to man, ‘elevating’ him as our classical theology used to put it, and as Vatican II still says (*Lumen Gentium* 2), penetrating him in order to divinize him, and thus becoming as it were an attribute of the ‘new man’ described by St. Paul. While it remains forever ‘un-naturalizable,’ it profoundly penetrates the depths of man’s being. In short, it is what the old Scholastics and especially St. Thomas Aquinas called (...) an ‘accidental form’ or an ‘accident’ (...) call it an accident, or call it a *habitus*, or ‘created grace’: these are all different ways of saying (...) that man becomes in truth a sharer in the divine nature.” On the role of de Lubac at the Second Vatican Council, see RICHES, Henri de Lubac and the Second Vatican Council 121–156.

185 DE LUBAC, *The Mystery of the Supernatural* 91.

186 Id., *Le mystère du surnaturel* 116.

187 Id., *Surnaturel* 483: “L’esprit, en effet, ne désire pas Dieu comme l’animal désire sa proie. Il le désire comme un don. Il ne cherche point à posséder un objet infini: il veut la communion libre et gratuite d’un Être personnel.”

middle” between natural and supernatural.¹⁸⁸ To remove this desire, for de Lubac, would mean to remove the *mysterium* of man’s relation to God.¹⁸⁹

To conclude, we can say that the difference between de Lubac and Balthasar lies not so much in a different concept of nature or grace, but in which of these is accented. This becomes apparent in their relation to the Fathers. If, for de Lubac, the greatest achievement of Patristic theology is the concept of man as *spirit*, and therefore as desire, for Balthasar the accent falls on the function of the Logos, the mediating element that allows every spirit to be and, therefore, to strive for the supernatural. Balthasar’s annotation to de Lubac is therefore not a critique as such, but represents his growing discovery of a different interest in, and approach to, modern theology. Balthasar’s question was no longer that of the dignity of human desire, but of the value of the *distance* between man and God *itself*—could the enduring gap between nature and grace, however small, be seen as good? Could the fact that natural desire is not yet the fullness of grace—the fact that it is a desire and not a possession—have an intrinsically positive value, or is it simply negative? Is desire only a residual spark of a lost condition to be restored, or is there somehow an added value in the fact that the “restoration” has to be gained, obtained, desired by men? For Balthasar, the answer is clearly positive: our natural desire is the guarantee of a true relation with the supernatural, with God—true because it is free. His concern was not anymore the dignity of human desire, but the discovery of the element underlying this dignity: the free submission to God, the personal aspect of the uplifting movement, the freedom at play between God and man. What takes place is a drama, not a monologue. This conviction, which will take systematic shape in *Theo-drama*, was already at stake in the 1920s and 1930s, when Balthasar read Origen in dialogue with de Lubac.

8. Balthasar and the Fathers

We can now understand the reason behind Balthasar’s enthusiasm for Origen, deeply rooted in the theological aims of his mentor. For Balthasar, de Lubac’s sug-

188 The expression ‘suspended middle’ comes from VON BALTHASAR, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac* 14–15. Henri de Lubac 12: “Eine schwebende Mitte.” This expression is also the title of the above-quoted work of John Millbank on Henri de Lubac.

189 For de Lubac, as for Origen, human life is a journey led by desire, as can be read in *Sur les Chemins de Dieu*. Desire is called ‘*habitude de Dieu*’ and, quoting Origen, DE LUBAC, *Sur les chemins de Dieu* 221, states that atheism is not the position of one who sets himself free from God, but of the idolater who “rapporte à n’importe quoi plutôt qu’à Dieu son indestructible notion de Dieu.”

gestions worked. He found in the Fathers what he was looking for.¹⁹⁰ According to a well-known anecdote, Balthasar would plug his ears during lessons in order to focus on reading Augustine under his desk, hoping to prepare an anthology of his *Commentary on Psalms*.¹⁹¹ As he wrote to his sisters, finishing his exams was “a great liberation: now I can undisturbed read *my Fathers*.”¹⁹² The contrast felt by Balthasar between the living wellspring of the Fathers, discussed in his meetings with de Lubac, and the desert of the official teaching, comports with the idea of a Church that was losing its contact with the world, a Christianity that has lost its centre:

We were a fine group [at Lyon], resolute and exposed, and it was clear to us from the beginning that the *bastions of anxiety* that the Church had contrived to *protect herself from the world* would have to be demolished; the Church had to be freed to become herself and open to the whole and undivided world for her mission. For the meaning of Christ's coming is to save the world and to open for the whole of it the way to the Father. (...) This passion rallied us young theologians in Lyons (Fessard, Bouillard, Daniélou and many others) around our older friend and master Henri de Lubac, from whom we gained an understanding of the Greek Fathers, the philosophical mysticism of Asia and the phenomenon of modern atheism; to him my patristic studies owe their initial spark. For patristics meant to us *a Christendom that still carried its thoughts into the limitless space of the nations and still trusted in the world's salvation*. (...) This passion made the radiance of de Lubac's *Catholicisme* a fundamental book for us, and I translated it shortly afterward.¹⁹³

190 One should not forget that, in France, Balthasar came to know several prestigious litterati such as Bernanos, Peguy, and Claudel, who he personally encountered, and who played a fundamental role in his life as a theologian. He translated Claudel's *Satin Slipper* five times, and worked on the translation of Claudel's lyric poetry for more than twenty years. It only appeared in 1963, but already in his working papers for *Origen: Spirit and Fire* there is a letter from his editor concerning the possibility of obtaining the rights to translate Claudel's *Cinq Grandes Ode*. While working on Origen, Claudel and many others were always in the background.

191 HANS URS VON BALTHASAR (ed.), Augustinus: Über die Psalmen, Leipzig 1936. The anecdote of the plugged ears is reported by HENRICI, Hans Urs von Balthasar.

192 Letter to his sister Heidi, 18.11.1935, reported in GUERRIERO, Hans Urs von Balthasar 38 (emphasis added). Guerriero refers that he could see this letter from Dieter, brother of Hans Urs: *ibid.* 12 n. 1.

193 MW 48–49 (emphasis added). ZSW 41–42: “Eines war uns – denn wir waren eine schöne, entschlossene, gefährdete Gruppe – von vornherein klar: es galt die künstlichen Mauern der Angst, die die Kirche zur Welt hin um sich aufgerichtet, zu schleifen, sie zu sich selbst zu befreien, indem sie ihrer Sendung in die volle und ungeteilte Welt überantwortet wurde. Denn der Sinn der Ankunft Jesu Christi ist es doch, die Welt zu erlösen, ihr gesamthaft den Weg zum Vater zu öffnen. (...) Dies Pathos war es, das uns als junge Theologen (Fessard, Daniélou, Bouillard und viele andere waren dabei) in Lyon um den älteren Freund und Meister Henri de Lubac scharte, der uns die griechischen Väter, die philosophische Mystik Asiens und den modernen Atheismus erschloß und dem meine patristischen Studien den zündenden Funken verdanken; denn Patristik hieß für uns: Christenheit, die noch in

This autobiographical passage reveals the power of the patristic studies group in Lyon. Though it was not dominated by an archaeological or philological interest, philology, as the birth of *Sources Chrétiennes* witnesses, became a highly effective tool in bringing something old, and yet new, into Christianity. To study the Fathers meant becoming, at the same time, conscious of the problem of liberalism, religious pluralism, Marxism, and modern atheism. To read the Fathers with de Lubac meant to imagine a Church with open arms, a Church that lived the Christian message in relation to the entire world, not only vis-à-vis doctrine (Blondel, Przywara) but also the arts (Claudel, Peguy), the sciences (Teilhard de Chardin), and politics (Maritain). One cannot understand the *ressourcement* without understanding the importance of these names. Balthasar himself tracks the reason behind the universal vocation of the patristic authors: the Fathers are an example of a Christianity that still believes in the possibility of salvation for all. They were not naive, but firmly convinced that the Christian message could, and must, be “carried into the limitless space of the nations”; their attitude was the opposite of self-preservation in a closed bastion.

The relevance of the Fathers for dealing with contemporary issues is evident in texts like *Theology and Sanctity*, about which Balthasar openly admits: “I have composed frequent variations on the theme of *Theologie und Heiligkeit*. Without doubt, the first stimulus for it came from the theology of the Church Fathers.”¹⁹⁴

den unbegrenzten Raum der Völkerwelt hinausdenkt und die Hoffnung auf die Erlösung der Welt hat. (...) Dies Pathos ließ die strömende Offenheit von de Lubacs *Catholicisme* für uns zu einem Grundbuch werden, das ich bald darauf übersetzte.” KANNENGIESSER, *Listening to the Fathers* 60: “In a generation which survived the slaughter of World War I and grew to maturity amid the turmoil of ideas surging through Europe in the aftermath of this war, von Balthasar shared the lively sentiment of a possible Catholic and theological renaissance. It was a feeling common to the most open minds in the Church of the '30s. From the poetic invention of the convert Paul Claudel to the popular veneration of the 'little' St. Therese, von Balthasar was continually observing new signs, precursors in his eyes of a fundamental restoration of Catholic thought that was fully modern. His personal project as theologian was to enter into the framework of such a hope. The Fathers of the Church were to become in some way his most authoritative spokesmen.”

194 VON BALTHASAR, *Our Task* 103. *Unser Auftrag* 99: “Das vielfach abgewandelte Thema ‘Theologie und Heiligkeit’ hat zweifellos seine erste Anregung von der Theologie der Kirchenväter her erhalten.” Balthasar refers also to *Razing the Bastions*, explaining the debt that this work pays to his teachers and friends Henri de Lubac and Erich Przywara, names that we will meet often in this research: “Schleifung der Bastionen has often been regarded as an anticipation of the aggiornamento thinking of Pope John XXIII. It is concerned with the universality of salvation, as proposed by Origen, E. Przywara, H. de Lubac and K. Barth. In my work on this area of discussion, there are no retractions of any sort. *Schleifung der Bastionen* is also a kind of homage to my teachers E. Przywara and H. de Lubac as well as to Adrienne von Speyr. All three of them showed me, in contrast to a narrow scholastic theology, the world-spanning dimensions of what is Catholic.” Adrienne von Speyr is one of the most relevant figures for understanding Balthasar’s work in its totality.

Furthermore, he openly declares that the Fathers were a “tool” for facing the problem of the relation between theology and life: “Once again it is Church Fathers, above all Origen, Maximus and Augustine, who serve to establish the chief aim: that *Theologie* and *Heiligkeit* ought to contribute a deeper fruitfulness to one another. Is not theology, too, a charism, and is not a life in Christ a new pointer to the Word?”¹⁹⁵ Balthasar is clear: the Fathers serve a “chief aim”. His interest in them is not just scholarly. In the Fathers, Balthasar finds a resource for presenting a clear, new vision of theology, paradoxically renewed through the oldest resource possible. He insisted, however, that this resource should not be simply repeated anachronistically, but creatively transposed into modern times:

It is our intention to underline the deep richness of the thought of the Fathers, still sadly too little known. Their thought cannot be brought back now without modifications for our time. Everything must be assimilated and modified starting from groundings that only in this way can remain alive. So the Fathers seem closer when we notice (at a certain depth, it is true) that *the struggle that they fought is the same that we accept today*.¹⁹⁶

It should be clear that the works of the Fathers are not, for Balthasar, a forgotten artefact to be restored for memory’s sake; they should not be read merely for information, but for the relation the authors exhibit between *what* they wrote and *how* they lived. This approach resounds in Henri de Lubac’s words: “The Fathers of the Church: a whole universe, and how much variety! (...) They are particularly dear to us. Their fruitfulness is more hidden: ‘We rarely speculate’ they seem to say to us through the voice of one of them, ‘but we live!’ They show us ‘the power of the Gospel’ at work.”¹⁹⁷ Hence Balthasar’s *enthusiasm* for Origen. His intention

In this research, however, I will not deal with her fruitful and rich production for a simple chronological reason: her presence in the life of Balthasar began a few years after his works on Origen. However, more research should be devoted on the relation between the fruit of Balthasar’s patristic sources and the work of von Speyr.

195 MW 31. ZSW 29: “Wieder dienen Kirchenväter, zumal Origenes, Maximus und Augustinus, zur Grundierung des Hauptanliegens: dass Theologie und Heiligkeit sich gegenseitig tiefer befruchten mögen. Ist Theologie nicht auch ein Charisma, und ist es ein Leben in Christus nicht neuer Hinweis auf das Wort?”

196 French preface to: *Liturgique Cosmique*. Maxime le Confesseur, Paris 1947. See also the *Avant-Propos* to PP xiii: “Le point de vue central qui commande les coix et le groupement des idées de chacun, n’est donc pas le souci de présenter ou d’influencer la théologie moderne. Nous ne tentons aucune transposition matérielle. Nous voudrions plutôt pénétrer jusqu’à cette source vitale de leur esprit, jusqu’à cette intuition fondamentale et secrète, qui dirite toute l’expression de leur pensée.”

197 DE LUBAC, *At the Service of the Church* 318. *Mémoire* 319: “Les Pères de l’Église: tout un univers, et combine variée! (...) Ils nous sont particulièrement chers, – mais leur fécondité est plus secrète: ‘nous spéculons peu, semblent-ils nous dire par la voix de l’un d’entre eux, mais nous vivons!’ Ils nous montrent à l’ouvre la force de l’Évangile.”

was not to give Origen a new, contemporary dress: his metaphysics and philosophy could never be the same as a 20th century thinker. In this sense, the *how* is different. However, his way of thinking the Christian fact was for Balthasar still worth being listened to and developed, even and especially after a long period of silence.

V. Balthasar's Critiques of Origen

1. Not an Easy Retrieval

In 1939 Balthasar published two articles with the aim of clarifying a phenomenon in European Catholicism: the turn to the East. These two articles, *Wendung nach Osten* and *Patristik, Scholastik und wir*, offer the first evidence that Balthasar's reception of Origen was not a simple retrieval, but a complex and stratified negotiation. In this chapter I will outline Balthasar's major critiques of Origen. These two articles, wherein Origen is criticized, have a similar structure and make similar arguments. Balthasar proceeds in his typical way, tracing two aspects of a problem and, after a careful description of each, presenting a solution to the problem in a sort of middle-position. The central question is why Western Christianity was suddenly exploring Eastern spirituality, in conjunction with its return to the Fathers. In *Patristik, Scholastik und wir* Balthasar presents a broader image of the problem, analysing three different moments of Christianity in order to understand how each of them relates to the essence of Christianity. *Wendung nach Osten* is a more specific reflection on the characteristics of eastern spirituality, introducing its main protagonists.

Patristik, Scholastik und wir indirectly helps us understand what Balthasar was looking for in his own time: creative energy. Is there an age whose living wellspring (*lebendigen Ursprung*) can still be a resource for the problems of the 20th century?¹⁹⁸ If the answer is yes, should the Church simply repeat the moves of that age, or should she open a living dialogue with it? One possible approach is to look at Church history as a "gradual departure from [its] own heritage, as an ever more subtle reconstruction, as a progressive branching out of the original core."¹⁹⁹ In this sense, every age is guilty of a loss of creative power—not only the 19th and 20th centuries. Balthasar is therefore critical of modern nostalgia:

We have grown tired of this 'pure thinking', we don't have any more time for that sort of thing! If only we could simply steal a quick glance at that much praised cathedral of the *philosophia perennis*! But a real tour would require years on our part – and who can afford that these days? And so we easily let ourselves be convinced that Scholasticism is not only unmodern and unpractical but is also more or less guilty for bringing us to this current impasse. In not much time at all, we have worked our way back one more step (...) and have become (...) 'patrologist'.²⁰⁰

198 FSO 348. PSW 66.

199 FSO 348. PSW 66: "(...) als ein allmähliches Abrücken vom Eigentlichen erscheint, als sein immer subtilerer Ausbau zwar, ein fortschreitendes Sichverästeln."

200 FSO 349. PSW 66: "Wir sind müde geworden dieses 'reinen Denkens', wir haben keine Zeit mehr dazu. Könnte man den vielgepriesenen 'Dom der philosophia perennis' noch mit ein

The style of this essay is very direct: Balthasar is clearly suspicious of the “almost Romantic longing which draws theologians as well as lay people into this lost Edenic garden”²⁰¹ of the Fathers, preferring them over Scholasticism because they can more easily be approached “existentially”²⁰² and require less pure thinking and protracted effort than Scholasticism. Despite the easy critique of this shallow perspective, we must ask: is this not normal? Does not every age look back to the past to help find its own roots and essence? Is it not possible that the Spirit itself encourages such retrievals? Balthasar is clear: to look back must not prevent us from living in the present. Theologians and scholars—but also laymen—have a responsibility to their own age. In a world falling apart, to reproduce the past “could only beget horrors.”²⁰³ Looking at the Fathers does not mean finding a better time, a place to hide from the horrors of war, the problems of the Church, or a continent that was “teetering on its foundations and seem[ed] ready to collapse.”²⁰⁴ The world, and especially the Church, he argues, should not run away from the modern condition, substituting one retrieval with another: “We are not ingenuous enough to prefer a ‘neopatristic’ theology to a ‘Neo-Scholastic’ theology!”²⁰⁵ On the contrary, Christians needed to find new interlocutors, a new attitude to face the responsibilities of their time. Being faithful to tradition does not mean repeating the conclusions of the past, no matter how clever. As we suggested, the reason for looking back was not to parrot dogmatic answers, but to find an atti-

paar Blicken umfassen! (...) Aber der fordert Jahre von uns – wer kann sich das heute leisten? (...) Und so lassen wir uns gerne überzeugen, dass die Scholastik nicht nur unmodern und unpraktisch ist, sondern mehr oder weniger Schuld an der heutigen Situation trägt. Kurzum, wir machen einen weiteren Schritt zurück und werden ‘Patristiker.’” To know more about who Balthasar wanted to criticize with this passage see MOGA, *Zwischen Vätern und Moderne*, who presents the attitude of a nostalgic patristic retrieval, manifested for instance in a certain interest for the eastern church by author like Bernard Schultze, Max Pribilla, and Georg Wunderle.

201 FSO 350. PSW 67: “So wenigstens glauben wir heute die Väterzeit sehen zu müssen, und eine fast romantische Sehnsucht zieht Theologen wie Laien in dieses verlorene Paradies zurück.”

202 FSO 349–350. PSW 66.

203 PT 10. PP vii: “Prétendre les rajeunir, les adapter aux besoins du temps est encore pire: un tel effort ne peut engendrer que des horreurs.”

204 PT 9. PP vii: “(...) en un monde qui vacille sur ses bases et semble être prêt à s’écrouler.”

205 PT 10. PP viii: “Nous n’avons point la candeur de préférer à une théologie ‘néo-scholastique’ une théologie ‘néo-patristique!’” For this reason, this work does not want to follow the path of MONGRAIN, *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, who claims Balthasar’s thought to be “an irenaean retrieval”. Another point of disagreement is the idea that Balthasar’s system is a the realization of de Lubac’s program. Not only I believe substantial differences to be present between Balthasar and de Lubac, but also I believe many of these differences to be based on their attitude towards the Fathers and their ‘Platonism’, object of this chapter. Despite this disagreement, Mongrain’s analysis of the *corpus triforme* in Ireneus and in Balthasar can be partially translated into the works on Origen.

tude from which to derive inspiration: an attitude of intimate reflection and heroic creation, the necessary prelude to spiritual faithfulness. Balthasar's mission was not to provide an exact transposition of ancient doctrines into a modern context, but rather to "penetrate right to those vital wellsprings of their spirit, right to that fundamental and hidden intuition that directs every expression of their thought and that reveals to us one of the great possibilities of attitude and approach that theology has adopted in a concrete and unique situation."²⁰⁶ In order to find the real essence of the Fathers, Balthasar suggests that we "press on past all the external and superficial features of each epoch, to focus on its innermost structural law, and then to measure each respective formal law according to the structural law of *what is essentially Christian* as we encounter this norm in the Gospel."²⁰⁷ Balthasar is here expressing the formal rule inaugurated in *Spirit and Fire*: to find the "innermost law" one needs to leave aside some "superficial features". One exemplary application of this method is in the text *Wendung nach Osten*, which could be seen as a necessary prologue to *Spirit and Fire*. Balthasar admits that the anthology is an attempt to show the double-stream flowing from Origen: gnosis and symbolism, spiritualism and sacramentalism.

2. *Wendung nach Osten*: the Features of Eastern Spirituality

In *Wendung nach Osten* Balthasar analyzes the roots of eastern spirituality in order to discern its peculiar features. Origen of Alexandria is a central figure: he anticipates all the aspects of eastern spirituality brought to fulfilment by other Fathers like Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus the Confessor, and John Damascenus. Before examining Balthasar's engagement with Origen in this text, I will briefly present the two strands that originate from the Alexandrian.

a) *Spiritualism and its Problems*

The first strand is the gnostic-spiritual, which finds its purest expression in Evagrius Ponticus, an author deeply studied by Balthasar, but also in Diadochus of

206 PT 12–13. PP xi: "Le point de vue central qui commande les choix et le groupement des idées de chacun, n'est donc pas le souci de présenter ce qui chez eux paraîtrait plus capable d'intéresser ou d'influencer la théologie moderne. Nous ne tentons aucune transposition matérielle. Nous voudrions plutôt pénétrer jusqu'à cette source vitale de leur esprit, jusqu'à cette intuition fondamentale et secrète, qui dirige toute l'expression de leur pensée et qui nous révèle une de ces grandes attitudes possibles que la théologie a adoptées dans une situation concrète et unique."

207 FSO 352 (italics added). PSW 68: "Es gilt durch alle äußerlichen und nebensächlichen Eigenschaften jeder Epoche zu ihrem innersten Strukturgesetz durchzustoßen und dieses am Strukturgesetz des Christlichen, wie es uns im Evangelium entgegentritt, zu messen."

Photike, and Cassianus.²⁰⁸ In Evagrius, Balthasar claims, that which is lesser than, and different from, the pure light of God is an obstacle for man to surpass. Individuality itself is negative: it is directly connected to original sin and draws man away from the divine unity. Evagrius' goal is thus the abolition not only of the corporeal world in which humanity lives, but also of the names and numbers used to refer to God.²⁰⁹ The goal of Christian life is to dissolve the stream of individuality into the shoreless sea of God. The main feature of this strand is the idea of a "noble" part of human nature that is closer to God (the spirit), being set against another (the body), which is nothing but an obstacle.²¹⁰ The root of this idea is, for Balthasar, the Neoplatonic scheme of participation (*Teilhabe*): the world is the result of a progressive egress of God from Himself (*Egression Gottes auf sich selbst ist selbst die Welt*).²¹¹ As an emanation from the divine, the world itself is a relative nothing: the Platonic scheme is not able to show that "creation is something fundamentally different from a depotenzialization of God."²¹² Balthasar sees three consequences: (i) an exaggerated denigration of corporeality (that does not fit in the Christian idea of good creation); (ii) a vision of the worldly mission of Christ as a transit towards pure spirituality; and, consequently, the idea that there would have been no incarnation if every man were as pure as Moses; (iii) the drift toward idealistic pantheism: the idea that the world is nothing more than a weaker form of the divine being—humanity with its strength can regain divinity only by returning to a lost spiritual condition. Balthasar clearly maintains that no Father really used the concept of participation in a pantheistic way, since it would have been openly against the Bible. Nevertheless, it is impossible to ignore the foundational logic, which remains present as a tendency, more or less concrete, across the Fathers. Even in post-Nicene times, Balthasar argues, the doctrine of the trinity and the theory of ascesis remained intimately related, since the idea of emanation always involves the counter-idea of ascesis. Two examples are presented: the controversy of the *Filioque* (to say that the Holy Spirit is the substantial love between Father and Son would go against the emanation schema) and the absence of Trinitarian mysticism in post-Nicene theology (every mystical tendency always tried to go back to the absolutely simple essence of God, which is unity, and not to the Trinitarian God).

Balthasar's ambivalence about this spiritualism, though attributed to Origenism and not directly to Origen, is closely connected to his critiques of Ori-

208 Die Hiera des Evagrius 86–106. 181–206; *Metaphysik und Mystik des Evagrius Ponticus* 31–47.

209 WO 37, referring to Evagrius' Letter to Melania.

210 MCGINN, *Presence of God* 172, who brings as major example Plato, *Theait.* 176B.

211 FSO 373. PSW 86.

212 FSO 379. PSW 91: "Dass die Schöpfung als solche etwas grundsätzlich anderes ist, als seine Depotenzierung Gottes, das vermag das platonische Schema nicht zu zeigen."

gen himself and so deserves further consideration. While tracing the features of Christianity in the text *Patristik, Scholastik und wir*, Balthasar found himself dealing with an element common to every epoch of history: the deep human desire to reach God, to become similar to him. In all times, “an estate, a caste, a special coterie” has striven to fulfil this desire. This is what Balthasar, in a very peculiar way, calls “the original sin”: the religious dream of becoming pure again; the denial of the human condition, and the attempt to achieve, through human effort, a divine condition contrary to the state of nature. “We know that the serpent got a hold in this very innermost drive of man to press on to God, and poisoned it. Original sin does not sit somewhere on the periphery of human nature; no, the very promise *eritis sicut dei* is the perversion of the original core of man’s being itself.”²¹³ This quest for self-divinization is, thinks Balthasar, a revolt against the Creator, a disowning of the nature in which man was placed: earthly, physical, communal, spatial-temporal existence. Man no longer wants to be man: “instead of accepting the primary fact of his creatureliness as the basis and starting point of all his religious movements and aspirations, he flies over this basis and seeks a magical way to reach *on his own* the Creator’s way of being.”²¹⁴ Is there a difference between the genuine religious impulse and the original-sin-attitude? Leaving for the next section a deeper analysis of Balthasar’s idea of natural desire, the quote above suggests an initial hypothesis: the difference between the authentic and inauthentic quest for God lies precisely in the “on his own”. The problem of the spiritual-gnostic attitude is the prevalence of human ascesis, the audacity of human strength that tries, on its own, to become Godlike. This temptation is always present: to forget the unsurpassable and most basic truth of human being, creatureliness, and to believe that, since man comes from God, he must thereby contain something divine, a little spark of divinity (*göttlicher Funke*): “He convinces himself that he is, at it were, a piece and component of the eternal world of Ideas – which is fundamentally no different than claiming to be a part of God himself.”²¹⁵ The earthly, therefore, becomes a husk to be ascetically shed. The deep reason underlying this gnostic idea is that “the similarity between Creator and creature that is given with the fact of our derivation from God is not etched into the more fundamental

213 FSO 353. PSW 69: “Aber wir wissen, dass die Schlange sich gerade durch dieses innersten Triebes des Menschen, zu Gott selbst vorzudringen, bemächtigt und ihn vergiftet hat. Die Erbsünde sitzt nicht irgendwie peripher im menschlichen Wesen, sondern das ‘eritis sicut dii’ ist die Perversion des ursprünglichen Kernes dieses Wesen selbst.”

214 FSO 353 (italics added). PSW 69–70: “Anstatt die Urtatsache der Kreativität als Basis und Ausgangspunkt aller seiner religiösen Bewegungen und Aspirationen zu nehmen, überfliegt er gleichsam diese Basis und sucht auf magische Weise die Seinsweise des Schöpfers selbst zu erreichen.”

215 FSO 354. PSW 70: “An seine Stelle tritt die Berechnung, dass (...) man doch dem inwendigen Wesen nach ein ewiger Gedanke Gottes sein muss, gleichsam ein Stück und Bestandteil der ewigen Ideenwelt, die doch nichts anderes als Gott selbst ist.”

relationship that defines what a creature is: that which is not God.”²¹⁶ The most immense thought is, for Balthasar: ‘I am not God’. As he says:

And should I ascend into eons and perfect myself there, should I lean out of my very self and leap out of myself in an infinite, loving ecstasy, and should God himself overshadow me with the gifts of his divinity – I still am not God (...) In other words, in the relation between God and creature, similarity and difference do not hold the balance, but this dissimilarity is more radical.²¹⁷

Balthasar's understanding of the concept of deification is therefore closer to Maximus the Confessor: it is a reaffirmation and restoration of created humanity in its proper, God-established integrity. Here, every step closer to the “supernatural” that implies the denigration of worldly reality is a step *against* the Incarnation. Balthasar rejects the idea of a completely unknowable Father: God has made, and continues to make, himself known. For this reason, the fulfilment of humanity is not absorption into divinity; creatureliness is defined as the proper ontological and cognitive distance from the Creator. The basic nature of humanity is that *it is not God*, as Balthasar will clearly state in his more mature works:

And perhaps the going forth from God is still more divine than the return home to God, since the greatest thing is not for us to know God and reflect this knowledge back to him as if we were gleaming mirrors, but for us to proclaim God (...) This is a new mystery, inconceivable to mere creatures: that even distance from God and the coolness of reverence are an image and a likeness of God and of divine life. What is most incomprehensible is, in fact, the truest reality: precisely by not being God do you resemble God. And precisely by being outside of God are you in God. For to be over against God is itself a divine thing.²¹⁸

216 FSO 354. PSW 70: “Das Erbsündige dieser menschlichen Religiosität besteht darin, dass die Ähnlichkeit zwischen Schöpfer und Geschöpf, die mit der Tatsache der Gottesabkunft gegeben ist, nicht in das fundamentale Verhältnis des Nicht-Gott-seins des Geschöpfes hineingeschrieben wird.”

217 FSO 354. PSW 70–71: “Dass Gott ist, das ist der ungeheuerste und schlechthin uneinholbare Gedanke; er sagt mir, wenn er mich einmal im Tiefsten getroffen hat, mit einer absoluten, durch nichts überholbaren Evidenz, dass ich selbst, bis ins letzte hinein, nicht Gott bin und möge ich mich in alle Aeonen der Aeonen steigern und vervollkommen, und möge ich mich auch selbst in einer unendlichen, liebenden Ekstase aus mir selber hinauslehnen, und möge selbst Gott mich mit dem Geschenk seiner Göttlichkeit überschütten. (...) Anders ausgedrückt: im Verhältnis zwischen Gott und Geschöpf halten sich Ähnlichkeit und Verschiedenheit nicht das Gleichgewicht, sondern die Unähnlichkeit ist das Radikalere.”

218 Heart of the World 33–35. Das Herz der Welt 20–21: “Und göttlicher noch vielleicht als die Heimkehr zu Gott ist der Ausgang von Gott, den dies ist das Größte, nicht dass wir Gott erkennen rückstrahlend wie blinkende Spiegel, sondern dass wir ihn künden, wie brennende Fackeln das Licht. (...) Das ist ein neues Geheimnis, unvermutbar dem geringen Geschöpf: dass auch die Ferne von Gott und die Kühle der Ehrfurcht ein Bild und Gleichnis für Gott ist und für göttliches Leben. Das Unbegreifliche ist wahre Wirklichkeit: Darin

This passage can be read as the development of an intuition already present in the aforementioned passage of *The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves*. If, in the younger reflection, Balthasar begins to think the dissimilarity as radical, this radicality will become more and more positive in Balthasar's thought as time goes by: a certain distance from God is itself an image of the divine life, because this distance is already present in the Godhead—in the eternal generation of the Son as different from the Father. This aspect, not yet developed in Balthasar's first works on Origen, seems nevertheless to take initial shape in these years. For Balthasar, it is essential that we recognize the fundamental distance between divine and created nature. In this attention we hear the echo of Balthasar's early work on Erich Przywara's *Analogia Entis*.²¹⁹ Balthasar and Przywara were close friends, and the two articles we are examining were published in the years Balthasar spent with Przywara at *Stimmen der Zeiten*. Emphasising the analogy is, for Balthasar, necessary and often forgotten by Christian theology. It is exactly in light of this problem that Balthasar writes his most critical lines against Platonism: if Platonism is an expression of the *supernatural* relation between grace and nature, it is still unable to explain the relationship between the two *natures* that motivates every act of grace, "for it can only indicate a connection and not *what* is connected in this connection."²²⁰ The spiritualizing tendency is for Balthasar the biggest problem with Origenism and, in a way, with Origen himself. The separation between God and human being, which may sound negative and frightening, is in the dynamic of love at the basis of Christianity, and so in fact the sweetest thing. The perpetuation of this distinction is the perpetuation of the relationship itself: "only where there is no-identity is love possible."²²¹ Or, as Balthasar will express many years after, "love is found only in distance, unity only in difference."²²² This love is visible in Jesus' sacrifice, as expressed in a decisive passage that we here quote in its entirety:

Because man wanted to overcome what was distinctive about his nature and wanted to shed what specifically belonged to his essence, his corporeality with all its needs, impoverishments, weaknesses in order to cultivate the spiritual side of his being, for that reason the weakness of the flesh (*sarx* and not just *soma*) is chosen as a crucial place of redemption, with all the consequences that this entails: suffering, powerlessness, loss of courage, abandonment, pain, and death. God chooses the weak to shame the strong; he chooses the natural and the fleshly to shame the spiritual. (...) The order of redemption is therefore the

gerade, dass du Nichtgott bist, darin bist du Gott ähnlich. Und darin eben, dass du außer Gott bist, darin bist du in Gott. Denn dies: Gott-gegenüber-sein, ist selber göttlich."

219 Die Metaphysik Erich Przywaras 496.

220 FSO 378–379 (italics added). PSW 90: "Denn sie vermag nur eine Beziehung, nicht ein in dieser Beziehung Bezogenes vorzuweisen."

221 FSO 355. PSW 71: "Nur wo Nichtidentität ist, ist Liebe möglich."

222 Heart of the World 217. Das Herz der Welt 172: "Liebe ist nur im Abstand, Einheit ist nur in Distanz."

radical reversal of the order of original sin: over against the ascent to God by man on his own powers (which results in the elevation of man, his assumption, in God). In the *Verbum caro factum est* and in the way it was accomplished, namely by accentuating and emphasizing the difference between God and man, all of mankind has been shown the exact place at which and from which alone its old longing for 'divinization' can be fulfilled. Christ is no pointer, no perfected, no illuminated, no spiritual man, no high spirit or great personality. Rather, Christ is God in the nature of a 'normal man' (Phil 2:7).²²³

This long passage is an occasion for us to look at the main problematic elements that Balthasar finds in Origenism and, by extension, in Origen himself.

(i) Ontological Condition of Nature. The first problem Balthasar finds in Origen is the risk of drifting into idealistic pantheism. If the world is constituted by spirit, which is bound to return to its original unity with the divine *πνεῦμα*, then creation is nothing but the de-potentialization of divinity: "Under the tendency to bring together human-spirit and God-Spirit into the infinite, the material pole of creation inevitably suffered devaluation."²²⁴ Balthasar acknowledges that this pantheism is only present in Origen as a "tendency", but "a tendency is more mobile than a proposition and can creep into the last little crevices of an idea."²²⁵

(ii) Ascension-Descension Problem. The second element is the scarce attention paid to the distance between God and man. Man, for a certain Origenism, strives to cultivate his spiritual aspect in order to "overcome what was distinctive

223 FSO 357 (translation slightly modified). PSW 73: "Ja, weil der Mensch das unterscheidend Naturhafte seines Wesens, seine Leiblichkeit mit allen ihren Mängeln, Armseligkeiten und Schwächen überwinden wollte, um das Geisthafte seines Wesens zu kultivieren, darum wird als der unterscheidende Ort der Erlösung die Schwachheit des Fleisches (sarx – nicht nur soma) erwählt, mit seinem ganzen Gefolge von Leiden, Ohnmacht, Mutlosigkeit, Verlassenheit, Schmerz und Tod. Gott erwählt somit das Schwache, um das Starke zu beschämen, er erwählt das Naturhafte und Sarkische, um das Geisthafte und Pneumatische zu beschämen. (...) Die Erlösungsordnung ist also die radikale Umkehrung der erbsündigen Ordnung: sie setzt gegen den eigenmächtigen Aufstieg des Menschen zu Gott den gnadenhaften Abstieg Gottes zum Menschen (und dies als Emporhebung, *assumptio* des Menschen in Gott). Im 'Verbum caro factum est' und in der Weise, wie die sich vollzog, nämlich in der Akzentuierung und Prononcierung des Unterschiedes zwischen Gott und Mensch, wurde der ganzen Menschlichkeit der genaue Ort gezeigt, an dem und von dem aus allein ihre alte Sehnsucht nach 'Vergöttlichung' erfüllt werden sollte. Christus ist kein 'Weiser', kein 'Vollendeter' und 'Erleuchteter', kein 'pneumatischer Mensch', kein 'hoher Geist' und keine 'große Persönlichkeit'. Sondern Christus ist Gott in der Natur eines 'gewöhnliches Menschen'."

224 SF 19. GF 38: "Unter der Neigung, Mensch-Geist und Gott-Geist ins Unendliche anzunähern, muss der materielle Pol der Schöpfung doch wachsend der Entwertung verfallen."

225 SF 19. GF 39: "Wir haben vereinfacht, denn es handelt sich überall nur um eine Tendenz, keinen inhaltlich formulierten Satz. Aber eine Tendenz ist beweglicher als ein Satz und kann sich bis in die letzten Ritzen eines Denkens einschleichen."

about his nature". Human life becomes an ascetic pilgrimage back to the original union with God. So, "Criticism of Origen will begin successfully when it takes as its object the formal attitude of the *ascensio in corde* and the broad sphere of its consequences in content."²²⁶ The problem with mystical asceticism is deeply related to the idea that the human spirit is divine, and, as such, opposed to the corporeal aspect of creation. Origen repeats often, with Paul, that "whoever relies on the Lord he is one spirit with him", but he forgets too easily that "the world is crucified to me and I to the world" and "I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me." The consequent problem is an insufficient emphasis on the divine decision for temporal flesh as the site of redemption. Balthasar maintains that divine suffering, powerlessness, loss of courage, abandonment, pain, and death are not present enough in Origen. A negative evaluation of matter and the corporeal pushes Origen to deem the ascetic ascent more important than the divine descent, life's goal being "the falling of the shell of the sensual away from the resurrection-reality of the Spirit."²²⁷ On the contrary, Balthasar feels the need to emphasise the magnificent, gratuitous and pure descent of God into the world:

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.²²⁸

This passage discloses Balthasar's greatest critique of the Alexandrian: Origen does not fully accept that the highest Christian value is weakness; that the cross, in its weakness, is the only true wisdom. But the most important element of this critique is the second passage: the reason for the rejection of weakness lies in a confusion between heroic and Christian. Balthasar appears to have reached a very deep level in his exegesis of Origen, since he finds that the hero cannot be read

226 SF 17. GF 36: "Die Krisis des Origenismus wird erst dort mit Erfolg einsetzen, wo Sie die formale Haltung der *ascensio in corde* und ihre weitschichtigen inhaltlichen Folgen zum Gegenstand nimmt."

227 SF 19. GF 38: "Der Abstieg des Kreuzes ist nur das Fallen der Hülle des Sinnlichen von der Auferstehungswirklichkeit des Geistes."

228 SF 18 (italics added). GF 37: "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 blitzen 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 gebreitete übernatürliche Form des Todes und der Auferstehung Christi."

only as the wise man (following the intellectualistic reading of Origen, with the Wisdom of God winning over every other divine name) but, indeed, the virtuous as well. Balthasar understands that Origen's ascesis is not only a path to knowledge, but also a path to virtue, arcing toward unity with a God whose first name is Goodness. The two names of God, Wisdom and Goodness, reflect two aspects of Origen's thought: God is Logos, and therefore Wisdom, but he is also Goodness. For Balthasar, this binary definition is problematic. He is less concerned with the prioritization of one element over the other, than with the conspicuous absence of a third: for the Christian God is *embodied* wisdom and goodness, a God who takes shape, manifests himself in a form (*Gestalt*). By forgetting God's manifest presence among us, by forgetting the glorious aspect of the Trinity, we attempt to lay hold of him by means of virtue or knowledge, missing the first, humble action of submitting to his presence and precedence. Hence, Christianity is reduced to morality.²²⁹ But is this truly the case with Origen? For Balthasar, Origen occupies a middle position between an identification of pagan and Christian values, and an Augustinian rejection of pagan values *tout court*. While this reconciliation often makes it seem as though faith is but one of many moral virtues, "Origen never forgets that no natural and human good can possibly stand up to the measure of the supernatural good. Actually, this assessment comes quite close even to the Augustinian. And ultimately, the human being can offer to God only God's own gifts."²³⁰ Balthasar saves Origen by asserting that, despite the risk of a moralistic tendency, priority is always reserved for the divine gift. For this reason, Christian life is not the natural and perfected development of a pre-existent morality that

229 We understand here one of the finest critiques that Balthasar launches against his own time. Many theologians accused Neoscholasticism of promoting a religiosity based on knowledge and human reason alone (corresponding to the idea of God as Wisdom, as reason). These critics therefore suggested another divine name, Goodness, claiming Goodness as the most important element in Christian religion, rather than Wisdom – virtue rather than knowledge. Balthasar claims that even this second position is risky, as any position that lets one divine name win over the others. His entire theological aesthetic is indeed not about presenting one name (Beauty) over the rest, but, after necessarily remembering that often forgotten name, to show (in the three volumes of *Theo-logic*) the *circumsessio* of the transcendentals.

230 SF 198–199. GF 289–290: "Was sind die guten Werke der Ungläubigen wert? Origenes hält hier eine kluge und feine Mitte zwischen der wahllosen Gleichsetzung der heidnischen und christlichen Sittlichkeitswerte und zwischen der strengen augustianischen Verwerfung der heidnischen Tugend als verkappter Laster. Zweifellos wird diese 'humane' Versöhnlichkeit bei Origenes gefördert durch seine Wiederbringungslehre. So scheint der Glaube oft fast auf eine Stufe mit den andern, sittlichen Tugenden zu rücken. Aber Origenes vergisst doch nie, dass alles natürlich und menschlich Gute, am Maßstab des 'übernatürlich' Guten gemessen, unmöglich bestehen kann. Es ist nur 'billiges Öl' gegenüber dem 'duftenden Salböl' der Kirche. Ja, diese Schätzung nähert sich sogar der augustianischen. Und letztlich kann der Mensch Gott nur Seine Gaben darbringen."

would have automatically developed in the natural flow of history and philosophy. The central goal of Christian life is not to become a good example, a hero on the stage of the world. Christianity has its core in the unique and unpredictable moment of incarnation. God is not primarily an example of goodness or wisdom, but first and foremost the event of the transcendent coming down to earth, the gift of sacrificial love. The moral values of Christianity are grounded in the fact of the divine gift of the Logos: Scripture, Incarnation, and Church.

(iii) Christology and Kenosis. The ultimate critique of Origen is the absence of a proper formulation of the kenotic event. For Balthasar, Origen's theology of the cross can be represented by the image of a ball which, thrown from a great height, hits the ground and immediately springs back to its starting point. The Alexandrian sees incarnation as a simple displacement (*Verstellung*) of things, a moment of divine pedagogy meant to initiate the human return to God. Incarnation is a remedial action taken by God to heal the terrible effects of the fall: it is only because of the fall that Jesus acquired a human body. For Balthasar, though, kenosis should be compared to a "wave of the sea which, rushing up on the flat beach, runs out, ever thinner and more transparent, and does not return to its source but sinks into the sand and disappears."²³¹ Christ's embodiment is not a brief moment, a temporary bounce on the earth. On the contrary, the emptied-out Word is the giving over of the Kingdom of the Father. The Father's decrease is the increase of Christ in man and could happen only on the cross. For Origen, however, the cross is as a sign of weakness and helplessness that does not fit well into the spiritual image of God; at least, according to Balthasar.

These three critiques underlie Balthasar's overall appraisal of Origen. Rather than addressing the specific issues, and whether Balthasar's critiques are justified, it is interesting to note how (i) these critiques are part of Balthasar's dialogue with the Fathers, whom he uses to solve problems of modern theology and how (ii) each critique finds a sort of counterbalance in Balthasar's own approach. In his critical assimilation of Origen's thought, Balthasar finds answers to his own critiques, and discovers, in Origen himself, the elements of a correction to the three negative tendencies. Many of these answers come from the second feature of eastern spirituality, a permanent tension in Origen.

b) Liturgical Symbolism

The counterbalance to the gnostic-spiritualistic tendency in eastern spirituality is the symbolic-liturgical element. Opposite to spiritual Gnosticism is, for Balthasar, Alexandrian symbolism, which does not destroy the symbol in order to reach

231 SF 18. GF 36: "Aber die Kenosis müsste richtiger der Meereswoge verglichen werden, die überstürzend am flachen Strande ausläuft, immer dünner, durchsichtiger, und in ihrem Ausmünden nicht zurückkehrt, sondern im Sande versinkt und untergeht."

the spirit, but seeks contact with the divine exactly in the symbol—in the form of image or liturgy. This second strand has its apex in Basil, John Chrysostom, and especially Dionysius the (pseudo) Areopagite. Dionysius replaced the gnostic idea of absolute light with the liturgical, sacral, and reverential movement of the angels in paradise, and the worldly hierarchy of the Church encircling the obscure mystery of God. If the spiritualistic strand prefers the vocabulary of light, the symbolic strand favours darkness, mystery, and obscurity. Over and against the idea of a divine spirit united with God, emerges the idea of reverential distance, an attitude that Balthasar tracks to Gregory of Nyssa, touched by the pathos of a “nostalgic distance from God.”²³² It is in the womb of this symbolism that negative theology will gestate. The pre-eminence of negative language did not, however, always lead to mysticism; it had the strong counter-pull of divine incarnation. While the Jews did not use images to represent God because he did not fully disclose himself in their history, Christians were encouraged to rely on the sensory world because God revealed his image in the flesh of Jesus: “God took flesh and made himself image. Are you so superior to cry against matter?”²³³ The principle of analogy overcomes the principle of identity. Once again, Balthasar is not naïve in attributing a complete “positivity of the finite” to these authors; he recognizes that, while neither Dionysius nor Damascenus call matter positive, they do not, at least, condemn it as an obstacle.²³⁴

Balthasar feels closer to this second strand: the symbolic attitude was, he believed, more fruitful for the 20th century than other Origenian trajectories. Once again, it is important for us to remember why Balthasar decided to present ancient theology in this selective way—for the sake of his age. The explicit evidence for this motive is a parallel that he traces between the concept of myth in German culture, and the eastern concept of image and mystery. Because of this resemblance, “the cosmic sacramentality of the East (from Origen through Dionysius and John Cabasilas up to Dostojewski and Solowiew) and the sense for a cosmic liturgy maintain a deep fertility: every worldly act maintains the consecration of an act of service.”²³⁵ Balthasar, who graduated in *Germanistik* before devoting himself to theology, felt that the issue was not simply of historical interest, but

232 WO 38.

233 WO 39, quoting MENGES, *Die Bilderlehre des hl. Johannes von Damaskus* 115.

234 WO 40: “Das, was wir anderswo (Apokalypse der deutschen Seele III, 230–240) die Positivität der Endlichkeit und des Materiellen genannt haben, das hätte weder Dionysius noch Damascenus akzeptiert; und hierin besteht ihr Tribut an die Gnosis.”

235 WO 43: “Von dieser Mitte aus erhält der kosmische Sakramentalismus des Ostens (von Origenes über Dionysius und Johannes Cabasilas bis zu Dostojewskij und Solowief) und damit sein Sinn für kosmische Liturgie eine höchste Fruchtbarkeit: Alles weltliche Tun erhält die Weihe eines dienstlichen, letztlich gottes-dienstlichen Tuns.”

something decisive for human existence. What for Greeks and Russians was a *Lebensgefühl* could in his day become an intellectual program.

Origenian literature had mainly focused on the spiritual-gnostic aspect, and not unreasonably: it is the easiest to trace in Origen. Balthasar, however, because of his personal sensibilities, and prior education, could read Origen from a different perspective. Without this perspective, the Alexandrian would have not been able to help him when dealing with problems like the dispute around nature and grace, and the role of the Church in the world. I believe that Balthasar was able to find a companion in Origen because he saw in him something that was overlooked in the previous critical literature, something perhaps not completely developed by Origen himself, and yet able to provide energy twenty centuries later. It is for this reason that Balthasar's reading does not take an either/or approach to the two positions. It is rather a development of the second thanks to the first and of the first thanks to the second: he does not speak of the *symbolic* but the *sacramental*.

3. Origen between Spiritualism and Sacramentality

Balthasar is careful in defining Origen as a spiritualist by virtue of his Platonism. Origen, of course, is a Christian and wanted to be remembered as such, which Balthasar highlighted by quoting him on this aspect in the opening of *Spirit and Fire*.²³⁶ The right expression for Origen's thought is, thinks Balthasar, captured in the word transparency (*Durchsichtigkeit*).²³⁷ Origen's cosmology expresses the fundamental experience of the transparency of this world to the spiritual world and, therefore, the experience of a radical symbolism: a sacramental ontology.²³⁸ Thanks to the descending movement of the spirit, this world is elevated from

236 HLC 16,6: "I want to be a man of the Church. I do not want to be called by the name of some founder of a heresy, but in the name of Christ, and to bear that name which is blessed on the earth. It is my desire, in deed as in spirit, both to be and to be called a Christian."

237 WO 33: "Vielleicht wäre mit dem Worte 'Transparenz' das Wesentliche gesagt: das Grunderlebnis der restlosen Durchsichtigkeit der sinnlichen Welt auf die geistige hin und damit dasjenige eines radikalen Symbolismus. Alles Sinnliche ist 'nur' Bild, Gleichnis, Rätsel, Hinweis, und wird dann verstanden, wenn sein inwendiger geistiger Sinn entziffert, sein 'Schatz im Acker' ausgegraben, seine 'kostbare Perle' herausgehoben ist; aber alles Sinnliche 'ist' eben Bild und ist darum auch Offenbarung, Enthüllung, Apokalypse des Geistes."

238 On this see especially the chapter "Hans Urs von Balthasar: Analogy as Sacramental Participation" in BOERSMA, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology* 117–135. See also Ben Quash's comment on the "almost sacramental character" of the mediation of the "differentiated diversity of material things": QUASH, *Hans Urs von Balthasar* 111. HOWSARE, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and Protestantism* 107, also speaks of Balthasar's "sacramental sensibilities".

sign to sacrament. For this reason, Origen is neither in the gnostic strand, nor in the symbolic one: he is the living source of both strands because he holds them together in his thought. It is true that every corporeal object is *only* image, allegory, riddle and clue of a spiritual reality (*Bild, Gleichnis, Rätsel, Hinweis*), and, as such, will only be understood in full when the spirit is decoded, when the pearl is found. It is, however, also true that corporeality *is* revelation, disclosure, apocalypse of the spirit (*Offenbarung, Enthüllung, Apokalypse*). The central point of Balthasar's reading of the Alexandrian comes into view: the world reveals its own sacramentality, it is not simply the product of sin, a fallen cosmos to be surpassed, but an *Offenbarung*. It is the revelation of something else, of something that does not just lie *behind* a veil, but manifests *in* the veil itself, something that appears in being veiled (*Enthüllung*). The veil is neither to be surpassed, nor ripped apart. It is only on the threshold (natural/supernatural, spirit/world, divine/material) that one can truly be oneself. Only if this threshold remains transparent towards both sides can it separate and, therefore, unite. This idea of transparency is two-sided and can become either a radical transcendentalism, or a veneration of images. It becomes radical transcendentalism when it looks at every image of the world as a means to the end of transcendence, as a shell that, once broken, can be discarded; the biblical affirmation of the goodness of creation is forgotten. Transparency becomes a veneration of images when one forgets that, between world and God, there remains a qualitative distinction. Balthasar admits that, among the two, Origen falls more often into the first hazard, typical of Neoplatonism.

4. Balthasar and Platonism

It would be easy to see Balthasar as a despiser of the Platonic element in Origen. Indeed, he disparages this element on many occasions. When dealing with Origen, however, Balthasar is genuinely balanced, recognizing the fallacy of a perspective that would simply discredit Platonism without a deep consideration of its manifold elements. For example, Balthasar acknowledges that Platonism and Neoplatonism were, at the time of the Fathers, deeply permeated with Aristotelian and Stoic elements. This applies not only to the Antiochenes, but also to Origenian theology: "Thus in many ways the danger of Platonism was hemmed in."²³⁹ There is also a deeper element of Platonism that, when ignored, results in positions like Adolf Harnack's, discrediting authors like Origen because of the "Hellenism" of their thought. Balthasar does not fall into this temptation:

239 FSO 378. PSW 90: "So mag in der mannigfachsten Weise die Gefahr des Platonismus gebannt sein."

Who can say to us how much Plato or Plotinus have been partaking in an authentic supernatural grace? What allows us to assert with certainty that the Neoplatonic view of God or the Buddhist turn inward were not – in many cases, at least – true path to supernatural salvation? The Fathers and the Scholastics worked at this kind of correction, in the belief that the pagan philosophers were not only a natural but also an expressly supernatural ‘pedagogy to Christ.’²⁴⁰

The best example of Balthasar’s position is his reflection on the Platonic idea of Eros. He admits that real Platonism possessed a deep understanding of love, recognising in it a quasi-divine nature: “And who warrants us further that Greek Eros (especially in Platonic form) has no transcendental aspects in an invisible dependency upon the grace of Christ?”²⁴¹ Plato’s love is not disinterested; on the contrary, the Eros described by Plato is the same kind of love that burns into the ears of the mystics: “It was the high audacity of leaving one’s self and the whole limited world behind because a mysterious, unmistakable call from the divine love penetrated into the inner ear.”²⁴² Balthasar deals with the concept of Eros in many articles between 1936 and 1938, the same years of his works on Origen. He conducted this study in close dialogue with a range of authors, above all in critical relation to Nygren’s Protestant denigration of Eros, and in positive dialogue with Paul Claudel. In *Eros und Caritas* Balthasar describes Eros as a positive element: “It is a human impulse to overcome one’s narrow egotistic sphere and to fly over, for something bigger of oneself, to give oneself, to forget one’s own poverty in the immersion into a sublime, fascinating and enriching essence or goal.”²⁴³ Eros is the impulse to combat egoism, it is the discovery of the abyssal depth of the other. It becomes therefore also service to the other, in the form of “ideas, people, art,

240 FSO 368. PSW 81–82: “Wer sagt uns den, wieviel an echter, übernatürlicher Begnadung Plato oder Plotin zuteil geworden ist? Was läßt uns mit Sicherheit äußern, dass die neuplatonische Gottesschau oder die buddhistische Versenkung nicht, in vielen Fällen wenigstens, wahre Zugänge zum übernatürlichen Heil waren? (...) Väter und Scholastiker haben sich um diese Korrektur bemüht, im Glauben, das die heidnischen Philosophien nicht nur eine natürliche, sondern eine ausdrücklich übernatürliche Erziehung zu Christus hin waren.”

241 WO 44: “Und wer verbürgt uns ferner, dass dieser griechische Eros, zumal in der neuplatonischen Form, nicht selbst übernatürliche Momente in sich birgt, also in unsichtbarer, unterirdischer Abhängigkeit von der Erlösungsgnade Christi steht?”

242 Eros und Caritas 154: “Es war der hohe Mut sich selbst und die ganze begrenzte Welt hinter sich zurückzulassen, weil ein geheimnisvoller, unüberhörbarer Ruf aus der göttlichen Liebe des Seins an ihr inneres Ohr gedrungen war.”

243 Ibid.: “Es ist ein allmenschlicher Drang, seine enge, egoistische Sphäre zu sprengen und zu überfliegen, für irgend etwas Größeres als er selbst ist, sich hinzugeben, sich und seine eigene Armut zu vergessen in der Versenkung an irgend ein erhabenes, lockendes, hinreichendes Wesen oder Ziel.”

problem, body, soul of the other men.”²⁴⁴ In his analysis, Balthasar starts from the affirmation of creation: God created man in his image and likeness, “therefore Eros, the human natural love for the world and for God, when unspoiled, must be itself image and likeness of God’s caritas.”²⁴⁵ There is no dualism between human desire and divine love, but image and likeness: human Eros is analogous to divine Agape. Human love also expresses itself in a natural tendency toward the good; a desire that finds true fulfilment in the divine Agape: “Before the revelation of the divine Caritas in Christ, Eros has to say that he, with all his desire and with all his flames did not grasp, until now, the ultimate and decisive meaning of love. In order to learn it, Eros resorts to the school of Caritas.”²⁴⁶ With the revelation of divine love, Eros is no longer simply an image (*Gleichnis*) but moves toward the divine archetype (*Urbild*): Eros itself assumes a certain kind of divinity. This does not happen, for Balthasar, because of a human titanic movement, but because of the divine rain of love on humanity. “Only the Christian love is a real movement in the world, because it follows only the divine traces.”²⁴⁷ This example helps us locate Balthasar within the manifold of positions viz. so-called “Christian Platonism.”²⁴⁸ Balthasar is ambivalent. He disapproves of the Platonic tendency in Origen, but also acknowledges the possible coexistence of Platonic and Christian elements in one coherent system. The available positions are usually given as two: one can, with Harnack, assert the damage done by the Hellenization of Christianity²⁴⁹ or, as recent studies prefer, endorse the synthesis as a positive Christianization of Hellenism.²⁵⁰ The first position means to eliminate every Platonic aspect

244 Ibid.: “Idee, Volk, Kunstwerk, Problem, Leib, Seele des Mitmenschen.”

245 Ibid. 155: “So muss doch wohl Eros, des Menschen natürliche Liebe zu Welt und Gott, an sich, wenn er unverdorben ist, ein Bild und Gleichnis der Caritas Gottes sein.”

246 Ibid. 156: “Vor der Offenbarung der Caritas Gottes in Christus wird sich Eros sagen müssen, dass er mit all seiner Sehnsucht und all seinem Flammen bisher doch noch nicht gehadert hat, was im letzten und entscheidenden Sinn Liebe heißt. Eros wird sich in die Schule der Caritas begeben, um das zu lernen.”

247 Ibid.: “Nur die christliche Liebe ist eine letztgültige Bewegung in die Welt hinein – weil sie dabei nur Gottes Spuren folgt.”

248 On this complex topic a first introduction can be given by DROBNER, *Christian Philosophy* 164–179. Some fundamental titles on this are VON IVÁNKA, *Plato Christianus*; BEIERWALTES, *Platonismus im Christentum*; KOBUSCH, *Christliche Philosophie*. An interesting contribution on Christian Philosophy and mystical experience is a short volume containing the interventions of Balthasar and Beierwaltes at the University of Zürich (1–2 February 1974): BEIERWALTES/BALTHASAR/HAAAS, *Grundfragen der Mystik*.

249 HARNACK, *History of Dogma* 1, 46, describes early Christianity as a religion of “life and feeling of the heart”, which suffered a “decomposition” because of Hellenism. On this, see especially MEIJERING, *Die Hellenisierung des Christentums im Urteil Adolf von Harnacks*.

250 For an overall glance: GLAWE, *Die Hellenisierung des Christentums*; TROMBLEY, *Hellenic Religion and Christianization*; MARKSCHIES, *Hellenization of Christianity* 5–34. On the fruitfulness of Alexandrian Christianity thanks to the relation between the Christian

in order to “save” a Christian Origen, if possible. As we know, Balthasar explicitly refuses the first position. The contrary position, the appreciation of Platonism as fully Christian (after some remodelling), risks ignoring the novelty of Origen’s reception of Plato; it also undercuts the necessity of the Christian fact, seeing Christianity as an update rather than a complete novelty.

A third position is possible, close to the second but, in a way, more fruitful: hospitality. The term, used by Michel Fédou to describe de Lubac’s reading of Origen, can be applied to Balthasar himself.²⁵¹ De Lubac was interested in rehabilitating forgotten figures like Origen; he did so by showing how Origen’s spiritual exegesis was inspired by the Christian mystery. What de Lubac did with Origen mirrors what Origen himself did with Hebrew exegesis: he hosted and enriched it. This hospitality applies not only to exegesis, notes Fédou, but also to some Greek philosophical doctrines (Plato, Clement, Philo). De Lubac is extremely positive about this hospitality. Speaking about the so-called Platonism of the Fathers, he explains that many of the elements usually considered Platonic or Stoic derive, on the contrary, from the needs of Christianity itself. The philosophical basis of the Fathers was conditioned by the needs of Christianity: “how else indeed could they make the most out of the metaphor of the body and its members in the great Pauline epistles if they were to leave Stoicism out of account? Or how could they interpret with accuracy the Epistle to the Hebrews if first they must eliminate all trace of Platonism? In fact, they never scrupled to borrow, and that to a large extent, from the great pagan philosophers whom they held in esteem.”²⁵² The clearest

theological system and pre-existent religious/philosophical realities see: SIMONETTI, *Teologia e Cristologia nell’Egitto Cristiano* 11–38. On this position referring to Origen: KOCH, *Pronoia und Paideusis*; CROUZEL, *Origen* 207–217; EDWARDS, *Origen against Plato*. The formula has often been reconstrued as a Christianization of Hellenism, for example by DANÉLOU, *Platonisme et théologie mystique; Message évangélique et culture hellénistique* 279. For an example of how Origen’s philosophical positions originated from the Scriptures, see especially the work of MARTENS, *Embodiment, Heresy, and the Hellenization of Christianity* 594–620. RAMELLI, *Origen, Patristic Philosophy, and Christian Platonism* 217–263, among others, sustains the thesis that the Scriptures available to the Fathers were already deeply “hellenized”.

251 I borrow this term from FÉDOU, *Henri de Lubac lecteur d’Origène* 133–146, who refers to the “hospitalité de la théologie”. The position taken from the scholars in Lyon seems to have survived long after them, since in 1998 John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* 1998, no. 76, will approve of “christian philosophy”: “The philosopher who learns humility will also find courage to tackle questions which are difficult to resolve if the data of revelation are ignored – for example, the problem of evil and suffering, the personal nature of God and the question of the meaning of life or, more directly, the radical metaphysical question, ‘Why is there something rather than nothing?’”

252 DE LUBAC, *Catholicism* 40–41. *Catholicisme* 17: “Platoniciennes ou stoïciennes, et si indispensable qu’elles fussent à leur œuvre, c’étaient bien moins des données de philosophie qui guidaient la spéculation des Pères, qu’une perception aiguë des exigences chrétiennes. Comment, par exemple, eussent-ils pu faire abstraction de tout stoicism pour exploiter

example of this is the doctrine of universal salvation; usually seen as an utterly Platonic element, in the Fathers it becomes an answer to the universal vocation of Christ's mission.

There is, however, a difference between the idea of hospitality in de Lubac and Balthasar. Far from a "dreamy nostalgia" that sees the return to the sources as a panacea, Balthasar remains openly critical of those aspects of the Alexandrians he deems incompatible with the Christian faith. Despite this reservation, the idea of hospitality can be applied to Balthasar as to de Lubac, because, for both, hospitality has the same source: the acceptance and reception of God's creation. For Balthasar, Christianity did not bend some Platonic concepts to fit its framework, but rather hosted and fulfilled ideas that philosophy anticipated, without fully understanding. The Christian fact completes elements of Origen's philosophical education. This education is not erased or scorned, but totally embraced and enhanced. In a 1976 interview, Balthasar confirms the suitability of the term "hospitality". Asked about the relationship between Church and culture, he answers: "You are correct in stating that the Church receives something from culture. It is she who takes responsibility for philosophy; she administers and transforms it; and, in an age without philosophy, she again can pass this gift on."²⁵³ To be clear, philosophy was not just tolerated; it illuminated unclear aspects of revelation. As an example, Balthasar notes that "in Origen (...) philosophical cosmogony and the doctrine of creation in Genesis illuminate each other."²⁵⁴ Balthasar describes Scripture as "syncretic", because of the melting together of philosophy, theology, and mythology. With the incarnation, God establishes a new relation with these three pre-existing elements: "To try to separate the Bible from every religion, philosophy and myth would mean to try to be more biblical than the bible and more Christian than Christ."²⁵⁵ The Fathers, for Balthasar, gave a new meaning to old words. Understood in this sense, Platonic vocabulary is salvageable. The other two elements are indeed subject to "objective mistakes and deviations" in the doctrines of the Fathers—especially in Origen himself. Granted, these are "mistakes"

la métaphore des grandes épîtres pauliniennes sur le corps et les membres? Comment auraient-ils pu rester fidèles à l'Épître aux Hébreux, s'ils avaient dû d'abord éliminer tout platonisme? Ils n'ont pas fait scrupule d'emprunter beaucoup aux grands païens qui admiraient!"

253 Spirit and Fire. An interview 582. ZSW 116: "Sie haben das richtig gesagt, dass die Kirche Kultur aufnimmt. Wir waren bei der Frage der Philosophie einmal schon an dem Punkt. Sie ist es, die die Philosophie übernimmt, sie verwaltet, verwandelt und an philosophielose Zeiten wieder weitergeben kann."

254 GL 4, 319. H 3/1, 287: "Bei Origenes (...) erläutern sich die 'philosophische' Kosmogonie und die Schöpfungslehre der Genesis gegenseitig." On this example see MARTENS, *Doctrine of Pre-Existence and the Opening Chapters of Genesis*.

255 GL 4, 243. H 3/1, 221: "Sie von Religion, Philosophie und Mythos 'reinigen' wollen, hieße biblischer sein wollen als die Bibel und christlicher als Christus."

only because Balthasar views this sort of Platonism from a Christian theological perspective. As he notes, “what is at issue for us here is in no way an immanent estimation and evaluation of Platonism and Aristotelianism as philosophical theories. We contemplate them only on the basis of their suitability to illuminate certain partial aspects of regions of the Christian and theological picture of the world.”²⁵⁶ This perspective is rooted in a specific 20th century discussion concerning the possibility of a Christian philosophy. For this reason, it is necessary to look for the reasons behind Balthasar’s cautionary approach to Neoplatonism in his own theological and philosophical context. It is, we will see, due to a certain polemical addressee in his education that Balthasar was so critical towards certain features of Origen’s thought. We can now inquire into the identity of this polemical reference.

256 FSO 380. PSW 92: “Auch betonen wir nochmals ausdrücklich, dass es uns hier und im folgenden in keiner Weise um eine immanente Schätzung und Wertung des Platonismus und des Aristotelismus als philosophischer Theorien geht. Wir betrachten sie einzig auf ihre Eignung hin, gewisse Teilaspekte und Bereiche des christlichen, theologischen Weltbildes zu erhellen und kategorial zu durchleuchten.”

VI. Why *this* Origen?

The Issues behind the Critiques: against Idealistic Neoplatonism

Balthasar lived most of his life in Basel, which, as Henrici points out, was “a city between two cultures”: German and French.²⁵⁷ Balthasar’s double background was more than geographical: from the first country he received his literary education, from the second his theological formation. Without these elements in mind it is impossible to fully grasp the context of Balthasar’s interest in Origen—and consequently, its various elements. Balthasar’s interpretation of Origen is not, in fact, the fruit of a detached, scholarly interest in the Fathers. As we have seen, his clear polemical target is the doctrine of *duplex ordo*, paired with a certain Neo-Scholastic approach, which he believes is responsible for the dreariness of modern theology and the inability of the Church to deal with the issues of the day. However, I believe a second important target emerges in his reading of the Fathers. While the polemic with the *duplex ordo* tradition derives from his French education, the second polemical reference is mainly due to his years at the faculty of German Studies. The first is readily acknowledged by almost every scholar of Balthasar; the second has received less attention.

Together with the *ressourcement* of the Church Fathers, the first half of the century in France saw a revival of Neoplatonism. The revival favoured a philosophy that was theurgical and strongly apophatic, such as that of Proclus. Hankey, who carefully reconstructs the history of Neoplatonism in France, describes two features of this revival: it was generally opposed to the Western metaphysical tradition, and it was generally anti-Idealist. “The second characteristic”, he claims “sets the 20th century retrieval in opposition to that in the 19th century, and even to ancient and medieval Neoplatonism generally. Hegel is central to the philosophical interest in Neoplatonism at the beginning of the 19th century, but this interest declines with the later return to Kant.”²⁵⁸ In this 20th century anti-idealistic revival of Neoplatonism we can locate de Lubac and, to some extent, Balthasar, who never denied a certain assonance between his aesthetic and Plotinus’. This anti-idealistic attitude emerged, however, in reaction to a strongly idealistic 19th century Neoplatonic revival. Indeed, Balthasar never hides a certain concern with the Neoplatonism of his own day. In the fourth volume of *The Glory of the Lord* he declares that “I had to be prepared for being tossed on to the old Neoplatonic scrapheap, before I have even a chance to excuse myself.”²⁵⁹ He goes on quoting

257 HENRICI, Hans Urs von Balthasar und der französische Katholizismus 169–174.

258 HANKEY, Neoplatonism in France 1–96.

259 GL 4, 16 n. 4: “Cf. H.-E. Bahr: ‘Von Balthasar’s entire theological aesthetic is an exceedingly urgent endeavor to penetrate behind Thomas and his Aristotelian-conditioned ontology of the beautiful’ (!), ‘in order to attain once more the sight of the whole of revelation and history, in a renewed neo-Platonic-Christian mysticism.’ *Monatsschrift für Pastoraltheol-*

those who labelled him a Neoplatonic Christian mystic. We begin to glimpse the complexity of Balthasar's relation with Neoplatonism. He knew that his theological aesthetic might recall Plotinus, but at the same time he rejected the title of modern-day Neoplatonic Christian mystic. Why? What was wrong with the Neoplatonism that surrounded Balthasar, in some ways so like his own project? What informed his concern? The answer hides in Balthasar's anxiety over the consequences of German Idealism, which he witnessed in his own time, and predicted for the times to come. As with the *duplex ordo* problem, the dualism of reason and faith had its peak in Balthasar's formative years, inheriting much of its logic from German Idealism, which spread to France at this time. The intent of this section is therefore to present the context in which Balthasar faced this problem so as to better understand how it affected his reading of Origen.

1. The French Debate on Christian Philosophy

The category of Neoplatonism was frequently deployed by Balthasar in the 1930s and the 1940s, always linked to the question of whether Christianity, by adopting Neoplatonism, had been able to deal with its cosmology of emanation. At stake, for Balthasar, is the relation between God and the world. His concern was indeed with the *exitus-reditus* dynamism of Neoplatonism; could it fit with the biblical account of incarnation? The best locus for understanding the second polemical addressee is the discussion around "Christian philosophy", an issue discussed by Balthasar in *On the Tasks of Catholic Philosophy in our Time*. After an analysis of the problems caused by the *duplex ordo*, he asks what happens to a philosopher who encounters the Christian event. If philosophy is the love of wisdom, "from what Eros does Christian philosophy *still* live?"²⁶⁰ These considerations find their roots in the French debate that began in 1926 with Émile Bréhier's *Histoire de la philosophie*.²⁶¹ Bréhier wanted to demonstrate that the Christian event did not influence the development of philosophical thought at all. In 1931, the debate reached its apex, with Bréhier's article in the *Revue de métaphysique et de*

ogie 53 (1964), 122." H 3/1, 17 n. 4: "Ich mußte darauf gefaßt sein, ehe man mich auch nur ausreden ließ, zum alten neuplatonischen Eisen geworfen zu werden. Vgl. H.-E. Bahr: Balthasars 'ganze theologische Ästhetik ist ein großangelegter Versuch, hinter Thomas und dessen aristotelisch bestimmte Ontologie des Schönen zurückzustoßen (!), um in einer erneuerten neuplatonisch-christlichen Mystik die Schau des Ganzen, der Offenbarung und der Geschichte wiederzuerlangen.' Monatschrift für Pastoraltheologie 53 (1964), 122."

260 CP 154. KP 19: "Von welchem Eros lebt denn eigentlich noch die christliche Philosophie?"

261 BRÉHIER, *Histoire de la philosophie* 1. L'Antiquité et le Moyen Âge.

morale, and his intervention at the *Société Française de Philosophie*.²⁶² He argued that every effort of Christianity to unite with philosophy was futile, since the two are incompatible: “One can no more speak of a Christian philosophy than of a Christian mathematics or of a Christian physics.”²⁶³ Many answers poured in the same day, notably from Jacques Maritain and Étienne Gilson.²⁶⁴ The 21st of March launched a major discussion in France: Maurice Blondel specified his position in a *Cahier de la Nouvelle Journée* (1932) and the *Société Thomiste* dedicated a day of study to the issue in Juvisy (11 September 1933). De Lubac himself followed the discussion and expressed his opinion, close to Blondel’s, in 1936.²⁶⁵ We are less interested in the discussion itself, than in understanding the relation between Bréhier’s enthusiasm for Neoplatonism and his position on Christian philosophy. Contrary to Henri Bergson, who years earlier proposed a reading of Plotinus guided by Schelling, Bréhier published *Philosophie de Plotin* (1928), an interpretation clearly inspired by Hegel. Bréhier identifies his work as a historian of philosophy with the Hegelian concept of a “single living mind” taking possession of itself.²⁶⁶ Bréhier’s interpretation of Plotinus is based on a rigid separation between Occidental, intellectual contemplation (philosophy) and the Oriental, mystical desire for union with the divine (religion). For Bréhier, Plotinus’ idea of union with the One (*reditus*) came from “the Orient close to Greece, in the religious speculations of India which by the time of Plotinus had been founded for centuries on the Upanishads and had retained their vitality.”²⁶⁷ In his *History of Philosophy*, in the section *Hellenism and Christianity*, Bréhier claims that there is nothing intellectual in Christianity, it is a spirituality completely separate from philosophy.²⁶⁸ For, as

262 21 March 1931, speech at the *Société Française de Philosophie*, then published as BRÉHIER, Y a-t-il une philosophie chrétienne? 133–162. There is no doubt that Balthasar knew Bréhier’s work, especially the translation of Plotinus’ *Enneades* edited between 1924 and 1931.

263 Ibid. 162: “On ne peut donc pas parler d’une philosophie chrétienne que d’une mathématique chrétienne ou d’une physique chrétienne.”

264 For the proceedings of the meeting, see Bulletin de la Société française de Philosophie 31 (1931). See in particular *ibid.* 19–52 (Bréhier’s presentation). 40–49 (Gilson’s presentation). 52–59 (following debate). 59–72 (Maritain). 86–92 (Blondel’s letter on this, published as an appendix).

265 DE LUBAC, Sur la philosophie chrétienne 225–253.

266 BRÉHIER, The History of Philosophy 22. Bréhier publishes an *Histoire de la philosophie allemande* in 1921 and three volumes of his *Histoire de la philosophie. Antiquité et Moyen Âge* in 1928.

267 Id., The Philosophy of Plotinus 116.

268 Id., The History of Philosophy 2, 224–225: “During the first five centuries there is no distinctive Christian philosophy that implies a table of intellectual values fundamentally original and different from that of pagan thinkers (...). There was nothing speculative about Christianity; its main concern was mutual assistance, both spiritual and material, in different communities. To begin with, however, the spiritual life practiced in these communities is not peculiar to Christianity: the need for the inner life or self-consciousness was felt

he says, “Philosophy is several centuries anterior to Christianity. (...) It retains an altogether external relation to Christianity, and, if one is able to speak of Christian philosophers, it is hard to see any positive sense which one can give to the notion of Christian philosophy.”²⁶⁹ This evaluation relates to his admiration for Hegel, “a man who was particularly qualified through his mental disposition to comprehend Plotinus.”²⁷⁰ Bréhier follows Hegel in the interpretation of Plotinus, specifically regarding the relation of the *Nous* to the One. When the One is contemplated by the Intelligence, the distinction between them vanishes. For Bréhier, as for Hegel, this mystical elevation does not, however, pass beyond the realm of thought: Plotinian contemplation is not part of a spiritual, but an intellectual, mysticism. Plotinus’ ecstasy was “pure thought which exists in itself [*bei sich*] and has itself for object,”²⁷¹ affirming therefore “the essential autonomy of the spiritual life when life is comprehended in itself.”²⁷²

Bréhier’s Neoplatonism was clearly idealistic, or better, Hegelian. This had a fundamental impact on the debate concerning Christian philosophy. Religious and philosophical elements, it was argued, should be kept apart; philosophy deserves an upper place on the ladder of thought, while religion is only a source of spirituality and practical rules of life. Thus, Bréhier maintained, there was no sense in speaking of Christian philosophy. If the Neo-Scholastic separation of the orders of nature and grace resulted in a nature totally emptied of the sacred, the Neoplatonic revival resulted in a completely sacralized nature. As Cyril O’Regan underlines, “for Balthasar both alternatives represent two sides of an inability to think participation, which in order to be identifiably Christian requires that participation be a function of the incommensurability of the creator and the created.”²⁷³ What Balthasar finds problematic in the Neoplatonic revival is, *mutatis mutandis*, not different from his problem with the Neo-Scholasticism: it under-

throughout the Greek world long before the triumph of Christianity (...). Furthermore, the spiritual life and practices of the Christians had not the slightest influence on the image of the universe that resulted from Greek science and philosophy (...). The spiritual life of the Christians evolved alongside the Greek cosmos without giving birth to a new concept of reality.”

269 Id., *Comment je comprends l’histoire de la philosophie* 9.

270 Id., *The Philosophy of Plotinus* 190. *La philosophie de Plotin* 180: “Un des hommes qui était le mieux préparé, par sa nature d’esprit, à comprendre Plotin, Hegel”

271 Id., *The Philosophy of Plotinus* 190. *La philosophie de Plotin* 180: “(...) il dit que, pour lui, l’extase était ‘pure pensée’ qui est en soi (*bei sich*) et se prend pour objet.” Bréhier quotes HEGEL, *Werke* 15, 39–41.

272 Id., *The Philosophy of Plotinus* 191. *La philosophie de Plotin* 181: “La réalité de l’Un correspond à l’affirmation de l’autonomie radicale de la vie spirituelle lorsque cette vie est saisie elle-même.”

273 I am here using Neoplatonism, following O’REGAN, Balthasar and *Gnostic Genealogy* 622, as a genealogical category rather than as a term indicating a compact or univocal group of authors.

cuts sacramentality. If Neo-Scholasticism reduced the sacraments to seven, losing the sacramentality of the world, Balthasar is aware that the answer is not an *ontic sacrality*, but a *sacramental ontology*. To speak of sacramental ontology means to think properly of participation, to preserve the incommensurability of Creator and creature. For this reason, Balthasar does not accept Proclus's theurgy, just as he does not accept Suárez's distinction of orders. As O'Regan notes, "agreeing with the need for resacralization (...) Balthasar puts out an advisory that too much as well as too little sacrality represents the eclipse of the Christian kerygma and the theological tradition, including the Christian Neoplatonic tradition that translates and defends it. The Christian subject can asphyxiate in a world devoid of the sacred. But the same subject can drown in a world drenched in the sacred."²⁷⁴

Against Bréhier's thesis of incompatibility, Maurice Blondel defends the possibility of a Christian, or better, Catholic theology. De Lubac, a few years later, will summarize the entire discussion between Bréhier, Maritain, and Blondel, accepting the latter's position as most balanced, and most Christian.²⁷⁵ This should not be surprising, considering that de Lubac's *Surnaturel* has its roots in Blondel's *L'Action*. Blondel moves the question to a doctrinal level; for philosophy to be fully reasonable it must acknowledge its *insuffisance radicale*, its structural incompleteness. This lack is not merely due to those future developments yet to unfold, but is more substantial, pertaining to what philosophy cannot give to itself—its own origin. De Lubac follows Blondel closely: the need for the supernatural is already present in the natural condition but hidden. The relation between reason and faith is therefore intrinsic. Philosophy, to be truly itself, must acknowledge its Christian origins: "Only Christian philosophy is really and fully philosophy."²⁷⁶ Balthasar is even more radical than Blondel, claiming that it is the telos of all human thought to culminate in Christianity as the highest and truest form of philosophy. For him, the great Christian philosophers of the past were great philosophers *because* of their being Christian, not *despite* (as for Bréhier) nor in *addition* to (as for Maritain) this fact. For Balthasar, Christianity is not only the fulfilment of all previous philosophy, but has the right to *spolia Aegyptiorum*: "taking elements of Platonic, Aristotelic, Stoic, Neo-Platonic, Gnostic and Hermetic

274 O'REGAN, *ibid.*

275 DE LUBAC, *Sur la philosophie chrétienne*. Maritain claims that human reason, with the Christian event, finds itself in a new and better condition—it works with the exact same procedures as non-Christian reason, but is easier and safer than before. For Maritain it is therefore better to speak of *Christian philosophers* than of *Christian philosophy*, since philosophical thought remains the same. In the end the thesis is reduced to considering Christianity a consolatory element for the thought of some philosophers. Gilson is more radical and, inspired by Thomas Aquinas' example, believes that philosophy never abstracts completely from faith.

276 *Ibid.* 234: "Seule la philosophie chrétienne era vraiment, sera pleinement philosophie."

thought and making use of these simultaneously alongside one another with an apparent nonchalance due to a wholly original, precise, and irreducible insight of faith into the essence of the divine truth.²⁷⁷ If we read de Lubac's comments on this concept, we understand how the idea comes from a certain reading of Origen; one that Balthasar, for his part, acquired in Lyon:

Not that Origen allows no place for the profane disciplines within ecclesiastical doctrine: for him, the spoils of Egypt are fair game! Origen did not invent this metaphor which was destined to become famous, but he did make it his own. (...) We note, besides, that these 'spoils' are of value only if they are brought back to the Holy Land for the building of the Temple. By contrast, he who goes down to Egypt to devote himself there to the profane sciences runs great risks. If he lingers there as did Ader the Idumean, if he lets himself be seduced by philosophy, he will return only to corrupt the faith and to break up the unity of his brothers. Those who escape this ruin are rare indeed.²⁷⁸

The philosopher cannot let himself be seduced by philosophy as an isolated discipline—for, as we have seen, the critiques that Balthasar puts to Origen are related to a certain Platonic vision of the world that might forget to return to the Holy Land and build the Temple.

Today, says Balthasar, philosophers enact their own *spolia Christianorum*: secular philosophy presents elements of Christianity deprived of their Christian heart. Balthasar has Hegel in mind, the greatest engineer of what O'Regan calls "misremembering."²⁷⁹ As he says, "what presents itself externally as a Hellenistic syncretism, e.g. in Alexandria (just as one may find much in Origen that externally sounds like an echo of Philo), is seen on closer examination to be the *attempt* to let the entire *worldly truth* become *transparent* to the divine truth."²⁸⁰ If Bréhier could claim that "the spiritual life of the Christians evolved alongside the Greek cosmos without giving birth to a new concept of reality"²⁸¹, Balthasar could rebuke him by noting that Christianity, or better Christ, brought to life a reconceptualization of everything. Christianity does not simply provide a new,

277 CP 158. KP 26–27: "Wenn die Väter platonische, aristotelische, stoische, neuplatonische, gnostische und hermetische Denkelemente übernehmen und mit einer augenscheinlichen Sorglosigkeit gleichzeitig nebeneinander verwenden, dann geschieht dies nicht aus einer kraftlosen, dekadenten und synkretistischen Denkform heraus, sondern umgekehrt aus einer ganz ursprünglichen, genauen und unreduzierbaren Einsicht des Glaubens in das Wesen der göttlichen Wahrheit."

278 DE LUBAC, Introduction to the English edition of *On First Principles* xv.

279 O'REGAN, Anatomy of Misremembering.

280 CP 158. KP 27: "Was sich also äußerlich, etwa in Alexandrien, als ein hellenistischer Synkretismus darstellt (wie man denn äußerlich in Origenes manches an Philo Anklingende finden mag), das erweist sich bei näherem Zusehen als der Versuch, die ganze weltliche Wahrheit zur göttlichen hin transparent werden zu lassen."

281 BRÉHIER, The history of philosophy 2, 224–225.

spiritual mode of living in the world, but a new way of envisioning the world as such. Balthasar recognizes that, after the concrete, formal entry of the Logos into history, life can never be the same again—all is transfigured, nothing is lost. Every philosophical truth, purified, leads to Christ. This is why the greatest philosophers are those who favour the sacramental approach, those able to transfigure not only the world, but reason, and by extension, philosophy. In the history of Western thought, Balthasar claims, Christian philosophy has remained alive only where it has been “set by the *intellectual passion* of great theologians *at the service of the concrete Logos*. Outside this theology, they remain not only abstract – but also impotent and sketchy.”²⁸² If an exclusive emphasis on the novelty of Christianity (rejecting any continuity with the past) results in the separation of reason and faith, the failure to recognize radical novelty leads to an impotent philosophy. The question we posed in the first section now comes back again: whom does Balthasar have in mind, when speaking of “abstract, impotent and sketchy theology”? What lies behind his radical approach?

2. French Neoplatonism and Idealism

Balthasar is so resolute in his defence of Christian philosophy because he has in mind a *specific* reading of Neoplatonism popular in France during his formative years. In the 19th century, Hegel’s *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* helped legitimize “history of philosophy” as a major academic discipline. In France, this developed into a renewed interest in Neoplatonism. The connection between Neoplatonism and Idealism can be traced back to the fundamental work of Victor Cousin, who was not only responsible for bringing Hegel and Schelling to France, but also for the translation of Proclus.²⁸³ Neoplatonism was of high interest to clergymen, although less appreciated by the anti-Modernist ecclesiastical authorities. André-Jean Festugière and Jean Trouillard believed Neoplatonism was an opening into Eastern Orthodoxy, more influenced by theurgic Neopla-

282 CP 154. KP 20: “Das beweist nicht die Unmöglichkeit christlicher Philosophie, auch nicht, dass die Ergebnisse der Vernunft durch die Theologie gegenstandslos oder gar falsch geworden wären. Nicht nur christliche Kosmologie, Anthropologie und Ethik bleiben möglich, auch natürliche Theodizee behält ihre relative Bedeutung. Aber lebendig in der Geschichte des abendländischen Denkens sind sie nur dort, wo sie von der Denkleidenschaft großer Theologen in den Dienst des konkreten Logos gestellt worden sind. Außerhalb dieser Theologie bleiben sie nicht nur abstrakt, sondern auch kraftlos und schemenhaft.”

283 COUSIN, Procli Philosophi Platonici Opera Inedita. Furthermore, the publication by Jacques Paul Migne of the works of the Church Fathers helped to make the works of Christian antiquity available. In general, Europe saw, in the 19th century, an explosion in publications of classical and medieval philosophical texts.

tonism than Western tradition.²⁸⁴ Although studied by priests, Neoplatonism was also explored by disenchanting laymen as a kind of alternative religion, or better, a way of life, as would later be seen in Pierre Hadot.²⁸⁵ Hadot's *Exercices spirituels* is exemplary, as it seeks to offer "a possibility to choose a purely philosophical way to those who could not or did not want to live in a religious way."²⁸⁶ In the thought of these scholars, Neoplatonism had provided a spirituality that was lost with the strong separation of philosophy and theology initiated by Christianity, especially through Aristotelian and Neo-Scholastic theology.²⁸⁷ Balthasar might have shared Hadot's critique of Neo-Scholasticism as being (partly) responsible for a loss of spirituality in Christianity, but, when searching for a fresh spirituality for his time,

- 284 The Dominican André-Jean Festugière (1898–1982) published editions of Proclus' commentaries on Plato: FESTUGIÈRE, Proclus: Commentaires sur le Timée (5 vols.). He also published an edition of Erasmus' *Enchiridion* and studies on Marsilio Ficino, relating Hellenistic Neoplatonism to Renaissance: FESTUGIÈRE, *Érasme, Enchiridion militis christianis; La philosophie de l'amour de Marsile Ficin*. Jean Trouillard (1907–1984) was professor at the Institut Catholique in Paris. After his thesis on Plotinus, he dedicated his work to Proclus: TROUILLARD, Proclus: *Éléments de théologie; L'Un et l'Âme selon Proclus; La mystagogie de Proclus*.
- 285 Hadot's main argument is that ancient philosophy was not a collection of theories, but rather a way of life, *bios*. The philosopher was therefore a spiritual advisor rather than a teacher of theoretical notions – the first example being Socrates. For Hadot, this idea of philosophy as a way of life has been eclipsed by the ascendancy of Christianity: philosophical discourse has been subordinated to the revealed Word of God in the Bible. Especially the assumption of Aristotelian logic and ontology in the Church's teaching marked the end of ancient philosophy as conceived by Hadot. HADOT, *Exercices spirituels* 68–69, claims that if we read ancient philosophy "dans la perspective de la pratique des exercices spirituels", it appears "dans son aspect originel, non plus comme une construction théorique, mais comme une méthode de formation à une nouvelle manière de vivre et de voir le monde, comme un effort de transformation de l'homme." With the "absorption de la philosophie par le christianisme" however, philosophy begun to be conceived, "conformément à une conception héritée du Moyen Âge et des temps modernes, comme une démarche purement théorique et abstraite." This mediaeval reduction has two stages. First "avec la scolastique du Moyen Âge, *theologia* et *philosophia* se sont clairement distinguées." Then, philosophy was reduced "au rang de 'servant de la théologie'." An application of Hadot's thesis is his study on Plotinus: id., *Plotin ou la simplicité du regard*.
- 286 Id., *La philosophie comme manière de vivre* 68: "(...) à ceux qui ne peuvent ou ne veulent pas vivre selon un mode de vie religieux, la possibilité de choisir un mode de vie purement philosophique." As an example of Hadot's thesis, he claims that Socrates's goal was the "will to do good" instead of the knowledge of the good – Hadot even associates Socrates with Kant.
- 287 It is interesting to notice that later in his life Hadot detached himself from Neoplatonism as an attainable way of life, claiming that the Plotinian mystical experience and the idea of a "purely spiritual" is untenable for our times. As an apparent denial of transcendence, Hadot's preference shifted to Stoicism and Epicureanism. This preference is comprehensible in light of his conception of philosophy as way of life and has the same roots of his idea of Christianity as culprit of the loss of the correct understanding of philosophy.

he looked back to the Church Fathers, not directly to Plotinus. For Balthasar, as we have seen, it is possible to speak of “Christian philosophy” without contradiction.²⁸⁸ In the major scholarship of his time, however, Christianity was seen as the opposite of true philosophy or, at best, a simplified version of philosophy for the masses. It is clear that Balthasar, when thinking of Neoplatonism, always had in mind a certain idealistic drift that marked its scholarship. In the years of Balthasar’s education, France experienced a great revival of interest in idealism, especially via Fichte, which influenced the general approach to Neoplatonic studies. This idealism was, for Balthasar, nothing less than a secularized form of Christianity:

Post-Christian philosophical thought outside the Church develops truly intellectual passion only where the *Christian-theological element appears in a secularized form* in the propositions of allegedly pure philosophy. In *gnosis*, for example, in the heretical *mysticism* of the Middle ages from Eriugena to Böhme, but finally also in *Idealism* from Kant to Hegel and in the philosophy of life and of *existentialism* which is completely permeated by Christian motifs.²⁸⁹

It is important to note a peculiar element of Balthasar’s approach: while, on the anti-Neo-Scholasticism side, he was very close to de Lubac and the general French perspective, his judgment of Neoplatonism went against the tide. The reason is simple: besides his French formation at Lyon, he had a solid background in Ger-

288 On this issue, see HANKEY, *Philosophy as Way of Life for Christians?* 193–204. Hankey suggests that what Hadot finds problematic in mediaeval schools was already present as a seed in Antiquity, and that this seed is exactly what Neoplatonism and Christianity have in common. Hankey claims that “while these problematic features are especially characteristic of post-Plotinian Neoplatonism, at least their seeds are also found in Plotinus and explain Hadot’s turn away from him” (ibid. 200). Hankey tracks the source of Hadot’s attitude back to his Sulpician education: the strong separation of nature and grace and the personal experience of his superiors discouraging him from attaining mystical experiences (because of the exceptionality of the phenomenon) brought Hadot to look back at ancient philosophy as a source of mysticism. Hankey claims that this personal experience might have influenced Hadot’s critique of Christianity to the point of missing those elements that Christianity genuinely shares with Neoplatonism: Hadot locates the foundation of *surnaturalisme* in Scholastic theology, specifically in Thomas, without seeing elements of this transcendence already in ancient philosophy. Indeed, claims Hankey, when he realizes that this supernaturalism was already in Plotinus, Hadot abandons it in favour of Stoicism.

289 CP 154. KP 20–21: “Den Gegenbeweis dazu erbringt das nachchristliche philosophische Denken außerhalb der Kirche dadurch, dass es nur dort wahrhaft denkerische Leidenschaft entwickelt, wo das Christlich-Theologische säkularisiert erscheint in Sätzen angeblich reiner Philosophie: in der Gnosis zum Beispiel, bei der häretischen Mystik des Mittelalters von Eriugena bis Böhme, aber schließlich auch im Idealismus von Kant bis Hegel und in der von christlichen Motiven völlig durchtränkten Lebens- und Existentialphilosophie.”

man studies. This element is the key to understanding why he so easily associated (a certain) Neoplatonism with Idealism. Balthasar employs, among others, two genealogical categories that are extremely relevant for his work on Origen: Gnosis and Idealism. As Cyril O'Regan has demonstrated, when Balthasar uses the categories of "Gnosticism", "Neoplatonism", and "Apocalypse", he is often referring in fact to German Idealism.²⁹⁰ This cross-reference also emerges in his works on Origen, especially in the epilogue to *Le Mystère d'Origène*, where he draws a unique comparison between Origen and Hegel.

3. The Roots of the Critique: Titanism and Daimonic Struggle

If one must pass a critical judgment of the whole of his [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.²⁹¹

The common feature between Origen and Hegel is, for Balthasar, the idea of the eschatological condition as the restitution of an original state. However, there is more than this behind the *Aufhebung*. *Aufhebung* means the superseding of an original condition, while still containing/preserving the superseded. Balthasar uses the example of the flesh in Origen: the flesh is only a moment in the circular movement of eternity, a step on the ladder of being. Nevertheless, it is not destroyed at the time of death. So too, the New Testament is not simply spiritual, *contra* the letter of the Old Testament, but is rather a letter pervaded with spirit.

290 O'REGAN, Balthasar and Gnostic genealogy 618. For O'Regan, Gnosticism should be taken as a genealogically superordinate category, referring to German Idealism. O'Regan not only traces this category in Balthasar's approach to history, but continues on this line in the reflection on Gnosticism in his trilogy and entire thinking, with a particular interest in the relation between Balthasar and Hegel.

291 MO (II) 62; PMO 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."

The question becomes therefore whether the material, the letter, is overthrown or upheld. Balthasar's recognition of the Hegelian *Aufhebung* is evident in his interest in the Origenian topics of the spiritual senses and the spiritual body. In the eschatological condition, the level of the letter/body is not physically lost, but spiritually elevated. The *Aufhebung* is therefore spiritual, not ontological: the letter is elevated, not annihilated.²⁹² *Aufhebung* is described as the basic formal law of Origen's salvation-history and therefore of incarnation: it describes the movement from body to spirit, from image to truth. It is not a simple overcoming: the body/image is both exceeded and preserved in the spirit/truth. The material world is not simply overthrown, but upheld: "all the embodiment of the Word in Scripture is only preparation for his incarnation in the flesh." In this sense, Christ is not just a fulfilment of the Old Testament, but also a "rejection of the people's servitude to the letter."²⁹³ The passages he next quotes address the letter being broken; Balthasar shows, however, that fulfilment is more than rejection and/or destruction. The "definitive in what was preliminary" implies that the preliminary itself has a definitive aspect, is destined somehow to remain. Through Christ, the Old Testament and the entire order of salvation are not destroyed, but preserved and brought "back" to him. Balthasar clearly recognizes that the purpose of the entire worldly history of salvation is to endure long enough to be internalized in the soul. The internal appropriation of the revelation transforms man into a temple of the spirit. It is exactly the notion of spirit that Balthasar finds problematic in Origen. Balthasar acknowledges this issue as a risk shared by 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."²⁹⁴ This thought is found also in *Spirit and Fire*: "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

292 The term appears three times in *Spirit and Fire*: in the paragraph "The law of sublation (Das Gesetz der Aufhebung)" and in the paragraph "The Spiritual God", respectively the last paragraph of section "II – Word" and the first of section "III – Spirit". A confirmation of the importance of the *Aufhebung* is found in the drafts in preparation to *Spirit and Fire*. In the mentioned 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".

293 SF 113. GF 173: "Die 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."

294 ST 3, 104. ET 3, 115: "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."

great Greek Fathers speak so often of ‘divinization.’²⁹⁵ Maintaining a fluid border between the human and the divine spirit risks transforming the idea of spiritual progress into what Balthasar calls “titanism”, which he defines in his early writings, specifically *Kosmische Liturgie* and *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele*. The issue of titanism attains a clearly defined shape in Balthasar’s monograph on Maximus the Confessor. In Origen’s cosmology, embodiment is a result of the fall. In this sense, the earthly life is described by Balthasar, following Maximus, with the term *πειρα*:

The metaphysics of Origen’s *On First Principles* was a metaphysics of *πειρα*: 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.²⁹⁶

Balthasar is here referring to the aforementioned epilogue of *Le Mystérion*, where he tracks the shared basis of *Aufhebung* in both Origen and Hegel: the greek *daimon*.²⁹⁷ 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.”²⁹⁸ “Over and over, down to Hegel and Bardjaev, this speciously deep thought was to haunt Christian metaphysics: that love without pain and guilt remains simply a joke, a game.”²⁹⁹ What does Balthasar mean by “greek

295 SF 183. GF 266: “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.’”

296 CL 129. KL 125: “Die Metaphysik des Peri Archon war in der Tat eine Metaphysik der *πειρα*, 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 eingefloßt 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.” Balthasar refers here to the analyzed Epilogue of PMO 113–116.

297 On titanism see the works of ZUCAL, *The Promethean Ambiguity of Hegelian Eschatology* 211–256; *L’ambiguità prometeica dell’ escatologia hegeliana* 211–256; *L’interpretazione teologica di Hegel nel primo Balthasar* 523–548. 267–304; *Prometeo e il fuoco dell’idea* 605–615.

298 MO (II) 63; PMO 114: “(...) 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.”

299 CL 130. KL 125: “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.” Balthasar refers here to HEGEL, Pheno-

daimon”? This feature of Platonism, though not completely mistaken, diminishes the notion of Eros. The movement of Eros is reconceived as the attempt to overcome the distance between the subject and object of love, without any respect for its purpose. This distance is no longer given by a creator bestowing it with inherent value, but is rather something to eliminate by human strength, through the pain of ascent. The connection between spiritualism and titanism is clear: if divine spirit and human spirit are identical, man is nothing less than a *göttlicher Funke*, which, claims Balthasar, is true of Origenism.³⁰⁰ Thus conceived, man’s struggle to return to God is a titanic struggle to reclaim an original, divine condition—just as it was for the Titans. Balthasar accuses Origen of titanism in a passage previously quoted, that it is here worth repeating:

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.³⁰¹

The hero is a man who, by his natural virtue, achieves salvation. Why think of Hegel when reading this passage? What drives us to establish this link is Balthasar’s mention of “so many today”. Looking at Balthasar’s output at the time, one notices that in 1937, exactly between the publication of *Le Mystérion d’Origène* and *Geist und Feur*, he published the first volume of his revised and expanded doctoral dissertation on the eschatological principle in German culture, with the title *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele. Studien zu einer Lehre von letzten Haltungen*. In 1947, the same work would be edited again, with identical content but a new title—*Prometheus. Studien zur Geschichte des deutschen Idealismus*. The myth of Prometheus is fundamental to understanding Balthasar’s approach to idealism,

menologie des Geistes 13. It is interesting to notice how once again Hegel and Bardjaev are grouped together, as already in *Le Mystérion d’Origène*. 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”: Origen, CMT XI 5–6.

300 FSO 354. PSW 70.

301 SF 18 (italics added). GF 37: “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 blitzen 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 gebreitete übernatürliche Form des Todes und der Auferstehung Christi.”

and especially to Hegel, the “*Schlußgestalt der Prometheus-Welt*.”³⁰² The fact that, when speaking of Origen, Balthasar refers to “the heroic” leads us to think that the connection between these two parts of his study are more than accidental or chronological. If we look at a later definition of titanism, things become clearer:

In all forms of titanism, ultimately, the person is sacrificed. (...) This is also what happens in Hegel, even though in him alone reason, spirit, remains 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.³⁰³

This description of Hegel finds partial resonance with Origen: in the Alexandrian too “spirit remains the all-embracing reality” and “reconciliation is brought about by the objective Spirit.” The same notion was advanced in *Apokalypse* where Balthasar, analysing the unity brought by the Spirit, claims that, in Hegel, this unity is given by knowledge, in a openly titanic way.³⁰⁴

302 *Apokalypse* 1, 611. See also GL 5, 420–423.

303 TD 2, 423. ThD 2/1, 388: “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 antizipierenden 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.” Interestingly, Balthasar, TD 2, 421, affirms that “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.” ThD 2/1, 386: “Ein solches Prinzip ist der alten Welt unbekannt. (...) Das Faustisch-Prometheische, das das Zeitalter des Idealismus beherrscht, zehrt von den anthropologischen Überspannungen, die das Christentum eingeführt hat.”

304 *Apokalypse* 1, 611.

4. The Prometheus Principle: *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele*

Balthasar's issue with Neoplatonism emerges between the lines of his doctoral dissertation, *Geschichte des eschatologischen Problems in der modernen deutschen Literatur*, completed before entering the Society of Jesus in 1929, but published in a revised and expanded form in 1937 with the title *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele*. Here, Balthasar analyzes the notion of eschatology in German culture. Eschatology, he contends, has two aspects: axiology (what one must be, the over-temporal value) and teleology (what one must realize, the concrete goal). For Balthasar, the most important question is the proper relation between ἀρχή and τέλος; and eschatology, as he sees it, is the attempt to understand this tension. Idealistic eschatology, claims Balthasar, began with the Joachimite immanentization of the transcendent Reign of the Spirit. From this perspective, idealism is nothing else than a development of the originally Christian desire for harmony, but one that forgets the unsurmountable distance between natural and supernatural. According to Christianity, it is in the transcendent destination alone (which remains irreducibly transcendent and not only transitory, as for Hegel) that the tension between axiology and teleology can be overcome. A similar problem was, thinks Balthasar, already present in Neoplatonism. In the first volume of *Apokalypse* we find in fact the strongest proof for our thesis: here, when writing of German Idealism, Balthasar always connects it with Neoplatonism. This seems to have been due, in particular, to the common interpretation of German Idealism given in German-speaking Europe in the first years of the 20th century.³⁰⁵ In 1909 and 1912 Moritz Kronenberg published two volumes of *Geschichte des deutschen Idealismus*, tracing a parallel between German Idealism and Greek antiquity: Plato and Aristotle are reborn in Schelling and Hegel; Sophocles and Euripides are Goethe and Schiller. Balthasar, recalling Goethe, names the common feature of Idealism and Greek antiquity the "Prometheus-Principle": "Man convinces himself that he is, as it were, a piece and component of the eternal world of Ideas – which is fundamentally no different than claiming to be a part of God himself."³⁰⁶ The same element is present in Fichte, the first great philosopher presented in *Apokalypse*; in him, the *scintilla animae* is freedom, which renders spirit indifferent not only to the world but also to God, insofar as world and God are nothing less than its own law.³⁰⁷

305 On the interpretation of German Idealism in the 20th century and its importance for Balthasar, see BONDELI, *Mystische Potentialität* 132–158.

306 FSO 354. PSW 70: "An seine Stelle tritt die Berechnung, dass (...) man doch dem inwendigen Wesen nach ein ewiger Gedanke Gottes sein muss, gleichsam ein Stück und Bestandteil der ewigen Ideenwelt, die doch nichts anderes als Gott selbst ist."

307 For Balthasar, the problem becomes the meaning of indifference. Coming from Ignatian spirituality, he knew the positive, Christian, value of indifference, exercised in relation to

Balthasar's treatment of Idealism is close to that of Kronenberg, but his intention is more clearly theological. For Balthasar, the fundamental structure of German Idealism goes back to the old Christian ideal of harmony—an ideal confirmed by another scholar of Idealism, Richard Kroner, who defined its structure as “a whiff of the eschatological hope from the first days of Christianity.”³⁰⁸ Analyzing German Idealism, Balthasar focuses especially on Fichte, the most important figure in the parallel between Idealism and Neoplatonism. Balthasar finds in Fichte a *Grundprinzip* that he calls *mystische Potentialität*.³⁰⁹ The *mystische Potentialität* is the relation between the divine creative possibility, and its actuality in the world, the tension between an origin and its determination(s). Balthasar also explains this as the “intermediate form between divine pure actuality and creaturely potentiality. It is the attempt to think the paradox: to put an identical, non-indigent (*unbedürftiges*), eternal, in necessary relation to a non-identical, indigent (*bedürftigen*), temporal basis.”³¹⁰ The *mystische Potentialität* is therefore the absorption of the Absolute in the human *Streben*. From this Fichtean *Grundstruktur*, explains Balthasar, develops, as from a single root, the entirety of German Idealism, achieving full bloom in Schelling. Fichte's “tangential-identity” remains “an hesitation between Christian potentiality (God as *actus purus* against the world as suspended between *actus* and *potentia*) and the mystical potentiality (God-World as suspended between *actus purus* and *potentia*).”³¹¹ The term *mystische Potentialität* was coined by August Faust in his 1931 research on the ancient/medieval concept of possibility, referring to Plotinus.³¹² For Faust, Balthasar explains, “it means the absoluteness of the reciprocal priority of what is absolute in se and what is only relatively absolute.”³¹³ He claims the return of this issue as proof that German

“value distinctions between worldly things from out of an ever greater, self-transcending love for God”: Apokalypse 1, 157.

308 KRONER, Von Kant bis Hegel 1: “(...) etwas von dem Hauche der eschatologischen Hoffnung aus der Zeit des entstehenden Christentums.”

309 Apokalypse 1, 176–177. On this notion Balthasar will say: “Mystische Potentialität ist (war) ein rein kritischer Begriff, aus dem wir nichts zu entnehmen haben (vergleichbar mit process theology!)”: Letter to Manfred Lochbrunner, 19.05.1958, in: LOCHBRUNNER, Balthasariana 360.

310 Ibid. 435: “Zwischenform zwischen göttlicher, reiner Aktualität und geschöpflicher Potentialität. Sie versucht das Paradoxe, ein Identisches, Unbedürftiges, Ewiges in eine notwendige Beziehung zu einer nichtidentischen, bedürftigen, zeitlichen Basis zu setzen. Der brennende Dornbusch war hier Gleichnis.”

311 Ibid. 209: “Ein Zögern zwischen christlicher Potentialität (Gott als *actus purus* gegen Welt als Schweben zwischen *actus* und *potentia*) und mystischer Potentialität (Gott-Welt als Schweben zwischen *actus purus* und *potentia*).”

312 FAUST, Der Möglichkeitsgedanke 1. Antike Philosophie.

313 Apokalypse 1, 176–177: “Die Wiederkehr derselben Problemebene zeigt, wie sehr der deutsche Idealismus Plotinerneuerung ist, gerade sofern Plotin eine Mitte zwischen altgriechischer und christlicher Metaphysik bezeichnet.”

Idealism is a Plotinus-revival (*Plotinerneuerung*). Without hesitation, Balthasar takes a concept designed to describe Plotinus and applies it to Idealism. Why does he see a *Plotinerneuerung* in the idealistic *mystische Potentialität*? Balthasar inherits from Kronenberg a parallel between Fichte's *vorreflexives Ich* and Plotinus' One. The divine *dynamis* of the One in Plotinus is for Balthasar charged with the same ambiguity as the Fichtean divine potentiality (*Möglichkeit, Vermögen*), which is, at one and the same time, the free power of the divine, and the activity that realizes the world, becoming what it is only through this realization. In the end, God and the world converge in the same stream of free realization.³¹⁴

But what in Plotinus means the aesthetic-religious fusion (*ästhetisch-religiöses Ineinanderschmelzen*) of God and the World, appears in Fichte to be moved into the bright light of the moral will. It is the structure of the highest decision, the decision for oneself (*Selbstwahl*), in which the will takes possession of his highest idea and finds its identity. So here is embodied even more the Ethos of Prometheus and his dialectic situation. Yes, the mystical potentiality is nothing as the philosophical formula of every double *δια* that characterizes the Promethean principle. However, since in Fichte this is not to be found as a standpoint (*Standpunkt*) by way of thinking, but chosen, freely chosen, then decision and standpoint are one and the same, and for this reason we hear here the motive of the heroic.³¹⁵

We see the promethean aspect of this *mystische Potentialität*, and we better understand Balthasar's concern with the Fichtean freedom as *scintilla animae*: man becomes the centre of the world, he attributes conscience to God and divinity to the world. God becomes therefore a *Seelenfünklein*, buried in the soul of man. Here, *Mystische Potentialität* and the Promethean principle coincide. We encounter the same features that Balthasar criticizes in Origenistic spiritualism: the idea of God as a divine spark in the human soul, together with the consequent confusion of the Christian and the heroic. What is missing is the supernatural form of the death and resurrection of Christ, and its power of transfiguring the realm

314 Ibid. 177: "Bei Plotin entspricht die Zweideutigkeit des Grundwortes Dynamis (Möglichkeit, Vermögen) dem Paradox Fichtes. Dynamis Gottes ist sowohl Seine absolute (freie) Kraft, Seine Wirklichkeit (energeia), wie auch jene Kräftigkeit, die erst durch Wirken (auf eine Welt, die durch und für es da ist und so Voraussetzung seiner energeia ist) zur Totalität wird."

315 Ibid.: "Aber was bei Plotin ästhetisch-religiöses Ineinanderschmelzen von Gott und Welt bedeutet, das erscheint bei Fichte ins helle Licht des sittlichen Wollens gerückt. Es ist die Struktur der höchsten Wahl selbst, jener Selbstwahl, in der der Wille sich seiner höchsten Idee bemächtigt und setzend sich mit ihr identifiziert. So ist es vielmehr das Ethos des Prometheus und seiner dialektischen Situation, das sich hier verkörpert. Ja, die mystische Potentialität ist nichts als die philosophische Formel jenes doppelten *δια*, das den Prometheus-punkt charakterisierte. Weil er aber bei Fichte als Standpunkt nicht denkend gefunden, sondern gewählt, frei eingenommen wird, ja Wahl und Standpunkt eins sind, darum klingt hier das Motiv des *Heldischen* rein an."

of natural values. The supernatural is not, for Balthasar, merely an element of the anthropological structure of desire, but first and foremost the person of Christ, the embodied Logos. Behind the “so many today” denounced by Balthasar lies a certain promethean vision of Christianity, a return to the heroic motive in idealism and, consequently, the idealistic interpretation of Neoplatonism favoured by figures like Bréhier. Christ, for Bréhier, is only a master of virtues, the personification of morality; nothing supernatural is at play. Balthasar sees a clear embodiment of the idealistic interpretation of Origen in Hal Koch’s *Pronoia und Paideusis*. Developing Origen’s doctrine of freedom, Koch construes the Origenian cosmos as a progressive development towards self-realization, speaking of “*pädagogischer Idealismus*.”³¹⁶ In his private notes Balthasar often refers to Koch’s thesis as, in fact, “Hegelian”, and close to a certain “*Idealismus*”.

5. Secondary Evidence: Balthasar’s Concern with Blondel

One occasion where Balthasar expresses his reservations about Neoplatonism is his analysis of its Renaissance forms. He claims that the modern adaptation of Neoplatonism in Bruno and, to a more limited extent, Nicholas of Cusa, is responsible for an exaggerated sacralization of the cosmos, and a dangerous focus on self-divinization.³¹⁷ For Balthasar, these authors depend largely on a hegemonic Proclean perspective:

Already in the Renaissance and the Baroque periods, one is justified in asking to what an extent the new cosmological natural philosophy and mysticism, which already begins with Nicholas of Cusa and develops in Bruno and in the Florentine Neoplatonism, is anything other than the mere secularization of the theological-mystical view of the world as this reaches from Origen and Dionysius via Eriugena to Eckhart and Lull.³¹⁸

316 KOCH, *Pronoia und Paideusis* 74. 160. 325. The literature on Koch is limited. On his life and political stand, see BALLING, Hal Koch als dänischer Historiker in der Okkupationszeit 13–26. Balling draws a connection between Koch’s political engagement and his studies of early Christianity, claiming that in both “fields” Koch lived in the “Symbiose zwischen einer lebenslangen Sokrates-Ergriffenheit und einer Christentumsdeutung scharf lutherischer Prägung” (ibid. 22–23). Despite often underlining the distinction between Hellenism and Christianity, Koch was skeptical towards Nygren’s distinction between “Eros religion” and “Agape religion” for two reasons, claims Balling. As an historian, he was fascinated by the many fruits of the combination of the two; as a theologian and citizen, he saw the human condition as something that can only be understood in the encounter and tension between the two elements.

317 A few examples are the passages on Bruno (GL 5, 260–264. 578) and Nicholas of Cusa (GL 5, 50. 288).

318 CP 166. KP 39–40: “Man kann sich bereits in der Renaissance und im Barock berechtigterweise fragen, wie weit die neue kosmologische Naturphilosophie und Mystik, einsetzend

This genealogical line, including Origen, is also traced in Balthasar's fifth volume of *The Glory of the Lord*, where he detects the presence of Neoplatonic ideas (confusingly however: Plotinus, Proclus, and Eriugena are always cited together, despite their differences), in thinkers like Nicholas of Cusa; ideas he further relates to the Fichtean revival in the 19th century.³¹⁹ Balthasar does not fully dismiss this Neoplatonic line: to their credit, they see the world as a divine apparition (*Erscheinung*),³²⁰ just as, with Balthasar's Origen, we spoke of *Durchsichtigkeit*, *Bild*, *Gleichnis*, *Rätsel*, *Hinweis*, *Offenbarung*, *Enthüllung*, *Apokalypse*. But the danger of modern, post-Christian Neoplatonism is, for Balthasar, clear: once we know what manifests itself in the *Offenbarung*, once the object we glimpse in the transparency of the world has become apparent, it is impossible to ignore what it truly is. With Christ, "this infinite truth has appeared in the form of finite, worldly truth. After the Son has lived on earth, this truth can no longer be considered an unattainable *transcendentale*, but must count as something *attainable*, even if it is also eternally surpassing and overwhelming."³²¹ From the moment the Logos takes flesh, the world is no more simply *transcendental*. It is *sacramental*. If we think of this in Origenian terms we must consider whether Origen's Logos is the *revealing* or the *revealed* factor. For Balthasar, the Logos in the world does not just reveal itself, but also the Trinity, primarily the Father. In the same way, the task of the philosopher is to "break open" philosophical truths in order to reveal Christ. It is not insignificant that this passage follows Balthasar's critical comments on Maurice Blondel, whom we know as the father of the method of immanence used by de Lubac.

Balthasar's suspicion of Blondel can be seen as an extension of his concern with German Idealism.³²² He had the same critical attitude (that not always, to be clear, became manifest and explicit critique) towards Blondel and Origenistic

bereits beim Cusaner, sich entfaltend bei Bruno und im florentiner Neuplatonismus, etwas anderes ist als die bloße Säkularisation der theologisch-mystischen Weltanschauung, wie sie von Origenes und Dionysius über Eriugena zu Eckhart und Lullus reicht."

319 GL 5, 214. 228. 334–335.

320 Ibid. 214: "For Plotinus, Proclus and Eriugena the world is the manifestation of the unmanifest God." H 3/1, 560: "Für Plotin-Proklus-Eriugena ist die Welt Erscheinung des nicht-erscheinenden Gottes."

321 CP 156. KP 24: "Aber diese unendliche Wahrheit ist in ihm in der Gestalt endlicher, weltlicher Wahrheit erschienen. Sie kann, seitdem der Sohn auf Erden gelebt hat, nicht mehr als ein unerreichbares Transzendentes angesehen werden. Sondern muss als etwas, wenn auch ewig Übersteigendes und Überwältigendes, doch Zugängliches gelten."

322 The major biographical reference for Blondel is BLANCHETTE, Maurice Blondel. See also BERNARDI, Maurice Blondel, Social Catholicism, and Action Française; PORTIER, Maurice Blondel. The recent KOERPEL, Maurice Blondel. Transforming Catholic Tradition, studies the meaning of tradition in the thought of Blondel within the conceptual, historical, and theo-political developments of modernity, proposing and developing a Blondelian "hermeneutic of tradition".

spiritualism because he saw in them the risk of an anthropological reduction of revelation and, consequently, the collapse of the necessary distinction between God and world, the only distinction that allows genuine freedom to be preserved. It is worth noting that Balthasar's *Germanistik* background gave him the tools to "sense" a certain tendency in authors who, despite being vocally opposed to Idealism, were nonetheless indebted to its logic.

My intent is not to provide a comprehensive analysis of Balthasar's relation to Blondel, but to show how his attitude towards *L'Action* functions as a revealing proof of his concern about a certain French tendency toward Idealism. Leaving aside the future development of Blondel and his "correct" interpretation, I am simply interested in the atmosphere Balthasar was breathing when he read and interpreted Origen. While his teacher de Lubac, coming from the French tradition, was a great admirer of *L'Action* and the method of immanence, Balthasar's position is more ambiguous. He was never convinced by *L'Action*, preferring the more private and spiritual pages of Blondel's letters, which he translated into German.³²³ Balthasar is not entirely critical, for he recognizes that *L'Action* gave to Catholic thought "a decisive new beginning."³²⁴ Indeed, his concern was not with a specific interpretation or issue, but with a general flare of idealism. This concern will be clarified, years later, in his presentation of the anthropological reduction of Christianity:

The *subject's* dynamism can take a predominantly historical or predominantly inward, pietistic form; it can also appear as a comprehensive philosophical project – for example, that of Joseph Marechal or Maurice Blondel – in which man is interpreted as finite spirit. Though this project need not to be interpreted ultimately according to *modernist thinking*, it nevertheless leads to an *anthropological justification of revelation*. We see this in Blondel, insofar as the acting substratum of his philosophy remains just as *abstract* ('le' Vouloir, 'l'Action) as it had been in *German Idealism* ('the' spirit in Hegel, 'the' will in Schopenhauer, and 'the' intellectual vision in Schelling).³²⁵

323 BLONDEL, *Carnets Intimes*. Tome 1 (1883–1894); Tome 2 (1894–1949). Balthasar's translation is edited in 1988 as: BLONDEL, *Tagebuch vor Gott* (*Carnets Intimes*).

324 DWH 114. Balthasar read *L'Action* in 1932, while in Lyon. LOCHBRUNNER, Hans Urs von Balthasar und seine Theologenkollegen 42: "Mit der Leidenschaft und Siegesgewissheit ist diese universale Tatphilosophie entworfen, wie sie nur ein junges Gemüt konzipieren konnte."

325 LA 41. GNL 25: "Der 'Dynamismus' des Subjekts kann vorwiegend historisch oder pietistisch-innerlich angesetzt werden, er kann auch als das all-bestimmende philosophische Schema erscheinen, wonach der Mensch als endlicher Geist gedeutet wird, wie bei Maurice Blondel und Joseph Maréchal, deren gewiss nicht modernistisches Denken zuletzt doch auf eine anthropologische Rechtfertigung der Offenbarung hinaus münden muss. Bei Blondel insofern als das handelnde Substrat der Philosophie jenes Abstraktum bleibt ('le' Vouloir, 'l'Action), das es auch im deutschen Idealismus gewesen war ('der' Geist bei Hegel, 'der' Wille bei Schopenhauer, 'die' intellektuelle Anschauung bei Schelling)." As an-

Despite being written in 1963, long after the Christian philosophy quarrel, this judgment on *L'Action* describes Balthasar's concern in the 1930s. He is not denying man's *capax dei*, nor "the proof for the existence of God that is based on the fulfilment of a need", which "has a long history and even can confidently appeal to Thomas Aquinas for support."³²⁶ For Balthasar, however, it was not enough to avoid the *duplex ordo* and reunite the natural and supernatural, if the price to pay was the loss of the distinction, in this case through the abstraction of the subject into a general "action". The consequence would, in fact, amount to a justification of revelation based on abstracted action, i. e. the subject, and not on the novelty of grace. In the quoted passage, Balthasar further associates Blondel with Maréchal, an association he makes on another occasion as well.³²⁷ It is true that a certain similarity exists; Maréchal often presented himself, and was presented, as connecting Blondel's thought to Thomism. It should, however, be noted that Blondel was very critical of this association. His personal correspondence with Maréchal is severe; Blondel did not agree with Maréchal's interpretation of his philosophy, especially regarding the relation between nature and supernature.³²⁸ The Blondel-Maréchal pairing is present also in *Theo-logic 2*, where Balthasar refers to de Lubac's inspiration in his reflections on nature and grace.³²⁹ In his memoirs, de Lubac sets Blondel, Maréchal, and Rousselot along the same line. The fact that even Balthasar and de Lubac could associate the two, despite their differences, indicates the general reception of Blondel at the time. It is also worth noting that Balthasar mentions Maréchal, together with Rahner, in the section on Fichte in *The Glory of the Lord 5* and that, already in 1933, Balthasar had connected Blondel and Maréchal to Fichte, in very critical terms:

icipated, Balthasar's concern regards *L'Action*, while the *Carnet Intimes* are appreciated for their deeply Augustinian core, *ibid.* n. 8: "Maurice Blondel's *Carnets Intimes* (Paris: Cerf, 1961), which he wrote during the composition of *L'Action*, nevertheless shows that beneath the philosophical (and we might say apologetic) outer garments hides a pure and holy Augustinian *cor inquietum*, and that this heart has already surrendered all of its striving toward God in a humble fiat of loving indifference."

326 LA 42–43. GNL 27: "Andererseits hat auch der Gottesbeweis aus der Bedürfniserfüllung seine christliche Vorgeschichte, die durchaus auch auf Thomas von Aquin hinweisen kann."

327 GL 1, 144.

328 On Maréchal, CP 161, will say: "The methodology carried out by Joseph Maréchal can be adducted as the most perfect example of such a clarifying transposition [spoils from Egypt] in the present age. Kant has never been understood more deeply and thoroughly by a Catholic philosophy – understood and at the same time applied and overcome." KP 32: "Als das in der heutigen Zeit vollendetste Beispiel solcher klärender Transposition mag die von Joseph Maréchal durchgeführte Methode angeführt werden, der den kühnen Versuch gemacht hat, den kantischen Transzendentalismus auf den Modus der scholastischen Ontologie zu übersetzen. Nie ist Kant tiefer und gründlicher von einem katholischen Philosophen zugleich verstanden, verwendet und überwunden worden."

329 TL 2, 96. ThL 2, 89.

Blondel touches modernism with an actualism of Aristotelian impression read through Fichte: God as fulfilment of the personal need, theology becomes immanent, almost deducted. *Maréchal* underpins the actualism of Blondel with thomistic metaphysics. But because his fight goes against Kant's formalism, [which he, on the other hand, believes to be able to overcome only through the dynamic final moment in the categorical synthesis], he arrives close to an Ontologism.³³⁰

The undoubtable influence of Fichte on *Maréchal* would require more attention.³³¹ Balthasar sees the Fichtean slant as problematic, especially given its impact on Karl Rahner. In fact, it is in his review of *Geist in Welt* that Balthasar connects Rahner, *Maréchal*, and Fichte.³³² On another occasion, years later, Balthasar again placed Blondel and Fichte under the common umbrella of "philosophy of deed".³³³

Blondel's relation to Idealism is crucial for understanding the relevance of his thought for the future development of theology and philosophy after *L'Action*.³³⁴ In a pseudonymously published article, *On the Sources of Modern Thought: the Evolution of Spinozism*, Blondel charted the evolutionary line of modern thought, from Spinoza's *Ethics* through Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, focussing on its transformation into a philosophy of action.³³⁵ Following Blondel's own lead, *L'Action* ought to be understood in light of an evolving modernism. Blondel's desire was to go beyond Hegel in surpassing both Spinoza's realism and Kant's criticism. He especially wanted to solve Kant's subject/object dichotomy, which idealism

330 Die Metaphysik Erich Przywaras 495: "*Blondel* streift mit diesem durch *Fichte* gesehene Aktualismus aristotelischer Prägung den Modernismus: Gott als Erfüllung der exigences personnelles, Theologie wird ver-immanentiert, fast deduziert. *Maréchal* unterbaut daher den Aktualismus Blondels mit thomistischer Metaphysik. Aber weil sein Kampf sich einseitig gegen Kants Formalismus richtet [den er wiederum nur durch das dynamisch-finale Moment in der kategorialen Synthesis überwinden zu können meint], gelangt auch er in eine gewisse Nähe zum Ontologismus."

331 Behind this lies also Bergson's "pantheism". Die Metaphysik Erich Przywaras 498: "Bei den Franzosen wirkt der Grundirrtum Bergsons nach, werdendes Denken sei auch Denken (Intuition) des Werdens. Dieser Irrtum, der mit Bergsons Pantheismus und seinem Versuch zusammenhängt, dem Begriff des Nichts, der Ohnmacht und Kreatürlichkeit aus dem Werdensbegriff auszuschalten, hüllt die wahre Lage kreatürlichen Denkens in Dunkel: seine Dynamik ist nicht, wie Blondel und *Maréchal* glauben machen, einsinnige Finalität, sondern eine ewige Bewegung zwischen zwei undurchführbaren Extremen und erst so eine onmächtige Mächtigkeit."

332 Review to *Geist in Welt*, in: *ZkTh* 63 (1959) 317–379.

333 MW 86. ZSW 74: "Philosophie der Tat".

334 McNEILL, *The Blondelian Synthesis*. Not only does McNeill show the sources of Blondel's thought in German philosophy, but especially the role of his thought in relation to the issues of modern philosophy.

335 AIMANT, *L'Evolution du Spinozisme* 260–275. This article, signed with a pseudonym, was the review of Delbos's thesis on Spinoza. Blondel's goal was to link Delbos's critical historical study to his own philosophy of action.

had reduced to a conflict intrinsic to the subject. Exactly because of this aim, Blondel strongly refused any association of his thought with German Idealism. Although proposed as an alternative to Idealism, Blondel's *L'Action* still exhibits some elements of resemblance, in particular with the philosophy of Fichte.³³⁶ Blondel often considers his method of immanence the natural development of a specific framework, from Spinoza through Kant to Hegel; he recognizes in each of these some element of inspiration for his own thought.³³⁷ While remaining critical, Blondel did shape his philosophy in constant dialogue with German Idealism, especially because of his teacher Emile Boutroux (who introduced him to post-Kantian thought, on the question of freedom) and his colleague Victor Delbos, whose thesis on Spinoza Blondel proofread.³³⁸ The correspondence between Blondel and Delbos shows their close collaboration while Blondel was composing *L'Action*; it also shows that their common teacher, Boutroux, was the common source of their critical understanding of German Idealism.

However, years later, Blondel seems to have rethought some of his positions. It is interesting for us to notice that this seems to have something to do with Origen, even if not directly. During the course of his life, Blondel reflected on Teilhard de Chardin and engaged in correspondence with him.³³⁹ Commenting on de Chardin's thought in 1925, Blondel states that Teilhard is facing "temptations" that he had earlier faced himself: "... for it seems to me that the temptations which I had and still have to watch for are very much like those facing Father Teilhard."³⁴⁰ The temptation was an "excessively naturalistic, an excessively physical manner

336 MCNEILL, *The Blondelian Synthesis*; HENRICI, Maurice Blondel di fronte alla filosofia tedesca 615–638; VALENTINI, La filosofia come "educazione alla libertà" 143–185.

337 MCNEILL, *ibid.* xiv: "From Spinoza he claimed that he derived his problem and the essential principle of his methodology; from Kant, the synthetic a priori and his concept of criticism; from Fichte and the early Schelling, the unity and the continuity of the rational and the practical in subjective consciousness; from Hegel, a logic capable of embracing the total phenomenon of subjective life and action; from the final Schelling, the legitimate role of a philosophy of religion."

338 Reading the *Carnet Intimes* it is evident that Blondel's knowledge of Fichte was filtered through the historical reconstructions of Delbos. For instance, Blondel follows Delbos's distinction between the "Fichte in Jena" and the "Fichte in Berlin", the former as thinker of subjective idealism that tends to transform the substance, the latter seeking a return to spinozian ontologism: DELBOS, *Le problème moral* 267. Furthermore, in the *Carnet* Blondel critiques, following Delbos, the "mysterious deduction" of the will present in the first editions of the *Doctrine of Science*: BLONDEL, *Carnets Intimes* 195.

339 TEILHARD DE CHARDIN/BLONDEL, *Correspondance commentée* par Henri de Lubac; eng. trans.: TEILHARD DE CHARDIN/BLONDEL, *Correspondence: with Notes and Commentary*.

340 Maurice Blondel's First Paper to Auguste Valensin, *ibid.* 24. TEILHARD DE CHARDIN/BLONDEL, *Correspondance* 130: "Il me semble que les tentations contre lesquelles j'ai eu et j'ai à me défendre sont très analogues à celles dont le P. T. a lui-même à se défier."

of formulating my concept of the universal function of Christ.” Teilhard’s method “reduces itself to a scientific, phenomenistic, naturistic frame of reference as it treats of material which is also and in fact which is primarily of a metaphysical, religious, and even properly of a supernatural character.”³⁴¹ A few years later, Blondel calls this risk “Origenism”:

We should defy Origenism, that tends to downplay the radical oppositions and the eternal stability of the free choice. The continuity of things does not prevent from the contingency of the singular solutions and from the risks of the reasonable creature.³⁴²

In this letter Blondel is commenting on Teilhard de Chardin’s *Mon Univers*. Despite their mutual endorsement of “panchristism”, Blondel underlines the differences between himself and Teilhard, referring to the latter’s “Origenism”. Teilhard de Chardin did not work directly on Origen; nevertheless, a certain similarity between his version of panchristism and the Cosmic Christ of Origen can be tracked.³⁴³ This issue, especially in Blondel and Teilhard, deserves more space than what we can here dedicate. We should note, however, a striking correspondence. The old Blondel held Teilhard in great esteem but saw in him the risk of immanentism that he himself ran in his younger thought. Similarly, Balthasar admired the older Blondel, but considered some positions in *L’Action* too close to monistic ambiguity. To be clear, we are not accusing Blondel of idealism or monism, but simply recognizing a possible tendency of his early thought, as he himself admitted later in his life.

It is more and more evident that a certain “idealistic Origenism” permeated France in the 1920s and 1930s. For example, Charles Journet complained of the tendency to “put between brackets the conceptual formulation of maybe even the revelation but certainly the theology and philosophy we have received from the Middle Ages (...) [tendency which] tries to rejoin the Greek Fathers to the extent that their doctrine is tacit, not to mention preferring a formulation that plays on

341 TEILHARD DE CHARDIN/BLONDEL, Correspondence 63; Correspondance 56. De Lubac, while commenting on Blondel’s letter to Valensin, references this passage contained in a letter that Blondel wrote to Bruno de Solages (16 February 1947).

342 12 September 1925, BLONDEL/VALENSIN, Correspondance 3, 128: “Défions-nous de l’Origenisme qui tend à méconnaître les oppositions radicales et la stabilité éternelle de l’option libre. La continuité des choses n’empêche pas la contingence des solutions singulières et les risques de la creature raisonnable.” It was the Jesuit Auguste Valensin (1879–1953) who put de Lubac, Rousselot and Blondel in contact, facilitating their correspondences and fruitful dialogues. De Lubac himself would edit the correspondence between Valensin and Blondel, as also that between Blondel and Teilhard de Chardin.

343 This connection is demonstrated in the only work on Teilhard de Chardin and Origen: LYONS, *The Cosmic Christ in Origen and Teilhard de Chardin*.

a conceptual keyboard borrowed from Hegel and Existentialism.”³⁴⁴ The *Nouvelle Théologie* was itself accused by Jacques Maritain of “reinventing the Fathers of the Church to the music of Hegel.”³⁴⁵ It is clear now that Balthasar’s concern with Origenistic spiritualism comes from a very specific environment, and not only from his direct reading of Origen.

344 Charles Journet, Letter of 27 December 1945, quoted in NICHOLS, Thomism and the Nouvelle Théologie 7 n. 13.

345 DONNEAUD, Une vie au service de la théologie 25. Donneaud refers here to an unpublished article of Maritain. Fessard’s philosophical method, for example, was precisely to compare Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* to Blondel’s *L’Action*. See GIAO, Le verbe dans l’histoire. Fessard wrote a thesis in 1938 on Maine de Biran, father of French spiritualism. In these years, the correspondence between Fessard and de Lubac shows that they both knew his thesis would be controversial: KIRWAN, An Avant-garde 117.

SECTION 2: BALTHASAR'S APPRECIATION OF ORIGEN

1. The Transparency of the World

If we reconsider the debate about Christian philosophy in the framework of the whole first section, Balthasar's answer becomes clear. The Christian thinker has to face both aspects of reality, the natural and the supernatural: "In this world, 'not of this world': the entire greatness of the Christian situation will be grasped only when both sides are taken seriously, while rejecting every synthesis of world and Christianity that is not carried out on the far side of the Cross and the descent into hell in the 'new earth', the redeemed creation."¹ The core of the issue is clearly the God-world relation. Balthasar could not accept a relation in terms of pure difference (*duplex ordo*), but he also rejected the pure-identity hypothesis, especially for its Trinitarian implications, which cut against his Johannine Christology. What Balthasar was seeking for his century was a "third way" between difference and identity, between Neo-Scholasticism and idealistic Neoplatonism. For this reason, he personally tackled the need of his generation to read the Fathers in a new frame. Balthasar never idealizes Origen, diligently tracking those ambivalent tendencies in his thought that had widespread influence over the history of Christian thought. In so doing he detects a latent tendency towards the idealistic pantheism of the Logos, where the space between God and world appears too thin. Nevertheless, he finds in Origen's entire thought many elements of a God-world relation that can help mediate between difference and identity. This is the way of *Durchsichtigkeit*, which he finds in the doctrine of *analogia entis*. The desertion of this way is, he thinks, largely responsible for the various crises of 20th century theology. Analogy becomes, for Balthasar, the necessary third way to understand the God-world relation, to steer between the extremes of pure difference and identity. Balthasar, rejecting both the pure difference thesis and the identity thesis, thereby rejects the approaches of Neo-Scholasticism and Neoplatonism. In this second section, we will see how the rejection shapes his reading of Origen. Highlighting

1 CP 149. KP 10–11: "In dieser Welt, nicht von dieser Welt: die Spannung in diesen Worten ist nicht durch den Hinweis auf eine harmlose Doppeldeutigkeit des Begriffes Welt aufzulösen. Nur im Ernstnehmen beider Seiten, in der Ablehnung jeder Synthese von Welt und Christentum, die nicht jenseits des Kreuzes und des Abstieges zur Hölle in der neuen Erde, der erlöstesten Schöpfung sich vollzieht, wird die ganze Größe der christlichen Situation er-messen."

issues like natural desire and spiritual beauty Balthasar clearly rejects the *duplex ordo* approach, but, at the same time, he avoids drifting into an easy relation with Origen's Neoplatonic tendency.

Understanding Balthasar's methodology will help illuminate the aspect of Origen that fascinated him: the tension between spiritualism and symbolism, between the divinization of man and the permanent distance between Creator and creature. The concept of mystery plays a pivotal role in Balthasar's reading, and leads him to interpret Origen as more than a simple Platonist. If it is true for both the Platonic and Christian traditions that true knowledge of mysteries is impossible, it is also true that, with the Christian revelation, the mystery par excellence took flesh and dwelt among humanity as Word, without thereby losing his greater inscrutability and distance from the world. Christianity seems to take "the best" of Platonism, those elements that Balthasar himself calls "traces" of a pedagogy of revelation in history. Balthasar will therefore speak of "quasi-sacramental structure of being itself."² He is particularly interested in the relationship between *φωνή* and *λόγος*. Indeed, if this relationship has "a fundamental role in Origen, Bigg is right in speaking of 'sacramental mystery of nature' as 'all-embracing law'."³ Charles Bigg seems to have anticipated the relationship that Balthasar traces between sacramental ontology and the doctrine of analogy, in considering Origen a thinker of the *analogia*. According to Bigg, "from this Law of Correspondence springs incidentally the profound observation that suggested the Analogy: 'He, who believes the Scripture to have proceeded from Him who is the Author of Nature, may well expect to find the same sort of difficulties in it as are found in the constitution of nature.'⁴ Balthasar is following Bigg when he attempts, through his essay, to "let the essential lines of this sacramentalism emerge."⁵ Here we uncover a fundamental focus of this research: Balthasar could find in Origen an "all-embracing Catholic-sacramental character" specifically because of his Logos-theology.⁶ Balthasar's idea of sacramentalism draws, once again, from his reading of Harnack:

2 SF 15. GF 32: "Quasi-sakramentale Struktur des Seins."

3 MO (I) 515; PMO 12: "Bigg aura raison de parler du 'sacramental mystery of Nature' comme de l'allembicing law'." Quoting BIGG, *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria* 173.

4 BIGG, *ibid.* 174. On this analogy see FÜRST, *Bibel und Kosmos* 130–146.

5 MO (I) 515; PMO 12: "C'est de ce sacramentalisme que nous tâcherons de dégager les lignes essentielles."

6 MW 26: "The summarizing study 'Le Mystérion d'Origène' shows to what an extent the Incarnation of the Word, and thereby the penetration of the flesh by the Spirit, has an all-embracing Catholic-sacramental character here: theology appears in this book as the doctrine of the appearing and communication of God through his eternal Word, which becomes sound and writing in the Old Covenant, in order then to become fully flesh and sacrament in the New and to bring about the turning of the world to the Father in Resurrection, Ascension and the outpouring of the Spirit." ZSW 25: "Wie sehr die Fleischwer-

The whole sensitive world is in its essence sign and image, forerunner of truth, a draft drawn with light hand, preparation of the future painting. In its essence, and not conventionally. Its whole being is a gesture that moves up towards its spiritual Idea. It is more than symbolic: it is symbol. 'Today with the word symbol we mean – Harnack claims rightly – something that is not what it means; but back then, symbol was meant to indicate something that truly was, somehow, what was meant. On the other hand, in the thinking of that time, the celestial Truth was always to be found in (or behind) the phenomenon (*Erscheinung*), so that it was never possible to identify the truth and the symbol completely.'⁷

This is fundamental for understanding Balthasar's account of Origen. When thinking of a symbol today, one forgets the deep meaning of the word, imagining it as a pointer to something else, an indicator whose value lies only in pointing. Etymologically, "symbol" derives from *sym-ballein*, to put together, suggesting the process of combining the pieces of a coin. By this definition, the two elements of a symbolic relationship cannot be thought in isolation from each other. More importantly, a symbol cannot be reduced to its means as a pointer; it is something that possesses latent unity in itself. For this reason, it is possible to describe Balthasar's interpretation as "symbolic ontology" but, because of the loss of the original patristic meaning of "symbol", we follow Balthasar in the use of the word "sacramentality" or "transparency". As we would expect, the term transparency (*Durchsichtigkeit*) is used by Balthasar, on several occasions, to explain his idea of *sacramentality*, always referring to the Fathers. When considering the role of the letter for Origen in *Le Mystère d'Origène*, Balthasar describes it as the "transparent symbol of mysteries" for those who have faith.⁸ In *Wendung nach Osten*, transparency is the word that expresses the essential point in Origen:

... dung des Wortes und damit die Durchgeistigung des Fleisches hier einen umfassenden katholisch-sakramentalen Charakter hat, zeigt die zusammenfassende Studie *Le Mystère d'Origène*, worin Theologie auftritt als Lehre von der Erscheinung und Mitteilung Gottes durch sein ewiges Wort, das im Alten Bund Klang und Schrift wird, um im Neuen Bund vollends Fleisch und Sakrament zu werden und in Auferstehung, Himmelfahrt und Geistausgießung die Weltwende zum Vater hinwirken."

7 MO (I) 518; PMO 19, quoting from HARNACK, *Dogmengeschichte* 1, 476: "Ainsi tout le sensible est dans son essence même, signe et image (HGn 9,1), précurseur de vérité (CCt 3), 'futuræ formæ liniamenta tenuis stili adumbratione' (Prin II 11,4). Par essence, et non par connotation. Tout son être est un geste qui monte vers son Idée spirituelle. Il est plus que symbolique, il est symbole. 'Nous entendons aujourd'hui par symbole, remarque très justement Harnack, 'une chose qui n'est pas ce qu'elle signifie; mais on entendait alors par symbole une chose qui était, de quelque façon, réellement ce qu'elle signifiait. D'autre part, dans la pensée d'alors, la Vérité céleste résidait toujours de telle sorte dans (ou derrière) la phénomène (*Erscheinung*), que jamais sur terre elle ne s'identifiait complètement avec lui.'"

8 MO (I) 533; PMO 36: "La lettre est le symbole transparent des mystères."

Maybe the word 'transparency' can say the essential: the fundamental experience of transparency of the perceivable world to the spiritual world and so a radical symbolism. Every corporeal is "only" image, allegory, riddle, clue and will be understood when the spiritual will be decoded, when the treasure hidden in the field will be exhumed, when the pearl will be found. But every corporeal "is" an image, and so revelation, disclosure, apocalypse of the spirit.⁹

The first polemical reference showed the meaning of sacramental *ontology*; now we can understand better what Balthasar means by *sacramental ontology*. The world is not itself divine (therefore, it is not holy in and of itself, as we will see in Idealism), nor is it simply a vehicle for divinity (an element whose relevance is only instrumental, as in the *duplex ordo* scheme). The word *transparency* explains the meaning of sacramentality; not only does every element of the world guide man towards the Logos, but also allows him to experience the Logos *in this life*—without, however, forgetting the difference between time and eternity. Sacraments are considered *signum sacro sanctum efficax gratiae*; more powerful than symbols, they are also *efficax*, they operate something. To speak of sacramental *ontology* means to say that worldly realities do not just lead to divine mysteries in an indicative way, i. e. by referring or pointing beyond themselves to something behind them, but that the worldly element is itself an expression of what stands behind.

A helpful resource for understanding Balthasar's idea of transparency/sacramentality is the chapter "The Eucharist, Symbolic Body" in de Lubac's *History and Spirit*.¹⁰ Despite having been published many years after *Spirit and Fire*, it illuminates a concept that Balthasar did not explicitly formulate. After analysing many interpretations of Origen's allegorical method, de Lubac focuses on the meaning of this method vis-à-vis the Eucharist. Dealing with the problematic passages in which Origen seems to approach the Eucharist as an allegory, de Lubac affirms that "this allegorism is not contradictory to the literal biblical meaning."¹¹ Referring to the body of Christ, de Lubac underlines that, for Origen, the individual flesh of Christ is not an end in itself: "Its goal is to allow the assumption of the Church. This ecclesial body (mystical body) must thus be said, in Origen's lan-

9 WO 33: "Vielleicht wäre mit dem Worte 'Transparenz' das Wesentliche gesagt: das Grunderlebnis der restlosen Durchsichtigkeit der sinnlichen Welt auf die geistige hin und damit dasjenige eines radikalen Symbolismus. Alles Sinnliche ist 'nur' Bild, Gleichnis, Rätsel, Hinweis, und wird dann verstanden, wenn sein inwendiger geistiger Sinn entziffert, sein 'Schatz im Acker' ausgegraben, seine 'kostbare Perle' herausgehoben ist; aber alles Sinnliche 'ist' eben Bild und ist darum auch Offenbarung, Enthüllung, Apokalypse des Geistes."

10 DE LUBAC, *History and Spirit* 406–415. *Histoire et Esprit* 355–362: "L'Eucharistie, corps symbolique."

11 Id., *History and Spirit* 409. *Histoire et Esprit* 358: "Cet allégorisme n'est pas négateur de la lettre biblique et il ne veut pas non plus lui être étranger."

guage, to be 'truer' than the former, because it constitutes a more perfect, fuller realization of the divine design."¹² In this sense, the historical body and the mystical body of Christ are one and the same life under two different aspects. De Lubac explains the Origenian expression of the Eucharist as a "typological and symbolic" body, not a denial of the reality of the body. For de Lubac, it is wrong to judge Origen's language fideistically, just as it is wrong to obsess over the real presence. "He simply means that the body received in the Eucharist is still symbolic with respect to other more direct and more spiritual manifestations of the Logos or, rather, with respect to the Logos himself."¹³

Let us thus translate with Huet: 'Mystical body, which is to say, properly speaking, sacramental body.' Note reproduced by De la Rue, 3:500; or PG 13: 952C. We should observe that Huet thus spontaneously rediscovered the expression 'corpus mystical' in the Eucharistic meaning that it had for several centuries and that is in fact an exact translation of Origen's expression.¹⁴

De Lubac, accepting Huet's translation, highlights the transition from the language of symbol to the language of sacrament. It is true that the sacrament is "still symbolic" with respect to the full manifestation of the immanent trinity, of God himself; however, as de Lubac notes, it is also true that Origen frequently affirms the real presence in the Eucharist. The term "sacramental" affirms, in a less ambiguous way, the primacy of objective revelation, of the real presence of Christ in the bread, in the Scripture, in salvation history. It is God himself who has entered history, who has chosen to communicate himself historically. The term "sacramental" specifies the deeper meaning of the word "symbolic", eliminating the generic ambiguity that risks losing *what* is communicated through the symbol, i. e. the living God revealing and giving himself in time and space.

- 12 Id., *History and Spirit* 409–410. *Histoire et Esprit* 360: "Son but est de permettre l'assomption de l'Église. Ce corps ecclésial – ce qu'on appellera plus tard le 'corps mystique' – doit donc être dit, dans le langage origénien, 'plus vrai' que le premier, parce qu'il constitue une réalisation plus parfaite, plus 'pleine' du dessein divin."
- 13 Id., *History and Spirit* 414. *Histoire et Esprit* 362: "Il veut dire ici tout simplement que le corps reçu dans l'Eucharistie est encore symbolique par rapport à d'autres manifestations plus directes et plus spirituelles du Logos, ou plutôt par rapport au Logos lui-même." The Origenian passage in exam is CMt XI 14. Ibid. 122: "Origen, who affirms this presence clearly more than once, is, however, more concerned to avoid a carnal understanding than to establish it or to explain it positively. Cf. HLv 7,5 (387)."
- 14 Id., *History and Spirit* 414–415 n. 126. *Histoire et Esprit* 363 n. 126: "Traduisons donc avec Huet: 'corps mystique, c'est-à-dire proprement sacramental.' Note reproduite par de la Rue, t. III, p. 500 (ou P.G., 13, 952 C). On remarquera que Huet retrouvait ainsi spontanément l'expression (corpus mysticum) dans la signification eucharistique qu'elle avait eue pendant quelques siècles, et qui est en effet une exacte traduction de la formule origénienne."

To speak of sacramental ontology does not mean, for Balthasar and de Lubac, that the world as such is a sacrament—we are always-already in the order of salvation history, and so are always referring to Scripture, Church, and the historical body of Christ. To be clear: what is meant here is not a new philosophical ontology. The consequences of this enlarged idea of sacramentality will, it is true, allow for a renewed consideration of the world, but this renewal requires the eyes of faith. In the light of faith, and the grace given by Christ's revelation, the world can truly be seen as sacramental:

Before the coming of Christ, the law and the prophets did not yet have the proclamation of what is clearly defined in the Gospel, since the one who was to clarify their mysteries has not yet come. But when the Savior had come to us and had given a body to the Gospel, then, through the Gospel, *he made everything similar to the Gospel*.¹⁵

2. The Third Way

This aspect of symbolism, the *Gestaltwerden*, has its roots in the ancient Greek sense for the symbolic and the theatrical. As O'Regan underlines, "Balthasar is persuaded that the marginalization of the aesthetic thought of the patristic period in modernity by conceptualist and anthropological orientations is theologically unjustified even in cases where one can confirm Neoplatonic contamination. In contaminated cases such as Origen, for instance, there may be much worth rescuing from the oblivion of the past."¹⁶ This ancient aesthetic impulse, rooted in Platonism but enlightened by the Christian fact, is one of the most important elements in Balthasar's reading of Origen. It is also, however, what makes it difficult for Balthasar to be univocal when dealing with the Alexandrian: the tension between spiritual Gnosis and symbolic liturgy cannot be ignored. If it is true that, for Origen, the first often seems to win over the second, it is also true that his writings reveal a deep love for the embodied Logos, for a God who gave himself in Scripture. Balthasar's goal in his anthology is to show how Origen carved a space between the two tendencies, and how both can flourish in the Christian notion of sacrament:

It was the fundamental mistake of the otherwise so excellent book of Walter Völker, *Das Vollkommenheitsideal des Origenes* (1931) to have overlooked this thoroughgoing sacramental structure of the whole cosmic system of Origen. We hope, without applying the least force to the intellectual *Gestalt* of the master, to be able to illustrate this sacramental structure in the arrangement of the whole book that lies before us.¹⁷

15 Id., *Histoire et Esprit* 274, quoting C1o I 6,33.

16 O'REGAN, *Von Balthasar and Thick Retrieval* 258.

17 SF 40. GF 40–41: "Es war der Grundfehler des sonst so trefflichen Buches von Walther Völker: 'Das Vollkommenheitsideal des Origenes' (1931), diese durchgängige sakramentale

If, as we argue, Balthasar composed *Spirit and Fire* in order to trace the two characteristic features of eastern spirituality in Origen, we can see how these two streams meet and merge in the unique river of sacramental ontology. Sacrament means for Balthasar an “actual realization (*reale Vergegenwärtigung*) of the transcendent in the symbolic of the world.”¹⁸ In sacraments, the spirit toward which the soul moves is made present, the formal symbol becomes more than indicative, actually realizing the transcendent. To be clear, a symbol can become sacramental only through the personal descent of the spirit. It is the transcendent that has to realize itself (*sich vergegenwärtigen*). Balthasar sees a gap, no matter how significant the Platonic influence, between Plato and Origen. This is due to the personal descent, to what, in *Spirit and Fire*, he calls the third and most important level of reading: the descending love of the Word. This concept comes to Balthasar through the work of Aloisius Lieske, *Die Theologie der Logosmystik bei Origenes*.¹⁹ Against Völker's subjective-mystical interpretation, Lieske shows Origen's objective-ontological theory of grace. Each human experience develops out of the indwelling of the Logos-Christ in the soul and the world. In Lieske's analysis, even the ascetic tension of the gnostic strand cannot be thought apart from Logos-theology.²⁰ His work allowed Balthasar to better understand the double-aspect of Alexandrian thought. Origen interprets everything as the *Leib des Logos*, as symbolic representation, while also maintaining that all symbols will be overcome in the final unity. For Lieske, these two aspects are combined in Origen, they are thought as a unity (*irgendwie letztlich als Einheit gedacht*)²¹: “As Origen once said in a paradoxical and Hegelian way: because something is not true does not automatically mean that it is false. For there is a third possibility: to be an indicator or *analogy* pointing to the truth.”²²

Struktur des ganzen Weltbaus bei Origenes zu übersehen. Wir hoffen, ohne der geistigen Gestalt des Meisters den geringsten Zwang anzutun, diese sakramentale Struktur im ganzen Aufbau des vorliegenden Buches aufweisen zu können.”

- 18 WO 42: “Sakrament heißt hier überall ‘reale Vergegenwärtigung’ des Überweltlichen in der All-Symbolik der Welt.”
- 19 LIESKE, *Die Theologie der Logosmystik*. Balthasar dedicates many pages of *Wendung nach Osten* to acknowledge the importance of this book. Lieske himself will positively acknowledge Balthasar's work: LIESKE, Review to *Geist und Feuer*.
- 20 The relevance of this Logos-theology for Balthasar is clearly evident in the structure of the second section of *Spirit and Fire*, “Word”. After “Word with God” comes “Word as Scripture” and, thirdly, “Word as Flesh”, which is divided in “Christ” and “Church”.
- 21 WO 35, referring to Lieske. As an example, Balthasar cites Origen's Trinitarianism, which can be seen as neither purely Christian (even if he always stresses the eternal generation of the Son) nor simply Neoplatonic (despite the presence of a subordinationist tendency).
- 22 SF 17 (*italics added*). GF 36: “Oder, wie Origenes einmal paradox und hegelisch sagt: Weil etwas nicht wahr ist, braucht es darum nicht schon falsch zu sein. Denn es gibt ein Drittes: ein Hinweis, eine Analogie zur Wahrheit hin zu sein.”

Only from this perspective can one understand why Balthasar decided to work on Origen at a time when school theology was moving in an entirely different direction. "Later theology gave up this esotericism. It could do this only at the price of a progressive separation between school theology and mystical (or existential experience-) theology, both of which form a strict unity in Origen."²³ Only in light of the underlying analogical framework and the implicit sacramental ontology can one understand how dogmatics and experience go together, how school-theology and personal experience are so intimately related in Origen. Balthasar was fascinated by the Alexandrian's brilliant synthesis, by his *flammende Liebe* for the Word that permeates life, creating a perfect union of existence and doctrine. For these reasons, it is clear why Balthasar decided to study Origen as opposed to one of the more popular Fathers. Origen endorses sacramentality because of his Platonic philosophy, not despite it. Spiritualism and symbolism, held together by the Christian fact, are in permanent tension in Origen, but each finds support in the other; Platonism gives to Christianity the possibility of solving some questions opened by revelation, and Christianity is able to enhance the best of Platonism without losing its peculiar contribution. Despite Balthasar's reservations, he comes to accept that Plato is not a "declared enemy of the aesthetic."²⁴ According to Balthasar, it is precisely because of Plato's focus on the upward arc of Eros, that he could build his ethical doctrine on an aesthetic basis. We are nearing the core of Balthasar's appreciation of Alexandrian thought, which he outlines in *The Glory of the Lord*: "three great themes of Antiquity pass almost unbroken over into the Christian": (i) "the theme of the procession and return of creatures from God and back to God, a theme that rules theological systematics from the *De principiis* of Origen;" (ii) "the theme of Eros as the fundamental yearning of the finite creature for transcendence in God as the primordial unity, the primordial beauty"; (iii) the theme of spiritual beauty of the soul, "a theme which traces its descent back to Plato and Plotinus, a courageous, world-affirming theme, which does not mourn the passing of physical beauty in a melancholy vein, but dares to see it as the reflection and sensuous image of a deeper, indestructible glory."²⁵

23 SF 17. GF 36: "Spätere Theologie hat diesen Esoterismus aufgegeben. Sie konnte dies nur um den Preis einer fortschreitenden Trennung zwischen Schultheologie und mystischer (oder existentieller Erfahrungs-) Theologie, die beide bei Origenes noch eine strenge Einheit bilden."

24 ET 1, 98. ST 1, 104: "Ein ausgesprochener Gegner des Ästhetischen."

25 GL 4, 321–322. H 3/1, 289: "Drei große antike Themen gehen beinahe ungebrochen ins Christliche über und ein: das Thema von Egreß und Regreß der Geschöpfe aus Gott und zu Gott; das Thema vom Eros als Grunddrang der transzendierenden endlichen Kreatur zu Gott als dem Ureinen, Urschönen; endlich das Thema von der seelisch-geistigen Schönheit: abkünftig von Platon und Plotin, ein Thema des Mutes und der Weltbejahung, die nicht schwermütig über die Vergänglichkeit körperlicher Schönheit trauert, sondern es wagt, diese als Abglanz und Sinnbild einer tiefen, unzerstörbaren Herrlichkeit anzusehen."

Balthasar is clear; it is because of these three elements that Platonism can serve as a resource for Christianity. These elements inspired Balthasar, long before his project of theological aesthetics, to devote himself to the reading of Origen. The structure of this second section will pattern itself after these three elements. In so doing, it will aim to demonstrate how Balthasar's reflections on Origen were able to illuminate not only theological questions, but also the overarching spiritual trajectory of the 20th century Church. A parallel can be traced between the Origenian topics engaged by Balthasar, the polemical targets of his works, and their respective ontological and hermeneutical ideas:

HISTORICAL EXPONENTS	ONTOLOGICAL THESIS (God-World relation)	HERMENEUTICAL THESIS (Christian philosophy)	ORIGENIAN ELEMENTS in Balthasar's interpretation
Neo-Scholasticism	Pure difference (symbolism)	Ancilla theologiae	Eros
Idealistic Neoplatonism	Identity (sacrality/pantheism)	Secularized Metaphysic	Freedom
Balthasar	Analogy (transparency-sacramentality)	Hospitality	Spiritual senses

The last column draws from Balthasar's reflections in *The Glory of the Lord 4* on the "great themes of Antiquity" that "pass almost unbroken over into the Christian." It seems possible to trace a connection between his polemical target when reading Origen, and the Origenian elements that Balthasar makes his own. The threefold structure of polemical targets/Balthasarian answers corresponds with the three elements of Origen's thought that lie at the heart of Balthasar's reflections: Eros, freedom, and spiritual sensitivity. Eros is discussed by Balthasar in terms of natural desire—the pivotal point of the nature/grace debate between de Lubac and the Neo-Scholastic tradition. Against the *duplex ordo*, and together with Origen, Balthasar reflects on the soul's desire for God and God's love for man. Freedom is discussed by Balthasar years later—a discussion that takes aim at German Idealism. Against the idealistic idea of heroic and titanic freedom, Balthasar, with the Fathers, thinks of freedom as consent to God. But neither of these two categories can stand on its own in Balthasar's system: everything stems from the theological aesthetic he defends in *The Glory of the Lord*, the centre of which is nothing else than spiritual sensitivity, key to the concepts of transparency and analogy.²⁶

26 As Mark McInroy has recently shown, the spiritual senses occupy a fundamental position in Balthasar's theology. It is beyond doubt that Origen plays a clear role in this: already in *Spirit and Fire* a long section is dedicated to them, as also in PMO.

This scheme is confirmed by a later book, *Love alone is credible*. Here Balthasar presents the “cosmological reduction” and the “anthropological reduction” as two paradigmatic ways of reading the essence of Christianity. The first is particularly present in the Patristic Age, Middle Age, and Renaissance; the second, after the Enlightenment. These two reductions can, however, be found in every age: often, as with Origen, in the interpretation of an author. Balthasar chooses “the third way of love”, which he proposes as a constructive solution to the problems associated with Neo-Scholasticism and Idealistic Neoplatonism: “... this little book stands as the positive, constructive complement to my earlier book *Razing the Bastions*, which cleared the way for this approach.”²⁷ It is true that the “third way of love” was not completely developed at the time of Balthasar’s reading of Origen. It was in his confrontation with the Church Fathers that Balthasar arrived at his understanding of the two *wrong* ways. Nevertheless, we can see how, in his interpretation of Origen, some aspects of this third way begin to emerge, specifically in the answer he gives to the issues of nature-grace, freedom, and the spiritual senses.

These issues are not disconnected from the particularities of the age in which Balthasar read Origen. He wrote in the 1930s, when natural desire and the relation between faith and reason were among the most hotly debated subjects. So, it is not surprising that the Origenian doctrines that most fascinated Balthasar were the doctrines of Eros, the spiritual path to God, and the spiritual senses. A few years later, de Lubac would publish “his” Origen. Despite having discussed and studied Origen in the 1930s, his book was not published until 1950. The issues had changed, leading him to focus on the history of revelation. The discussion, in the late 1940s, featured Barth and Cullmann as key interlocutors, rather than Garrigou-Lagrange and Blondel. The interpretation of Origen seems, therefore, to be a good touchstone for the issues at stake in 20th-century French and German theology. In fact, we can trace a correspondence between the three elements of Origen’s thought underlined by Balthasar, and the pressing issues of his age. This is in keeping with Balthasar’s own idea that “the fundamental questions of contemporary Catholicism receive from Origen an almost prophetic clearness (*eine fast mahnende Deutlichkeit*).”²⁸ The three elements listed in the scheme of *Glorry IV* can be associated with three fierce controversies known to Balthasar and his contemporaries:

27 LA 13. GNL 7: “Insofern kann diese kleine Schrift als die positiv-aufbauende Ergänzung zu der früheren Schleifung der Bastionen gelten, worin aufräumend der Raum dafür freigestellt wurde.”

28 KL v-vi: “Die Grundfragen des heutigen Katholizismus (erhalten) von Origenes her eine fast mahnende Deutlichkeit.”

- 1) *Exitus/Reditus*: Freedom and Grace
- 2) Eros: *Desiderium Naturale* and *Natura Pura*
- 3) Spiritual Senses: Faith and Reason

Of course, this schematization cannot fully capture the complexity of the terms and controversies under discussion. It remains true, however, that the many shades of these controversies were often attached to one or another of the paired oppositional terms, if only for simplicity's sake. In this sense, a certain correspondence with the two polemical targets can be found. A certain revival of Neoplatonism (with a possibly idealistic drift) was usually responsible for the focus on natural desire, the spiritual senses of faith, and freedom construed in terms of voluntarism and self-determination. At the same time, a overshadowing Neo-Scholasticism was responsible for the focus on pure nature, and a stronger emphasis on the autonomy of reason and divine grace. These last associations, more than any other in our scheme, represent a simplification. Nevertheless, Origen truly was, for Balthasar, an occasion to enter into these controversies due to the Alexandrian's both/and approach to the two streams of eastern religiosity—spiritualism and symbolism. We will now show how this played out in terms of each specific element.

I. The Dignity of Eros: Origen's Contribution to the Nature-Grace Controversy

1. Desire in *Spirit and Fire*

Following the chronological order of Balthasar's interests, we start by describing desire and the movement of the finite creature towards God. This involves not simply erotic desire, but, moreover, the purpose of human nature as such. The reason for starting with the problem of human desire stems from our reading of *Spirit and Fire*.

(i) The Structure: the first thing to examine when dealing with the anthology is its structure. With its four sections, *Spirit and Fire* tells the story of the soul's journey to God, of the phases and the development of the spiritual life.²⁹ At first glance, this might seem to challenge what has been said about Balthasar's criticism of spiritualism—was he not against the idea of a spiritual part of man, that seeks to return to its original divinity? Two elements of the structure, however, show that there is no real contradiction. (i) The first section of the book is on the soul (*ψυχή*), not the spirit (*νοῦς*). Phenomenologically, Balthasar starts with the actual human condition and not with the prelapsarian condition of pure spirituality. When reading Origen, Balthasar is interested in showing the human condition in its existential mode: the *ψυχή* is always embodied, occupying a middle position between *νοῦς* and *σώμα*. More than theological cosmology, Balthasar is interested in a phenomenological-theological anthropology.³⁰ The human element that seeks God is not the disembodied spirit but the corporealized soul. (ii) The counterpart of the first section is a second section (*Word*) dealing with the divine *Logos*, a word that approaches the soul in Scripture (*Word as Scripture*) and in the flesh (the physical body – *Christ* – and the mystical body – *The Church*). It is only in light of this section that the third section (*Spirit*) can be understood. No matter how great its freedom, the soul cannot reach God by its own capacity, but only in light of the Word.

(ii) The Prologue: the second important element is the title of the prologue, *Of tents and wells*, and its opening line: "The distinctive characteristic in Origen's

29 *Spirit and Fire* was defined as 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": SIMONETTI, *La teologia dei padri* 175 n. 67. Simonetti himself worked on an anthology which, like Balthasar's *Spirit and Fire*, aimed to present the Origenian idea of the soul's journey to God: SIMONETTI/BOITANI/BONFRATE, *Il viaggio dell'anima*.

30 According to Balthasar's phenomenological approach, what comes first is always what we see, what surprises us, the objectivity of reality. On Balthasar's "phenomenological-theological method", see LÖSER, *Im Geiste des Origenes* 11.

thought is the Eros of an unquenchable thirst for wisdom.”³¹ The tent represents the itinerant nature of the human soul. In Origen’s exegesis, Israel is described as living in tents, not houses, because “a house is a solidly grounded, permanent thing, set on a definite plot of ground”, and represents “those who are perfect in work and deed.” On the other hand, “tents serve as shelter for those who are always on the road, always moving, and who have not yet come to the end of their wandering (...), those who labor for wisdom and knowledge.” Human souls live in tents, “because there is no end to that task – for what could ever put a limit on God’s wisdom? Indeed the more one enters into it, the deeper one goes, and the more one investigates, the more inexpressible and inconceivable it becomes, for God’s wisdom is incomprehensible and immeasurable.”³² For this reason, Balthasar decides to begin his anthology with the image of the tent: “For the soul (...) will always be called onward from the good to the better and from the better to the higher.”³³ As for wells, Origen explains the history of Isaac who, after receiving God’s blessing, began to dig wells. The well is, for Origen, man’s effort to find the water of life he thirsts for: “... water is found in all the earth, a rational sense and the image of God is found in every soul, faith, piety and religion can be found in everyone.”³⁴ The well, as the tent, is an image of movement, of nomadism, and therefore an image of each soul on its way to fulfillment.³⁵

(iii) The Incipit: these two elements clearly show that the subject of *Spirit and Fire* is the soul in its embodied condition. What is at stake is human nature. That the peculiar element of this nature is desire can be seen in the first text chosen by Balthasar to open the section, *Soul*, immediately following the prologue:

Just as the eye naturally seeks the light and vision, and our body naturally desires food and drink, so does our spirit have its own *natural desire* to know God’s truth and the causes of things. But we have received this desire from God not just so that it never should or could

31 SF 25. GF 45: “Der unterscheidende Zug im origenistischen Denken ist der Eros unersättlichen Weisheitsdurstes.”

32 Origen, HNm 17,4 in SF 25.

33 HNm 17,4 in SF 26.

34 HGn 13,3.

35 On the importance of this image, see BONFRATE, Origene: viaggio di parole 495. For Origen, the well is an image of the human effort to find the spiritual sense of the Scripture. The Word of God is a well when “it hides the depth of a mystery”, but it is a wellspring when “it overflows and spreads out on the people”. The effusion (following 1 Cor. 2,10) happens because the Spirit of God transforms the wells in wellsprings and rivers (HNm 12,1). This is made clear by Balthasar from the beginning, HGn 13,1–4 in SF 27–28: “We see so much depth in the mysteries of the wells and we say ‘Who is sufficient for these things?’ For who would be worthy to explain the mystery (*sacramentum*) of such wells or the deeds told about them, unless we call upon the Father of the living WORD and He Himself deigns to put His WORD on our mouth so that we may be able to draw out for you in your thirst a little living water from such rich and varied wells as these?”

be gratified; for otherwise 'the love of truth' would seem to have been planted in our spirit by the Creator in vain.³⁶

(iv) Contemporary Texts: in his years in Lyon, Balthasar never abandoned his love of literature; in 1939 he translated Paul Claudel's *Le soulier du satin* and published many articles on the author. The main theme of these articles was the question of love, as clearly suggested by their titles: 'Eros und Agape', 'Eros und Caritas', 'Auch die Sünde – Zum Erosproblem bei Charles Morgan und Paul Claudel' and, many years later, 'Der gekreuzigte Eros'. In these articles, Balthasar responds to the statement of Nygren, who, in the (in)famous *Eros and Agape*, claims that Platonic, human Eros is individualistic and egoist, so that only Christian, divine agape can be called true love. In making this argument, Nygren also accuses thinkers like Origen of inadequately mixing these two different elements. As he sees it, humankind is only a channel or *object* of divine love, but never the *subject* of it. The attribution of the word Eros to God would therefore be folly. Balthasar accuses Nygren of ignoring all the Fathers (and Scholastics) who, following Ignatius of Antioch's "my Eros is crucified", recognized the possibility of using the word Eros for God.³⁷ One of these is Origen: "Origen uses explicitly the word Eros in place of the word Agape."³⁸ Balthasar thinks that Nygren's misunderstanding of the word originates from the common usage of terms like "platonic love", the idea that true love must be disinterested. On the contrary, Balthasar recognizes the central, positive thrust of Origen's Platonism, an aspect that fully enters into Christianity:

But the Eros that animated Plato and that enflamed the souls of the great mystics of every religion was something completely different. It was the high courage of leaving one's self and the limited world behind because a mysterious, unmistakable call from the divine love of being entreated in the inner ear.³⁹

Human desire (Eros) is not the love of disembodied essences, but a response to the yearning for an absolute Good that grounds all corporeal things.

These four elements exhibit the fundamental importance of human desire in *Spirit and Fire*. The origin of Balthasar's interest in this subject is clearly his relation to de Lubac, who was working on *Surnaturel* during the same years that

36 Prin II 11,4 in SF 37.

37 Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Romans 7,2.

38 NYGREN, Eros und Agape 400: "Origenes setzt ja selbst ausdrücklich das Wort Eros an die Stelle des Wortes Agape."

39 Ibid. 154: "Aber der Eros, der Platon selber beseelte, der auch in den Seelen der großen Mystiker aller Weltreligionen brannte, war etwas ganz anderes: es war der hohe Mut sich selbst und die ganze begrenzte Welt hinter sich zurückzulassen, weil ein geheimnisvoller, unüberhörbarer Ruf aus der göttliche Liebe des Seins an ihr inneres Ohr gedrungen war."

Balthasar was preparing his work on Origen. The separation of natural and supernatural order was, for de Lubac, due to a misunderstanding of the concept of human nature and desire. As already explained, Balthasar supported de Lubac's proposal of a deeper union between the two levels, but his approach to the issue represented a move beyond de Lubac, based on a different set of questions. If de Lubac's central concern was human dignity, Balthasar focused more on the inherent value of the distance between man and God. Is the permanent distance between nature and grace, however small, something positive in itself? It is the same concern that we saw in Balthasar's critique of Origenism. Is desire only a residual spark of a lost condition to be restored, or is there somehow an added value in the fact that the "restoration" has to be gained, obtained, desired? For Balthasar the answer is positive: the fact that natural desire is what it is, a kind of lack, and not yet a full satisfaction, is the guarantee of a free, uncoerced relation with the supernatural, that is, God. His concern had less to do with the dignity of human desire, than the discovery of the element supporting this dignity, the freedom at play between God and man. What takes place is a drama, not an immutable monologue. This conviction, which eventually took systematic shape in *Theo-drama*, was already present in the 1920–1930's, when Balthasar wrestled with de Lubac in the context of reading Origen. It is therefore time to analyze Origen's account of desire so as to understand his unique contribution to the discussion of nature and grace.

2. Desire in Origen's Cosmology: the Cosmic Adventure of the Soul

The common interpretation of Origen's cosmology seems to contradict what de Lubac and Balthasar believe about natural desire.⁴⁰ Since Neo-Scholastic theology acts, for de Lubac, "as though the same God were not the author of both nature and grace"⁴¹, the common interpretation of the *De principiis* states that the earthly world, and the human condition with it, are the consequences of a fall. The God of grace, who lovingly created rational creatures, seems not to be the "creator" (in a positive sense) of the earthly condition, which is rather a negative side-effect of our fallenness. Moreover, we find in Origen the same dichotomy that afflicts every discussion on nature and grace. The ultimate goal of creation is to be united with God through Christ, because "all things were created through him and for him." At the same time, however, Origen is aware that "we were by nature children

40 An overall presentation of the question in different Origenian texts is to be found in RICKENMANN, *Sehnsucht nach Gott bei Origenes*. A recent publication, extremely relevant for our thesis, is ALBANO, *Il mistero dell'uomo* 15–74.

41 DE LUBAC, *Apologetics and Theology* 94–95.

of wrath": the natural condition is contrary to grace, fallen. Using anachronistic terms, we could say that, by stressing the Neoplatonic aspect, Origen emerges as an "intrinsicist"; by stressing the difference, he can be presented as a supporter of "extrinsicism". The clearest passage on this issue is contained in the *Exhortation on Martyrdom*:

Man earnestly desires life, deriving confidence from the rational nature of his soul in its affinity to God (*συγγενὲς θεῷ*). Both substances are intelligible, invisible and, as the prevailing opinion demonstrates, incorporeal. Why, in effect, should He who created us have placed in us a desire to reverence Him and to be united with Him – a desire which continues to show some traces of the divine will even in those who are in error – if it were not possible, and indeed quite possible, for rational beings to satisfy this natural desire?⁴²

This passage introduces the three aspects of desire I now turn to analyze: (a) the dynamic and natural aspect of the desire to be united with God; (b) the grounding of desire on a certain affinity to God; (c) the conviction that this desire is the manifestation of "some traces of the divine will".

a) "A Desire to be United with Him": the Dynamic Character of Desire

In *De principiis* Origen recognizes the presence in man of a desire to know not only the causes of things (the "natural end") but also God's truth. This desire is "natural to us" and "implanted in our soul". The concept is expanded upon in Origen's *Commentary* and *Homilies on the Song of Songs*. In the prologue to the *Commentary* Origen reflects on the pivotal term of the nuptial song: love. His main argument is based on love being a name that belongs firstly to God, "Him, that is, from whom we have the very power of loving. And this command undoubtedly implies that we should also love wisdom and right-doing and piety and truth and all the other virtues; for to love God and to love good things is one and the same thing."⁴³ Since God called himself love, for Origen it makes no difference whether we speak of passion for God or love for him: "and I do not think one could be blamed if one called God Passionate Love (*Amorem*), just as John calls Him Charity (*Caritatem*). Indeed I remember that one of the saints, by name Ignatius, said of Christ: "My Love (*Amor*) is crucified", and I do not consider him

42 Origen, EM 47.

43 CCt prol. 2,35: *Ita ergo et primum caritatis nomen in Deo est, propter quod iubemur diligere Deum ex toto corde nostro et ex tota anima nostra et ex totis uiribus nostris, utpote eum, a quo habemus hoc ipsum, ut diligere possimus. In ipso iam sine dubio continetur, ut et sapientiam et iustitiam et pietatem et ueritatem omnesque uirtutes pariter diligamus; unum enim atque idem est diligere Deum et diligere bona.*

worthy of censure on this account.”⁴⁴ The expression of Ignatius of Antioch might have shocked Origen, but it did not. He does not interpret it, as others have done, as the mortification of fleshly passion for the sake of achieving a superior love. Origen accepts the name Eros for Jesus—here, desire and its fulfillment coincide. God is not only the final satisfaction of man’s desire, but the very substance of this desire. For this reason, even the human desire for earthly things assumes a positive value, if well ordered. God gives man things to be used and loved in a greater frame, not for their own sake. The problem, for Origen, lies not in desire itself, but in the confusion between means and ends: “Everyone who loves money or any of the things of corruptible substance that the world contains, is debasing the power of charity, which is of God, to earthly and perishable object, and is misusing the things of God by making them serve purpose that are not His; for God gave the things to men to be used, not to be loved.”⁴⁵ For this reason, even the earthly *ordo* is oriented toward the *somnum bonum*. This is confirmed by Origen’s definition of Eros as something implanted by God in every man: “It is impossible for human nature not to always feel the passion of love for something (*aliqui amat*) but some people pervert this faculty of passionate love (*amoris affectum*), which is implanted in the human soul by the Creator’s kindness (*qui animae rationabili insitus est beneficio conditoris*).”⁴⁶ Origen clearly states that our nature always

44 Ibid. prol. 2,36: *Non ergo interest, utrum amari dicatur Deus aut diligere, nec puto quod culpari possit, si quis Deum, sicut Iohannes caritatem, ita ipse amorem nominet. Denique meminisse aliquem sanctorum dixisse, Ignatium nomine, de Christo: ‘Meus autem amor crucifixus est’ nec reprehendi eum pro hoc dignum iudico.*

45 Ibid. prol. 2. The clearest example is Origen’s use of eros in the carnal sense. When he refers to the vocation to marriage, he speaks of eros in the most “fleshly” sense and declares that it is a way to reach, and remain with, God. The richest witness to this aspect is found in the Fragments of the *Commentary on the First Letter to the Corinthians*, where Origen describes marriage in relation to the vocation to virginity. While in many fragments, following Paul, he clearly considers marriage the lesser evil for those unable to stay pure, a way of avoiding sin and adultery, other fragments contain a very different assessment of marriage as vocation, equal to that to the virginal life: “Since many believe that the unmarried possesses something more of the married person, and that the married person has, because he is married, something less than the unmarried, I want to teach that celibacy is in its nature indifferent and that marriage is in its nature indifferent” (I 37). Origen wants to show that each condition is a way to know and serve God: none of them is better *in se*. He stresses the responsibility that each spouse has toward the other: the other is he/she for whom Christ died. For this reason, the body of a spouse belongs to the other spouse: nobody has the ownership of his own body, which is given at the moment of marriage (I 33). Spouses are described as servants, because each spouse owns and serves the body of the other. “Those who are slaves in God, they are free” (I 38). In this sense, vocation is described by Origen as true freedom: that of serving God. This idea of the body as something worthy to be shared with the spouse is confirmed by CCt III 2.

46 CCt prol. 2,39. On the terms used by Origen see the introduction of FÜRST, *Die Homilien und Fragmente zum Hohelied* 10–37. See also LIMONE, *I nomi dell’amore* 407–429.

desires something, whether it be *cupidine et amore terreno*, or *cupidine et amore caelesti*.⁴⁷ There exists, therefore, in every human being a desire for the divine, "*amore caelestium diuinorumque desiderium*."⁴⁸ Desire can be deemed 'natural' for two reasons: it is "implanted in the human soul by the Creator" and it is "always" present in man, despite its different forms requiring consent or withdrawal.⁴⁹ Origen describes this desire as a source of action and movement, using terms like *arise, scale the heights, progress, wake up*.⁵⁰ Desire is the impetus of "the adventure of one's cosmic career."⁵¹

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 honor of God's image in his first creation, whereas the perfection of God's likeness was reserved for him at the consummation.⁵²

With its terminological shift, this passage can help us understand Origen's contribution to the modern discussion on the relation between nature and grace, for the very reason that these two elements were not, for Origen, in real contraposition. Origen ignores the distinction between natural and supernatural because of his idea that man is created in the "image" of the Son, whereby "likeness" must be achieved. The image of God is therefore already present in the soul, making any strong separation between natural and supernatural untenable—herein lies his

47 Ibid. prol. 2,16.

48 Ibid. prol. 3,7.

49 In a way, we find a similarity with Thomas' previously presented terminology. If the *amore caelestium diuinorumque desiderium* is the desire for divine union (*somnum bonum, desiderium videndi deum*), human 'natural' desire – in sense of what men 'always feel' in his life – can be ordained to the *caelestium desiderium* (and be therefore *amore caelesti*) or remain at a earthly level (*amore terreno*). This desire, even when directed to earthly things, has a divine origin: it is implanted in the human soul by the Creator. Man can choose to return it to its natural habitat or to ignore its origin, but creation is recognized by Origen as divine.

50 HCT 1,1: "It is hard to find a man competent to scale the heights of the Song of Songs"; "and when you have been through all the songs, then set your course for greater heights." Ibid. 1,6: The bride "arises towards greater things and begins to mount from lowly things to lofty." The beauty of the bride begins when the Bridegroom is close, ibid. 2,4: there is a movement between the two; ibid. 2,8: "which among us has progressed so far as to have chief and first of all his loves that of the Word of God?" Love has to be awakened, ibid. 2,9: "What does the Bride entreat of the daughters of Jerusalem? Whether he have raised and roused up love. How long, O daughters of Jerusalem, O maidens, sleeps there in you the love that does not sleep in me, because I have received the wound of love?" For more occurrences, see RICKENMANN, Sehnsucht nach Gott bei Origenes 320.

51 SF 8. GF 21: "Abenteuer der kosmischen Laufbahn."

52 Origen, Prin III 6,1. Origen presents this argument many times: CC IV 30; CRm IV 5; Orat 27,2; HEz 13,2; ClO XX 22.

contribution to the debate. The distance between “image” and “likeness” opens up a space for human freedom. This is one of the greatest factors behind Balthasar’s interest in Origen. That likeness has to be reached means that human life is a movement, a cosmic adventure indeed. While image is the static element of our nature, likeness is the dynamic element – we are free to move and look for the answer to our desire: “This is so that human beings would work to acquire it by their own industrious efforts to imitate God; for in the beginning only the possibility of perfection is given them by the dignity of the image, while in the end they are to acquire for themselves the perfect likeness by the carrying out of works.”⁵³ Balthasar comments on this Origenian passage, explaining that Christ is the primal image of the heavenly man. By imitating Christ, not only can man restore the heavenly image in his soul, but actually achieve a higher state than he began with: “the freely gained ‘likeness’ turns into an ‘image’, becomes reality (a motif which, through Origen, came to have great significance among the later Fathers).”⁵⁴ The category introduced here is that of progress.⁵⁵ Every man is called to bring what is already “naturally” present within himself (the image) to fulfillment (the likeness). We know that Balthasar finds this Origenian feature problematic: to claim that we must follow the spirit in order to be like God may invite a spiritualistic drift and thus a depreciation of the human condition in its originality and peculiarity. Balthasar is therefore hesitant to endorse the condition of possibility for this achieved likeness. Here, one must always remember that natural desire,

53 Prin III 6,1.

54 SF 54, in the chapter “Image of God”. GF 87: “In Christus erscheint uns das Urbild des himmlischen Menschen, nach dessen Vorbild lebend wir das überdeckte ‘Bild des Himmlischen’ in uns wiederherstellen können. Ja durch unser freies Bemühen wird der Endzustand sogar höher sein als der Ausgang: zum seinhaften ‘Bilde’ tritt die frei-erworbene ‘Ähnlichkeit’ (ein Motiv, das durch Origenes in der späteren Patristik große Bedeutung erlangt.” This aspect seems to be understood by Balthasar more than by de Lubac. We agree here with ALBANO, *Il mistero dell’uomo* 41 n. 49: De Lubac did not fully understand the anthropological implication of Origen’s exegesis. Balthasar’s *Spirit and Fire* seems to overcome this gap. Despite his work on exegesis and on the Scripture in Origen runs parallel to his reflections on natural desire, the connection between the two does not seem to be fully recognized by de Lubac, at least not concerning the central Origenian topos of human freedom. On this see also CHÊNEVERT, *L’Église dans le Commentaire d’Origène sur le Cantique des Cantiques* 286–289. Chênevert shortly underlines Balthasar’s novelty in tracing Origen’s metaphysics of the person, where the person is totally constituted by his opening to his whole being because of the ascending movement to God.

55 ALBANO, *Il mistero dell’uomo* 69. On Origen’s account of spiritual progress, see CAPITAIN, *De Origenis Ethica*; VÖLKER, *Das Vollkommenheitsideal des Origenes*; BARDY, *Les idées morales d’Origène* 23–38; GRUBER, *ZOH. Wesen, Stufen und Mitteilung des wahren Lebens bei Origenes*; DILLON, *Plotinus, Philo and Origen on the grades of virtue* 92–105; WILKEN, *Alexandria: A School for Training in Virtue* 15–30; SCHOCKENHOFF, *Zum Fest der Freiheit*; COCCHINI, *Eros in Origene* 21–38; PIZZOLATO/RIZZI, *Origene maestro di vita spirituale*.

for Balthasar (as for de Lubac), is not the desire to become God, but to *see* God.⁵⁶ Furthermore, Balthasar recognizes that human beings can only achieve this vision if they truly want it. Such an achievement is not merely passive or automatic, but requires a free and active struggle.

A third aspect is fundamental, and it indicates Origen's contribution, *mutatis mutandis*, to the nature-grace debate. His emphasis on the indestructible human spirit means that human life cannot be understood outside the dimension of a desire which, by being "natural", makes us at home in the "supernatural". This is the mystery of the human condition, clearly expressed by Origenian cosmology. The distinction between natural and supernatural does not fully hold in Origen because of the deep unity he maintains between two categories that will be separated only by later thinkers. Desire is the expression of this undeniable unity and con-naturality between what we call "natural" and "supernatural". It is the paradoxical mystery of man that he can only understand himself in the relation to something that is at the same time already "given" (image) and yet must be achieved (likeness), i. e. in the relation between something simultaneously internal and external to him: anthropology can only be dynamic.

b) "The Soul's Affinity to God": the Analogical Character of Desire

According to Origen, in desiring, man discovers his own being. He is "a searcher (*un chercheur*): *quotidie renovatur* (CRm 5,8). His poverty is his richness (CC 5,76). His freedom is given (*donnée*) for the action (HEz 13,2). This exstasis outside of his being is, at the same time, directed toward the center of his own being, toward his source (CIo 2,2)."⁵⁷ The adventure of the human soul in the cosmos is, for Origen, nothing less than the rediscovery of the most intimate truth:

56 It is important to underline that de Lubac thinks "to see God" and "to become like God" are very similar expressions: MARITAIN, *Humanisme intégral* 104. See DE LUBAC, *The Mystery of the Supernatural* xxxvii: "Whatever unforeseeable forms our civilization may take in the future, there will never be any 'integral humanism' except on condition of recognizing and respecting in man 'that image of God' which is called to be like God, in other words, to 'see God'."

57 MO (I) 522; PMO 23: "L'homme est donc dans son être même un chercheur: *quotidie renovatur*. Son indigence est sa richesse. Sa liberté n'est donnée que pour l'action. Et, ce qu'il faut souligner encore une fois: cette extase de son être est en même temps une marche vers le centre de lui-même, vers sa source." It is interesting to notice Balthasar's underlining that this movement will never find an end, since God himself is love and love is dynamic: *fnis nullus in Dei caritate* (CCt III 10,8). In this perspective, since the beginning and the end are moments of love, they are not to be thought as a static moment, but as themselves dynamic.

our being qua *imago Dei*.⁵⁸ The key-element for understanding desire in Origen is, therefore, the concept of image, a kinship rooted in creation:

They [human beings] are seen to have a kind of kinship (*consanguinitatem*), through this, to God; and since God knows all things, and nothing of intellectual things can escape his notice (...), it is possible that a rational intellect also, advancing from small things to great, and from things visible to things invisible, may attain a more perfect understanding.⁵⁹

The possibility of fulfilling our being “in image” by achieving divine “likeness” is based on human *consanguinitas* with God. In the quoted passage from the *Exhortation on Martyrdom*, Origen speaks of this consanguinity in relation to desire. For, “man earnestly desires life, deriving confidence from the rational nature of his soul in its affinity to God (*συγγενὲς θεῷ*).”⁶⁰ Here we find a cornerstone of the Origenian controversy. If the kinship with God were presented as something ontological, as a community of substance, Balthasar’s accusations of spiritualism would be correct, as would Jerome’s.⁶¹ This critique resembles the one advanced by many theologians against *Surnaturel*—stressing the *natural*ity of desire brings us to consider it a feature of man’s *essence*. If this were true, grace would be part of the *debitum naturae*, and God would somehow be “forced” to repay man. While it is not per se wrong to speak of *consanguinitas* and *natural* desire, according to Balthasar this language risks provoking confusion between God and the world

58 CROUZEL, *Théologie de l’image* 263: “Pour Origène le selon-l’image forme l’essentiel de l’être humain, notre principale substance; c’est dire quel l’homme est constitué par sa relation à Dieu; il vient de Dieu, il va à Dieu, et son chemin c’est Dieu encore. Sa dignité n’a qu’un fondement, le selon l’image, ses rapports avec Dieu. Supprimez Dieu, et l’homme s’abîme dans le néant, comme lorsqu’on ôte un objet, on détruit par le fait même son ombre ou l’image qu’il faisait dans le miroir.”

59 Origen, *Prin IV* 4,10: *Unde et consanguinitatem quondam per hoc habere uidentur ad deum; et cum deus omnia nouerit, et nihil eum rerum intellectualium ex se lateat, potest tamen etiam rationabilis mens proficiens a paruís ad maiora et a uisibilibus ad inuisibilia peruenire ad intellectum perfectiorem.*

60 EM 47. See also *Prin III* 1,13. On this SIMONETTI, *La teologia trinitaria* 121–123.

61 Jerome, *Ep. ad Avitum* 14: “And in case we should suppose that the impiety of these previous quotations was too little, at the end of the same volume he adds the following: That all rational natures, that is, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, all angels, authorities, dominions and other powers, and even man himself in virtue of his soul’s dignity, are of one substance. For he says, God and his only begotten Son and the Holy Spirit are conscious of an intellectual and rational nature: so are the angels and authorities and the other powers; so, too is the ‘inner man’, who was made in the image and likeness of God. From which the conclusion is drawn that God and all these creatures are in some way of one substance. He adds this phrase, ‘in some way’, in order to escape the charge of gross impiety; and the man who in another place is unwilling to admit that the Son and the Holy Spirit are of the Father’s substance, lest he should seem to be dividing the divine essence into parts, is here distributing the essence of Almighty God to angels and men.”

(if these words are understood, indeed, as the enemies of *Surnaturel* understood them). Leaving aside the complicated issue of Jerome's translation, it remains interesting for us to try and discern Balthasar's real interest. Clearly, he does not want to preserve human dignity by way of spiritualizing it. He prefers to ground the value of humanity in its material ensoulment, in its gradual development, in its limited and finite form. How could Balthasar affirm the total freedom of divine grace without losing human freedom? Was he right to accuse Origenism and not Origen himself? To get a better handle on these issues, we must analyze the affinity between man and God, the *συγγένεια*, in its many aspects.

(i) The gnoseological analogy: the kinship that Origen traces between man and God is often described as gnoseological. As is evident in the passage quoted above concerning human consanguinity with God, Origen traces a parallel between the way God knows and the way humans know. The analogy between man and God is therefore not substantial, natural, or essential, but gnoseological—having to do with the way we know reality: “There is a certain affinity between the intellect and God, of whom the intellect itself is an intellectual image, and that by means of this it is able to know to some degree the nature of divinity, especially if it is purified and separated from bodily matter.”⁶² As God knows the intelligible realities, so can man reach the spiritual meaning of the visible world. In this sense, we are not obliged to become God, spiritualizing our nature or elevating one single aspect of our being (spirit) by eliminating all others. What we can do is emulate the way in which God knows the world.

(ii) The filial analogy: *consanguinitas* recalls the idea of divine fatherhood, a recurrent theme in Origen. Despite the absence of a systematic analysis of the concept, Peter Widdicombe has noted that “it has a perceptible prominence for him [Origen] that it did not have for the earlier Christian writers.”⁶³ Origen recognizes that God is Father not only of Christ, but of all humanity—following John, he calls all men “sons.”⁶⁴ For Origen, God's fatherhood is at the heart of the Christian faith. This is not to say, however, that all men are *born* sons. Origen always refers to man's sonship as adoptive, as something to be obtained through successive stages.⁶⁵ Man has to move from the condition of slave to the condition of son, converting God's lordship into fatherhood:

62 Prin I 1,7.

63 WIDDICOMBE, *The Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius* 7.

64 Commenting on Paul's self-definition “relative” to his disciples and friends, Origen, CRm X 39, explains that “he would doubtless know that this *relationship*, or *consanguinity*, between himself and them derived from that fatherhood about which he says ‘I bow my knees before the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom every fatherhood in heaven and on earth is named.’” On the divine fatherhood in Origen see WIDDICOMBE, *ibid.* 7–120.

65 HLc Fr. 37; Orat 15,4.

It is for human beings who before this were incapable of the Word, the Son of God, that the Word comes to be. But with God, the Word does not come to be as if he were not with him before; but because he is always with the Father, it is said: 'And the Word was with God' (...) for before all time and eternity, 'in the beginning was the Word (Jn 1:1).'⁶⁶

The world already contains the seal of fatherhood, due primarily to the personal act of creation. But, since the Father is unknowable, a mediation is required. We discover divine fatherhood only through the incarnation of Christ, who is "Son by nature", and through the Holy Spirit, who has the "spirit of adoption". The whole mystery of human sonship is grounded in the mystery of Trinitarian filiation. Through Christ's mediation, man is empowered to say "yes" to what had once been merely potential. The relation between the Father and the Son is of a personal nature,⁶⁷ for which reason man's relation to God, through the Son, is likewise made personal. Since the Son is the image of the Father, and all men are created in the Son, it is he who allows men to call themselves "sons"—albeit, adopted.

This concept of sonship allows one to understand how Origen's account of the relation with God can be called mystical.⁶⁸ In order to fulfill the desire to see God, man must first be in union with the mediator of this vision (since God cannot be seen directly), i. e. with the Logos of God. Only in this sense can we speak of mystical gnosis. The union is not only intellectual, but also affective and personal: the acquired knowledge satisfies both the erotic and the noetic aspects of human desire. This is the core of a tension present in every Origenian doctrine. To ask whether Origen is an intellectual/Platonic mystic or a Christian "affective" mystic is for Balthasar to pose a wrong question—he is both, the tension is never resolved. Origen is, for Balthasar, the foremost thinker of natural desire to see God. But the Alexandrian also insists that our desire arises from, and moves toward, the divine Eros, the descending movement of Christ into the world as mediator. Desire is natural, but it is not born of human effort. It must be accepted as gift, the gift of divine fatherhood. As other Origen scholars have stated, the human movement in this life is a *παθεῖν*, not only a *μαθεῖν*. The soul's journey is not only a struggle against sin, but also a passionate desire to be with her lover, whose presence she has already experienced and tasted.⁶⁹ Desire is not only a lack, but a positive glorification of God's initiative. This is what Balthasar means when he claims that the core of Origen's thought is not mythological doctrine (first level) or ascending

66 HEZ 4,6.

67 Origen hints here, without a systematic exposition, "at a fundamental datum of later trinitarian thought: that the Father-Son relation is simply part of the definition of the word God": WILLIAMS, Arius 139.

68 CROUZEL, Origène et la 'Connaissance mystique'.

69 HARL, Le langage 6–7. 12–16.

Platonism (second level) but the passionate and tender love of the Word (third level).

(iii) The ontological analogy: *λόγος σπερματικός*:

Since Adam and all the more since Christ, the world as a whole stands in the light of grace, nature as a whole has supernature as its intrinsic end, whether it wants it or not, knows it or not. Natural knowledge of God, natural religious ethics stands under this secret sign, whose manifest character the Church proclaims and in a mysterious fashion is. Is this not the meaning of the old patristic doctrine of the *λόγος σπερματικός*?⁷⁰

Balthasar claims that nature has an intrinsic supernatural end, and that every natural goal (natural knowledge, natural ethics) is to be understood in light of it. Surprisingly, to explain this supernatural end Balthasar refers to the Stoic doctrine of the *λόγος σπερματικός*. For Balthasar, this doctrine is clearly present in Origen, as we can see in his preparatory notes for *Spirit and Fire*. The section that will become *Word with God* (*Wort bei Gott*) is entitled *λόγος σπερματικός* in the notes. Its contains two booklets: *Wort bei Gott* and *Die Erkenntnis Gottes*. These will become the two chapters of the section *Word with God: The word of revelation* (*Das Offenbarungswort*) and *The knowledge of God* (*Die Erkenntnis Gottes*). The original titles are very important, as they reveal the three aspects of the Logos: (i) Logos Spermatikos (in *Spirit and Fire: Wort bei Gott*); (ii) Logos-Grappe (in *Spirit and Fire: Wort als Schrift*); (iii) Logos-Sarx (in *Spirit and Fire: Wort als Fleisch*). The title *λόγος σπερματικός* refers to a doctrine typical of the Greek Fathers. In Origen, this doctrine is strictly related to the doctrine of the spiritual body and informs his reflections on resurrection. Origen affirms that “there is a seminal principle (*λόγος σπέρματος*) lodged in that which Scripture speaks of as the tabernacle of the soul.”⁷¹ While, for Stoics, the seminal reason is the principle of repetition of the cyclical periods, for Christians it is the principle of resurrection. This seminal reason is the element of growth and individuality, it remains unchanged in every transformation of the body, and guarantees identity and continuity between the corporeal and resurrected body. Despite the absence in Origen of a clear connection between this seminal reason and desire, we can understand why Balthasar detected a relation: the seminal reason, as Eros, is a principle of movement and individuality. This element is totally natural, but allows man to remain himself, from the earthly to the spiritual condition, from birth to the moment of resur-

70 MW 53. ZSW 45: “Die Welt steht seit Adam und erst recht seit Christus als ganze im Licht der Gnade, Natur ist als ganze innerlich auf Übernatur finalisiert, ob sie will oder nicht, weiß oder nicht. Natürliche Gotteserkenntnis, natürliche religiöse Ethik stehen unter diesem geheimen Vorzeichen, dessen Offenbarkeit die Kirche verkündet und selber zeichenhafte ist. Meint die alte patristische Lehre vom Logos spermatikos nicht dies?”

71 CC VII 32. See also Prin II 10,3; CC V 23.

rection. In light of this doctrine, we better understand the paradox of desire: it is natural, intrinsic to human being, and nevertheless can guide us to supernatural ends; it is 'inside' human being, but allows each of us to reach the divine.

(iv) The soteriological analogy: the doctrine of deification. A last relevant piece for understanding the role of desire in Origen is provided by the recently discovered *Homilies on Psalms*.⁷² These contain some important reflections on the meaning of "deification" for Origen and help shed light on the problem of spiritualism. Among the occurrences of the term "deification" across Origen's other texts (always used in the passive form of the verb *θεοποιέω*) we find two main features: (i) Christ, because of his relation to the Father, can deify inferior creatures through the Logos; (ii) what is deified in them is the intellect.⁷³ The prevailing idea is man's conformity to Christ. In his being Son, Christ is the archetype of the sonship to which every man is called. In the *Homilies on Psalms*, however, we find many occurrences of the term in its active form. The most important for our research is in the Homily on Psalm 81. For the first time, deification refers not only to the intellect or the soul, but to the entire *compositum* of man. Origen explains that it should not come as a surprise that the spirit is deified, since it is made in the image of God. It might, however, be more surprising that the soul is deified, since, as the unstable locus of freedom, it is liable to sin. But, according to Origen, what is most shocking is that the body will be deified.⁷⁴ As Perrone underlines, this deification of the body is entirely consistent with Origen's reflections on the resurrection of the flesh and the resurrected body of Christ.⁷⁵ The horizon of man's conformity to Christ is, for Perrone, clearly soteriological. Man is called to the divine sonship, and the elected Son comes to transform the creature and assimilate their being to his own. But since he is God, to assimilate means to deify.

Balthasar, who did not know these texts, addresses this issue when claiming that "each nous is created in image of Logos, likeness of Father, whose image the Son is (CIo 13,36). Each creature is therefore god for 'grace and participation' (HEX 6,5), not for identity of nature (CIo 2,12)."⁷⁶ Therefore, man can assimilate Christ both spiritually and corporeally. The principal resource for understanding this deification is, for Origen, the glorious body of Christ (especially in 2nd Homily

72 This precious text was discovered in Munich's *Staatsbibliothek* in 2012. On this recent discovery I follow the reflections of PERRONE, *La déification selon Origène 187–220*.

73 For a general presentation of the deification in Origen, see CROUZEL, *Théologie de l'image* 163.

74 H81Ps 1 (fol. 361^v–362^r).

75 PERRONE, *La déification selon Origène* 212–213.

76 MO (I) 535; PMO 38: "Toute créature rationnelle est créé à l'image du Logos, et, par là, à la similitude du Père, dont le Fils est l'Image. Elle est donc 'Dieu par grâce et par participation', non par identité de nature."

on Psalm 15, following Phil 3,21), prototype of the deification of the human body.⁷⁷ In this homily Origen refuses to consider the body of Christ as a “pneumatic body” of the same substance as the Logos.⁷⁸ On the contrary, he presents Christ exactly as tripartite man. He insists on the nature of the *corpus terrestre* in the resurrected Christ.⁷⁹ Balthasar's main argument borrows a particular Origenian image, the resurrected body of Christ marked by “traces of blood and wounds”, so much so that the angels are surprised by the redness of his cloak. Christ's resurrection and ascension are therefore paradigmatic of the deification of the body.

The essential point in these four aspects of analogy is the mediating role of the Logos, both in creation (as model of the image), and in redemption (as archetype and “medium” of deification). This does not mean that we gain the same kind of sonship as Christ, since he alone can substantially partake in the divinity of the Father. Indeed, as Perrone argues, the singularity of Christ's divinization is clear in the Homilies.⁸⁰ For this reason, the ontological difference between man and God is totally preserved. Christ is elevated by the Father in a unique way. In contemplating the face of the Father, a continuous source of joy for the Son, Jesus provides a new opportunity: conformity with the only one who can see the Father.⁸¹ By following the “elected Son”, every man can be elevated to the condition of “adopted son”. The economy of salvation gradually realizes the communion between God and man, because it brings together human and divine nature, making human nature “divine” not only in Christ, but in everyone who accepts his message.⁸² The *commercium* of divine and human nature takes place not only in Christ, but somehow analogically between man and God.

Returning to Balthasar's problem with the spiritualizing tendency of Origenism, we can ask: is this divinization to be understood in a spiritualistic way (as a divine part of man in opposition to the fleshly and sinful part) or does Origen mean something different? Perrone explains it clearly: “Following a typical schema of Origen's thought, one can underline that the ‘divinization’ is present as a gift of God that demands man's active answer.”⁸³ Divinization takes place in man, insofar as he follows the embodied Logos, Christ. It is therefore to be thought of as a divine gift that never uplifts automatically, but always requires an active response. Balthasar would add that the possibility of answering the call of God is itself a gift;

77 It is not without meaning, notes PERRONE, *La déification selon Origène* 212, that Pamphilus refers exactly to this psalm in order to defend Origen from those who accused him of denying the resurrection of the flesh: Pamphilus, *Apol.* 142–145.

78 H15Ps 2,8 (fol. 27^{r-v}).

79 *Ibid.* (fol. 26^r).

80 PERRONE, *La déification selon Origène* 219.

81 H15Ps 2,10 (fol. 29^v).

82 CC III 28.

83 PERRONE, *La déification selon Origène* 213.

we should not interpret the upward movement of man as a titanic human effort, but as a free answer to a free gift. When reading Origen it would be a mistake to think of human spirit as *imago dei* in isolation from the structure of mediation. Man is the image of the Father not directly, but through the medium of the Logos.

The four elements of the analogical man-God relation have shown that, for Origen, there is neither identity, nor complete dissimilarity, between “nature” and “supernature”, created spirit and divine spirit. The difference between them does not mean that one can last without the other but, on the contrary, that each finds its identity in the difference. As Balthasar will say few years later:

(...) the necessity to have a nature [to receive grace] as well as the freedom of grace both depend on the freedom of God’s decision as to whether there should be a world or not. That is for God to decide. But if he decides to create a world, then of course this decision can only take the form of the analogy of being, which is grounded in God’s very essence itself. Created being must be by definition created, dependent, relative, nondivine, but as something created it cannot be utterly dissimilar to its Creator.⁸⁴

The radical importance of this doctrine is acknowledged by Balthasar in the introduction to *Spirit and Fire*: “As Origen once said in a paradoxical and Hegelian way: because something is not true does not automatically mean that it is false. For there is a third possibility: to be an indicator or *analogy* pointing to the truth.”⁸⁵ We face here, once again, the essence of Balthasar’s concern for his century, and so the essence of his interest in Origen. If de Lubac thought the separation between school theology and existential experience was due to the concept of pure nature, Balthasar maintained that the problem had deeper metaphysical roots: the culprit, he argued, was the forgetfulness of the doctrine of analogy. For, without analogy, natural desire is condemned to eternal disappointment. But, if a strong concept of analogy were to be reintroduced, the Lubacian and Origenian doctrine of natural desire might find its true value. According to Balthasar, the analogical relation between the two orders can sustain natural desire in its quest for God, because of the *cognatione* between man and God, because of our creation in the image of Christ. Christ, moreover, is also key to the attainment of likeness:

84 TKB 285. KB 295–296: “Denn auch diese Necessität hängt, ebenso wie jene Freiheit, an der Freiheit der Entscheidung Gottes, ob überhaupt eine Welt sein soll. Darüber entscheidet Gott. Wenn er sich dafür entscheidet, dann freilich kann diese Entscheidung nur die Form der analogia entis haben, die im Wesen Gottes selbst begründet ist. Geschöpfe kann es nur als – eben geschaffene, abhängige, relative, nichtgöttliche Wesen geben, Wesen aber, die als Geschaffene dem Schöpfer nicht völlig unähnlich sind.”

85 SF 17 (italics added). GF 36: “Oder, wie Origenes einmal paradox und hegelisch sagt: Weil etwas nicht wahr ist, braucht es darum nicht schon falsch zu sein. Denn es gibt ein Drittes: ein Hinweis, eine Analogie zur Wahrheit hin zu sein.”

it is only because of the Incarnation that man can achieve creaturely perfection.⁸⁶ "Human nature is in no way able to seek after God, or to attain a clear knowledge of Him without the help of Him whom it seeks."⁸⁷ If, even before the incarnation, the world was image, it was only with the Logos' adoption of a concrete human shape that likeness became possible.

If spirit in man is desire, one should not forget the distance between this spiritual desire and the spirit of God. In Origen's cosmology, only the Logos is generated *ex Deo*: the intelligences (spirits) are created *ex nihilo*.⁸⁸ For this reason, Cruzel reminds us that man, in preserving the image of God in the spirit, does

86 TD 2, 270: "It is in our real world that the eternal Son, the Word of God, has become flesh and has shown the world, in his Cross, the Father's perfect love for the world. Thus the exemplary 'idea' of the world has been given a definitive concrete form, and there can be no other ideas independent of it and in competition with it." ThD 2/1, 245: "In unserer wirklichen Welt ist der ewige Sohn, das Wort Gottes, Fleisch geworden und hat in seinem Kreuz die vollkommene Liebe des Vaters zur Welt dargestellt. Damit ist die exemplarische Idee der Welt endgültig konkretisiert, und es kann neben ihr keine anderen, davon unabhängigen, damit konkurrierenden Ideen geben."

87 CC VII 42.

88 The doctrine of creation is a perfect example of the Christian *hospitality* vis-a-vis Platonism. In *De principiis* Origen clearly affirms that, among the principles of Christian faith, we find the axiom of one God who created *ex nihilo* the universe (Prin I praef. 2; II 9,2). Origen does not cite scriptural evidences, but accepts this as a teaching of the Church, as an apostolic teaching (*praedicatio apostolica*: praef. 4). The creation *ex nihilo* is therefore part of the *depositum fidei*: *cum nihil esset, esse fecit universa* (praef. 4). Origen continues, however, stating that what was before creation is unknown (and so too what there will be after the end of this world). On these matters, says Origen, the Church has not expressed clear truths. It is therefore here that Origen's use of philosophy comes into focus, in the attempt to explain what revelation has left unexpressed. A second source suggests Origen believed in the creation *ex nihilo*: in his *Praeparatio evangelica* VII 20,1-9, Eusebius refers to Origen's (lost) *Commentary on Genesis*. Here Origen explains that the belief in an uncreated matter (co-eternal to God) is due to a misreading of the analogy between human and divine craftsmanship. If one thinks of God as a sculptor, one always needs to think of a corresponding matter. Origen denies the uncreated matter through a *reductio ad absurdum*: if we assume that matter is uncreated, and imagine a scenario wherein matter does not exist, it would follow that God would be unable to create. This would contradict divine providence: the uncreated matter would "limit" the divine action (Eusebius, *ibid.* VII 20,3). The argument continues: if the matter was existing, uncreated, outside of God, there would be no reason to deny the possibility of thinking also the forms as existing outside of God: the divine providence would be totally unnecessary. O'NEILL, How Early Is the Doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*? 449-465, traces the evidences that "the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* was already formulated as a credal statement by the time of the New Testament". For O'Neill, John 1:3 and Heb 11:3 are positive statements. The reason for the ambiguities in other Origenian statements is for O'Neill to be understood simply in an anti-gnostic and anti-materialistic frame. Origen isn't an emanationist; unlike Plotinus, he suggests the creation *ex Deo*: from God alone.

not preserve sanctifying grace, but only grace *qua* desire.⁸⁹ Human spirit should be understood as a sort of nostalgic desire, a desire that needs the incarnation to assume its true meaning. Once again, Origen's account of the Scripture helps to shed light on this anthropological problem. For Origen, the Incarnation is the true "explanation" of the spiritual level of the Scripture. The Old Testament read by the Jews was not an effective guide to salvation.⁹⁰ It is only in Christ that the totality of the divine mysteries (that, in Scripture, were numerically limited because of the constraints of the written form) is made manifest.⁹¹ Only with the Incarnation does the spiritual meaning of the Sacred Scriptures become legible. If man is more *capax Dei* than the text, still both these "capacities" find fulfillment in Jesus, who reveals the content of the mysteries—not for the sake of conveying a greater quantity of knowledge, but because in him "the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily." A passage from de Lubac helps us reach a conclusion viz. our analysis of Origen's understanding of the human spirit as desire:

89 CROUZEL, *Théologie de l'image* 210: "Sous quelle forme l'image de Dieu se conserve-t-elle alors? Non comme grace sanctifiante (...). Peut-être Origène l'insinue-t-il lorsqu'il parle de ce désir de communion avec Dieu, et de piété, qui est en l'homme 'désir qui conserve, même chez les déçus, quelques traces de la volonté divine' (Ad. Mart. XLVII, GCS I, p. 43, l. 2 sq). La permanence du selon-l'image serait donc un désir inefficace, une nostalgie, maintenant un déchirement intérieur dans l'esprit humain, qui ferait une bonne part du tourment du damné. Mais par l'action du Christ, ce désir inefficace peut devenir efficace, et la permanence du selon-l'image être la source de la conversion." Crouzel continues explaining that even the demons conserve the image of God, since they are also subject of divine creation. It is in virtue of the image (i. e. of creation) that even the possibility of devil's final conversion should be approached in Origen.

90 CC V 60: "In fact, the reason why we do not live like the Jews is that we think the literal interpretation of the laws does not contain the meaning of the legislation." CMTS 10: "They (i. e. the Jews) talk about circumcision, about the Passover, about unleavened bread, of meals and of feasts and of new moons and of Sabbaths and of the remaining commands of the Law, but they do not act according to the intent of the law. They are not circumcised, as is the meaning of the law (for this reason, the apostle says: 'We indeed are the circumcision, who serve God in the Spirit and do not trust in the flesh' [Phil 3:3]), nor do they sacrifice the Passover (because they do not know that 'Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us' [1 Cor 5:7]), nor do they eat unleavened bread according to the intent of the law (which the apostle explains, when he says: 'Let us celebrate the festival, not with the old yeast, nor the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth' [1 Cor 5:8]). We who are the disciples of Jesus, however, understand those, 'who sit on Moses' seat, the scribes and Pharisees' [Mt 23:2], as those who practice the circumcisions and the other physical commands of the law, but who are far removed from the spiritual commands of the law (*a spiritalibus legis mandatis*). We do and observe whatever they say to us about the law, since we understand the sense of the law."

91 Clo I 10,60: "But one who presents how Jesus is a multitude of good things can infer from these innumerable things written about him that the things which are in him in whom all the fullness of divinity was pleased to dwell bodily are by no means contained in writings."

In other words, 'in man himself, the real gift of sanctifying grace is, not only formally but also materially, something quite different from his spiritual openness to the absolute with all the energy that may arise from it, although that 'quite different' thing does adapt itself precisely to that openness.' In short, for Christians created nature is no kind of divine seed. The 'depths' of the spiritual soul, that mirror where the image of God is reflected secretly, is indeed, as Tauler says, the 'birth-place' of our supernatural being; but it is not its seed or embryo. It is indeed our 'capacity' for it – to take a word used by Origen, St. Bernard, St. Thomas, and many others – but that does not make it a participation in it, even initially or distantly, which needs but to be developed and enriched. It is not even the promise of it, so long at least as the objective promise has not been heard there.⁹²

Though written by de Lubac, these words could easily be Balthasar's. They effectively summarize the many elements that have emerged in our reconstruction. The first relevant point is that the material difference between sanctifying active grace, and the dynamic spiritual opening of man, cannot be confused. This is indeed the difference between human ascending movement and divine descent in revelation. The second point is the negation of the spiritualistic idea of desire as a divine seed: "something divine in us". As we have seen, this is the central point of Balthasar's critique of Origenism; Alexandrian thought acknowledges a capacity, but not actual grace. Third, this desire is not even a *debitum* that has to be paid back. Divine grace cannot be coerced. It is a gift. Finally, the above passage shows that man's natural desire to see God can be understood only in light of the image and likeness of God—in light of what we discovered as a form of analogy. This truly Origenian statement is grounded in the Platonic doctrine of participation and image. If, in the human desire to see God, we find what Balthasar calls the second stratum of Origen's thought, desire reveals a still deeper level. The third stratum, "not taken up by the tradition, uniquely personal, mysterious", is Origen's passionate and tender love for the Word, which should not be restricted to his personal love for Scripture. It must be understood that the element which allows this personal love to arise is precisely the novelty introduced by the Christian fact, that which reveals the world as analogy. The love for humanity that God reveals through his Son is further manifest in "some traces of divine will", traces that can be tracked in Origen's description of the rise of erotic desire in response to the objective divine promise.

92 DE LUBAC, *The mystery of the supernatural* 84, quoting SCHILLEBEECKX, *L'instinct de la foi* 400. It has to be remembered that *The Mystery of the Supernatural* was written by de Lubac after the observations of Rahner and Balthasar, in order to explain better what was left unclear in *Surnaturel*. This passage symbolizes therefore the path from *Surnaturel* to *Le Mystère du Surnaturel*.

c) “Some Traces of Divine Will”: the Divine Arrow of Love as
“Objective Promise”

The *locus* of Origen’s account of desire as manifestation of divine promise is the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*.⁹³ For Origen, the three books of Solomon present a tripartite teaching. In the book of Proverbs, we find moral science (concerning practical life), in Ecclesiastes, natural science (the knowledge of things’s nature). The *Song of Songs* is therefore the model of the enoptic moment of knowledge, or *disciplina inspectiva*, that “instills into the soul the love of things divine and heavenly, using for his purpose the figure of the Bride and Bridegroom, and teaches that communion with God must be attained by the paths of charity and love.”⁹⁴ The structure here parallels the personal path of the soul to God; from the literal meaning, we move to the obscure and mysterious spiritual meaning. As allegory is the continuous quest for God through the different moments of truth-recognition, human life is the continuous quest for God through the different moments of practical life, exegesis, and mystical union.⁹⁵

To describe this union, the *Song of Songs* uses an image that will remain fundamental for the whole history of mysticism and theology, particularly for Balthasar—the nuptial image. Origen is the first author to read the bride not only as an allegory of the Church, but also the individual soul. For Balthasar “each interpretation depends on the other, and neither is adequately separable from the other.”⁹⁶ The *Commentary* begins with the bride waiting for her groom to come; she is full of desire for him, and yearns for his swift appearance. Her desire is oriented toward something that is not within her grasp, something she cannot see or taste; the groom is far away. Why, then, is she described not simply as waiting, but *longing* for his love? Origen describes the awakening of human desire as “the wound of love.”⁹⁷ The bride suffers from desire because she has received a “wound”, because her heart has been struck by an arrow:

93 On this, see CROUZEL, *Origines patristiques d’un thème mystique* 309–320; PIETRAS, *L’amore in Origene*.

94 CcT prol. 3,16.

95 HNm 17,4. The whole *Commentary on the Song of Songs* is the explanation of mystical symbolism: the blessing of love (Is 49:2; Cant 2:5), the kiss of the lovers (Cant 1:1), the hug (Cant 2:6).

96 SF 273. GF 404: “Beide Auslegungen bedingen einander und sind nicht adäquat trennbar.”

97 CcT III 8,13; HCt 2,5; 2,8. Balthasar in *Le Mystérion d’Origène* will suggest a comparison between the figure of the wound and that of the window (CcT III): MO (I) 528 n. 1; PMO 122 n. 29.

How beautiful, how fitting it is to receive a wound from Love! One person receives the dart of fleshly love, another is wounded by earthly desire; but do you lay bare your members and offer yourselves to the chosen dart, the lovely dart; for God is the archer indeed.⁹⁸

This is an image of the birth of desire in the soul. The cause of desire is the love of the groom for his bride, manifested through his arrows and his voice. The goal of desire is to be united with the groom, to dwell with him in his house. It is clear that, for Origen, desire is *itself* a sort of primordial answer, drawn forth by the primary love of God for man and manifested in many ways. The archer is God the Father, and the elected arrow is his Word, Christ, “for this Word is the image and splendor of the invisible God, the Firstborn of all creation, in whom were all things created that are in heaven and on earth, seen and unseen alike.”⁹⁹ The wound is a *caritatis vulnus*: it is the God who called himself charity (1 John 4:8) who wounds the heart of man. The image of the dart of love returns when Origen mentions the two of Emmaus being “wounded by the dart” as an example of those who are “wounded” by exegetical discourse and the teaching of Scripture; this is equivalent to being wounded by love.¹⁰⁰ Origen speaks of different kinds of wound: the wounds of Wisdom, Beauty, Justice, Power, and Knowledge.¹⁰¹ These arrows correspond to the different *ἐπίνοιαι* of the Logos, who, in his utter plentitude, pierces the soul.¹⁰² The arrow being Christ, and Christ having many *ἐπίνοιαι*, means that the awakening of desire for God can come in many forms. The Logos can take many names to win human hearts. Another example, probably the most suggestive in Origen's corpus, and the one closest to Balthasar, is the wound of beauty:

If, then, a man can so extend his thinking as to ponder and consider the *beauty and the grace of all the things that have been created* in the Word, the very charm of them will so smite him, the grandeur of their brightness will so pierce him as with a chosen dart that

98 HcT 2, 8: *Quam pulchrum est, quam decorum a caritate uulnus accipere! Alius iaculum carni amoris excepit, alius terreno cupidine uulneratus est; tu nuda membra tua et praebe te iaculo electo, iaculo formoso, siquidem Deus sagittarius est.*

99 CCt prol. 2,17.

100 HcT 2,8.

101 CCt III 8,13: “A soul which is ardent for the wisdom of God could also say: ‘I am wounded with wisdom,’ namely, with the capacity to gaze upon the beauty of his wisdom. And another soul, looking upon the magnificence of his power and admiring the power of the WORD of God, can say ‘I am wounded with power’ (...). But common to all these is that wound ‘of love’ with which the bride professes to have been ‘wounded.’” HNm 17,4: “For once the soul has been struck by the fiery arrow of knowledge (...) it will always be called onward from the good to the better and from the better to the higher.”

102 The doctrine of the *ἐπίνοιαι* is characteristic of Origen's Christology and is present in many of his works. Some examples are Prin I 2,1–4.13; II 6,1; ClO I 21. On this see FÉDOU, *La sagesse et le monde* 233–269; KÜHNER, *The “Aspects of Christ”* 195–216.

he will suffer from the dart Himself a saving wound, and will be kindled with the blessed fire of His love.¹⁰³

This primordial meeting with the Logos activates the quest for God. Man receives a wound of love because he has been struck by an arrow of scriptural truth, knowledge, beauty, justice, or wisdom, but the result is always a reflexive desire to reach the one who lies behind all these aspects—love himself, God. Love seems therefore to be the common thread to all the *ἐπίνοιαι* Christi. The divine arrow allows the soul to seek Christ everywhere: “Without ceasing the soul searches after the bridegroom, the Word, and when it finds him it looks for him again, like an addict, in other things as well. And when it has contemplated those, it longs for the revelation of the rest; and having received this, it begs the bridegroom to come and stay longer.”¹⁰⁴ We meet again what Balthasar calls the *transparency* of the world: once the soul has met God through his traces in the world, she longs for more and looks for him “in other things as well.” The meeting with the world opens the soul to something more, to a new vision of reality, allowing her to see everywhere the presence of the groom. Each “meeting” is therefore not only a sign of something hidden, but also a catalyst that sets the soul in motion. The divine arrow is proof that desire for the groom must first be awakened, it needs some sort of external stimulation. This hypothesis is confirmed by an Origenian passage that explains how the bride has gained a new kind of sight because of the bridegroom: “the beneficial action originates from the groom; in fact, when he has not yet manifested himself to the bride, she could not yet dedicate herself to the groom. It is only after the bride has known the divine beauty of the groom that she can reach the salvific enchantment of love.”¹⁰⁵ The arrow is the objective promise of fulfillment, a promise that ignites in man a burning desire for what is promised. Before having met the bridegroom, the soul cannot dedicate herself to him; only after this meeting is she enabled to look for her salvation: the soul can now begin her journey to God. We find here the confirmation of our anticipation: what enables the quest for God is the preceding movement of God Himself, through His arrow, the Logos. This seems to be the meaning of Origen’s claim

103 CcT prol. 2,17. Origen merges here two texts, Is 49:2 (“He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver”) and Cant 2:5 (“I am blessed by *agape*”). It is interesting to notice that all the passages we have on the wound of love are on the individual level of interpretation, and not the ecclesial – the greatest example being the personal experience of HcT 1,7. It must however be remembered that we are missing many passages of the commentary and that we have only two homilies.

104 CcT Fr. 6,7–8.

105 Fr. 30 in LIMONE/MORESCHINI, Origene: Sul Cantico dei cantici 200. See also CcT III 1,4: The bride has eyes of dove only after having seen the bridegroom.

that the true beauty of the bride is first visible when the bridegroom draws near to her.¹⁰⁶ The soul is not beautiful (or wise, or just) simply because she is created in His image, but because He drew close to her and invited her to follow Him. It is God himself who looks for man, who ignites desire as He steps toward the soul.

To better understand Balthasar's interpretation, we shall now look at a controversy that arose in the 20th century around the Origenian account of love, stemming from Anders Nygren's *Eros and Agape*. In his book, Nygren accused Origen of closing the gap between Platonic Eros and Christian *agape*. For Nygren, Platonic Eros is egoistic and therefore incompatible with Christian love.¹⁰⁷ But does Balthasar think the same? Is Origen's Eros "too Platonic" to be Christian? What happened to the concept of Eros is a clear example of what we previously called "hospitality". Contra Nygren, Balthasar deems Origen's use of the Platonic concept wholly adequate.¹⁰⁸ As erotic love brings one person to move towards another, Christian faith believes in a God who decided to move towards man. For this reason, it must be possible to call God Eros, in the same way that John calls him *agape*, *caritas*. If we ask, "did Origen really have the same concept of Eros that Plato did?", we must claim with Catherine Osborne that the Platonic *Symposium* is only *one* source of Origen's thought. The basic Platonic idea of love, expressed by Diotima's speech in the *Symposium*, is based on the notions of poverty and lack. However, we have seen Origen starting from a positive ground, an objective promise, symbolized by the divine arrow, by incarnation in its many forms. This arrow, of course, provokes a desire that feels like a lack, but the starting point is a generative meeting with those aspects of reality that speak of God, if not the meeting with God himself. This is one of the clearest examples of Origen using a Platonic notion, Eros, and enhancing it though Christianity. The arrow was already present in the Greek tradition, as the tool used by the gods to attract man; the genius of Christianity was its ability to transfigure the dynamic range of the image. The arrow is Christ, both mediator and beloved. Desire remains a

106 Hct 2,4.

107 Answering to Nygren, Rist, *Eros and Psyche*, denies the Eros-Agape antithesis and claims that Plato and Plotinus were not defenders of this sharp distinction, usually considered a Christian innovation. See also VAN WINDEN/DEN BOEFT/RUNIA, *Eros and Agape in Early Christian Thought 287-300*, who shows how Origen does not fully identify Eros and Agape, but incorporates the powerful Platonic notion of Eros into the Christian view. OSBORNE, *Eros Unveiled* 52-85, seems to be the scholar closer to Balthasar's interpretation on the matter. She admits that Nygren would be right in seeing Eros as distant from the Christian view of love, if Eros would have meant for Origen only "lack". It is her position that we find more consonance with Balthasar's idea and it is therefore her passages that we will here follow.

108 If we keep in mind that Balthasar believes Plato to be an aesthetic thinker, indeed the founder of aesthetic, we understand how he could save Plato from the denigration of a certain Lutheran theology as that of Nygren. ET 1, 98-101. ST 1, 104-107.

quest, a “negative” movement, but it exists thanks to a “positive” event, thanks to something given. This is the crucial point of Origen’s account of desire. There is an important difference between the desire to fill a natural gap and the desire that fills a gap beyond any and all anticipation: “The distinction between a desire that is motivated by the need to fulfill a lack, and love that happens to fulfill a lack though not motivated by need, is implicit in what Origen describes in his commentary about the origins of our desire for God.”¹⁰⁹ It is on the basis of richness and plenitude that man moves; desire arises because of something always-already given. For Balthasar, the problem of the debate around Nygren is that it obscured the most radical shift in the history of Platonism. This is what Balthasar seems to articulate in the prologue of *Spirit and Fire*: “Works are finite, knowledge is infinite. But unlike the ascending Eros of Plato, this infinity is conditioned less by the creature’s ineradicable orientation into God than by the personally infinite essence of God himself. Thus, for all eternity, hope is upwardly open.”¹¹⁰ For Origen, desire is not primarily a lack, but rather a sign and image of the infinite essence of God. Origen takes the notion of God as Eros seriously: *For God so loved the world* (John 3,16) was for him more than a metaphor. Balthasar recognized this when defining the “law of love” in *Spirit and Fire*:

Plato spoke sublimely of love; the love of Christ, however, is from the outset in no danger of being led astray into the external and sensual because the God which it proclaims is wholly spirit and wholly love. This is the new element which Plato did not know about: that there is not just the rising Eros of the creature, but also, preceding all created love, a mystery of love in God himself, and that all love of the creature towards God always presupposes an invitation from God to enter into the mystery of the Trinity.¹¹¹

This passage not only captures the core of this chapter but furthermore shows how Balthasar starts developing his intra-trinitarian theology while reading Origen. When explaining man’s desire to know God, Balthasar underlines not only the divine initiative behind this desire, but its intra-divine origin. The mystery of love *in* God himself is the Trinity. Therefore man will look for Him “not only until

109 OSBORNE, *Eros Unveiled* 77.

110 SF 25. GF 45: “Werke sind endlich, Wissen ist unendlich. Aber diese Unendlichkeit ist weniger, wie im steigenden Eros Platons, durch das unendliche Hin-zu-Gott des Geschöpfes bedingt, als durch das Persönlich-Unendliche Wesen Gottes selbst. So ist in alle Ewigkeit die Hoffnung nach oben offen.”

111 SF 213. GF 312: “Plato hat erhaben von der Liebe geredet, aber erst die Liebe Christi ist nicht mehr in Gefahr, ins Sinnlich-Äußere abzugleiten, weil der Gott, den sie kündigt, ganz Geist und ganz Liebe ist. Dies ist ja das Neue, das Plato noch nicht wußte: dass es nicht nur aufsteigenden Eros des Geschöpfes gibt, sondern ein aller Geschöpf-Liebe vorausliegendes Liebesgeheimnis in Gott selbst, und dass alle Liebe der Kreatur zu Gott immer schon eine Einladung Gottes voraussetzt, in das Mysterium der Dreieinigkeit einzutreten.”

he comes to us, but until he also dwells among us.”¹¹² This mystery of love in God does not yet have, in Origen, a fully trinitarian formulation, but is clearly visible in Christ, the crucified Eros. Christ, with his passion, manifests the union of two natures, the overcoming of the gap between two orders. Human Eros not only looks for something missing, but recognizes, and gives glory to, the Other who left His traces in the world. For these reasons, in the *Commentary on the Song of Songs* desire is not only an ascending movement, but also the joyful song of gratitude for the divine initiative. Desire is not only an upward movement, but also the song of joy and glory to the Groom who dwells among men, who inhabited the house of man.

3. Towards Sacramental Ontology: the “Objective Promise” in Balthasar's Theology

It is now possible to see how the Origenian theme of the arrow of love finds a parallel in Balthasar's theology. One fundamental trope illuminates Balthasar's idea of the precedence of the “otherness” in the relationship—the mother's smile. In Origen, the wound has a transcendent (and transcendental) character because of its origin in something ‘other’. In a similar way, when describing the process of human knowledge, Balthasar thinks of a child who comes to self-consciousness within the comprehending grace of its mother's love.¹¹³ The child exists before the mother's smile and has an individual character independently from it. There is in the child no anticipation of what the mother will do, nor of what it will come to learn. However, it is only in the moment of the smile, when the relation is opened, that the consciousness of the child is awakened and opened to reality:

Its ‘I’ awakens in the experience of a Thou: in its mother's smile through which it learns that it is contained, affirmed and loved in a relationship which is incomprehensively encompassing, already actual, sheltering and nourishing ... Existence is both glorious and a matter of course. Everything, without exception, which is to follow later and will inevitably be added to this experience must remain an unfolding of it. There is no ‘gravity of life’ which would fundamentally surpass this beginning. There is no ‘taking over control’ of existence which might go further than this first experience of miracle and play. There is no encounter – with a friend or an enemy or with a myriad passers-by – which could add anything to the encounter with the first-comprehended smile of the mother.¹¹⁴

112 CCt Fr. 27.

113 For a comprehensive explanation of Balthasar's example see SCHINDLER, Hans Urs von Balthasar 36–39.

114 GL 5, 616–617. H 3/2, 945–946: “Sein Ich erwacht an der Erfahrung des Du: am Lächeln der Mutter, durch das es erfährt, dass es in einem unfäßlich-Umgebenden, Schon-Wirklichen,

The “I” of the child emerges from the “Thou” that protects its existence. “The body which it snuggles into, a soft, warm, and nourishing kiss, is a kiss of love in which it can take shelter because it has been sheltered there a priori.”¹¹⁵ The mother’s smile, as the arrow of love, is an external factor that opens a relation, bringing the child to consciousness, and evoking in him the desire to look to the one who smiles. The maternal love, as the divine arrow, is a gift that allows the opening of human being toward the outside world. The irreducible difference of the child from its mother (and so implicitly from all else in the world) emerges. Simultaneously, it is the maternal love itself that permits this difference to be.

We defined nature as “sacramental”. In the same way, the mother’s smile activates in the child a quest for more. As the child is introduced to reality by the mother, humanity is introduced to the knowledge of God by the encounter with life, by the many “natural” arrows God uses to provoke human nature, to call it beyond itself. For Balthasar, man discovers himself in a moment that is not primarily cognitive or moral, but aesthetic. Man perceives himself as an individual being thanks to something that is given from beyond the horizon of expectation, something that he can in no way anticipate or control—the beauty of the world, the smile of a mother. Therefore, difference as such is not negative, but positive.¹¹⁶ The gap between God and humanity may sound negative and frightening, but in the dynamics of love that comprise Christianity we can feel it as the sweetest thing. The perpetuation of this gap is, at the same time, the perpetuation of the relationship itself: “Only where there is no-identity is love possible.”¹¹⁷ Relation is possible only in distance, unity only in difference. The core of Balthasar’s relation to Origen is the dynamism of nature’s call to something greater. We have seen that Christian desire is not, as Platonic Eros, based on lack but positivity. Correspondingly, the distance between natural and supernatural should not be seen as negative, but a positive factor, in the etymological sense: it is something given, it implies a giver, and therefore the game of freedom between giver and receiver.

Bergenden und Nährenden eingelassen, bejaht, geliebt wird. (...) Dasein ist sowohl herrlich wie selbstverständlich. Alles, restlos alles, was später hinzutreten mag und unweigerlich dazukommen wird, muss Explikation dieser ersten Erfahrung bleiben. Es gibt keinen Lebenserst, der diesen Anfang grundsätzlich überholte. Es gibt kein In-Verwaltungnehmen der Existenz, die es weiterbrächte als die erste Erfahrung von Wunder und Spiel. Es gibt keine Begegnung – mit Freund oder Feind oder Milliarden Gleichgültiger – die etwas hinzufügen dürfte über die Begegnung mit dem ersten verstandenen Lächeln der Mutter.”

115 GL 5, 616. H 3/2, 945–946: “Der Körper, an den es sich schmiegt, ein weiches, warmes und nährendes Kissen, ist ein Kissen der Liebe, worin es sich bergen kann, weil es darin immer schon geborgen worden ist.”

116 SCHINDLER, Hans Urs von Balthasar 38.

117 FSO 355. PSW 71: “Nur wo Nichtidentität ist, ist Liebe möglich.”

This section opened with the hypothesis that Balthasar's reading of Origen can be described with the terms "transparency" and "sacramentalism". The question around human desire has revealed that human nature is, for Origen, not just a vestige of the Fall, but the place where a certain "more" is at stake. Eros has revealed its sacramental character; it is *already*, in itself, the witness of divine love for the world, of divine grace. Balthasar's idea of sacramental ontology is expressed in his description of his own book:

The summarizing study 'Le mystérion d'Origène' shows to what an extent the Incarnation of the Word, and thereby the penetration of the flesh by the Spirit, has an all-embracing Catholic-sacramental character here. Theology appears in this book as the doctrine of the appearing and communication of God through his eternal Word, which becomes sound and writing in the Old Covenant, in order then to become fully flesh and sacrament in the New and to bring about the turning of the world to the Father in Resurrection, Ascension and the outpouring of the Spirit.¹¹⁸

Balthasar is not only stating and defending the role of the sign in Origen's cosmology, but the aspect of totality this implies. What Balthasar underlines when talking about sacramentality is deeper than mere symbolism. He decides to accentuate the symbolic aspect of the sacrament more than the causal aspect. However, his goal is not to deprecate the causal interpretation of the sacraments. He is more interested in the universal character, when speaking of sacramentality, of Origenian cosmology. The stress does not lie on sacramentality in the classical sense, the doctrine of the seven sacraments, but on the ubiquitous manifestation of the Logos. The Sacraments are therefore not only the seven "institutions" of the Church, but the totality of the flesh penetrated by the Spirit, the many communications of God. Following Hugo Rahner¹¹⁹, Balthasar denies the common idea that the sacraments play no role in Origen; he is claiming that Origen has a wider, analogical idea of sacramentality, extended across the many aspects of the Word's economies. In this sense, the world and natural life (even in the form of human nature) are already moments where grace is efficiently communicated, already infused by the Word. Balthasar thinks therefore the sacrament as a "real symbol". Truth, despite remaining veiled, suggests itself in its effects and in an already-present, albeit partial, transfiguration of nature.

118 MW 26. ZSW 25: "Wie sehr die Fleischwerdung des Wortes und damit die Durchgeistigung des Fleisches hier einen umfassenden katholisch-sakramentalen Charakter hat, zeigt die zusammenfassende Studie *Le Mystérion d'Origène*, worin Theologie auftritt als Lehre von der Erscheinung und Mitteilung Gottes durch sein ewiges Wort, das im Alten Bund Klang und Schrift wird, um im Neuen Bund vollends Fleisch und Sakrament zu werden und in Auferstehung, Himmelfahrt und Geistausgießung die Weltwende zum Vater hinzuwirken."

119 RAHNER, Taufe und geistliches Leben bei Origenes.

Further, Balthasar has discovered something more in Origen that he assimilates to his own personal system: the sacramental characteristic of ontology is revealed aesthetically. Eros is the first example of how human sensitivity reveals a sacramental function. According to Balthasar, Eros was one of the three aspects that Origen borrowed from Plato, together with spiritual beauty, and the movement of *exitus-reditus*. This first example is particularly powerful because it involves a basic human element, desire, in the quest for knowledge, beauty, and wisdom. We now have to pose a fundamental question, anticipated in the description of Balthasar's divergence from de Lubac. If sacramentality reveals itself in aesthetic moments, we must ask: why? Why did God choose to reveal his grace in the material world? Why do the arrows shot by God manifest as worldly phenomena, if the world is, for Origen, a consequence of a fall? Why choose a tool so laden with sin and mortality?

Many scholars have identified Origen's answer as the *pedagogical reason* for the aesthetic medium. If God bestowed his grace immediately, in its pure form, man would not be able to understand, because of his fallen condition. Origenian cosmology is permeated with the idea of veiledness and sufferance as *patheimathos*, a salvation fitted to our attenuated nature. Incarnation is a pedagogical tool for those who are not wise enough to comprehend God purely and simply. Balthasar himself recognizes this, when considering the role of evil¹²⁰:

For, continuing unchangeable in His essence, He condescends to human affairs by the economy of His providence. And with respect to His having descended among men, He was previously in the form of God; and through benevolence, divested Himself (of His glory), that He might be capable of being received by men.

For those below did not possess eyes capable of seeing the transformation of the Word into His glorious and more divine condition. For the answer is, that such arrangements have been made in order that those who were enemies through sickness of the soul, and alienation of the natural reason, might become the friends of God.¹²¹

This idea is also involved in the doctrine of the divine *ἐπίνοιαι*. Christ has many names in Scripture: "Some of these *ἐπίνοιαι*, such as the names Wisdom, Word, Truth, and Life, denote the Word as he is eternally in himself; others are bound up with the economy of the Redemption."¹²² Jesus' primordial names are incomprehensible to fallen human nature; however, because of God's love for the fallen

120 SF 336: "(...) the role of evil in the world is understood: it has the task of providing opportunity for battle and perseverance and in God's hand it is changed into a means of good." GF 500: "(...) der Sinn und die Rolle des Bösen in der Welt: Es hat die Aufgabe, Gelegenheit zu Kampf und Bewährung zu geben und verwandelt sich in Gottes Hand in ein Mittel zum Guten."

121 CC IV 14.

122 DANÉLOU, Origen 258.

soul, he adopted human titles, such as shepherd, life, light of men etc.¹²³ These have a clear pedagogical aim. God provides Christ with human titles so that disoriented souls can find their way back to the Father. If we think of the *Song of Songs*, however, we will be surprised to find that the divine arrows of love are indeed the arrows of Wisdom, Logos, Power, Justice, and Truth. Reality, with its beauty (and power and justice . . .), reveals an aspect of the divine; it is an expression of Christ, a place where divine grace expresses itself. Can this still be considered *exclusively* a pedagogical expedient?

For both Balthasar and Origen, the answer can be found in a fundamental aspect of reality: God's respect for human freedom. The divine initiative towards such a fragile and mysterious tool as human nature is due not only to human incapacity, but also to God's desire to be loved by sons, not slaves. In the world, God shows something of himself, flashes a sign, but then turns his shoulder. Here, the reason for Balthasar's insistence on divine-human distance is clear—only in this distance can the dramatic aspect of the relation between God and man be preserved. The *Song of Songs* perfectly reflects Balthasar's concern. For the "second Origen", it is the story of desire as lack, as a painful movement towards the beloved groom. However, for the "third Origen", it is already a song of glory on the lips of the loving groom, who first loved us. The deepest meaning is clarified: it is the story of a dramatic relation between two free characters, where the freedom of man is preserved by God's free decision to reveal himself as mystery. This, for Balthasar, is the "game of love, that hides in order to be desired and that shows itself in order to be embraced; this *συστολή* and *διαστολή* characterize the personal world."¹²⁴ Christ the bridegroom, being love, hides and shows himself in a game that involves the freedom of the soul-bride. Life becomes therefore a sort of hermeneutical game played in the space that separates man from God. So, the aesthetic manifestation of divinity (as mystery) is not only pedagogical, based on our incapacity to understand, but also a sign of God's respect for human freedom, i. e. his love for humanity.

It is now evident that the center of the question of Eros is, at least for Balthasar, the double preservation of human and divine freedom. When the groom knocks at the door, the bride opens—the house was already there, built with human resources, made of human sense and effort. It is at this door of human nature that the groom knocks; it is with her humanity that the bride opens the door. But,

123 Clo I 20,122: "We must also consider whether he (i. e. Christ) would not have become a shepherd if man had not been compared to 'senseless beasts nor become like them.' For if 'God saves men and beasts,' he saves what beasts he saves by granting a shepherd to those who have not the capacity for a king."

124 MO (I) 526 n. 4; PMO 122 n. 24: "Avec tout le jeu de l'amour qui se cache pour se faire désirer et se montre pour se laisser êtreinre, cette *συστολή* et cette *διαστολή* qui caractérisent le monde personnel, in CcT 3; GCS 8, 218."

at the same time, it is only thanks to the knocking groom that the house, and the bed, become sties of flourishing. It is the light of Christ that allows for every hospitality. This relation with God brings man back to his origins, and, instead of setting man free from God, “libérer de Dieu” (the hope of atheist humanism), sets man free *in* God, “libère en Dieu.”¹²⁵ The *Song of Songs* cannot be reduced to a song of the bride’s desire, nor a song of the glory of the coming groom—it is both at once. The nuptial image helps explain not only the relation between Christ and the Church, but also between Christ and the soul. It is, for Balthasar, the first step towards a solution to the problem of theology and life, which was burning into his heart when he arrived in Lyon. As he says, “Theology in the Church proceeds always as a continuous dialogue between Bridegroom and bride. The Bridegroom gives and the bride receives.”¹²⁶ For this reason, contra Rahner, Balthasar does not conceive of desire as a “natural orientation”, but as an “invitation”, that of the bridegroom to the bride.¹²⁷

4. A Unique Symbol: the Mystical Marriage

For Balthasar, the bridal image represents the “ontological compenetration of man and God.”¹²⁸ The theme of nuptiality informs the structure of *Spirit and Fire*. After the many chapters on the spiritual senses we find a chapter on *Generation*, which is further divided into: *Generation by God*, *Fidelity*, *The Great Canticle*, and *Divine Birth*. The chapter opens with the generation of new life in man thanks to marriage with God (*Generation by God*); however, this new relationship must be preserved by man (*Fidelity*). *The Great Canticle* presents all the facets of the mystical marriage between the soul and God, which is made possible through the *Divine Birth* of the elected Son. It “is still grounded in the ultimate mystery of childhood in God himself. The eternal Son is constantly being born of the Father,

125 DE LUBAC, *Athéisme et sens de l’homme* 45: “Qu’à celui qui propose à l’homme de se libérer de Dieu, il (i. e. le chrétien) sache montrer dans la simplicité, par l’exercice même de sa foi, que la seule libération parfaite est celle qui nous libère en Dieu.”

126 ET 1, 201. ST 1, 217: “Zusammengefaßt heißt dies, dass Glaubenslehre in der Kirche sich je im lebendigen Gespräch zwischen Bräutigam und Braut vor sich geht: der Bräutigam ist der Schenkende, die Braut ist die Zustimmungende.”

127 TD 4, 166: “Since this mark (i. e. desire) persists even when man turns away from grace, we can term it a ‘supernatural existentielle’, but must not seek to unpack its contents any further. It is more than a natural ‘orientation’: it is an ‘invitation.’” ThD 3, 152: “Man kann es (da es auch in der Abwendung von der Gnade verharrt) als ‘übernatürliches Existential’ bezeichnen, wobei man aber dessen Gehalt nicht weiter ausdehnen wird: es ist über die natürliche ‘Hinordnung’ hinaus ‘Einladung.’”

128 MO (I) 523; PMO 25: “Compénétration ontologique de la créature et de Dieu.”

and in the Sons' being born we are born with him."¹²⁹ Due to this adoptive sonship, we become part of the *Mystical Body*—the subject of the following chapter. The nuptial image is also present in *Le Mystérion d'Origène*, where it is listed among the symbols of ontological union between God and man. Besides the spiritual senses and the spiritual manducation, there is the personal spiritual union. The nuptial image is for Balthasar the perfect description of knowledge, since "knowledge occurs in the form of amorous assimilation, which is why the Scripture calls the conjugal act 'knowledge'."¹³⁰ This particular image, more so than spiritual sensitivity or spiritual food, represents the "spiritual, personal union" between man and God.¹³¹

As we noted, Origen is the first author to interpret the bride not only as the Church, but also as the individual soul: "In spiritual nuptials, consider the union of the Word as bridegroom with the soul as bride. She is not hurt or harmed by him, but with each embrace receives incorruption and fertility; and the children born of such nuptials are spiritual offspring."¹³² The bride is the soul, and the feminine aspect represents the human capacity to receive God (*capax Dei*). So Origen uses the nuptial image to illustrate the relation between human nature and divine grace. We saw this in the figure of the arrow. The groom initiates the relationship with the bride, and gives her the opportunity to reciprocate. If the gift of divine love is accepted, the soul becomes fruitful; the wound inflicted by the arrow becomes fertile soil for the divine word.¹³³ The two characters of the *Song of Songs* are

129 SF 278. GF 412: "Aber das ganze Ehegeheimnis ist doch eingegründet in das letzte Kindschftsgeheimnis in Gott selber. Immerdar wird der Ewige Sohn aus dem Vater geboren, und im Geborenwerden des Sohnes werden wir mitgeboren."

130 MO(I) 525 n. 4; PMO 121 n. 20: "Toute vraie connaissance se fait par assimilation amoureuse, c'est pour cela que l'Écriture appelle l'acte conjugal 'connaissance'."

131 MO (I) 525; PMO 27: "Union spirituelle personnelle."

132 CMt XVII 21 in SF 269. Several scholars have commented on the ambiguous distinction between personal and ecclesial readings of the bridal song in Origen. For LAWSON, Introduction to Origen, *Song of Songs* 15, Origen "is saturated with the idea of the compenetration of the life of the Church and the life of the soul, of the mystery of the Church and our life under grace: in the final analysis, the two – inseparable – stand for true participation in the Divine-Human nature of the Logos." NICHOLS, *Lovely Like Jerusalem* 236, similarly recalls the idea of *anima ecclesiastica*, merging the two readings. On this see also the introduction of FÜRST, *Die Homilien und Fragmente zum Hohelied* 10–34.

133 CMtS 43 in SF 269: "Just as the seed is formed and shaped in those with child, so it is in the soul which accepts the Word: the conception of the Word is gradually formed and shaped in it (...). In his Epistle to Timothy Paul says that 'woman will be saved through bearing children, with modesty' (1 Tim 2:15). But who is this woman, if not the soul which conceives the divine Word of truth and brings forth good works which are like Christ?" CPs 112,9 in SF 268: "The soul becomes sterile when God abandons it; but becomes a mother when he is at work in it." HCT 2,6: "Not just in Mary did his birth begin with an overshadowing; but in you too, if you are worthy, is the Word of God born." Other images of this generativity are in HLC 36; HNm 10,7; HGN 6,1; HEX 1,3; ClO Fr. 3,29; HLv 12,7.

involved in an ongoing quest, each for the other: “The urgency of her sentiment of love leads the praying matron to vanish from the stage. Moreover, the movement between inside and outside supports the entire plot in an implicit or explicit way and receives a new focus with the mention of the Bride’s house. The sign that her passion becomes unbearable is that she does not remain at home – where she normally should stay and wait for the Groom – but goes outside so as to catch sight of the Groom when he arrives.”¹³⁴ Is the image of two bodies desiring and chasing each other just a creative means of explaining an abstract truth, or does Origen intend something more fundamental in this dialogic symbolism, something that reveals more about man’s true relation with God?¹³⁵ This dialogic relation seems to be more than metaphorical.¹³⁶ Indeed, Origen does not reject the literal understanding of the Song; his distinction between spiritual and outer man, between soul and body, shows that he grants each of them a place in the interpretation. In this commentary he affirms that “the invisible things of God are understood by means of things that are visible.”¹³⁷ Origen is not only the first author to interpret the bride as the human soul, but also the first to read the *Song of Songs* as a play, and not merely as a dialogue.¹³⁸ The *Song of Songs* is clearly a bridal song, recited on the occasion of a wedding. However, there is more at stake for Origen: “This book is at once a drama and a marriage-song.”¹³⁹ Origen himself provides a definition of drama: “a play set on the stage, in which different persons appear and disappear from the scene.”¹⁴⁰

What Balthasar wants to highlight is exactly this broad understanding of the nuptial relation: every soul is oriented to the same end, as bride to groom.¹⁴¹ Not

134 PERRONE, Origen’s Dramatic Interpretation of the Song of Songs 81.

135 A recent work on Origen’s exegesis of the *Song of Songs* is KING, Origen on the Song of Songs as the Spirit of Scripture. King claims that the *Song of Songs* is, for Origen, an exception among the scriptural books: it does not have a literal meaning, but only a spiritual one. This interpretation goes against what I am trying to show here: there is indeed a literal meaning of the text, which is transfigured by the spiritual, but not annihilated. The eschatological truths, for Origen, remain always within and beyond the letter: without this, the bride-soul would never be able to enter into a personal and hermeneutical movement of interpretation of/adhesion to the bridegroom, who opens the spiritual senses of the Scripture. It is exactly in this free, hermeneutical process that the soul is involved: in the nuptial relation with the bridegroom.

136 I follow here BOERSMA, Nuptial Reading 227–258. Boersma claims this against Christopher King’s allegorical interpretation.

137 CcT III 12.

138 PERRONE, Origen’s Dramatic Interpretation of the Song of Songs 81. On the relation between God and the soul in terms of drama, see also LOMIENTO, Amatorium drama, who analyzes in depth Origen’s commentary in light of the category of drama.

139 HCt 1,1.

140 CcT prol. 1,3.

141 CMtS 43.

only does the bride's desire for the groom represent human desire for the supernatural, but also the relation between human nature and divine grace. "It does not surprise that Origen finds himself entangled into the inextricable dialectic of every religious ontology: how is the *πνεῦμα* of man distinct from the *Πνεῦμα* of the immanence of Grace in him?"¹⁴² The question about the difference between the human and the divine spirit appears over and over in Balthasar's works on Origen. The nuptial image confirms that this question cannot be dissociated from the dramatic background. Ontology itself becomes dialogic:

The extatic movement onto which the spiritual being is based does not allow him to trace clearly and geometrically the borders of his domain. Ontology itself is dialogic, as the scheme of a parable with two fires, one in finitude, the other one in the infinite. The laws which regulates the proportions are the axioms of grace, logic and free. Origen finds these axioms in three words of saint Paul: "according to the merits of faith-trust (*secundum analogiam fidei*)", "according to the needs of the creature (*ad id quod expedit*)", "according to the free choice of God (*dividens unicuique prout vult*)".¹⁴³

For Origen, and then Balthasar, the nuptial image describes the relation between human desire and divine grace. These two vectors are not opposed in the *Song of Songs*. Rather, the Song is more than a metaphor, it portrays a true quest of the soul, and the true divine initiative towards man.

Balthasar is thus correct in recognizing that Origen's use of the *Song of Songs* is not exclusively mystical. In fact, it is the dramatic representation of a relationship between God and man, "it is a matter of general and fundamental ontological categories."¹⁴⁴ As Perrone has noted, "the mimetism of the letter is not uniquely ascensional" and "even if Origen at the end seems to outstrip himself of the dramatic interpretation with the aim of exalting the superiority of spiritual exegesis over it, yet the charming beauty of the letter of the Song held him too, without dissolving into his allegorical but, on the contrary, emerging with unsuspected theatrical effectiveness."¹⁴⁵ The best way to understand this not-merely allegorical

142 MO (I) 530; PMO 31: "Il n'est donc pas étonnant qu'Origène se trouve entraîné dans l'inextricable dialectique de toute ontologie religieuse: Comment le *πνεῦμα* de l'homme est-il distinct du *Πνεῦμα* qui est l'immanence de la Grâce en lui?"

143 MO (I) 530–531; PMO 31–32: "Le mouvement extatique qui fonde l'être spirituel créé ne lui permet pas de tracer clairement et géométriquement les frontières de son propre domaine. L'ontologie même est dialogique, comme le schème d'une parabole à deux foyers, l'un dans le fini, l'autre dans l'infini. Les lois qui en règlent les rapports sont les axiomes de la Grâce, logique et libre. Origène les trouve dans trois mots de saint Paul: 'selon les mérites de la foi-confiance (*secundum analogiam fidei*)', 'selon les besoins de la créature (*ad id quod expedit*)', 'selon le choix libre de Dieu (*dividens unicuique prout vult*)'."

144 MO (I) 525; PMO 27: "Il s'agit toujours de catégories ontologiques générales et fondamentales."

145 PERRONE, Origen's Dramatic Interpretation of the Song of Songs 101–102.

meaning is to think outside the boundaries of the Commentary and remember the fundamental role that the Fourth Gospel plays for Origen.¹⁴⁶ The images of the vine, the marriage in Cana, Christ the groom, the prostitute elevated to bridehood, all typically Johannine, are frequently deployed in Origen's commentary. Reinterpreted in light of the Johannine Christology of Christ-Groom, it is clear that, for Origen, the *Song of Songs* is more than a simple metaphor—the body of the bride, caressed by the Spouse and burning with desire, is a witness of God's presence, of the active role of the Logos in the world. In this sense, the Johannine influence restrains Origen from Platonizing the bridal relation, and from spiritualizing the bodies to the point of losing them. Despite Origen's tendency to construe the divine-human relation in intellectualist terms, following the Johannine identification of Christ and the Logos-Truth, Balthasar argues that the Gospel of John also works in the opposite direction, guarding against the pure spiritualization of the flesh:

[Origen's] Johannine symbolism has a genuinely Biblical and not a mythical, Hellenistic basis: the creaturely form (to its unmost hiddenness under the form of contradiction) is, by virtue of its being affected by God, transparent to the love of God himself. To the gaze of answering love, the concealment is already the unveiling. No theologian, not even Origen, has developed this thought more effectively and magnificently than Cyril of Alexandria in his commentaries on Scripture, particularly on John.¹⁴⁷

The *Commentary on the Song of Songs* is an example of the sacramental approach that Balthasar traces in Origen. In the mystery of the groom who gives himself and moves away, the groom's body represents the impossibility of a purely intellectualistic understanding of the Logos. This is evident in Origen's touching descriptions of the game that the Truth plays with him when reading texts, exactly as the groom does with the bride:

The Bride then beholds the Bridegroom; and He, as soon as she has seen Him, goes away. He does this frequently throughout the Song; and that is something nobody can understand who has not suffered it himself. God is my witness that I have often perceived the Bridegroom drawing near me and being most intensely present with me; then suddenly

146 As recognized by LETTIERI, *Il corpo di Dio* 3–90, there would be no patristic exegesis of the *Song of Songs* without a Johannine filter.

147 GL 1, 653. H 1, 647: "Der johanneische Symbolismus hat hier einen echt biblischen und nicht mythisch-hellenistischen Grund: die Kreaturgestalt – bis zur letzten Verborgenheit unter der Widerspruchsgestalt – ist in ihrem Ergriffenwerden durch Gott Transparenz der Liebe Gottes selbst; die Verhüllung ist schon, für den Blick der antwortenden Liebe, Enthüllung. Kein Theologe, auch Origenes nicht, hat diesen Gedanken konsequenter und großartiger durchgeführt als Cyrill von Alexandrien in seinen Kommentaren zur Schrift, besonders zu Johannes."

He has withdrawn and I could not find Him, though I sought to do so. I long therefore for Him to come again, and sometimes He does so. Then, when He has appeared and I lay hold of Him, He slips away once more; and when He has so slipped away, my search for Him begins anew. So does He act with me repeatedly.¹⁴⁸

Origen's desire to understand Scripture is the same as each soul that "longs for union with Christ"¹⁴⁹, a union where the elements at play (arrows, kisses, the beauty of nature ...) are not only symbolic, but real gifts from the coming groom. The *Song of Songs* describes the process of the bride-soul in her free act of adhesion to the bridegroom; it also describes the initiative of the bridegroom who invites the soul into a personal relationship with him. A classic figure of the *Song of Songs* is the window through which the bride catches sight of the groom; he waits outside and she can only see him by straining her vision.¹⁵⁰ Balthasar understands clearly the game of hiding and showing as the rule of every personal union, the game of love. This process is, first of all, for Origen, a matter of exegesis. His *Commentary* describes Christ inviting the exegete to the contemplation of the true spiritual sense of the letter. Moreover, this exegetical model represents the entire life of each soul, in Origen's complex cosmology. The history of salvation, the time that unfolds between the beginning and the end, is described by Origen as the nuptial relation between bride and bridegroom, between the single soul and Christ. Life is the dramatic unfolding of the individual freedom of the bride and the infinite freedom of the bridegroom, a relation that unfolds without depriving either of their spontaneous initiative.

5. The Bridal Relation of Nature and Grace

To conclude this inquiry, we have now to understand how the nuptial image sheds light on the debate concerning nature and grace at the center of this chapter. Desire in Origen propels the soul in her cosmic adventure; in the same way, the bride of the *Song of Songs* is described as continuously looking for the bridegroom. This quest, however connatural, is initiated by the bridegroom's decision to leave traces of himself in the world. Nonetheless, the movement of the bride remains free and genuine; in this dynamic relation no actor of the drama is deprived of its freedom, and, by virtue of this free quest, the final union will be a true union of love.

As we said, the relation between nature and grace, conceived as distinct categories, never emerges as a question for Origen: the two elements are always united

148 HCt 1,7.

149 CCt I 1.

150 Ibid. III 13.

in his thought. It is exactly for this reason that he can be of great help in thinking through them today. This unity is given by the absolute sacramental vision of nature we discovered in the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*. The soul's desire is not erased or ignored by the grace of Christ. In its quest for union with God there is always-already an objective promise that, without any sign of anticipation, the bridegroom comes to fulfill. As Crouzel has suggested, Origen ignores the distinction between natural and supernatural, because, for him, divine action is simultaneously external and internal to human action. Man, being created in the image of the Logos, already contains the first gift of grace, a sign of filiation, a seed from which our path towards likeness can grow.¹⁵¹ For Balthasar, this is the deep-set "law of theology" that he formulates in a section of *The Glory of the Lord* 1 dedicated to Matthias Joseph Scheeben.¹⁵² What brings us to look at Scheeben is the fact that, while Balthasar never dedicated a specific treatise to the question of nature and grace, he did describe Scheeben's exposition of the issue as "a profound understanding of this law of theology."¹⁵³ For Scheeben, as for Origen, the core relation between human nature and God is the incarnation of the Logos; this relation can therefore be read in light of the nuptial dynamic of the *Song of Songs*:

- 151 CROUZEL, *Théologie de l'image* 245: "On ne peut pas dire avec justesse que l'action de Dieu et celle de l'homme coexistent ou collaborent, car elle ne sont pas deux, l'action de Dieu est intérieure à l'action humaine. Le selon-l'image, qui est un don de grace, l'amorce de notre divinisation et de notre filiation, non seulement une puissance, mais un début – Origène ignore la distinction du naturel et du surnaturel – constitue notre principale substance, et la montée vers la ressemblance est le développement de ce germe."
- 152 After studying in Rome at the Gregorianum under Jesuits of the "Roman School", Scheeben became a professor at the seminary in Cologne at the age of twenty-five in 1860. His main works are SCHEEBEN, *Natur und Gnade; Die Herrlichkeiten der göttlichen Gnade; Die Mysterien des Christentums*. In English translation, respectively: *Nature and Grace; The Glories of Divine Grace; The Mysteries of Christianity*. The most comprehensive and recent work on Scheeben is NICHOLS, *Romance and System*. We will follow the arguments of the already quoted SWAFFORD, *Nature and Grace*, who underlines the importance of Scheeben to understand the position of Hans Urs von Balthasar. On Scheeben, see also the recent OAKES/BARRON, *A Theology of Grace* 1–46; TANZELA-NITTI, *Mistero trinitario*; MINZ, *Pleroma Trinitatis*.
- 153 Often quoted by Balthasar, Scheeben is appreciated because of his single systematic principle: the understanding of love as the heart of sanctity. Scheeben sees the nuptial image as revealing the heart of the trinity, and consequently of the God-man relation. We see the relevance of this attitude for Balthasar: when reading the Greek Fathers, he was looking for saints who understood the role of human nature in relation to God, the role of philosophy in relation to theology. It is significant that the Greek Fathers were also a fundamental inspiration for Scheeben himself. For Balthasar's presentation of Scheeben on nature and grace see GL 1, 104–117 and *Theology and Sanctity* 202–204. On Scheeben's image of the spiritual marriage see VALKOVIC, *Luomo, la donna e il matrimonio*.

No one in recent years has had such a profound understanding of this law of theology as M. J. Scheeben, from whom everything is related to the structure of the *Connubium*. At the center of his theology is the God-man with the two natures, whose union he interprets, with the Greek Fathers, as the marriage of God with mankind in Mary's bridal chamber. (...) The whole structure of the world is seen to derive from a relation of love, a nuptial relation. Scheeben consistently applies his basic theme all through theology. He makes it the foundation of the formal relationships of the natural and the supernatural, of reason and faith, and also of the process of justification, of the nature and workings of actual and habitual grace, and, naturally, of the theology of the life of Christ, of the relations between Christ and the Church, of the eucharist and all the sacraments, even of scripture and inspiration. Everything is, for him, a revelation of the love of the Trinity, the *theios Eros*.¹⁵⁴

Even without a detailed analysis of Scheeben's system, and despite Origen's trinitarian grounding being less accentuated, an evident consonance with Origen's *Commentary on the Song of Songs* emerges—the nuptial image as key to the relation between soul-body, and Christ-Church.¹⁵⁵ For Balthasar, as for Scheeben, it is only by understanding the distance between nature and supernature that a true union can exist. According to Scheeben, “In this relationship the sharp distinction between the two factors is preserved in unity, and the necessary independence is maintained in subordination. Indeed, *union* of both is based upon their very *difference*, and the subordination of the lower to the higher is shown to be the supreme elevation of the former.”¹⁵⁶ Despite his insistence on the distinction between nature and grace, so different from the Balthasarian perspective, Scheeben does not accept a material or existential separation. On the contrary, as with Balthasar, the two aspects are held together *because* of the distance between

154 Theology and Sanctity 202. Balthasar defines Scheeben as “the greatest german theologian to-date since the time of Romanticism” and admits that he is the author who opened the door to theological aesthetics. This, for two reasons: (i) because, instead of a theology composed aesthetically, he interrogated himself viz. which kind of aesthetic can be derived from Christian revelation; (ii) because he separated the two levels of nature and grace in order to recombine them in a deeper union: GL 1, 104–112.

155 A major difference between Origen and Scheeben is however fundamental. Concerning natural desire, Scheeben accepts the theory of twofold end. For him, the desire for the supernatural is a wish, and not an essential constitutive element of nature, as it is for Origen (and for Balthasar); underlining this aspect of wish, he avoids to oblige God to give his grace. On this, see SWAFFORD, *Nature and Grace*; OAKES/BARRON, *A Theology of Grace* 1–46.

156 SCHEEBEN, *The Mysteries of Christianity* 788 (emphasis added). *Die Mysterien des Christentums* 665: “So ergänzen sich die verschiedenen natürlichen Bilder und die aus dem innersten Wesen des Christentums sich ergebenden Analogien, um uns das Verhältnis der Vernunft zum Glauben als ein solches zu veranschaulichen, welches in der Einheit den strengsten Unterschied, in der Unterordnung die notwendige Selbständigkeit beider Faktoren wahrt, ja die Vereinigung beider auf ihren Unterschied gründet und in der Unterordnung des Niederen unter das Höhere die höchste Erhebung des ersteren darstellt.”

them. The distinction is exactly what preserves the union. The logic of Scheeben is that reality is ultimately one. If it is true that there are two levels, natural and supernatural, there are still not two economies, but one: that of divine providence. Scheeben's insistence upon the distinction between natural and supernatural is meant to preserve their concrete union: "When grace is transformed into the light of glory, the union will become an indissoluble spiritual marriage, a *matrimonium spirituale ratum et consummatum*."¹⁵⁷ Without denying natural desire, Scheeben understands that such desire finds its true meaning only in difference. Only in the preserving distance can each member maintain its uniqueness and love, only here can the deep core of divine grace be encountered as such. As we noted in the previous section, the greatest problem that Balthasar had with Origenism was the lack of such a distance between the two levels, the forgetfulness of difference, and so analogy. The greatness of Scheeben is indeed that of keeping grace gratuitous, and, at the same time, maintaining an intimate union between grace and nature. How did he do it? What was the rational argument for this union in distinction?

Scheeben's argument is relevant for us because it illuminates the heart of Balthasar's reading of Origen—the Incarnation. In Scheeben, union-in-difference is made possible by the Incarnation, where a nuptial union takes place between the Logos and humanity. His distinction between grace and nature is not a breed of extrinsicism, imagining grace as a "penthouse atop a skyscraper."¹⁵⁸ On the contrary, "the creature's elevation into God occurs as a result of a preceding descent and ingress of God's part, an interpenetration of nature and grace which receives from Scheeben the name of 'marriage'."¹⁵⁹ This image of human elevation resulting from a divine descent seems also to describe the activation of the soul's desire via the traces of divine will. Human nature is not divine *in se*, but becomes so, as a bride is transformed and elevated: "Because of the perfect hypostatic union of a member of the human race with the Logos, the whole of human nature is wedded to Him in a very expressive sense of the word, and has become His bride. The Logos, by assuming flesh from the flesh of the race and by making it His own, has become one flesh with all other persons of the race."¹⁶⁰ We find here two classic

157 SCHEEBEN, *Nature and Grace* 337. *Natur und Gnade* 200–220: "Wenn die Gnade in das Licht der Herrlichkeit übergegangen ist, wird die Verbindung eine unauflösliche, ein *matrimonium spirituale ratum et consummatum*." A major difference with Origen emerges however in the following statement: "Die Freiheit der Natur neben der Gnade hört auf, weil sie ganz von ihr durchdrungen und eingenommen wird."

158 OAKES/BARRON, *A Theology of Grace* 33.

159 GL 1, 107. H 1, 103: "Die Erhebung der Kreatur in Gott geschieht durch eine vorgängige Herab- und Einsenkung Gottes, eine Durchdringung der Natur mit der Gnade, die Scheeben von Anfang an und dann bis in alle Einzelheiten der Dogmatik hinein unter dem Titel 'Vermählung' behandelt."

160 SCHEEBEN, *The Mysteries of Christianity* 371. *Die Mysterien des Christentums* 310: "Daß gerade durch die volle hypostatische Einheit eines Gliedes der menschlichen Natur mit

Balthasarian tropes: the idea of distinction in order to unite, and the nuptial image. Their common root should come as no surprise; they is, of course, the Greek Fathers:

The Fathers view the Incarnation itself as a marriage with the human race, inasmuch as it virtually contains everything that can lead to the full union of the Son of God with men. But the relationship of unity it sets up comes to full fruition only in the church. Man is to attach himself to his divine bridegroom by faith; and the bridegroom seals His union with man in baptism, as with a wedding ring. But both faith and baptism are mere preliminaries for the coming together of man and the God-man in one flesh by a real communion of flesh and blood in the Eucharist.¹⁶¹

Once again, we find ourselves on the path toward Origen. In the *Commentary on the Song of Songs* Balthasar finds the image of Christ as an arrow of love, *trait d'union* between human and divine, not only in a metaphorical sense, but really and truly both man and God. The *admirabile commercium* of natures in Christ is the key to the *connubium* between man and God.¹⁶² In this sense, Balthasar grasps the deep core of Origen, whose entire cosmology reveals a Christological focus, however nascent:

dem Logos die ganze Natur mit ihm im stärksten Sinne vermählt und seine Braut geworden sei. Indem nämlich der Logos Fleisch vom Fleische des Geschlechtes angenommen und sich zu eigen gemacht, sei er mit den übrigen Personen des Geschlechtes eins geworden in einem Fleische.”

161 SCHEEBEN, *The Mysteries of Christianity* 543. *Die Mysterien des Christentums* 447: “Die Inkarnation an sich wird schon von den heiligen Vätern als eine Vermählung mit dem Menschengeschlechte dargestellt, insofern darin virtuell alles enthalten ist, was zur vollen Vereinigung des Sohnes Gottes mit den Menschen führt. Allein das in ihr grundgelegte Einheitsverhältnis kommt erst in der Kirche zu Ausführung. Der Mensch soll im Glauben sich an seinen göttlichen Bräutigam anschließen, und dieser will in der taufe seinen Bund mit ihm, wie durch einen Trauring, besiegeln. Beides geschieht aber nur dazu, um in der Eucharistie durch reale Kommunion des Fleisches und Blutes den Menschen und den Gottmenschen zu einem Fleisch zu verschmelzen und dadurch in der vollkommensten Weise den Menschen mit der Gnadenkraft seines Hauptes zu befruchten.” Greek patristic’s influence on Scheeben can be seen in his “unabashed embrace of the christocentrism found in the Letters to the Colossians (1:16–17) and Ephesians (1:10), a point which will be very important for us later on when we seek to demonstrate Scheeben’s ability to accommodate the intrinsic contribution of de Lubac”: SWAFFORD, *Nature and Grace* 145. Swafford recalls NICHOLS, *Romance and System* 19, who writes: “His habitual references to the Greek patristic sources, Cyril of Alexandria above all, in far more than a merely illustrative sense, and his reliance on the power of images, both biblical and more generally cosmic, differentiated him from many modern Schoolmen.” Some useful references: FEE, *The Text of John in Origen and Cyril of Alexandria* 357–394; TRIGG, *Origen and Cyril of Alexandria* 955–965.

162 There is in Origen no perfect image of the hypostatic union. Yet, the soul of Jesus, however complex this doctrine is, is a “member of the human race” elevated by the Logos.

They see that from Him [Jesus] there began the union of the divine with the human nature, in order that the human, by communion with the divine, might rise to be divine, not in Jesus alone, but in all those who not only believe, but enter upon the life which Jesus taught, and which elevates to friendship with God and communion with Him every one who lives according to the precepts of Jesus.¹⁶³

The possible deification of man is not to be found in a pre-given divinity of the soul, independent of free adhesion, but only in the free acceptance of Christ; not in the image of a vague spirit, but a tangible, personal Logos.¹⁶⁴ According to Balthasar, the marriage between natural and supernatural takes place in Christ, the “concrete analogy of being”, and it takes shape on the Cross, where the distance between them is paradoxically eliminated and, at the same time, stressed at the highest level. This, for Balthasar, is the paradox of Christianity: in the humble descending movement of God, the erotic ascending movement of the creature is fulfilled—but only to the extent that the latter accepts the former. For this reason, “the sexual Eros is analogy for the agape between Christ and the Church in the sacrament of marriage. The mystical Eros preserves in his fulfillment the law of agape of the Cross: only now it experiences what it means to give oneself in the dark night, since Eros can now glimpse the example of the effusive agape of God.”¹⁶⁵ Christ is the arrival point both of the individual soul’s journey, and of the Church’s economy of salvation: Origen’s entire exegesis of the *Song of Songs* is centered on Christological mysticism. In this sense, the literal meaning of the song, the nuptial union, is not simply allegorical, but sacramental: it expresses the real dynamism of the soul and the Church in their union with Christ, just as the union of two lovers is not only a symbol of their love, but a real expression of it. For Balthasar, Origen “has understood with a surprising depth the relations of truth-immanence and of truth-transcendence in the relationship between the

163 CC III 28.

164 SF 57, on the chapter “Image of the Word”: “But the image of God in the soul is the image of the Logos. For in him the Father has created all things, formed all other images according to his ideal. The Logos is primal reason, primal spirit, primal life, and only in a thoroughly personal and dynamic relationship to him does the inner human live and grow.” GF 91: “Das Bild Gottes in der Seele ist aber näherhin das Bild des Logos. Denn in Ihm hat der Vater alles geschaffen, nach Seinem Urbild alle Abbilder gestaltet. Der Logos ist die Urvernunft, der Urgeist, das Urleben, und nur in einem durchaus persönlichen und dynamischen Verhältnis zu Ihm lebt und wächst der innere Mensch.”

165 Eros und Agape 402–403: “Der geschlechtliche Eros wird Gleichnis für die Agape zwischen Christus und Kirche im Ehesakrament; der mystische Eros erhält zu seinem Weg- und Vollendungsgesetz das Gesetz der Agape des Kreuzes: erst jetzt erfährt er ganz, was es heißt, sich in der dunklen Nacht selbst aufzugeben, da er das Beispiel von Gottes sich verströmender Agape erblickt.”

creature and God.”¹⁶⁶ The nuptial image is the highest symbol of the man-God relation. This relation has to be interpreted not only in a soteriological key, but in light of a preservation of freedom possible only through a personal relationship. The Origenian cosmological process of desire, “the march of being towards its proper ideal (its Truth), this march that is the truth in action, is transformed therefore into an interpersonal relation. The Ideal of the Person is itself Person.”¹⁶⁷ Not only is the wound of love inflicted by a personal encounter, but the entire movement of the soul becomes itself relational, *dramatic*. For, “the question that now presents itself is no longer that of the gratuitousness of the supernatural in relation to a nature oriented towards it, but rather the prior question of the essence of finite freedom and of its intrinsic relation to divine freedom.”¹⁶⁸ This is therefore the meaning of sacramental ontology: the world, in its being an expression—more than a symbol—of something other, offers the possibility of a relationship with that Other, a relation where the answer of the Bride rises from the call of the Bridegroom, and where their song becomes, in the play, a harmonious duet of divine and human freedom.

166 MO (I) 520; PMO 20: “Il a compris avec une profondeur étonnante les relations de vérité-immanence et de vérité-transcendance dans les rapports de la créature avec Dieu.”

167 MO (I) 527; PMO 29: “La marche de l'être vers son idéal propre (sa Vérité) (...) cette marche qui est la vérité en acte, se transforme donc en une relation interpersonnelle. L'Idéal de la Personne est lui-meme Personne.”

168 OUELLET, Paradox and/or Supernatural Existential 264.

II. The Spiritual Senses: Origen's Contribution to the Faith-Reason Controversy

The second element of Origen's thought which fascinated Balthasar, to the point of deeply influencing his own thought, is the doctrine of the spiritual senses.¹⁶⁹ This doctrine is a perfect example of the continuity and discontinuity between Origen and Balthasar. In this section, I will focus on the specific role of the spiritual senses in Balthasar's work, in order to understand how Origen became, for Balthasar, an occasion to develop his own theoretical response to issues in modern Europe, and how, already in his reading of Origen, Balthasar was developing important elements of his personal theology, both in continuity and discontinuity with the Alexandrian. Discontinuity over the spiritual senses, more than any other element, demonstrates the multivalent relationship between Origen and Balthasar, and reveals how the Alexandrian helped Balthasar in his own time.

1. The Spiritual Senses in Balthasar's Works

Origen believed that "*there is a general sense for the divine which is subdivided into several kinds.*"¹⁷⁰ He means to say that there is not only a "general" spiritual sense of the Scriptures, but five additional spiritual senses: "Every member of the external human being is also called the same thing in the inner human being."¹⁷¹ Much could be said about the spiritual sense of Scripture. I decided in this chapter, however, to highlight the spiritual senses as perceptive tools. This latter direction is the main focus of Balthasar's interpretation, while de Lubac, for example, will focus more on the exegetical meaning of the spiritual sense. Recently, Benjamin Meyer (*Exegetical Mysticism: Scripture, Paideia, and the Spiritual Senses*) has claimed that Origen's notion of the spiritual senses is developed exclusively in

169 The notion of spiritual senses has raised interest in contemporary scholarship, and not only by way of Origen. The best example, with contributions from many authors, is GAVRILYUK/COAKLEY, *The Spiritual Senses. Perceiving God in Western Christianity*. Among these we find Mark McInroy on Origen (ibid. 20–35) and on Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar (ibid. 257–274). This last chapter presents some of the considerations that McInroy develops in his valuable contribution McINROY, *Balthasar on the Spiritual Senses*. Other important works on Balthasar and the spiritual senses, often in connection to Origen, are FIELDS, *Balthasar and Rahner on the Spiritual Senses* 224–241; RICKENMANN, *La dottrina di Origene sui sensi spirituali e la sua ricezione in Hans Urs von Balthasar* 155–168; DE MAESENEER, *Retrieving the Spiritual Senses in the Wake of Hans Urs von Balthasar* 276–290; PRATO, *I sensi spirituali tra corpo e spirito* 255–296.

170 CC I 48.

171 Dial 16.

the context of biblical exegesis. Although it is true that the spiritual senses are for Origen a tool to read Scripture, it is wrong to think they cannot be more. There is only one incarnation of the Word, but its dimensions are manifold. In this sense Balthasar, as de Lubac, remarked that the use of the term “incarnation” for Scripture is “in part metaphor,” though not entirely. The Word did not only take a body in the pages of Scripture, but also in Christ himself and the wider world. Scripture should therefore be read as an incarnation of the Logos, and attention must be paid to its strongly Christological paradigm. Interestingly, this was for Balthasar a desideratum for the Church of his age, as mentioned in *Razing the Bastions*, where the Fathers are brought forward as virtuous examples.¹⁷² In the end, considering the spiritual sense in its exegetical and perceptive aspects ultimately amounts to the same thing. We remember Origen's idea that both world and Scripture are full of mysteries and, therefore, share a similar exegetical structure: “*Haec autem rationes non solum in creaturis omnibus habentur, sed et ipsa scriptura divina tali quadam sapientiae arte conscripta est.*”¹⁷³

Origen's texts are full of references to the five senses: as for sight, we have “eyes of the mind”¹⁷⁴, “eyes of the inner human being”¹⁷⁵, “intelligible eyes”¹⁷⁶, “eyes of the heart”¹⁷⁷. For hearing, we have “spiritual ears”¹⁷⁸, “internal ears”¹⁷⁹ and a “bodiless voice in the depth of [our] heart”¹⁸⁰. Our spiritual body “has nostrils with which to perceive the good odour of righteousness and the bad odour of sins”¹⁸¹, nostrils to “be partakers and receivers of His odour”¹⁸². At last, there is a “sense of touch for handling the Word of life”¹⁸³ and a “taste that feeds on living bread that

172 RB 30: “And this has been the case, not least because the spiritual exposition of Scripture, grounded thoroughly and correctly by the Church Fathers despite many mistakes and insufficient technical equipment, was more and more neglected later on and is good as forgotten today.” SB 18–19: “Und dies um so weniger, als die geistige Auslegung der Schrift, von den Kirchenvätern trotz mancher Mißgriffe und ungenügender technischer Ausrüstung völlig richtig begründet, später immer mehr vernachlässigt wurde und heute so gut wie vergessen ist.” Balthasar mentions here also de Lubac's *History and Spirit*, especially chapter 4, on the spiritual senses.

173 CCt III 13,28.

174 FrLam 116.

175 Dial 16.

176 ClO I 9,55.

177 Prin I 1,19.

178 Orat 13,4.

179 Dial 17.

180 Psalm 4,4.

181 Dial 18.

182 Prin II 6,6.

183 CC I 48.

has come down from heaven”¹⁸⁴. These senses are the perceptive organs of our spiritual body, used to investigate “those things which are intellectual.”¹⁸⁵

A whole subsection of the section *Spirit in Spirit and Fire* is dedicated to these inner senses. Balthasar collects a vast amount of texts on the spiritual senses in general, as well as on each specific sense. The interpretation given is simple:

Through grace Christians have received a sensory capacity for the divine which, in its delicacy and precision, can be refined endlessly, and which indicates to them even more correctly what God wants from them in all of life’s situations. One can call these sense mystical in the broad sense, but they are, at least initially, given along with grace itself and as such are not really mystical phenomena, still less an unveiled experience of God.¹⁸⁶

In *Le Mystérion d’Origène* the issue is faced in a less analytic and more speculative way. In the section *Mystery and Incarnation*, Balthasar deals with the three aspects of the embodiment of the mystery: Christ, the Church, and the Scriptures. After presenting them in their “objectivity”, he moves to the necessary receptivity in the heart of the human subject, i. e. spiritual sensitivity. “Without this complement, the objective theology of Mystery would remain incomplete.”¹⁸⁷ Balthasar explains in fact that Origen applied this doctrine to the three mentioned aspects of the mystery and presents them one by one. In all the three cases, “one needs to believe in order to see.”¹⁸⁸

Besides the two works on Origen, the doctrine of the spiritual senses often resurfaces in other of Balthasar’s writings. The most conspicuous example is *The Glory of the Lord* 1.¹⁸⁹ In the first section of the book (*The Subjective Evidence*) Balthasar presents a host of authors who held a doctrine of the spiritual senses, many of whom he will draw upon to shape his own theory. He starts from the early Christian thinkers (Origen, Evagrius, Diadochus, and Pseudo-Macarius) and moves on to the medieval age (William of St. Thierry, William of Auxerre, Alexander of Hales, Albert, and Bonaventure). Particular attention is given to

184 Ibid.

185 Prin IV 4,10.

186 SF 218. GF 319: “Denn durch die Gnade hat der Christ ein Sensorium für das Göttliche erhalten, das in seiner Zartheit und Genauigkeit ins Unendliche verfeinert werden kann und das ihm immer richtiger angibt, was in jeder Lebenslage Gott von ihm will. Man kann diese Sinne ‘mystisch’ im weitere Sinne nennen, aber sie sind, wenigstens anfangsweise, mit der Gnade selbst gegeben und als solche nicht eigentlich mystische Phänomene, noch viel weniger eine hüllenlose Erfahrung Gottes.”

187 MO (I) 553; PMO 63: “Sans ce complément, la théologie ‘objective’ du Mystère resterait déficiente.”

188 MO (I) 554; PMO 65: “Il fallait croire pour voir.”

189 GL 1, Part II: The Subjective Evidence. Chapter 3: The Spiritual Senses 356–415. On Origen, specifically 359–362.

Ignatius of Loyola. Next, he turns toward major contemporary voices: Karl Barth, Romano Guardini, Gustav Siewerth, and Paul Claudel. Across their thought, Balthasar tracks the three fundamental elements of his doctrine of the spiritual senses. (i) The central role of human body—"It is with both body and soul that the living human being experiences the world and God."¹⁹⁰ (ii) The central role of Christ's body—"Flesh speaks to flesh; the Word chose this unmistakable language."¹⁹¹ (iii) The importance of the language of divine humility—"it is senses that perceive God's humility sensually. It is senses that see what God had to do in order to become visible. It is senses that hear what God's Word had to undertake in order to become audible to sensual ears."¹⁹²

The spiritual senses are clearly made to perceive the form of God's beauty; they are the receptive organs of his glory. The central role of the spiritual senses in Balthasar's theological aesthetic has been recently demonstrated by Mark McInroy. This centrality is grounded in Balthasar's own words: "My intention in the first part of my trilogy called *Aesthetic* was not merely to try our spiritual eyes to see Christ as he shows himself but, beyond that, to prove that all great and history-making theology always followed this method."¹⁹³ This proves that Balthasar's intention was not only to excavate the historical issue of spiritual sensibility, but to show its influence upon the best of theologies. Lying as it does at the very beginning of "history-making theology", it is likely that Balthasar would conceive of Origen's thought as revolving around the spiritual perception of God's self-disclosure. One might claim this interpretation is forced, but, as I will demonstrate, as early as the 1930s (thirty years before shaping his theological aesthetic) Balthasar was already detecting many elements of this approach to theology in Origen. To be sure, Balthasar's theological aesthetics contain more than can be drawn from patristic theology and, in general, from the authors he read in his youth. For example, Balthasar's formulation of the spiritual senses might be considered too "positive" on the role of sensibility, when compared to Origen. But this positivity comes from a tension rooted in Origen himself. Moreover, these roots can only be seen if one reads Origen's reflections on the spiritual senses in the frame of his entire thought, and not as a defined doctrine with clear-cut borders. And this wide-framed reading is exactly what Balthasar supplies.

190 GL 1, 396. H 1, 392: "Der wirkliche Mensch erfährt mit Leib und Seele: die Welt und in-
folgedessen auch Gott."

191 GL 1, 397. H 1, 392: "Fleisch spricht zu Fleisch; das Wort hat diese unüberhörbare Sprache
gewählt."

192 GL 1, 397. H 1, 392: "Sinne nehmen sinnlich die Demut Gottes wahr. Sinne sehen, was Gott
tun musste, um sichtbar zu werden, Sinne hören, was das Wort Gottes vorkehren musste,
um für sinnliche Ohren hörbar zu werden."

193 VON BALTHASAR, *Theology and Aesthetic* 66.

2. Why the Spiritual Senses?

Why does Balthasar decide to address this issue in *The Glory of the Lord 1*, thirty years after encountering it in Origen? The doctrine of the spiritual senses recaptures Balthasar's attention in a specific context: the discussion around the act of faith, often presented as "believing in order to see or seeing in order to believe?". In 1910 the issue took shape in Pierre Rousselot's article *Les yeux de la foi* (whose German edition would be edited, years later, by Balthasar himself).¹⁹⁴ Rousselot was an important figure in many of the pressing debates at the time of Balthasar's education. An exemplary instance is Rousselot's study on Thomas Aquinas's intellectualism. He reads the controversial and problematic issue of intellect in Thomas in what can be defined as a Kantian interpretative key. One of his aims is to show that Thomas's intellectualism anticipates neo-Kantianism, French spiritualism, and Catholic Modernism in their mutual distrust of the power of intellect.¹⁹⁵ In *Les yeux de la foi*, reflecting on the act of faith and reason, Rousselot insists on the epistemic priority of divine love; love gives us the "eyes of faith", which, in turn, empower the intellect to behold the rational basis of faith. Love gives us new eyes, says Rousselot, so the act of faith involves both knowledge and affection. He describes the act of faith as a cooperation of reason and grace, certainty and freedom (against a priority of reason/certainty claimed by Gardeil, Billot, and Bainvel). To explain his concept, he uses the image of two detectives who, while investigating identical evidence, reach opposite conclusions; in this scenario, only one has properly interpreted the evidence, showing the crucial role of subjectivity. The intellect, argues Rousselot, is illuminated by some sort of intuition, something impossible to rationalize. In the example, the "something" is the light of faith, given by God. We can see how Rousselot's claim might be accused of voluntarism (an accusation he indeed received). If the intellect is stimulated by nonrational divine love, how can arbitrariness be avoided?

In 1961 Balthasar published his thoughts on this issue in *Seeing the Form*, the first volume of *The Glory of the Lord*. Balthasar agrees with Rousselot, who "moves in the right direction", but is too focused on the subjective act of faith, neglecting

194 ROUSSELOT, *Les yeux de la foi* 241–259. 444–475. On Rousselot see the monographic number of *Gregorianum* 96/4 (2015). On the importance of Rousselot for the *Nouvelle Théologie*, see KIRWAN, *An Avant-Garde Theological Generation* 81–89. 108–109.

195 HILAIRE, *Thomas Aquinas, Pierre Rousselot, and the Performative Aesthetics of Contemplative Theology* 5: "His insistence on the imperfection of all science and rational systems was intended in part to resist the legacy of the generation of Thomists previous to him who typically emphasized the exhaustiveness and certitude of rational concepts and the totalizing worldviews that could be deduced from them."

the object.¹⁹⁶ For Rousselot, the eyes of faith are a gift that empower us to see the rationality of faith; for Balthasar, it is rather the luminous object of revelation that enlightens the eyes of faith—in a certain sense, sight is given by that which it sees. If Rousselot speaks of signs and evidence, Balthasar speaks of form. Here, the spiritual senses are the subjective correlate of the objective evidence of revelation. These senses are opened up by the shining of their object, what Balthasar calls *lumen*. Jesus, the supreme form of revelation, is both object of the act of faith and giver of the eyes by which he is recognized: “This means that God does not come primarily as teacher for us (‘true’), as a purposeful ‘redeemer’ for us (‘good’), but for *himself*, to display and to radiate the splendor of his eternal triune love in that ‘disinterestedness’ which true love has *in* common with true beauty.”¹⁹⁷ Balthasar defends the objective evidence of revelation, whose subjective correlate is the spiritual senses. In this way, he seems to circumvent the question of the priority of faith or intellect in the act of faith—it is a mutual priority. This expression was already used by Rousselot, but Balthasar reconfigures it in light of what is revealed, rather than in light of the cognitive structure of the subject. Without denying Rousselot’s achievement viz. the role of subjectivity, Balthasar insists on the biblical doctrine of the light of faith as an objective element, present first and foremost in God. The soul, perceiving the form of Jesus, experiences this perception as an act of faith; at the same time, it is made possible by a certain *connaturalitas* of the soul.

The doctrine of the spiritual senses is directly related to this paradoxical answer. The act of faith occurs “where the profane human senses, making possible the act of faith, become spiritual, and where faith becomes sensory in order to be human.”¹⁹⁸ Where did Balthasar’s attention to the “objective” aspect of revelation come from? Among other important elements that inspired *The Glory of the Lord*, Balthasar’s idea of the spiritual senses operating in the act of faith came from his interest in the Fathers. His reading of Origen is a particularly good example. If de Lubac read Origen for his ideas of natural desire and the spiritual sense of Scripture, Balthasar tended towards a reading that favoured the Logos. The Alexandrian’s love for Scripture is, for Balthasar, a perfect example of the primacy of

196 GL 1, 171: “Rousselot, in his manner of expression and thought-habits, still remains too close to the Kantianism he is trying to surpass.” H 1, 170: “Rousselot bleibt in seiner Ausdruckweise und Denkgewohnheit noch immer zu nah dem Kantianismus, den er überholen will.”

197 MW 81. ZSW 68: “Das bedeutet: Gott kommt nicht primär als Lehrer für uns (‘wahr’), als zweckvoller ‘Erlöser’ für uns (‘gut’), sondern um SICH, das Herrliche seiner ewigen dreieinigen Liebe zu zeigen und zu verstrahlen, in jener ‘Interesslosigkeit’, die die wahre Liebe mit wahrer Schönheit gemein hat.”

198 GL 1, 357. H 1, 352–353: “Die Mitte des Begegnungsaktes muss also dort liegen, wo die menschlichen profanen Sinne, den Glaubensakt ermöglichend, geistlich werden, und der Glaube, um menschlich zu sein, sinnlich wird.”

revelation and the fascination it provokes in man. It is no coincidence that Origen articulates the same paradox as Balthasar. For Origen, it is Jesus who activates the spiritual senses, but at the same time “Christ does not appear to those without eyes of faith.”¹⁹⁹ Following Carabine, we could say that “*Herrlichkeit* itself can be regarded as a commentary on this text which echoes Origen’s expression of the self-revelation of God as the visibility of doxa: ‘so that we who were unable to look upon the glory of that marvelous light, when placed in the greatness of his Godhead, may by his being made to us brightness, obtain the means of beholding the divine light by looking upon the brightness (Prin I, 2, 8).’”²⁰⁰ Balthasar’s answer to Roussetot’s problem, despite reaching maturity only in *The Glory of the Lord*, was already taking shape in Balthasar’s confrontation with Origen, as we can see in *Le Mystérion d’Origène*:

The Logos is actively present only in those hearts ready to listen to him. It is here that, in the doctrine of Mystery, the pivotal notion of subjectivity has its place, a notion largely developed in the admirable doctrine of the internal senses and spiritual discernment. Without this addition, the objective theology of mystery would be incomplete. Man alone cannot teach theology; he will always build an anthropology. It is necessary for the interior master to disclose the spiritual senses, the five lamps of the wise virgins.²⁰¹

Already in 1936, while working on Origen, Balthasar was formulating his idea of theological aesthetics, the likes of which, he hoped, could safeguard the role of subjectivity without forgetting the objective theology of mystery. Pivotal to this idea was the doctrine of the spiritual senses. The occasion for discovering the importance of spiritual perception in Origen came to a young Balthasar through Karl Rahner’s article *Le début d’une doctrine des cinq sens spirituelles chez Origène* (1932).²⁰² Here, Rahner presents the two prerequisites for a proper doctrine of the spiritual senses: a fivefold structure, and non-metaphorical consideration of the senses, criteria he drew from the Jesuit Augustin-François Poulain.²⁰³ Rahner col-

199 CC II 65–67.

200 CARABINE, *The Fathers* 78.

201 MO (I) 553; PMO 63: “Mais le logos n’est présent *ἐνεργεία* que dans les cœurs prêts à l’écouter. Et c’est là qu’intervient dans la doctrine du Mystérion le rôle capital de la ‘subjectivité’, largement développé dans l’admirable doctrine sur les sens intérieurs et le discernement des esprits. Sans ce complément, la théologie ‘objective’ du Mystère resterait déficiente. L’homme ne peut enseigner la théo-logie, il ne fera jamais que de l’anthropo-logie. Il faut le maître intérieur qui ouvre les sens intérieurs, ces cinq lampes des vierges sages.”

202 RAHNER, *Le début d’une doctrine des cinq sens spirituels chez Origène*. To this follows: RAHNER, *La Doctrine des “Sens Spirituels” au Moyen-Âge* 236–299. Balthasar mentions Rahner’s studies on the spiritual senses for the first time in October 1934. Quoted in LOCHBRUNNER, Hans Urs von Balthasar und seine Philosophenfreunde 15.

203 POULAIN, *Des grâces d’oraison*.

lected many Origenian passages on the spiritual senses, believing they amounted to a coherent doctrine; one that construed the spiritual senses as a tool of direct, mystical perception of God. With Rahner, Balthasar prefers an analogic reading of the senses, against the classic metaphoric interpretation. There are, in fact, many texts in Origen where the senses are presented as a metaphor of intellectual knowledge, especially when he comments on Pr 2,5 and the spiritual sense of the Scripture.²⁰⁴ Explaining the passage “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”, Origen asks: “What else is ‘to see God in the heart’ but to understand and know him with the mind?”²⁰⁵ Perception means nothing but intellectual comprehension, knowledge. The metaphoric interpretation of the senses goes together with the Origenian idea that, in order for the spiritual senses to work, the bodily passions must be subdued. That said, this “intellectualistic language”, claims Balthasar, “should not mislead us into interpreting Origen in a rationalistic sense, nor indeed to interpret him mystically as did Evagrius.”²⁰⁶ Balthasar explains that in the background of this doctrine is the doctrine of the spiritual body which, falling away from God, becomes fleshly.

3. The Spiritual Body

The center of this notion lies in the question of whether the intelligences can contemplate God *directly*, without any sort of mediation. Since for Origen “God is incomprehensible and immeasurable”²⁰⁷, we must reject this possibility. Every *voûç* needs a mediation in order to contemplate God, who created all things with an original body. This is what Origen calls the “spiritual body”. Origen is clear in maintaining that nothing can exist without a body: “Any being, with the exception of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, can live apart from a body. Life without a body is found in the Trinity alone.”²⁰⁸ As Crouzel suggests, Origen’s definition of life before the fall as “incorporeal” does not refer to a disembodied soul, but simply a soul without a *corporeal* body.²⁰⁹ Following Paul (“flesh and blood shall not

204 Prin I 1,9; CC VII 34.

205 Prin I 1,9.

206 GL 1, 360. H 1, 356: “Diese intellektualistische Sprache darf nicht dazu verleiten, Origenes rationalistisch auszulegen, allerdings auch nicht mystisch in der Weise von Evagrius.”

207 Prin I 1,5.

208 Ibid. II 2,2: “Logic and reason compel us to understand that rational natures were created first of all, and that material substance can really be distinguished from them only in theory, and that they neither live nor have lived without it.” Also *ibid.* I 6,4: “to exist without a bodily element is a thing that belongs only to the nature of God, that is, of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”

209 CROUZEL, *La doctrine origénienne du corps ressuscité* 175–200. 241–266. One relevant piece of evidence for the central role of a spiritual body in Origen is the fact that such

inherit the kingdom of God”²¹⁰), Origen believes that our corporeal body will not resurrect in its fleshly condition. However, he concedes that something must be judged after death, and only the “uneducated” believe that our body will “perish so completely after death that nothing whatever of its substance is left.”²¹¹ This passage from *De principiis* is fundamental because of the “whatever of its substance”: death is described as nothing but a change of qualities. This change is expressed by the recurrent Paulinian metaphor of the seed; our body, as a seed of wheat, will die, giving birth to a new sheaf. This metaphor, together with the idea that “there are two men in every one of us”²¹², prevents one from understanding the spirit/flesh division as exclusively moral. Origen seems to believe in an “inner man”, not only as an ethical attitude opposed to sin, but as an actual, immaterial element of human nature, present even in the earthly condition. In the transition from our fallen to our spiritual condition there is a transformation. The flesh of the earth is raised again to the glory of a spiritual body:

This change (...) consists in some act that is worthy of the divine grace; for we believe that it will be a change of like character to that in which ‘a bare grain of wheat or of some other kind’ is sown in the earth, but ‘God gives it a body as it pleased him’ (1 Cor 15, 37–38) after the grain of wheat itself has first died.²¹³

Origen believes that it is God who gives us a spiritual body after the death of our material one. This passage suggests a temporal sequence: the corporeal body precedes, and eventually yields to, the spiritual. Once the first dies, the latter will arise. Elsewhere, however, Origen suggests a deeper kind of union between the two, claiming that “there is not one body which we now use in lowliness and corruption and weakness and a different one which we are to use hereafter in incorruption and power and glory”, but that “this same body, having cast off the weaknesses of its present existence, will be transformed into a thing of glory and

a body is described as present even at the highest moment of holiness: “(...) whether it is possible for rational beings to endure altogether without bodies when they have reached the height of holiness and blessedness – [a thing which] to me indeed seems very difficult and well-nigh impossible” (Prin II 2,1). Among others, Simonetti, Edwards, Hennessey and Chadwick have underlined the presence of the spiritual body in Origen’s cosmology: CHADWICK, Origen, Celsus and the Resurrection of the Body 83–102; HENNESSEY, Origen of Alexandria. The Fate of the Soul and the Body after Death. There are, however, some scholars who do not accept the congruence of the spiritual body in Origen’s explanation of creation, due to the controversial interpretation of the ‘cloak of skin’ of Gen. 3:21: PĀRVAN, Genesis 1–3: Augustine and Origen on the Coats of Skins 56–92.

210 1 Cor. 15:50.

211 Prin III 6,5.

212 2 Cor. 4:16; Rom. 7:22; Eph. 3:16.

213 Prin II 10,3.

made spiritual."²¹⁴ Even if the idea of temporal transition remains, it is suggested that there is only one body with different qualities, not two. We might therefore conclude that the spiritual and earthly body should be distinguished logically, not chronologically. Further confirmation of this hypothesis can be found among Origen's reflections on creation, since, for him, the end is always like the beginning²¹⁵.

And just as we would (...) need to have gills and other endowment[s] of fish if it were necessary for us to live underwater in the sea, so those who are going to inherit [the] kingdom of heaven and be in superior places must have spiritual bodies. The previous form does not disappear, even if its transition to the more glorious [state] occurs, just as the form of Jesus, Moses and Elijah in the Transfiguration was not [a] different [one] than what it had been. (...) It is sown a psychic body, it is raised a spiritual body' (1 Cor. 15,44) (...). [A]lthough the form is saved, we are going to put away nearly [every] earthly quality in the resurrection (...) [for] 'flesh and blood cannot inherit [the] kingdom' (1 Cor. 15,50).²¹⁶

This passage is a very precious resource for understanding the role of body and corporeality in Origen. Here, it is argued that material substance—the human body—is only detachable from intelligence. The body is not a later addition to the *νοῦς*. They are always-already conjoined. This extract clearly confirms that, between the corporeal and the spiritual body, there is only a difference of status,

214 Ibid. III 6,6.

215 Ibid. I 6,1. Another evidence is given by an indirect source, commonly considered to be reliable by the scholars. Procopius's *Commentarii in Genesim* refer to the opinion of some allegorists, among which there might be Origen in the missing *Commentary on Genesis*: *Οἱ δὲ ἀλληγοροῦντες μετὰ τὸν εἰρημένον διασπρμόν φασι, ὡς ὁ μὲν <χατ' εἰκόνα> τὴν ψυχὴν σημαίνει, ὁ δὲ ἀπὸ τοῦ χοῦ πλαστεῖς τὸ λεπτομερὲς σῶμα καὶ ἄξιον τῆς ἐν παραδείσῳ διαγωγῆς, ὡς τινεὶς 'ἀγγοειδὲς' ἐκάλεσαν. Οἱ δὲ δερμάτινοι χιτῶνες τὸ <δέρμα καὶ κρέας με ἐνέδυσαν, ὅστέοις δὲ καὶ νεύποις με ἐνεῖραν>. Τῶ δὲ ἀγγοειδεῖ τὴν ψυχὴν ἐποχεῖσθαι πρώτῳ λέγουσιν, ὅπερ ὕστερον ἐνεδύσατο τοὺς δερματίνους χιτῶνας* (p. 151 METZLER). Writing about the "two creations" of Gen. 1:26 and 2:7, Origen refers to them as logically, but not chronologically distinct. Gen. 1:26 describes the creation of the rational *νοῦς*, while Gen. 2:7 refers to the spiritual body, *tenue corpus* of Adam in Eden. In this schema, the cloak of flesh (Gen. 3:21) represents only the postlapsarian body, our earthly body. If we accept this fragment, it is clear that, for Origen, the *νοῦς* always possessed a spiritual body. The simultaneity of the creation of nous and spiritual bodies can also be found in the *Commentary on Genesis* of Didymus the Blind, who was heavily influenced by Origen: NAUTIN, Didyme l'Aveugle: Sur la Genèse, in particular Gen. Com. 108,5–7.14–15 (where he claims that a man in paradise could not have a dense body); Gen. Com. 118,14–16 (where he hints at a different kind of corporeal substance appropriate for life in paradise); Gen. Com. 107,4–7 (where he states that man in paradise was immaterial).

216 Origen, Fragment on Ps. 1:5, in: Methodius, De resurrectione I 22–23 (GCS 27, 244–248), and Epiphanius, Panarion omnium haeresium 64,14–15 (GCS Epiph. 2, 423–425); trans.: DECHOW, Dogma and Mysticism 374–375.

a change of qualities (and not of form). There is but one body for each rational creature, a body that becomes “fleshly”, when transformed into “the grosser and more solid condition” by the descent of the soul, and whose “spiritual” qualities reawaken after the resurrection. Balthasar is therefore stating that, between the earthly and the spiritual body, there is a qualitative, not a substantial, change.²¹⁷ Origen seems to hold a less negative opinion of corporeality than expected: if it is true that the flesh will not inherit the Kingdom, we might say that the body will, together with the spirit, in a renewed, transfigured condition. What will be lost is only the flesh (*σάρξ*), not the body (*σῶμα*).

4. Balthasar’s Interpretation of Origen’s Spiritual Senses

Following this interpretation of the spiritual body, fleshly sensibility is nothing less than “the fall and scattering into the material of an original and richly abundant capacity to perceive God and divine things.”²¹⁸ Balthasar locates the richness of this sensibility in the peculiarity of each sense: “Even though in the last analysis these senses are always reaching out towards God, the sole inner teacher, the divine WORD still encounters the soul in such a variety of ways that it satisfies each sense in a different way.”²¹⁹ On this matter, a significant difference can be found between Karl Rahner and Balthasar.²²⁰

Rahner and Balthasar shared a similar background. In 1939, they worked together on a plan for a new dogmatic, and were very close until Vatican II, when their differences in method and intent became clear.²²¹ Two of their joint interests are relevant to our research. First, the importance of eschatology: *Catholicisme*, translated into German by Balthasar, and enthusiastically reviewed by Rahner, played a fundamental role for both.²²² Secondly, their interest in the Church Fathers. This interest was mediated by some common friends: not only Henri de

217 MO (I) 537; PMO 43. Origen speaks of *incrassatio* of the soul: H38Ps 1,8.

218 GL 1, 360. H 1, 356: “Die fünf vereinzelt sinnlichen Sinne wären nur die ins Materielle gefallene Zerstreung eines ursprünglichen reichen und füllenhaften Wahrnehmungsvermöges für Gott und göttliche Dinge.”

219 SF 218. GF 319–320: “Wenn auch diese Sinne letztlich immer zu Gott, dem einzigen inneren Lehrer, verspüren, so begegnet doch das göttliche WORT der Seele in solchem Reichtum, dass Es jeden Sinn in anderer Weise sättigt.”

220 TKB 298. On the relation between Balthasar and Rahner see WILLIAMS, Balthasar and Rahner 11–34; LÖSER, Karl Rahner und Hans Urs von Balthasar als junge Theologen 401–410.

221 ZSW 112, declares that this planned dogmatic will become, between 1965 and 1976, the 5 volumes of *Mysterium Salutis*, which contains contributions from, among others, Balthasar and Rahner. See FEINER, *Mysterium Salutis. Grundriss heilsgeschichtlicher Dogmatik*.

222 In: ZkTh 63 (1939) 443–444.

Lubac, but also Hugo Rahner (brother of Karl and friend of Balthasar), and Aloisius Lieske, whose work on Origen was lauded by Rahner and Balthasar alike.²²³ In the years of the composition of *Spirit and Fire*, Rahner was working on *Aszese und Mystik in der Väterzeit*, a revised translation of Marcel Viller's *La Spiritualité des premiers siècles chrétiens*.²²⁴ Rahner, for his part, expressed his deep appreciation for Balthasar's patristic works,²²⁵ indicating that the two were in dialogue when writing their respective works on the Fathers.

Their differences, however, are already evident in these studies. The reason for their divergence probably lies in the different background of their education. Germanistic, Lyon, and Munich for Balthasar; philosophy, Freiburg, and Valkenburg for Rahner. De Lubac and Przywara for the former, Heidegger and Maréchal for the latter. While Balthasar developed a phenomenological method, even in his reading of the Fathers, Rahner always applied a transcendental method. At stake in the transcendental method was the *condition of possibility* of man's fulfillment. The phenomenological method was more concerned with *form* (*Gestalt*), a unity that is more than the sum of the parts, or the "horizon of possibility" itself. These two different approaches/methodologies continued to develop, becoming, around the time of the Council, antagonistic vis-à-vis universal eschatology. This dispute will find concrete expression in 1966 with Balthasar's *Cordula oder der Ernstfall*, an open critique of Rahner's concept of "anonymous Christianity". Although I will not delve into the details of this debate, it is interesting to trace the origin of the opposed attitudes to their original discrepancy—the role of nature towards grace. This dynamic, as we observed, is implicit in the reading of Origen's cosmology as either symbolic or sacramental. If, for Rahner, the object of spiritual perception is God himself, for Balthasar the object is the divine embodied Logos, and, therefore, the whole world transfigured by incarnation:

223 Particularly important works of Hugo Rahner are: *Die Gottesgeburt. Die Lehre der Kirchenväter von der Geburt Christi aus dem Herzen der Kirche und der Gläubigen*; *Das Menschenbild des Origenes*; *Taufe und geistliches Leben bei Origenes*. For more indications on Rahner's patristic interest, see BACHT, *Theologie in Valkenburg* 23; NEUFELD, *Die Brüder Rahner* 98–99; LÖSER, *Geschenkte Wahrheit* 34. It is furthermore important to remember that Rahner reviewed the work of Lieske, as also Balthasar did.

224 Balthasar positively reviewed this work. Rezension: *Aszese und Mystik in der Väterzeit. Ein Abriß von Marcel Viller S. J. und Karl Rahner S. J.*, in: *StZ* 136 (1939) 334.

225 Rahner, Rezension: H. U. von Balthasar, *Die Gnostischen Centurien des Maximus Confessor*, in: *ZkTh* 66 (1942) 153–156. Rahner also quotes *Le Mystérion d'Origène* in: *RSR* 26 (1936) 513–526 and 27 (1939) 38–64. Many other examples could be brought forward to show that the *Grundstimmung* of this relation was a sincere appreciation, such as the speeches that both held in the honor of each other's 60th birthday. Balthasar, *Karl Rahner zum 60. Geburtstag am 5. März 1964*, in: *Neue Zürcher Nachrichten*, 29.2.1964, Beilage *Christliche Kultur* Nr. 8; Rahner, *Hans Urs von Balthasar – 60. Geburtstag*, in: *Civitas* 20 (1965) 602–605.

The object of the 'spiritual senses' is not the *Deus nudus*, but the whole of the 'upper world' which, in Christ, has descended to earth and manifests itself in the fulness of the cosmos of Sacred Scripture: this is where Origen's spiritual senses are openly exercised and it is from here, therefore, that they should be interpreted.²²⁶

In the Origenian threefold partition of knowledge (*ethica, physica, enoptica*), spiritual perception is, for Rahner, located on the third level, the enoptic. According to Rahner, the senses are tools of mystical knowledge, their objective correlates being the *Deus nudus* and the angels. We could say that he derives the function of the spiritual senses from anthropology, specifically from his notion of *Vorgriff*. Balthasar, however, starts from theology, specifically the notion of incarnation. Furthermore, Rahner relies heavily on the (many) passages where Origen claims that spiritual perception is reserved for the "Perfects", those who have attained the beatific vision through their intellectual and moral progress.²²⁷ This mystical interpretation is also supported by multiple passages from the *Selecta in Psalmos*, where the active life is described as a preparation for the contemplative life. The latter, it is argued, is superior, because it does not rely on a fallen body/sensibility.²²⁸ It is specifically here that Balthasar departs from Rahner. Balthasar wanted to reveal a different value of the spiritual senses, discovered through his work on Evagrius Ponticus.²²⁹ In this exposition, he shows that the *Selecta in Psalmos*, which lead Rahner to his strongly mystical interpretation, are in fact Evagrian, not Origenian.²³⁰ Leaving aside the problem of the authenticity of these *Selecta*, I would like to move directly to Balthasar's consideration of the spiritual senses in Origen, to show how such a problem is relevant for his personal reading of the

226 GL 1, 361. H 1, 357: "Entscheidend ist, dass der Gegenstand der geistlichen Sinne nicht der *Deus nudus* ist, sondern die ganze obere Welt, die in Christus auf die Erde abgestiegen ist und sich in der Fülle des Kosmos der Heiligen Schrift manifestiert: hier offenkundig üben sich die origenischen geistlichen Sinne, von hier aus müssen sie deshalb gedeutet werden." This is confirmed by some Origenian texts: "(...) a sight which can see things superior to corporeal beings, the cherubim or seraphim being obvious instances, and a hearing which can receive impressions of sounds that have no objective existence in the air." (CC I 48). CIO I 25,161: "The Savior shines on creatures that have intellect and sovereign reason, that their minds may see their proper objects of vision, and so he is the light of the intellectual world."

227 As an example: CCT I 4.

228 GL 1, 360 n. 1: "Rahner's work is dated only in the sense that he bases his interpretation on those parts of the Commentary on the Psalms which I have since demonstrated belong to Evagrius." H 1, 355 n. 1: "Rahners Arbeit ist nur insofern überholt, als er die Deutung auf jenen Teilen des Psalmenkommentars aufbaut, die unterdessen von mir als Evagrius Ponticus gehörig nachgewiesen worden sind."

229 VON BALTHASAR, *Die Hiera des Evagrius* 86–106. 181–206.

230 Confirmed then by the study of RONDEAU, *Le commentaire sur le Psaumes d'Evagre le Pontique* 307–348.

Alexandrian. While, for Rahner, spiritual sensitivity is located on the third level of knowledge, the enoptic, for Balthasar the spiritual senses belong to the physic. He is well aware that Origen is not univocal on this matter:

Both approaches to understanding the world can be found in Origen, who understands the spiritual senses, on the one hand, as the ('normal') development of a living faith, but who considers spiritual and physical senses, on the other hand, as irreconcilable: where the spiritual eye is open, the physical eye must close.²³¹

It is of course true that Origen himself gave this teaching a spiritualizing hue by bringing the bodily senses and the spiritual senses into a mutual relationship of total opposition: it is impossible, he says, for the external eyes or ears and the internal eyes or ears to be open at the same time.²³²

Balthasar believes that, despite certain controversial passages, Origen upholds the grandeur of the corporeal world, and that, moreover, this is due to his emphasis on spiritual perception. Spiritual sensitivity should not be seen as a mystical enlightenment detached from concrete reality, but a mode of perception within it. Two main pieces of evidence support Balthasar's argument for the perceptive value of the spiritual senses. The first is the hylomorphic metaphysical framework of Origen's doctrine of the spiritual body. As clearly stated in *De principiis*, God alone is incorporeal, "incomprehensible and immeasurable."²³³ In other words, it is impossible for created intelligences to achieve direct contemplation of God. According to Origen, they always need some sort of mediation: a spiritual body. Spiritual senses are just his way of describing the perceptive tool(s) of this body. However, as we saw above, Balthasar claims that, since God through Christ has manifested himself in the fullness of the cosmos of Sacred Scripture, the object of the spiritual senses is not (as Rahner wanted) pure divinity, but the whole of the present world, saturated with the glory of the Lord. The senses are not instruments of mystical divination, or portals to an unveiled experience of God (who is beyond such access). Fortunately, thanks to the incarnation of the Logos in Christ, the Scriptures, and the Church, our perception has been renewed. The dualistic interpretation is rejected. Our same earthly senses are made heavenly. Not only does the spiritual body exist before sin and after the resurrection, but

231 CL 285. KL 283: "Beide weltanschaulichen Motive finden sich bei Origenes, der einerseits die geistlichen Sinne als die ('normale') Entfaltung des lebendigen Glaubens versteht, andererseits geistliche und sinnliche Sinne für unvereinbar hält: wo das geistliche Auge sich öffnet, schließt sich das sinnliche."

232 ET 2, 478. ST 2, 489: "Freilich hat Origenes selbst dieser Lehre einen spiritualistischen Anstrich gegeben, in dem er die sinnlichen Sinne und die geistlichen in ein vollkommenes Gegensatzverhältnis zueinander brachte. Es können, sagt er, nicht die äußern und die innern Augen oder Ohren zugleich offen sein."

233 Prin I 1,5.

is somehow operative in our earthly condition, in the active use of our spiritual senses. The two bodies are therefore two sides of the same substance. The spiritual senses are strictly bound to their corporeal equivalents.

A second argument is the peculiarity of each sense, which Balthasar finds in Origen, but not in Evagrius or Diadochus. In *Spirit and Fire* Balthasar presents the five senses separately, relying on the Origenian statement that “there is a general sense for the divine which is subdivided into several kinds.”²³⁴ For Balthasar, “the tremendous significance of the doctrine of the inner senses is revealed fully only by looking into the activity of the individual senses.”²³⁵ Balthasar is sure of a more-than-metaphorical significance of the senses: “Only he can see, hear, touch, taste and smell Christ who is able to perceive Christ as the true Light, as the Word of the Father, as the Bread of Life, as the fragrant spikenard of the Bridegroom who hastens to come”²³⁶, and further explains that “each sense contains a different mode of spiritual contact with the divine.”²³⁷ There is no general mystical unity, since the Word is expressed through different phenomena (since the Word is not only in Christ but also in the Church and in the Scriptures). So too is our perception differentiated. Spiritual sensitivity must be interpreted as fivefold, because the perception of the divine, in his manifold splendor, is a multi-layered phenomenon, which demands to be perceived in its complex entirety:

According to Origen, these divine things can never be reduced to a mystical unity without modes, but, rather, they possess a fullness and a glory that far transcend the lower fullness and glory, of which material multiplicity is only a distant reflection and likeness. Both sensibilities are thus but different states of the one and only sensibility.²³⁸

We can now understand what Balthasar calls unity-in-duality. Spiritual perception is always-already *in* us, not something reserved for a future condition, or for mystics alone. The pneumatic man, intellectual and immortal, can perceive, with

234 CC I 48.

235 SF 232. GF 342: “Die überragende Bedeutung der Lehre von den inneren Sinnen enthüllt sich erst ganz bei der Einsicht in die Tätigkeit der einzelnen Sinne.”

236 GL 1, 360. H 1, 356: “Freilich sieht, hört, tastet, schmeckt und erduftet ihn nur, wessen geistliche Sinne wieder lebendig sind, wer ihn als das wahre Licht, das Wort des Vaters, das Brot des Lebens, die wohlriechende Narde des vorausseilenden Bräutigams wahrzunehmen vermag.”

237 SF 232. GF 342: “Jeder Sinn enthält eine andere Weise geistigen Kontaktes mit dem Göttlichen.”

238 GL 1, 360. H 1, 356: “[Die göttliche Dinge] (...) die für Origenes sich nirgends auf eine mystische weiselose Einheit reduzieren, sondern eine die untere weite übersteigende Fülle und Herrlichkeit besitzen, wovon die materielle Vielfalt nur ein ferner Abglanz und ein Gleichnis ist. Sind also beide Sinnlichkeiten – ontisch wie noetisch – nur verschiedene Zustände der gleichen und einen, so folgt allerdings (...).”

his spiritual senses, the intellectual proprieties of the upper world. But in Origen's cosmology, the upper world has descended to earth and manifests itself in the cosmos of Sacred Scripture, of Christ's body and the concrete world. God the Father does not remain closed within Himself but gives his Logos. Our spiritual senses are the tools of perception of this reality, which is fully entangled with the corporeal, worldly situation. The incarnation instilled our perception with grace. Nor can this be interpreted as an élitist grace, as in the mystical experience. Grace begins with Christ's incarnation, which is directed to every last man on earth, being the condition of possibility for the active use of our spiritual senses. Indeed, these are the perceptive tools of the logos-structure of reality.²³⁹

If the senses are activated by the Incarnation, it means they were somehow closed beforehand. This is clear in Origen: "As human beings, all of us have within us both sight and blindness. Adam could both see and not see."²⁴⁰ Every man is born blind, but "because he had become blind, Jesus came to make him see."²⁴¹ We may wonder why God does not illuminate the senses straightaway after the fall, when their activation would have been a great solace. The answer is simple, if we recall the relation Origen establishes between spiritual and corporeal bodies. Since the spiritual is entangled with the corporeal, the former must emerge out of the latter, following the law of progression. This progressive emergence, which preserves human freedom, comes from the divine decision to include us as participants in our own salvation. It also reinforces the idea that there is no spiritual sight without physical sight; to see with the eyes of the heart means to behold something deeper in the corporeal world. This "something" is exactly the mystery of the Logos who dwells among us—it is the God who makes himself known.²⁴² The descent of the Logos makes it possible to perceive spiritual realities—or better, to perceive the spiritual aspect of *this reality*, to perceive the incarnate Logos, who is *imago et splendor dei invisibilis*.²⁴³ The spiritual senses, activated by Christ's incarnation, allow us both to recognize him and to follow him in the concrete sit-

239 Origen's Logos-theology is pervasive and mirrored in the triadic structure of his meditation on the three books of Solomon (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs): ethike, the stage of moral life; physike, the observation of the world from the perspective of the forms, and enoptike, the contemplation of the divine itself. Spiritual perception is to be found at the physike level, and not, as we might think, at enoptike: since God incarnated as Logos, it is through the physik stage that we may reach divine contemplation.

240 HLC 16.

241 Ibid.

242 CPs 4,7: "Just as with physical light which enables those with healthy eyes to see both the light itself and other sensible objects, so too does God come with a certain power to the mind of each one. As long as those to whom he comes are not all closed off and their ability to see clearly not impeded by their passions, God makes himself known and leads those illumined by him to a knowledge of other spiritual things."

243 CCT prol. 2,17.

uation of the world: “We have foot and steps with whom we act on this earth, we have steps of the inner man thanks to which we can walk along the way that says ‘I am the way, the truth, the life’”.²⁴⁴

5. Analogy and Presence

The most important element of the analogical interpretation of the spiritual senses is the notion of the presence of the Word. Prior to Balthasar, Poulain had explained this notion as the necessary precondition for the analogy between the two kinds of sensibility.²⁴⁵ If, in the analogy of disproportionality (metaphor), there is no real sensibility at play, since the proportionality is set by the observer, Balthasar believes that, for the spiritual senses, proper proportionality is valid because the common denominator is sensibility itself—the issue is therefore to understand what kind of sensibility this is. For Rahner, it is a mystical sensibility, directed only to God. For Balthasar, it is a versatile sensibility, directed to the diversely embodied Logos. When we see with the eyes of the heart, says Balthasar, we are not simply understanding something on an intellectual level: we are experiencing the Logos as it was “before becoming flesh” and, by virtue of the Incarnation, seeing the world in its original, fundamental pattern: “The spiritual senses are the human range of senses adapted to the riches and the variety of the paths taken by God in his revelation, with the capacity simultaneously to ‘see his glory’, ‘hear his word’, ‘breathe his fragrance’, ‘taste his sweetness’, and ‘touch his presence.’”²⁴⁶ It is clear that the idea of presence is the real point of contention between Balthasar and Rahner. For Rahner, the senses remain *mystical* tools because he downplays the personal and surprising aspect of the Word’s presence in the “variety of paths”, placing more emphasis on what is “already” present in the structure of human thought. We saw this in the previous chapter, viz. the supernatural existential. Balthasar, on the contrary, turns his attention to the Word, who, in the richness of his many names, reveals himself in surprising ways. Origen’s thought is not, for Balthasar, grounded in generic, noetic mysticism. This interpretation is supported by the special attention Origen gives to each particular sense—each of which

244 H36Ps 4,1.

245 POULAIN, *Des grâces d’oraison* 93 (italics altered): “Does the soul possess intellectual spiritual senses, having some resemblance to the bodily senses, so that, in an analogous manner and in diverse ways, she is able to perceive the *presence* of pure spirits, and the presence of God in particular?”

246 ST 2, 479. ET 2, 489: “Die geistlichen Sinne sind das dem Reichtum und der Mannigfaltigkeit der Offenbarungswege Gottes zugeordnete menschliche Sensorium, das in einem seine Glorie schauen, sein Wort hören, seinen Duft atmen, seine Süßigkeit schmecken, seine Gegenwart ertasten kann.”

captures a particular aspect of the Word: "Sight: proximity // Hearing: distance // Touch: sacramentality // Smell and Taste: assimilation."²⁴⁷ Balthasar sees the plurality of these senses as a clue that their object is not simply the "naked God". Presenting this argument in *Le Mystérion d'Origène*, he explains that, for Origen, the senses operate upon the three "aspects" of the Mystery: the Christ, the Church, and the Scriptures. In each of these aspects, the senses are described as a tool of the "penetrating gaze". In the Church, the senses are able to detect the glory hidden "behind a darker cover."²⁴⁸ In Christ, they are used to see the resurrected body, since, for Origen, "it is impossible for mortal eyes to see an immortal body."²⁴⁹ Finally, regarding Scripture, "You think they are obscure? Believe, and you will find them."²⁵⁰

Under these three aspects, Balthasar detects a game of revelation-obscurity initiated by the Logos. However, the obscurity they exhibit is not only due to human weakness: Christ was "sent not only to be seen, but also to stay hidden."²⁵¹ In the Church, this obscurity is to be found in difficulty of doctrine: "Who would know that light is good if we did not perceive the darkness of night? This contradiction is the heritage left by Christ to the Church."²⁵² Balthasar defines this contradiction as "the esoterism of a double veil, symbol and faith: for both, an immediate apprehension is impossible."²⁵³ It is not insignificant that the section on the spiritual senses in *Le Mystérion d'Origène* follows the section "Eucharist and Scripture." In the earlier section, Balthasar attempts to shed light on an ambivalence in Origen concerning the doctrine of the Eucharist. Some of Origen's texts defend the real presence while others discuss "spiritual manducation."²⁵⁴ Balthasar suggests that "this opposition makes violence, if not to the letter, to the spirit of Origen."²⁵⁵ Spiritual sensibility does not eliminate the fleshly senses, despite being a new form of perception. On the contrary, they are elevated:

247 Balthasar's personal notes on Origen in preparation to *Spirit and Fire*.

248 MO (I) 555; PMO 67: "Sous un vêtement plus obscur"

249 MO (I) 554; PMO 66: "Car il est impossible de voir avec des yeux périssable un corps impérissable." Quoting Origen, HLC 4.

250 Frler 39.

251 CC II 67.

252 MO (I) 555; PMO 67: "Qui saurait que la lumière est bonne si nous ne sentions pas les ténèbres de la nuit? Cette contradiction est l'héritage laissé par le Christ à l'Église." Quoting Origen, HNm 9,1.

253 MO (I) 556; PMO 68–69: "Les trois aspects objectifs du Mystère se complètent ainsi dans le subjectif et sont, par l'esotérisme d'un double voile, symbole et foi, dérobés à toute saisie immédiate."

254 MO (I) 548–549; PMO 59.

255 MO (I) 550; PMO 60: "Cette opposition fait violence, sinon à la lettre, du moins à l'esprit d'Origène."

This sensual perception, which Origen described with the utmost care, is at one and the same time the *fulfillment* of the natural intellectual senses (*gratia perficit naturam*) and a *wholly new* sensitivity for the modes in which the divine appears in the world, a sensitivity that is only the result of the “infusion” of grace.²⁵⁶

For Balthasar, there is no need to choose between one side of the supposed opposition between spiritual and bodily senses, nor to read the former as destructive of the latter. Somehow, the relation between the two sets of senses mirrors the relation between nature and grace. As revelation fulfills natural desire, while, at the same time, remaining ever-greater and more astonishing than we expect, so too the spiritual senses are the fulfillment of the natural senses, despite being completely new. In their unpredictable novelty they mirror the Incarnation, which is their ultimate basis: “But vision is the unfolding of a faith that is already there (just as inner hearing is the unfolding of an outer hearing which is the proclamation of doctrine).”²⁵⁷ Balthasar’s refusal of the opposition spirit/body goes together with his rejection of the opposition metaphor/analogy, which was relevant to his confrontation with Rahner over the notion of presence and reciprocity, i.e. the personhood of the Logos. Analogy, for Balthasar, is legitimate because, in both the spiritual and fleshly body, the object of perception is *someone*, not *something*; a person whose self-presentation is unpredictable. The metaphoric interpretation, as the univocally mystical interpretation, only works if God is understood as a static object. But, for Balthasar, as for Origen, God is a dynamic Logos who gives himself in the history of revelation. The human perceptive tools must be able to recognize a living person who, as every person, gives himself in always-new, unforeseen ways. The *ἐπίνοιαι* are grounded in divine love, being the ways in which the Logos descends towards men. This sheds light on the tension that Balthasar often presents between an ascending, and a Johannine model. In the first, the *ἐπίνοιαι* are *only* a pedagogical ladder, while, in the second, they are also a sign of the divine love for man. As McInroy has explained, Balthasar introduces a “personalistic dimension” to the doctrine of the spiritual senses. While McInroy considers this to be a rupture with tradition and, therefore, with Origen, I believe Balthasar is merely revealing the elements of a personalistic reading latent in Origen himself:

256 ET 2, 478. ST 2, 489: “Diese Sinnlichkeit, die Origenes aufs sorgfältigste beschrieb, ist zugleich die Vollendung der natürlich-geistigen Sinne (*gratia perficit naturam*) und eine völlig neue, durch die Gnade erst eingegossene Sensibilität für die Erscheinungsweisen des Göttlichen in der Welt.”

257 SF 239. GF 352–353: “Schau aber ist bereits die Entfaltung eines Glaubens (wie inneres Hören die Entfaltung eines äußern Hörens der Lehrverkündigung ist).”

Just as faith progresses from an objective holding-something-to-be-true to subjective appropriation and insight, so does the spiritual sense of touch progress from an objective, sacramental to a subjective, personal "contact" with God. (...) In this contact with Christ exists the only access to contact with God.²⁵⁸

6. Beyond the Opposition: from Aesthetics to Dramatic

The first evidence of a personalistic reading of the senses is the abovementioned concern for the distinctiveness of each sense. As Balthasar often repeats, Origen's is not a unitive mysticism without distinction, but a relationship between the soul and God that takes many forms. It is rich and articulated, because it is a union between two persons, not a fixed concept that can be understood once and forever. Classically, the first place in the ranking of senses is given to sight. In his personal notes, Balthasar associates sight with the "*dynamische Wahrheit*", "*das Existenziale*". The existential seems to be opposed to utterly intellectual knowledge. Balthasar does not deny the knowledge of ideas but wants rather to specify the importance of seeing a person, the Logos, who is the dynamic embodiment of ideas and virtues. Next, Balthasar discusses hearing as "*das Personale*". The Word is the self-revelation of God's personal freedom. Hearing bears a sign of the distance of God's voice, and Balthasar classifies it as the sense of the obscurity of divine will and the asymmetry of the relationship between man and God: one can only wait for the other to speak.²⁵⁹ The distinction between seeing and hearing is particularly important for Balthasar: "If the act of seeing aims at the encounter face to face of the highest, identical mutual gaze, the act of hearing aims upward into an ever more perfect obedience and thus into a creatureliness that distinguishes itself ever more humbly from the Creator."²⁶⁰ This division will become iconic in Balthasar's distinction between the Eastern Church as Johannine, the Church of Seeing, and the Western Church as Pauline, the Church of Hearing: "In the East, Logos means 'meaning' and 'idea'; in the West, it means Verbum,

258 SF 249. GF 368–369: "Wie der Glaube vom objektiven Fürwahrhalten, das schon aus sich wirksam ist, zur subjektiven Aneignung und Einsicht fortschreitet, so schreitet der geistige Tastsinn vom objektiven, sakramentalen, zum subjektiv-persönlichen Kontakt mit Gott fort. (...) In diesem Kontakt mit Christus besteht der einzige Zugang zu einem Kontakt mit Gott."

259 ET 2, 479: "In distinction from this aiming at the identity of the mutual gaze, the hearing of God takes its starting point in the knowledge that the Divine Being remains always far removed." ST 2, 490: "Hören Gottes setzt, diesem Zielen auf die Identität des Augenblicks gegenüber, beim Wissen um die bleibende Entrücktheit des göttlichen Wesens an."

260 ET 2, 480. ST 2, 491: "Wenn das Sehen durch die Distanz von Spiegel und Gleichnis hinaufzielt zum Auge in Auge des höchsten, identischen Ineinanderblicks, so zieht das Hören empor in einen immer vollkommeneren Gehorsam, und also in eine immer demütiger sich vom Schöpfer unterscheidende Geschöpflichkeit."

'word'.²⁶¹ Once again, as in the division between the gnostic-spiritual and symbolic-liturgical strands of theology, Origen sits at the very beginning of the division, as a riverhead that splits into two streams.²⁶² The tension between seeing, which aims at identity, and hearing, which represents distance, is fundamental to Balthasar's reflection on Origen. The sense of touch is defined by Balthasar as "*das Sakramentale*". Touch is the sense of encounter, and Balthasar marks it in his notes with the word "*praesentia*". It is the sense that allows for the most personal encounter, while yet preserving an ultimate otherness. Finally, smell and taste are defined as "*das Mystische*". These imply a sense of fusion, or assimilation. This phenomenon is especially clear with taste: food not only gives us pleasure, but is assimilated and metabolized, becoming one with the body.

The second piece of evidence of a personalistic reading of the senses is the attention paid to their active and passive aspects. This is substantiated in Balthasar's personal notes, where sight, hearing, and touch (the most dramatic senses because implying always a certain distance) are listed with both active and passive verbs. [Seeing: *videri et videre* // Hearing: *audire et loqui* // Touch: *tangi et tangere*]. Elsewhere, Balthasar claims that "Origen had repeatedly said that every Christian virtue contains two elements within itself: one more active and acquired, the other more passive and bestowed by grace from above."²⁶³ The spiritual senses are not simply a passive instrument of divine contemplation, but the site of dramatic play, where the subject, once "seen" by Jesus, is empowered to see the world with new eyes; that is, if he trains them correctly: "But in order for a presence to be, a rec-

261 ET 2, 482. ST 2, 493: "Der Osten ist johanneisch, er ist die Kirche der Schau. Der Westen ist synoptisch-paulinisch, er ist die Kirche des Hörens. Im Osten heißt Logos 'Sinn' und 'Idee'; im Westen 'Verbum', 'Wort'."

262 It is interesting to notice that the identification of the East with the sense of seeing explains for Balthasar the true reason behind the schism. ET 2, 483: "Theōsis, deification, is the ultimate cry, the ultimate goal of Eastern Christianity, because it is the ultimate meaning of the pure vision. This is why the East aims at (mystic-supernatural) identity, and why monophysitism is the genuinely Eastern heresy. The two or three 'small' dogmatic differences between Rome and Byzantium were never more than the occasion, never the truly weighty reason, for the schism. The Eastern Church became heretical because she handed herself over to the absolutization of the inner dynamism of the act of seeing, which points ultimately, in its upward flight, to identity with God and to negation of the world." ST 2, 494: "Theōsis, Vergottung ist der letzte Ruf, das letzte Ziel östlichen Christentums, weil sie der letzte Sinn der reinen Schau ist. Darum zielt der Osten auf (mystisch-übernatürliche) Identität und ist der Monophysitismus die eigentliche Häresie des Ostens. Die zwei-drei 'kleinen' dogmatischen Differenzen zwischen Rom und Byzanz waren immer nur Anlaß, nicht aber tragender Grund der Schismas. Die Ostkirche ist darum häretisch geworden, weil sie sich der Verabsolutierung der inneren Dynamik des Schauens überließ, die in ihrem Auftrieb zuletzt auf Identität mit Gott und auf Weltverneinung ausgeht."

263 GL 1, 361. H 1, 357: "Origenes hatte oft wiederholt, dass jede christliche Tugend zwei Elemente in sich berge: ein mehr aktiv-erworbenes und ein mehr passiv gnadenhaft von oben geschenktes."

iprocity is necessary: he comes closer, but if we do not get close to Him, if we do not go towards Him, we cannot rejoice of his presence.”²⁶⁴ This statement explains the passage from aesthetics to dramatics in Balthasar's own thought. The subject does not passively endure the flux of sensible data, but is rather involved in a dramatic game that awakens his freedom, as well as that of the other. Thus, quoting Prato, it is impossible to formulate a doctrine of the spiritual senses without a theory of human freedom in relation to divine freedom.²⁶⁵ The active role of the senses is particularly clear in Origen's approach to the role of the flesh of Christ: “And all flesh shall see the salvation of God (Lk 3:6; cf. Isa 40:5). You were once flesh, or rather, to say something quite astonishing, while you are still in the flesh, you see the salvation of God.”²⁶⁶ Christ does not just mediate our salvation, pointing beyond himself; he *is* our salvation. As Balthasar explains: “The effectiveness of the outer element is grounded in the special effectiveness of the body of Christ which, as body of the WORD, itself possesses divine powers.”²⁶⁷ When the fleshly senses perceive Christ, they are already perceiving salvation, and tasting its sweetness.²⁶⁸ However, it does not follow that encountering Jesus in the flesh means we will recognize him as the Christ. Origen makes this clear in his explanation of the miracle of the hemorrhaging woman. Many in the crowd were “seeing” Jesus,

264 MO (I) 556–557; PMO 69: “Seulement, il faut réciprocité pour qu'il y ait présence. ‘C'est ainsi qu'il s'approche, lui, mais si nous ne nous faisons pas proches de Lui, si nous n'allons pas à Lui, nous ne jouirons pas de sa présence.’”

265 PRATO, *Vedere la forma* 293–294: “L'occhio vede a partire dal cuore. Il ‘cuore puro’ è quello guidato dall'amore, il suo primo atto non è un protendersi [*Hin-zu*], ma un ritirarsi [*Vor-zu*] (...). Non c'è teoria della percezione, non c'è dottrina dei sensi spirituali senza un'antropologia della libertà.”

266 HLC 22 in SF 239.

267 SF 249. GF 368: “Diese Wirksamkeit des äußern Elementes aber gründet sich in der Eigenwirksamkeit des Fleisches Christi, das als Leib des WORTES selbst göttliche Kräfte besitzt.”

268 The personal sensorial experience of the Logos is described by Origen in two passages, HLC 15 in SF 248: “For mine eyes have seen thy salvation’ (Lk. 2:30). For before, said (Simeon), I believed by way of understanding, I knew through reasoning; but now I have seen with the eyes of my flesh and am thus brought to fulfillment.” CIO XIII 53,352–353 in SF 245: “They said to the woman, ‘It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.’ The Samaritans reject the faith based on the words of the woman, because in hearing the Savior himself they had found something better which enabled them to know ‘that this is indeed the Savior of the world.’ And it is certainly better to see the WORD with one's own eyes and hear him teaching and, without using other teachers, impressing images on our mind which then discovers the forms of truth in a most clear manner. That is certainly better than it is not to see him and, not illuminated by his power, only to hear about him through others who see him. For it is impossible for the same affection which comes about in the mind of one who sees, to be experienced by one who has not seen but is only taught by one who has. For it is better to walk by sight than by faith (cf. 2 Cor. 5:7).”

but only the woman saw him with the eyes of faith: “So too, although there were many who saw him, of none of them is it written that they ‘saw’ him unless they recognized that he is the WORD of God and Son of God in whom the Father is said to be simultaneously recognized and seen.”²⁶⁹ Why is the knowledge mediated by the senses superior to the second-hand witness of another? In the quoted passage, there emerges a personalistic feature of knowledge. Origen underlines the importance of recognizing Jesus as word and as son. The *Commentary on the Song of Songs* is the clearest example of the personalistic reading under both of these aspects: “But I [says the bride] who want to be seen by you alone, I want to know by what way I can come to you so that it can be secret, so that no one will be between us, so that no strange onlooker will meet me on the way.”²⁷⁰ The nuptial analogy is fitting because of the exclusivity implied in the reciprocal self-giving of bride and bridegroom. What is given, in the many *ἐπίνοιαι*, is Jesus himself as a person, exactly as a groom to his bride:

“Our God will visibly come” (cf. Ps. 50:2–3 LXX). Now if our God will visibly come, but this God is Christ, and Christ came in the flesh, this “visibly” thus means the flesh. For the flesh of Christ was endowed with bodily senses so that he could give himself with passion to those become worthy through devotion.²⁷¹

The body and sensibility of Christ are supplied so that he can totally give himself; a donation that coincides with the opening of the spiritual senses in the soul. So, the flesh of Christ becomes a fundamental sign of the personal, relational value of

269 CCt III in SF 237: “The sight with which God is seen is not that of the body but of the mind and spirit. The Savior himself, making this distinction in the gospel with just the right words, did not say: ‘No one’ sees ‘the Father except the Son,’ but: ‘No one knows the Father except the Son’ (Mt. 11:27). And finally, to those whom he allows to see God, he gives the ‘spirit of knowledge’ and the ‘spirit of wisdom’ (Isa. 11:2; cf. Wis. 7:7.22), that they might see God through the same spirit. That is why he said to his disciples: ‘He who has seen me has seen the Father’ (Jn. 14:9). And surely we will not be so stupid as to think that whoever sees Jesus in his body sees also the Father. Otherwise one would have to conclude that the ‘scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites’ (cf. Mt. 23:13) and Pilate who had him scourged (cf. Jn. 19:1) and the whole crowd which cried out ‘Crucify, crucify him!’ (cf. Lk. 23:21), in seeing Jesus in the flesh also saw God the Father – which seems not only absurd but also blasphemous. For just as, when the crowd was pressing around him as he went along with the disciples, none of those pressing in and crushing him are said to have ‘touched’ him except she alone who, suffering from a ‘flow of blood (...)’ came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment’ Jesus is speaking of her alone when he says: ‘Some one touched me; for I perceive that power has gone forth from me’ (Lk. 8:42–48). So too, although there were many who saw him, of none of them is it written that they ‘saw’ him unless they recognized that he is the WORD of God and Son of God in whom the Father is said to be simultaneously recognized and seen.”

270 CCt II in SF 249.

271 CPs 49,3 in SF 239.

these senses. The self-giving of the groom makes the relation with the bride possible by amplifying her sensibility.²⁷² For this reason, the spiritual senses are, for Balthasar, a tool of the active life, preserving soul and God in a reciprocal and continuous dance of revelation-hiding, of giving and stepping back. Balthasar traces the involvement of freedom (and therefore the passage from aesthetics to dramatic) to the existence of sensibility per se, as described by Origen.²⁷³ Sense-experience allows one to save the analogy between spirit and flesh, and to overcome the opposition between metaphor/analogy, all thanks to the fact that the Logos sensed in the *ἐπίνοιαι* remains a person, the ultimate revelation of personal love. The spiritual senses are truly senses, and not merely by metaphor, because the object of sensation is not an abstract essence, but a personal Logos who always gives himself in new and surprising ways. The very fact that the relationship is mediated by sensibility (whether spiritual or fleshly) makes the encounter with the Logos relational, a drama between two persons. Even if one were to read the spiritual senses as a metaphor for intellectual comprehension, this would still involve the contemplation of a person. Sensuality implies an intimate, interpersonal connection, as opposed to the utter assimilation of a soul into timeless ideas. The senses are, therefore, the means of perceiving a person in the way this person chooses to communicate through their body-language. Balthasar expresses this personalism in a footnote of *Le Mystère d'Origène*:

The world of ideas is absorbed in the unity of Christ. Their multiplicity is transformed into richness of aspects (*ἐπίνοιαι*) in the concrete Unity (CCt 2; ClO 1,11; ClO 19,5). The platonic ideas are in Origen, as in the Cappadocians, of secondary importance. They will reemerge only with Dionysius. The moral consequence of this personalism is that every sin is a personal injury (ClO 2,9; CRm 2,5; HLv 12,7; HNm 20,2) and that the error is as severe as the intimacy is deep (HEz 10,2).²⁷⁴

The presence of a spiritual body, from the dawn of creation, is a sign of the personalistic aspect of every engagement between creature and Creator. Spiritual sensitivity is the element that allows Origen to overcome every dualism, because

272 CCt II 9 in SF 220.

273 As already in the section on nature and grace, we are once again leaning towards the importance of the passage from aesthetic to dramatic not only in Balthasar but already in Origen. The spiritual senses reveal that what is opened up is a game of two freedoms – bride's and bridegroom's, man's and God's.

274 MO (I) 527 n. 3; PMO 122 n. 26: "Le monde des Idées est absorbé dans l'unité du Christ. Leur multiplicité se transforme en richesse d'aspect de l'Unité concrète. Les Idées platoniciennes jouent chez Origène comme chez les Cappadociens un rôle secondaire. Elles ne reparaitront au premier plan que chez Denys. – La conséquence morale de ce personnalisme est que tout péché est une injure personnelle et que la faute sera d'autant plus grave que l'intimité avait été plus étroite."

these senses derive from a pre-lapsarian state, where there was no intellectual fusion, but only sensitive spiritual contemplation of the divine Persons.

The drama of the *Song of Songs* makes the point clear: to see the groom does not simply mean to understand his teaching, but to meet an actual person. So too, the veil of the letter in scriptural interpretation invokes a personal presence, not an impersonal idea. It is significant that Origen describes his exegetical work with the image of the groom who, once seen, departs and returns continuously. This is often interpreted as the description of exegetical work, not because the exegete lacks the intelligence to grasp the meaning once and forever, but because the ultimate meaning of the text is a person who we meet again and again. The *Song of Songs* overcomes the simple opposition of idea/person by revealing that idea and presence coincide. The Logos does not just *assume* personhood for pedagogical reasons: he *is* a person. The intellectual contemplation of the *ἐπίνοιαί* stands, for Origen, in analogical relation to the scriptural interpretation, with the spiritual senses signaling the passage from aesthetic to dramatic.

But one can also understand Origen's assignment of the *Song of Songs* to the enoptic level, and, consequently, Rahner's enoptic treatment of the spiritual senses. While it remains true that the spiritual senses are already operative at the physical level of worldly perception, their ultimate purpose is to unite man with the Logos. This is the real meaning of mysticism for Balthasar; not a fusion with the Father, but a relationship mediated by the other's freedom, a freedom inseparable from corporeality, whether fleshly or spiritual. An enoptic approach does not mean a disembodied mysticism, but the playful veiling-unveiling of the mystery of the divine person who, as person, always reveals himself through sensible media. This is the greatest difference between Balthasar and Rahner. For the former, in fact, the personal aspect of the Logos makes every *Vorgriff*, every pre-comprehension, insufficient, because overcome by the ever-greater freedom of the divine person. It is therefore clear why Balthasar so admired the doctrine of the spiritual senses and the spiritual body. The theme of the spiritual beauty of the soul is "a theme which traces its descent back to Plato and Plotinus, a courageous, world-affirming theme, which does not mourn the passing of physical beauty in a melancholy vein, but dares to see it as the reflection and sensuous image of a deeper, indestructible glory."²⁷⁵ Origen surpasses Plato without losing sight of him. The world of ideas and virtues is not denied, but transposed into the medium of an embodied person:

275 GL 4, 321–322. H 3/1, 289: "(...) abkünftig von Platon und Plotin, ein Thema des Mutes und der Weltbejahung, die nicht schwermütig über die Vergänglichkeit körperlicher Schönheit trauert, sondern es wagt, diese als Abglanz und Sinnbild einer tieferen, unzerstörbaren Herrlichkeit anzusehen."

It would be a misunderstanding of Origen's basic position to subordinate the incarnation of the Logos to a universal, neutral presence of him in every created reason. This presence is indeed affirmed in that Origen has no conception of reason except as the organ for hearing the Word, and he expounds the words 'In the midst of you there stands one whom you not know' in the sense of the presence (Parousia) of the Logos in the midst of every man's reason. (...) We, as person, should encounter the Word as a person. (...) This characteristic imparts the whole of Origen's theology a dynamism enabling it to penetrate through every external covering, every rite, institution and outward historical circumstance to the spiritual truth, so that he almost comes to view as merely phenomenal the outer envelope of flesh, letter, sacrament and institution.²⁷⁶

The spiritual senses are, for Balthasar, the key to Origen's personalism. Given that "person" is not an Origenian category, Balthasar's interpretation should be understood as a reading of the kinship Origen sees between God and man. As Origen says, there is "some sort of consanguinity" between God and man, which we know by the fact that we apprehend something of God through the Son. This is what Balthasar means when he claims that Christ is the concrete *analogia entis*: Christ became man, and can therefore reveal something of the Father to us, but he is also infinitely dissimilar, because he is one with the Father, and so, God. The spiritual senses are the designated tools for experiencing this analogy and are therefore signs of both similarity and dissimilarity. This nearly brings Balthasar to fold reason and spiritual sensitivity into a single category, claiming that "Origen has no conception of reason except as the organ for hearing the Word." In this sense, Balthasar suggests that, in Origen, not only is there no duality between "believing" and "seeing"; there is almost no duality between understanding and seeing.

To summarize, we can say that Balthasar rejects: (i) the rationalistic interpretation that claims the spiritual senses are reducible to a metaphorical description of the intellectual act of knowledge;²⁷⁷ (ii) the mystical interpretation that reduces

276 ET 1, 246–247. ST 1, 266–267: "Man erkennt die Grundabsicht von Origenes, wenn man die Inkarnationsbewegung des Logos zugunsten einer allgemeinen neutralen Logosgegenwart in jeder geschaffenen Vernunft relativieren wollte; die Letztere ist zwar bejaht, sofern Origenes keine Vernunft anders den als Organ des Wort-Hörens konzipiert und die Gegenwart (Parousia) des Logos in der Mitte jeder Vernunft durch das Wort des Johannes expliziert: 'In eurer Mitte steht einer, den ihr nicht kennt'. (...) [Die Offenbarung ist] ein Zug, der der ganzen Theologie des Origenes eine durch jede Hülle, jeden Ritus, jede Institution, jede äußere geschichtliche Situation zur geistigen Wahrheit hindurchdrängende Dynamik verleiht, bis zur Grenze einer Phänomenalisierung der Hülle von Fleisch, Buchstabe, Sakrament und Institution."

277 GL 1, 361: "Because the distinguishing qualities of the 'spiritual senses' are manifestly far more than mere paraphrases for the act of 'spiritual' cognition." H 1, 357: "(...) denn offensichtlich sind die unterscheidenden Qualitäten der geistlichen Sinne weit mehr als nur Umschreibungen des Aktes geistiger Erkenntnis."

the spiritual senses to the product of an ascetic effort, reserved for the élite;²⁷⁸ (iii) Platonic dualism, which he sees as subordinate to the Paulinian dualism of spiritual and fleshly man.²⁷⁹ Bracketing these interpretations, Balthasar's Origen emerges as a defender of the act of faith, conceived as the appropriate human response to an unpredictable event of grace. This event is mediated by physical sensibility, which, in turn, elevates man to a new level of spiritual sensibility. The physical senses are receptive of the embodied form of the Logos, but only become spiritually active once the encounter takes place, once God takes his step towards man. This interpretation stresses the kenotic aspect of the Logos' descent and its inestimable value. It is not simply a remedy to the fall, but the most glorious manifestation of God:

But just as, according to Origen, the Word of God flows out into the world only because spiritual blood has flowed from the wound in the side of the Crucified, so does the fragrance of God flow out into the world only because, in the self-emptying (kenosis) of God, the jar of nard of his love broke open.²⁸⁰

7. Origen and Balthasar: Continuity and Discontinuity

A certain discontinuity between Origen's and Balthasar's notion(s) of the spiritual senses can be found in an innovation that sets Balthasar apart. What Origen lacks, claims Balthasar, is a proper admiration for the radical incomprehensibility and hiddenness of the divine. Balthasar sees his own fascination with the incarnated Logos (even in his being veiled) as greater than Origen's. When Origen speaks of

278 GL 1, 361: "(...) because then the opposition between the specifically mystical mode of experience and that of an ordinary living faith would have to be explicated in a wholly different way." H 1, 357: "(...) weil dann der Gegensatz zwischen der spezifisch mystischen Erfahrungsweise und derjenigen des allgemeinen lebendigen Glaubens ganz anders deutlich gemacht sein müsste."

279 GL 1, 361: "Even though the form of expression in which Origen clothes his concepts occasionally may be purely Platonic and dualistic, it nonetheless represents another sort of dualism, the Christian and Biblical dualism of Saint Paul when he distinguishes between the fleshly and the pneumatic man." H 1, 357: "Rein platonisch-dualistisch mag wohl gelegentlich die begriffliche Einkleidungsform der Aussage sein, sie steht aber für einen anderen, christlichen und biblischen Dualismus, den paulinischen vom sarkischen und pneumatischen Menschen."

280 SF 254 (modified). GF 376: "Aber wie das Wort Gottes nach Origenes nur dadurch in die Welt ausgeflossen ist, dass es als geistliches Blut aus der Seitenwunde des Gekreuzigten floß, so strömte auch der Duft Gottes nur dadurch in die Welt hinaus, dass in der Selbstentleerung (*kenosis*) Gottes das Nardengefäß Seiner Liebe zerbrach."

the sensible forms taken by the Logos, he does not consider them beautiful and glorious in and of themselves, but only insofar as they function as pedagogical tools. Thus, our task has moved beyond discerning whether the spiritual senses are metaphoric or analogical. Rather, we need to ask whether the relationship between Word and soul, as described in the *Song of Songs*, is the restoration of a lost condition, or whether the personal and relational dimensions are inscribed in the nature of the God-Man relationship itself. For Balthasar, the passage from an abstract faith in *something* to a concrete faith in *someone* is intrinsic to the nature of God as Trinity. The personal dimension of the salvific message is not, however, seen by Origen as an unequivocal good, argues Balthasar. Evidence of Origen's reluctance is the fact that he still conceives of the activated spiritual senses, even when experienced in this world, as the restoration of an original condition (spiritual embodiment). For Balthasar, on the contrary, the Incarnation is not the restoration of a prelapsarian sensibility, but rather the gift of a genuinely new sensibility. Jesus' form, his flesh on the Cross, is the splendor of a glory never before experienced. It is notable that one of the major critiques Balthasar advances against Origen is the absence of a well-shaped theology of the Cross. Without such a theology, the death and resurrection remain an act of heroism, a moral victory, but not an instance of paradoxical glory.²⁸¹ While, for Balthasar, the divine descent is contemplated aesthetically, in Origen, despite the recognition of gratuitous divine love, there remains a certain aspect of pedagogical condescension to human weakness. The consequence of this is a deficient understanding of the value of the symbol:

It is true that Origen, in his thirst for knowledge, has maybe minimized the eternal value of the structure of the symbol. Clement 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 with those bodies whose grace is underlined or suggested by the clothes' (Strom. V. 56,5).²⁸²

There is, however, one specific element in the thought of the Alexandrian where Balthasar sees an admiration for the divine descent and, therefore, the glory of the earthly condition: Holy Scripture. Origen's love for Scripture is not simply a

281 Balthasar's critique follows here a certain stereotypical interpretation of Origen's theology of the Cross, recently dismantled by FÉDOU, *La sagesse et le monde* 195–232, a chapter emblematically called "De la Croix à la Gloire".

282 MO (I) 561 n. 4; PMO 135 n. 48: "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. V. 56,5)."

love for its spiritual meaning, but more so for its letters, for its element of hiddenness. The very fact that meaning is constantly renewed in the process of reading signals an enjoyment in the exegetical act, which, in turn, suggests a deeper unity between the spiritual and physical body of the text. Once the former is discovered, the latter remains valuable. There is not just one unique meaning; rather, in the shadow of the letter hides an infinite, ever-greater host of meanings. The letter is the site of an inexhaustible enjoyment which is not merely a concession to human deficiency. If the embodied Logos remains, for Origen, a remedy to the fall of rational beings, its scriptural form is an ever-generous medicine, to the point of offering ever-new prescriptions and interpretations. In its materiality, the obscurity of the letter is beautiful, rich, and glorious. According to Origen, in the incarnated form of the written word, the Logos, we can already contemplate the glory of the object of revelation. On this point, the continuity between Origen and Balthasar is much greater than we might expect: there is already, in Origen, a deep personalistic understanding of the Logos.

The hypothesis that Balthasar's attention to revelation in its objective/aesthetic form comes from his reading of the Fathers is now confirmed, minus some differences due to his personal theological needs and developments. The Fathers helped Balthasar recover the objective aspect of revelation in a moment when theology had left the *pulchrum* aside. It is undeniable that, for Origen, this object remains, if not negative, then rarely a cause of celebration. It is exactly in the interval of this discontinuity that Balthasar formulates his answer to Rousselot's problem.

8. The Fruit of the Doctrine of the Spiritual Senses

Between the intellectualist "believe in order to see" condemned by Rousselot, and the voluntarism of which he found himself accused, one finds Balthasar's path of the spiritual senses. For Balthasar, the eyes of faith are "already" in the subject, prepared to embrace the objective revelation; at the same time, it is necessary that the object impose itself from without. Moreover, one must recognize that the light of faith makes the gaze possible in the first place. As opposed to Rousselot, Balthasar sees this light in the form of the object; it is already "at play" in the subject-object correlation. There is no revelation without a subject ready to receive it as gift. Speaking of the act of faith, Balthasar warns against two extreme positions: (i) an absolute priority of faith, that can turn into an extreme voluntarism; (ii) an excessive rationalism, where the gratuitous aspect of revelation is lost. When Balthasar wrote *Razing the Bastions*, a few years later, he sought a balanced harmony between *theoria* and *praxis*, between theology and living faith. The spiritual senses are at the core of this issue. They are the meeting point of faith and intellect, of active and contemplative paradigms. Exploring the treatment of the senses by

various thinkers makes it easier to see who Balthasar was accusing of voluntarism and rationalism. Knowing the historical background of Balthasar's studies, it is possible to understand who he had in mind when speaking of the two extreme poles.

In the first case (extreme voluntarism) Balthasar is explicit—he is thinking of a Protestant treatment of faith wherein philosophical research is denigrated. Implicitly, this is the pole of the many voluntarisms opposed to scholastic theology. Balthasar's concern lies with Blondel, Bréhier, and, in the frame of Origen studies, Hal Koch. The connection between Protestantism, Idealism, and Neoplatonism is explicitly underlined by Balthasar on numerous occasions. The target of the second case, excessive rationalism, is not explicitly addressed in *Glory*, but is easy to detect: scholastic theology. He claims that the “rationalism that has penetrated theology is a new form of Gnosticism. More categorically than ever before, it claims right of domicile in theology. It can also manifest itself as a form of the Church's *aggiornamento*, as a precondition for the evangelization of the modern world. It alone, allegedly, can create a common basis for dialogue with nonbelievers.”²⁸³ How do these two polemical targets relate to the doctrine of the spiritual senses? How are the spiritual senses an example of Balthasar's third way between these two pitfalls?

Balthasar intends the spiritual senses to act as a “third way” because they preserve the elements lost in the polarized extremities. Firstly, Protestant theology is responsible for the “elimination of aesthetics from theology”, coinciding with “the expulsion of contemplation from the act of faith, the exclusion of ‘seeing’ from ‘hearing’, the removal of the *inchoatio visionis* from the *fides*.”²⁸⁴ The act of faith here ceases to be contemplative, becoming a mere impulse of the heart, an interior process that loses every connection with its objective correlate. Sensibility too is lost. What remains is a spiritualized motion; the spiritual senses are reduced to mystical, disembodied tools. On the other hand, in Neo-Scholastic theology the subjective correlate is lost, and with it the personal involvement in the act of faith. Balthasar speaks of “catholic eliminations of aesthetics from theology happening with modern rationalism. Is there thus no path between the Scylla of extrinsicism and the Charybdis of immanentism?” Balthasar seeks a Christianity that, in avoiding both blind faith and gnostic pretension, can bear witness to the genuine evidence of enlightened revelation without reducing it to the measures/laws of

283 TD 4, 460. ThD 3, 429: “Der in die Theologie eingedrungene Rationalismus, der als neue Form der Gnosis in ihr kategorischer als je zuvor sein Heimatrecht fordert, kann sich auch als seine Form des *Aggiornamento* in der Kirche, als Vorbedingung für die Evangelisation der heutigen Welt ausgeben.”

284 GL 1, 68. H 1, 65–66: “Entästhetisierung in der Theologie und im ganzen christlichen Leben, die man zusammenfassen kann als Ausräumung der Kontemplation aus dem Glaubensakt, des Sehens aus dem Hören, der *inchoatio visionis* aus der *fides*.”

human perception. Balthasar finds the solution in two approaches that converge into unity:

On the one hand, there is the personalism we discussed above. No I possesses the possibility or the right to master intellectually the freedom of the Thou that comes out to meet him, to deduce and understand ahead of time the way the Thou will act. I can “understand” a love that has been given to me only as a miracle; I cannot understand it through empirical or transcendental analysis, not even in terms of knowledge about the human “nature” that includes us both – for the Thou will always remain an “other” to me.

The second approach lies in the aesthetic sphere, which represents a third, irreducible realm next to that of thought and action. In the experiences of extraordinary beauty – whether in nature or in art – we are able to grasp a phenomenon in its distinctiveness that otherwise remains veiled. What we encounter in such an experience is as overwhelming as a miracle, something we will never get over. And yet it possesses its intelligibility precisely as a miracle.²⁸⁵

The spiritual senses are the third way between extrinsicism and immanentism because they unify the best parts of the two tendencies: personalism and aesthetics. The spiritual senses offer an answer to the issue of the act of faith; seeing spiritually *is* to believe. It has been demonstrated that this third way is not simply a departure from tradition. Already in his reading of Origen, Balthasar is able to show how the Alexandrian himself contains and anticipates a personalist approach.

Furthermore, Balthasar claims that the two extreme poles ignore the signs of revelation, separating the historical and metaphysical levels. When Balthasar defines the meaning of sign and revelation in his theological aesthetics, he does so through the doctrine of the spiritual senses. If, for Neo-Scholasticism, the signs are a witness of divine, ecclesial credibility, for Balthasar, the signs are themselves knowledge of God. There is no real distance between faith and knowledge. In the voluntarist position of Blondel, Maréchal, and Rousselot, the risk is rather to minimize the value of the signs of revelation, and to maximize the role of natural desire. If in Neo-Scholasticism signs only point to the divine Being, and in volun-

285 LA 51–52. GNL 33–34: “Zwei Ansätze bieten sich an, die aber dann zur Einheit konvergieren: einmal der zuletzt erwähnte personale, da kein Ich die Möglichkeit und das Recht hat, die ihm entgegenkommende Freiheit des Du wissenmäßig zu überherrschen, ihr Verhalten vorweg abzuleiten und zu verstehen. Eine mir geschenkte Liebe kann ich je nur als ein Wunder verstehen, empirisch oder transzendental aufarbeiten kann ich sie nicht, auch nicht aus dem Wissen um die gemeinsam umgreifende Menschen-Natur; denn das Du ist das je Andere mir gegenüber. Der zweite Ansatz liegt im Ästhetischen, das neben Denkhaltung und Tathaltung eine dritte, nicht rückführbare Sphäre darstellt. Bei Erfahrungen ausgezeichneter Schönheit – in Natur wie in Kunst – wird das sonst mehr verhüllte Phänomen in seiner Unterscheidung greifbar: Was uns entgegentritt ist überwältigend wie ein Wunder und darin vom Erfahrenden niemals einzuholen, besitzt aber gerade als Wunder seine Verstehbarkeit.”

tarism signs become so transparent that only the signified remains, the spiritual senses preserve both the novelty and naturality of revelation:

The love which is infused in man by the Holy Spirit present within him bestows on man the sensorium with which to perceive God (...); the new sensorium is infused into the natural sensorium and yet it is not one with it: for all that is bestowed upon man as his own (and increasingly so as he is the more unsolved), it is equally his only as a gift.²⁸⁶

The spiritual senses are therefore the most conspicuous instance of the aesthetic-dramatic interpretation of Origen given by Balthasar. They are the first sign of the free divine initiative towards man. As such, they confirm Balthasar's tendency to read the man-God drama from an aesthetic perspective, i. e. from the divine initiative. In turn, they allow him to read Origen as a theologian of the divine love for man and, consequently, an exponent of the dramatic relationship between man and God.

286 GL 1, 243. H 1, 240: "Die vom gegenwärtigen Heiligen Geist dem Menschen eingeflöste Liebe schenkt ihm das Sensorium für Gott (...). Dies neue Sensorium ist dem natürlichen eingesenkt und ist doch nicht eins mit ihm: so sehr es dem Menschen zu eigen geschenkt ist (desto mehr, je entselbsteter er ist), so sehr eignet es ihm doch immer in der Weise der Gabe."

III. *Exitus-Reditus*:

Origen's Contribution to the Freedom-Determinism Controversy

1. Origen's Cosmology of Freedom

The third fundamental aspect of Balthasar's admiration for Origen is the latter's re-configuration of the Greek structure of *exitus-reditus*. For Balthasar, this topos becomes an occasion to deal with Origen's complex doctrine of freedom. *Exitus-reditus* is the classical Neoplatonic category of the relation between God and God's creatures, and Origen's cosmology clearly falls into this scheme. Creatures, shaped in the image of the Son, but having fallen away, must "go back" to God. This *reditus*, however, is not merely a reversal; it is the attempt to reach a future "likeness" which, for Origen, was always intended by God as the end of human nature:

The fact that he said 'in the image of God he made him' and was silent about the *likeness*, indicates nothing else except that the human being obtained the dignity of the image in his first creation (*prima conditione*), but the perfection (*perfectio*) of the *likeness* was reserved for him at the consummation (*in consummatione*); that is, that he might acquire it for himself by the exercise of his own diligence in the imitation of God, so that while the possibility (*possibilitate*) of attaining perfection was given to him in the beginning (*in initiis*) through the dignity of the *image*, he should in the end (*in finis*), through the accomplishment of the works, complete in himself the perfected *likeness*.²⁸⁷

What is striking here is the idea that likeness is something to be achieved *in finis*; if image is given, likeness has more to do with freedom. In Origen, freedom plays a fundamental role, as many scholars have recently demonstrated, and is particularly evident in the history of Origen's reception.²⁸⁸ Indeed, from the beginning

287 Prin III 6,1: *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 uero ei perfectio in consummatione seruata est: scilicet ut ipse sibi eam propriae industriae studiis ex dei imitatione conscisceret, quo possibilitatem sibi perfectionis in initiis datam per imaginis dignitatem, in fine demum per operum expletionem perfectam sibi ipse similitudinem consummaret.*

288 Origen's doctrine of freedom has been thoroughly investigated in the past years by many scholars, often with the intention of understanding its fundamental role in his cosmology. The best example is SCHOCKENHOFF, *Zum Fest der Freiheit*. Recent interest has raised on the metaphysical foundation of this doctrine, starting from Theo Kobusch' reflections on the divine passibility: KOBUSCH, *Die philosophische Bedeutung des Kirchenvaters Origenes* 94–105; Kann Gott leiden? 328–333; HENGSTERMANN, *Origenes und der Ursprung der Freiheitsmetaphysik*; FÜRST, *Origenes. Grieche und Christ in römischer Zeit* 110–142. An analysis of the sources of this doctrine has been done by JACKSON, *Sources of Origen's Doctrine of Freedom* 13–23.

of his reception, Origen was interpreted in light of his doctrine of freedom, often in opposition to what became the official line of the early Church, Augustine's doctrine of grace. Already, Jerome considered Origen too close to Pelagianism because of his insistence on the autonomous determination of the soul. Many followed Jerome's lead, the most famous being Luther, who dismissed Origen as a preacher of justification by deeds. There is no denying that the problem of freedom is fundamental to Origen's cosmology, and demands our special attention. This problem must be examined in context. It involves Origen's relation to Platonism, but many other elements of his thought as well. Only if all the vectors of his theology are kept together, can one avoid using partial or anachronistic criteria to judge his orthodoxy. Despite the absence of a clear formulation of the relation between freedom and grace, Origen's cosmology is permeated by a manifold sense of divine grace, an aspect that might even help correct the narrow focus of a certain tradition of grace, the same that led to Origen's (perhaps too hasty) dismissal.²⁸⁹

According to Origen, at the moment of creation God made rational creatures equal and free, in His image and likeness. By rebuffing their Creator through *neglegentia* and *satietas*, these creatures fell away from God, assuming corporeal bodies.²⁹⁰ The nature of the creatures was no longer purely spiritual, but neither was it utterly physical; it became something intermediate: a soul (*psyche*). The soul can, in every moment of its life, move in one of two directions, towards the spirit or towards the flesh. Indeed, this movement is implicit in every free act. Therefore, for Origen, freedom is primarily a choice for the flesh or for the spirit, to climb up, or down, the ladder of being. Furthermore, the creaturely condition is not due to a divine imposition. It is a consequence of self-determination. The given position of a creature on the ladder of being derives from what Origen calls previous causes: the merits or faults of each creature before the Fall.²⁹¹ Leaving aside the Platonic pattern of this doctrine, it is important to remember that this vision of freedom originated in the battle against Gnosticism. Origen's concern was primarily to preserve the goodness of God, as demonstrated by the famous explanation he gives of God's preference for Jacob over Esau, and the hardening of Pharaoh's heart.²⁹² For Origen, it is clear that God created all rational creatures in a state of ontological equilibrium. So, if God is good, the disequilibrium of evil must lie in something other than God, i. e. in free choice.

289 MCGUCKIN, Grace 115. "If Origen stresses freedom somewhat at the expense of grace, it might equally be claimed that Augustinianism defends grace at the expense of freedom." Once again it should be remembered that, more than Origen and Augustine, the clear contra-position of freedom and grace seems to prevail in Origenism and Augustinianism.

290 Prin II 9,2-3.6.

291 Ibid. II 3,3; III 1,12.17; CRm IV 5; IV 9; IX 3; X 38.

292 On this see PERRONE, Il cuore indurito del faraone.

But, if the Fall is a matter of freedom, then so too is salvation. In response to the abuse of freedom, God gave his creatures the capacity to conquer temptation. He did not bestow beatitude itself, for in that case there would be no struggle, and thus no merit: "To destroy the voluntariness of virtue is to destroy its essence."²⁹³ At the same time, however, Origen often repeats that the unassisted will is incapable of consistent obedience.²⁹⁴ He associates divine grace with the redemptive action of the Logos; dead through sin, humankind is brought back to life by the salvific action of Christ.²⁹⁵ Since the Logos permeates the entire cosmos, grace is abundant from the beginning of time for those who belong to Christ, to the one who initiates and completes redemption by way of sanctification.²⁹⁶ The healing power of grace in the Logos is so potent that, in the end, all the souls will be perfected through their own free decisions, finally choosing what the Logos requires. This is the basis for Origen's doctrine of *apocatasasis*.²⁹⁷ Speaking of grace in Origen, one must think not only of conversion, but also, and even more so, of spiritual progress; a grace perfecting that which man has freely chosen.²⁹⁸ The emanation of the Logos from God the Father is a communication of His eternal life, and the spiritual life of humanity is a continuous development of the soul following this divine pedagogy.

An important aspect to be considered when dealing with freedom in Origen, and Origen generally, is the problem of Rufinus' translation. We encounter the issue in Origen's *Commentary on Paul's Epistles to the Romans*, where divine grace seems to prevail over human freedom: "I can barely persuade myself that there can be any work which would require payment from God as something owed, because even our ability to do anything at all, or to think, or to talk, we can do only as a result of his gift and generosity."²⁹⁹ Balthasar, noticing the "Augustinian" emphasis on grace, comments on this passage: "That this strongly Augustinian passage must not necessarily have been added by Rufinus is proven by the following fragment which has been preserved in Greek. [These fragments] come from the *Commentary on Romans*, the last and most mature work of Origen. The apologetics of freedom against a naturalistic Gnosticism recedes into the background and gives way to a genuinely Pauline theology of faith."³⁰⁰ According to Balthasar,

293 CC IV 3. See also Prin III 2,3.

294 CC VII 73.

295 ClO XXVIII 6,49–50.

296 Hler 9,4.

297 CC VIII 72.

298 Prin I 3,5–7; ClO VI 36,180–187; CRm IX 3.

299 CRm IV 1.

300 SF 197 n. 1. GF 287 n. 1: "Dass diese stark augustinische Stelle nicht notwendig von Rufin hinzugefügt sein muss, bezeugt das folgende, griechisch erhaltene Fragment. [Diese Fragmente] entstammen dem Römerbrief-Kommentar, dem letzten und reifsten Werke Origenes'. Die Apologetik der Freiheit gegen die naturalistische Gnosis tritt hier zurück und

we cannot dismiss the passages on divine grace simply because of Rufinus' mediation, not only because the Greek texts often reveal the same complex formulation of the problem, but also because Origen's entire oeuvre bears the traces of this issue.

From this synthetic presentation it is clear that any attempt to explain Origen's doctrine of freedom and grace by privileging one over the other is doomed to fail: the buried term immediately comes back, mainly because of Origen's account of the Logos, which is neither utterly "philosophical", nor merely biblical. Both elements remain available to him; if, when fighting the Gnostics, Origen can underline the voluntariness of human action and personal responsibility in salvation, so too, when thinking of the human condition in general, he can admit the necessity of grace. It cannot even be said that the insistence on grace comes from biblical references alone. While interpreting Scripture, Origen carefully notes that salvation does not depend on personal strength, but divine grace³⁰¹, and that sinners are lifted up by God.³⁰² Nevertheless, in his exegesis he also speaks of sinners lifting themselves up by their own efforts.³⁰³ The role of freedom is thus stated in biblical terms. It is not, however, so easy to defend Origen's account of grace in strict philosophical terms. Even when striving to include divine intervention in the scope of human life, he does so only in terms of a human *sub specie temporis* vision, and not in an ontological sense. One example is his image of a ship surmounting the dangers of the sea: although the victory has been achieved by the sailors and their captain, "no one in a right mind would ascribe the safety of the ship to anything apart from the mercy of God."³⁰⁴ Is Jerome's accusation of Pelagianism correct? Is Origen's consideration of divine initiative only admitted *sub specie temporis*, while, *sub specie aeternitatis*, voluntarist pantheism holds sway? Is Origen's cosmos really created by a God who remains aloof from the stage of

macht echt paulinischer Glaubenstheologie Platz." The two texts mentioned by Balthasar from the Greek fragments are text 485 in SF: "Nothing which God gives to a created nature is given by way of obligation; instead he gives everything as grace. In no way is eternal life a payment or any kind of debt on the part of God; it is instead his grace (...) (Com. Rom. Frag. Cramer IV, 28)"; and text 487: "But that the law of faith suffices for righteousness, even if we have done nothing, can be demonstrated from the robber crucified with Jesus and the sinful woman in Luke (...). For it was not from any work but from her faith that her sins were forgiven her. But that unrighteousness committed after coming to true knowledge destroys the faith of the one justified, Paul will show quite clearly. I also think that the works done before faith, even if they seem to be correct, do not justify the one doing them because they are not built upon the proper foundation of faith (FrRm Cramer IV, 24)."

301 HEx 6,1.

302 H37Ps 2,1.

303 H36Ps 4,2.

304 Prin III 1,19.

history, or is God, on the contrary, part of the play? Balthasar's answer is clear: Origen is no Pelagian. Balthasar clarifies this position on two occasions. First, in *Spirit and Fire*, where I believe he is still incomplete in grasping the core of Origen's doctrine. Second, in *Theo-Drama 2*, which I believe is more adequate in respect to Origen's doctrine, but also more fruitful in explaining human freedom.

2. A First Explanation: Freedom and Grace in *Spirit and Fire*

We have already witnessed Balthasar's approach to the problem of freedom in his attitude towards the issue of nature and grace. This approach is repeated when he considers grace in relation to freedom, specifically in relation to the later Augustinian view. Balthasar works through the problem in a section of *Spirit and Fire*, when commenting on some passages dealing with *Faith as grace* in this long text:

While Augustine at a later time in his battle against the Pelagians embedded human freedom so completely in divine grace that (true) freedom actually becomes an effect of grace, Origen, in his battle against a naturalistic gnosis (which transferred good and evil into the nature created by God) had to emphasize human freedom. His specific solution is as follows: that on the one hand all natural powers are given and preserved by God, but the human being is free in using them for good or ill; and that on the other hand, in the area of the virtues, there is for each virtue a human, natural virtue to be gained by one's own activity, and a corresponding divine, supernatural virtue given only as grace. God gives these gifts of grace to whoever works for the natural virtue, but he is in no way obliged to do so. Thus Origen certainly emphasized more strongly than Augustine the human being's freedom of choice and his own activity as distinct from grace. But in no way is he to be for that reason suspected of Pelagian tendencies. God's grace and human cooperation interpenetrate, but in such a way that grace always remains strictly underserved and free, and no human work can make the slightest claim to it. Everything in the type of spirit that Origen is and the whole system of his thought exclude the possibility that the impulse to conversion (*initium fidei*) comes from the human being.³⁰⁵

305 SF 192–193, introduction to the section “Faith as grace”. GF 280: “Während Augustinus später im Kampf gegen die Pelagianer die menschliche Freiheit so sehr in die göttliche Gnade einbettet, dass gerade die (wahre) Freiheit zu einer Wirkung der Gnade wird, muss Origenes im Kampf gegen eine naturalistische Gnosis (welche das Gute und Böse in die von Gott geschaffene Natur verlegte) die menschliche Freiheit betonen. Seine bezeichnende Lösung ist diese: dass einerseits alle Naturkräfte von Gott gegeben und erhalten sind, aber in ihrer guten oder bösen Anwendung der Mensch frei ist; dass es andererseits im Gebiet der Tugenden je eine menschliche, ‘natürliche’, durch eigenes Tun zu erwerbende, und eine göttliche, ‘übernatürliche’, nur als Gnade verliehene Tugend gibt. Gott gibt diese Gnadengabe in Freiheit dem, der sich um die natürliche Tugend müht, ist aber keineswegs dazu verpflichtet. Origenes betont also gewiss stärker als Augustinus die Wahlfreiheit des Menschen und seine der Gnade gegenüberstehende Eigentätigkeit. Aber keineswegs ist

In this passage Balthasar conforms to some traditional elements: (i) the freedom-grace dichotomy; (ii) the Augustine-Origen opposition and (iii) the anti-gnostic roots of Origen's attention to freedom. In *Spirit and Fire* Balthasar has yet to provide a fully-articulated account of freedom outside these boundaries. For example, in his analysis of Origen's idea of grace, Balthasar relies exclusively on the idea of grace in conversion, the *initium fidei*. But this does not exhaust Origen's thought on the topic. As we saw in the chapter on Eros, the image of God in man is not, for Origen, based on pre-actualized grace, but a natural desire that becomes efficient with Christ's coming. The same *initium fidei* is not a sudden conversion, but a power latent in each man. The *initium fidei* is nothing more than the beginning of life itself, the soul's adventure in the cosmos.³⁰⁶ To be clear, Balthasar is correct in stating that divine initiative is that which sparks conversion in Origen; the dynamic relation between nature and grace developed in the *Song of Songs* implies the precedence of divine initiative in creation. But the problem in Origen runs deeper. It involves his entire cosmology and Logos-theology, as Balthasar will later realize. In this sense, human freedom finds its home not only in the theological, biblical frame of Origen, but also the philosophical.

3. A Different Approach to the Problem: Origen in *Theo-Drama 2*

If one reads the problem of freedom in light of the classic controversies, Origen's notion of freedom suggests a tool used by the soul to regain a lost condition of beatitude. In this sense, freedom would be nothing more than freedom of choice between flesh and spirit, where the former is evil, and the latter good. However, considering the first two steps of this research (a sacramental ontology opened by aesthetic), we should recognize that freedom in Origen implies more than simply freedom "from" the flesh. If the post-Incarnational world is not merely a pedagogical tool of redemption, but also a sacramental space, a "real symbol" and manifestation of the divine (not a piece of, not a process toward, but a manifestation, *Offenbarung*), then the idea of freedom must be reshaped as well.

Undoubtedly, there is in Origen an aspect of freedom from the boundaries of the flesh, just as there is an aspect of asceticism. But there is also a new kind of freedom that stems from the manifest Logos. To move from (sacramental) ontology to freedom is not to gain a notion of freedom "ethically" superior to freedom of

er darum pelagianischer Tendenzen zu verdächtigen. Gottes Gnade und der Menschen Mitwirken greifen ineinander, aber so, dass Gnade immer streng ungesollt und frei bleibt und kein Menschenwerk den geringsten Anspruch auf sie erheben kann. Die ganze übrige Geistesart von Origenes und das ganze System seines Denkens schließen es aus, dass der Anstoß zur Umkehr (*initium fidei*) vom Menschen ausgehe."

306 On this, see SCHECK, Origen and the History of Justification 60–61.

choice, but rather to find its foundation. The pivotal point is no longer found in the opposition between Origen and Augustine, between human ascent and divine descent, but in a deeper ground that supports them both.

A step can therefore be taken from aesthetic to dramatic, a step that Balthasar did not take in *Spirit and Fire*, but while shaping his own *Theo-Dramatic*.³⁰⁷ If the world is sacramental, freedom becomes the dramatic interplay between rational beings, their Creator, and the world that is His symbol/sacrament. It is, moreover, a *disproportioned equilibrium*, for it is God (reality, in Balthasar's case) who makes the first move. Once the game has begun, however, the disproportion remains in the background, and the struggle for balance begins.³⁰⁸ For this reason, one might be tempted to see God as irrelevant to Origen's cosmos: having shaped the intelligences and given them freedom, God would, on this reading, simply leave them to move up or down the ladder of being on their own. However, to read Origen in this way would be to totally miss his insistence that the source and end of creation is ontological (divine) goodness. It would therefore be to miss the real basis of the created order, the divine Logos—a possibility that, indeed, God left open when creating free men instead of slaves or lesser gods. So Origen's notion of grace cannot be reduced to the *initium fidei*, the moment of conversion: his Logos-theology implies a more constitutive and sacramental idea of grace. Grace is not simply there in the beginning but extends across the entire history of the world. History becomes the "cosmic adventure" of finite freedom in its relation to the Logos' manifold disclosure. The divine goodness, which continually reaches out to humanity, is the true center of Origen's cosmology.³⁰⁹

The whole shape of existence is therefore an engagement of human freedom with the saving will of God, as traced in *Theo-Drama 2*. Balthasar reads the relationship between man and God in terms of a drama between two freedoms, the

307 On Balthasar's theology of freedom see DALZELL, *The Dramatic Encounter*; TÜCK, *Der Abgrund der Freiheit* 82–116; MÖLLENBECK, *Sein als Gleichnis unendlicher Freiheit?* 117–145; KRENSKI, Hans Urs von Balthasar; GALLAHER, *Freedom and Necessity*.

308 The absolute priority of the divine freedom was the point of arrival in Balthasar's *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele*. In the last pages of the third volume Balthasar states, *Apokalypse 3*, 317–318: "(...) wenn es dem Menschen gegeben ist, sich zu vollenden, ja noch mehr: wenn ihm überhaupt der Horizont einer möglichen Vollendung vorgegeben ist, dies nur von der vorgängigen Überbrückung des absoluten Risses her möglich sein kann, also von der absoluten Priorität der Freiheit Gottes her." Balthasar's idea is therefore that the uplifting movement of man is directed to a final point, *ibid.* 324, "wo das Transzendente gegen mich her, auf mich zu transzendiert, wo, mit Hegel zu sprechen, der Begriff 'gegen mich übergreifend' wird und ich mich 'in dieser Transzendenz als endlich' anschau."

309 Origen does not speak of eternal creation with regard to the nature of creatures, but the eternal will of God. LYMAN, *Christology and Cosmology* 65: "In contrast to the Father they (i. e. the creatures) have been created. The crux of the notion of eternal creation is God's desire for creation rather than the quality of human nature; only in the sense of being in the desire or wisdom of God are creatures eternal."

infinite freedom of God, and the finite freedom of man. He defines man's freedom as "finite freedom", "for if, in the face of all objections, we still have an irrefutable awareness of our freedom, we are equally aware that our freedom is not unlimited, or more precisely that, while we are free, we are always moving toward freedom."³¹⁰ This definition seems also to fit with Origen, especially if his concept of desire is acknowledged: the spirit in man is what moves him Godward. Balthasar describes finite freedom as constituted by two pillars: freedom as autonomous motion (*autexousion*, the power of acting from within oneself, self-determination) and freedom as consent.

(i) The First Pillar: Balthasar maintains that, in the ancient Christian authors, from Irenaeus to Augustine, "finite freedom is moved to the center stage."³¹¹ In their writings, the infinite freedom of God is never systematically discussed: "particularly in Irenaeus, Origen and Gregory of Nyssa, the nature and disposition of the encompassing divine freedom is largely conceived and described by reference to the unrestricted privileges of human self-determination."³¹² In Origen, freedom is mostly treated from the perspective of self-determination; our position on the ladder of being is the consequence of a prelapsarian choice.³¹³ Again, Origen sees human life itself as a pathway to God, where every choice matters. For this reason, when explaining Origen's concept of freedom of choice, Balthasar claims the Alexandrian as a supporter of freedom as indifference:

We have been set free in such a way that we occupy an elevated position of 'indifference'; from this vantage point we can choose, and indeed we must choose, because we can only realize this elevated indifference by making choices, choices which affect everything with which we share existence.³¹⁴

(ii) The Second Pillar: if the first pillar describes the constitution of man as free (thanks to the divine image), the second pillar describes the fulfillment of freedom in something else, in something beyond itself (the likeness to be reached). Presenting Augustine, Balthasar defines the second pillar as "theonomy". In Au-

310 TD 2, 207. ThD 2/1, 186: "Denn wenn wir, allen Einwänden zum Trotz, ein unwiderlegliches Bewußtsein unserer Freiheit haben, so ein ebenso gewisses davon, dass unsere Freiheit nicht unbeschränkt ist, genauerhin: dass wir als Freie zu unserer Freiheit immer erst unterwegs sind."

311 TD 2, 216. ThD 2/1, 194: "Vollends in die Mitte rückt die endliche Freiheit".

312 TD 2, 216. ThD 2/1, 195: "Besonders bei Irenäus, Origenes und Gregor von Nyssa werden Wesen und Verhalten der umgreifenden göttlichen Freiheit weitgehend von den uneingeschränkten Privilegien der menschlichen Selbstbestimmung her gedacht und beschrieben."

313 HEz 1,3; HLv 2,2.

314 TD 2, 227–228. ThD 2/1, 206: "Freiheit ist das Freigesetztsein in eine Überlegenheit der 'Indifferenz', die wählen kann, aber auch wählen muss, weil sie nur durch Entscheidungen, alles Mitseiende betreffend, sich verwirklichen kann."

gustine, it is clear that finite freedom can only fulfill itself in the context of infinite freedom. Turning to the Greek Fathers, Balthasar recognizes that “the East pursues a different path in portraying the second pole of finite freedom”³¹⁵(as a Godward momentum). But, he asks, “how does the movement towards the infinite enter into finite freedom, which we have described as autonomous motion and autonomy?”³¹⁶ Gregory of Nyssa provides the answer: finite freedom is simply given, a created fact. But, if we dig beneath it, we find that infinite freedom is always-already “there”, rising up at every moment; “the source from which it springs is a source that wells up eternally.”³¹⁷ Therefore, finite freedom continually receives itself; its eternal movement begins at the moment of creation. This was already implicit in Origen: human freedom is created, and can only find rest when reunited with the divine ground, the source of its own existence. For Gregory, “in a certain sense the soul is constantly being created (*πάντοτε κτίζεται*) in that it transforms itself, through growth in what is good, into what is better.”³¹⁸ However, Balthasar claims that Nyssa’s conclusion is “contrary to Origen”.

4. Movement and Freedom

Balthasar, along with Gregory, claims freedom to be “the movement toward self-realization within infinite freedom” and accuses Origen of perpetuating an “immature” concept of freedom as mere indifference. Therefore, at certain points in *Theo-drama*, Balthasar criticizes a merely auto-deterministic idea of freedom, associated with Origen:

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.³¹⁹

315 TD 2, 234. ThD 2/1, 212: “Einen andern Weg in der Schilderung des zweiten Pols endlicher Freiheit geht der Osten.”

316 TD 2, 236. ThD 2/1, 214: “Aber wie kommt die Bewegung zum Unendlichen in die endliche Freiheit hinein, die doch als Selbstbewegung und Selbstbeherrschung beschrieben worden war?”

317 TD 2, 236. ThD II/1, 214: “Die Quelle, der sie einströmt und die nur die unendliche Freiheit sein kann, ist eine ‘ewig strömende Quelle.’” Quoting PG 46, 105B.

318 TD 2, 236 n. 73. ThD 2/1, 214 n. 1: “In einem bestimmten Sinn wird sie (die Seele) immerfort geschaffen (*πάντοτε κτίζεται*), indem sie sich durch ihr Wachstum im Guten ins Bessere wandelt.”

319 TD 2, 218. ThD 2/1, 197: “Origenes geht, immer in der gleichen Abwehrbewegung, bis in ein Extrem, das ihn formal modernen Standpunkten wie dem Secrétans oder Sartre an-

This is confirmed by a passage in *Cosmic Liturgy* where he considers Maximus as a corrective to Origen:

After Maximus develops this notion of the mutual interplay of willing and intellectual thought, he concludes: "There is, then, no compulsion in the nature of intellectual beings." Once again, this insight meant both the conclusion and the exclusion of a long struggle, a long danger that had come to a head in Origen but had continued to rage ever since: freedom is not identical with the ability to choose between good and evil; otherwise, the fall of the creature could be expected to occur with a diabolical necessity! Christ's freedom reveals to Maximus the mistake in this concept of freedom. Free self-determination toward every good thing by following the law implied in one's status as God's image, in obedience to the flow of one's own natural movement toward God: there, in Maximus' view, is where the personal freedom of the creature must come to its lived reality.³²⁰

Scholars often consider Maximus a "corrective" to Origen.³²¹ It is particularly interesting to review why Balthasar thought this was the case; behind his judgement

nähert: 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." Exactly because of his idea of freedom of choice that, at a first glance, seems to be so modern and absolute (to the point of being compared to Sartre!), Origen can provide a perfect occasion to reflect on freedom even in the 20th and 21st centuries. Despite the almost twenty centuries that separates him from us, his idea of freedom seems to be extremely close to what is presented nowadays: the possibility to choose, the prevalence of potentiality over actuality, the idea that not only the position we occupy in the world but even our substance is for us to be determined. This seems to be addressed by Balthasar when he defines the freedom of choice of Origen a simple freedom of indifference. Other elements of Origen's "system" can shed light on the freedom of the single soul and its rootedness in a concept superior to utter indifference. Three elements in particular help us to understand what lies behind the turn from freedom of choice as indifference between good and evil and freedom as dramatic relation. It is not without meaning that these three elements are solidly grounded in what we can consider Origen's aesthetics.

320 CL 229, KL 226: "Nachdem Maximus diese gegenseitige Durchdringung von Wollen und geistigem Denken ausgeführt hat, schließt er: 'Es gibt also keinen Zwang in der Natur geistiger Wesen' (Disp. 91, 293BC). Wiederum bedeutet diese Einsicht den Abschluss und Ausschluss eines langen Ringens, einer langen Gefahr, die bei Origenes kulminierte, aber auch später weiterschwelte: Freiheit ist nicht identisch mit Wählenkönnen zwischen Gut und Böse; sonst wäre der Abfall der Kreatur mit dämonischer Notwendigkeit zu erwarten. Christi Freiheit zeigt Maximus das Fehlerhafte jenes Freiheitsbegriffs – so wie das Freiwerden durch Christus es Augustinus zeigte. Freie Selbstbestimmung zu jedem Guten im Befolgen des Gesetzes seiner Gottabbildlichkeit, im Gehorsam an die Flussrichtung der eigenen Natur auf Gott hin: darin muss sich für Maximus die personale Freiheit des Geschöpfes darleben."

321 For a detailed comparison of the notion of perpetual progress in Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor in relation to Origenism see BLOWERS, Maximus the Confessor, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Concept of Perpetual Progress 151–71.

lies an important insight that will help him step forward in his reflection on freedom in Origen:

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, motion for Maximus 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.³²²

According to Balthasar, Origen sees freedom as that which empowers all movement. For Maximus, on the contrary, movement has its foundation not in pure freedom, but in an orientation of nature. Movement is therefore negative for Origen, being responsible for the human fall from God. It is evident that Balthasar is critical of Origen's idea of freedom, which he had already made clear in *Spirit and Fire*. Freedom as indifference is unstable. The reason behind this criticism can be traced back to titanism. Balthasar suggests that, in Origen, the Greek *daimon* recaptures the goodness of God by its own strength. He follows Maximus in his analysis of Origen's error—the goodness of being with God is only dialectically evident:

If they say to us that the intellects *could* have [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 [desirable] because of its opposite – not as something loveable absolutely, through its own nature.³²³

As we discovered in reading the epilogue to *Le Mystérion*, Balthasar sees Origen, together with Hegel, as a thinker of progress qua *Aufhebung*. They both fall into the temptation of defining being-with-God as a dialectical good—not desirable in and of itself, but only after the experience of its opposite. The final synthesis

322 CL 130. KL 126: “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.”

323 CL 130. KL 125, quoting Ambigua PG 91, 1069C: “Wenn sie uns aber sagen, die Geister könnten zwar wohl dem göttlichen Gut anhängen, sie wollten es nur nicht, um nämlich die Erfahrung des Gegenteils zu machen, dann wäre auch so das Schöne nicht durch sich selbst, als Schönes, sondern nur durch seinen Gegensatz für sie ein notwendig zu begehrendes Gut, nicht als ein durch seine Natur und absolut genommen liebenswertes.”

is achieved by way of antithesis, and not by virtue of its desirability *in se*. In Origen(ism), motion is negative, as Balthasar continuously underlines throughout *Cosmic Liturgy*; it is because of motion that the rational creatures fell away from God. In Maximus, on the contrary, freedom rests on the solid ground of nature; God designed the rational creatures as moving creatures, ergo motion *as such* is good. The problem lies, for Balthasar, in the notion of *beginning*. For Maximus, movement is good because it is connatural to man, not only morally, but ontologically. In Origen, however, movement is not structural, but accidental. What in Origen is found only morally and dialectically, is, for Maximus, found at the ontological level: like Origen, he was convinced of the finitude of motion in both the material spiritual worlds, “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.”³²⁴ While, for Maximus, motion is natural, for Origen, it is not. The question is whether stability derives from becoming, or vice versa. For Maximus it is clear that stability is not a potential condition of becoming; it is rather the end stage of the realization of a potency already contained in the creature. Stability is the opposite of motion, not becoming. Consequently, stability can only be the endpoint of the process, absolutely distinct from the beginning; it can only be described as “becoming”. The relation between rest and movement is captured in the Maximus triad: *coming to be – movement – coming to rest*. Movement (freedom) is up to man, but follows the divine initiative. Motion is a consequence of this first moment, the coming-to-be initiated by God: “The middle concept 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.”³²⁵ This non-identity is, for Maximus, a certain distance (*Abstand*, *διάστημα*) within finite being itself, and it is by virtue of this undeniable distance that movement never stops. Maximus’ ability to integrate movement into his system as a positive element is dependent on the Aristotelian concept of *ἐνέργεια*, a natural activity in 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 [for existence] can also be transformed from a Gnosis that conquers the world by seeing through

324 CL 141. KL 136: “Maximus (...) war mit Origenes von der Endlichkeit aller Welt – und äonischen Bewegung überzeugt. Freilich aus verschiedenen Gründen: für Origenes war Bewegung an Abfall geknüpft, für Maximus ist sie ontologischer Ausdruck des Geschafenseins.”

325 CL 137. KL 132: “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.”

its reality into a *loving, inclusive affirmation even of finite things*.³²⁶ Origen lacks an affirmative account of finitude because he lacks a proper appreciation of the Aristotelian *ἐνέργεια*.

Following Balthasar's suggestion, we can now read Origen's and Maximus' notions 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 (*kinesis*) is established by the thesis (*stasis*), but the transition to the synthesis (*genesis*) is only dialectical; there is no real distance between rest and becoming, since stability is not the opposite of becoming, but of motion. Indeed, freedom in the pre-lapsarian condition and freedom as movement (fall and post-lapsarian) are the same (with the exception of the burden of the flesh). Origen does not recognize a distance between becoming and movement. Consequently, he assimilates becoming and rest, resulting in a tragic restlessness. Maximus, however, interprets becoming as a fundamental element (thesis): it is the beginning of every movement. Its antithesis (movement) is thus its natural (and not dialectical) development, making the synthesis (rest) the natural opposite of the antithesis (movement). There is no dialectical opposition, 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 a negative, but positive development. Balthasar believes the lack of this *Abstand* makes Origenism a "*Tragizismus*"³²⁷: a collapse of becoming into rest. If these modalities are contemporary, then movement is clearly negative and unnatural. 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."³²⁸

To conclude, we should note two elements of the preceding analysis that echo Balthasar's idea of titanism: the metaphysics of experience as the idea that "love without pain and guilt remains simply a joke, a game"³²⁹ and the tragic eternal

326 CL 135. KL 130: "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."

327 KL 124.

328 See above n. 302.

329 CL 130. KL 125: "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." Balthasar refers here to HEGEL, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* 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" (cf. Origen, CMT XI 5–6).

opposition between rest and movement.³³⁰ Ultimately, the problem with Origen's account stems from the dialectic position of his antithesis vis-à-vis the original thesis: becoming (antithesis) is not given by God, but by an absolute human freedom, in its departure from God (movement). The experience of becoming therefore becomes a titanic struggle to become what one is. Because of the coexistence of becoming and rest, experience (movement) is not a positive gift, but a negative factor to be overcome. In this titanic struggle we recognize the element that led Balthasar to compare Origen to Sartre. Movement is nothing more than freedom ("elevated to some quasi-divine height and left there completely by itself"), and the consequence of this movement/freedom is the life of becoming, experience (*πείρα*). Experience, in turn, is the only way we can recognize, and regain, the radical positivity of rest-in-God. This positivity is only achieved through negation. 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. What is missing, for Balthasar, is a positive denotation of movement at the moment of creation. If this is true, the idea of being-with-God remains "empty and abstract", an idea whose positivity is only found on the other side of a dialectical struggle.³³¹

Does Balthasar really think this is the best Origen has to offer? Does Origen only defend a dialectical notion of experience and freedom? In *Cosmic Liturgy* Balthasar seems to hint that this is not the case. 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."³³² We have already witnessed the demonic aspect of spiritualism and titanism. What then is the central truth of this metaphysics of experience? What is the "real seed" of Origen that passes on to Maximus? What was Origen able to anticipate, despite lacking the Aristotelian notion of *ἐνέργεια*?

5. "Der wahre Kern"

Balthasar sees something vital in Origen, a "true core", that precedes and anticipates Maximus. Despite apparently following Maximus in his critique of Origen, Balthasar elsewhere provides a completely different perspective on the issue,

330 CL 129. KL 125: "Wir zeigten anderswo, wie sehr diese Lehre vom Intellektualismus Origenes' und von alter platonischer Dämonie beeinflusst ist."

331 CL 103. KL 97: "Leer und abstrakt."

332 CL 135–136 (italics added). KL 131: "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."

showing that Maximus develops the seeds of thought present in Origen, however ambiguous. This development is confirmed by other evidence. When discussing the Greek Fathers' approach to the first pillar of freedom, Balthasar claims that they "never insist[s] on this pole for its own sake (as a modern philosopher, for instance, might write a treatise on the freedom of the will) but in order to establish one of the fundamental premises for theo-drama."³³³ Why should this not apply to Origen? Does Balthasar list him together with Gregory and Augustine, and then, few pages later, change his mind? I believe that Balthasar is suggesting that Origen's concept of freedom is not limited to freedom as indifference, and that the quoted passage can equally apply to his doctrine of freedom: it is a fundamental premise, not "freedom for its own sake". Despite the comparison with Sartre, there is a clear difference between celebrating freedom for its own sake "like a modern philosopher" and affirming it as one pole of a relationship. Balthasar's concern is not simply the precedence of "true freedom" (*libertas*) over "free will" (*liberum arbitrium, autexousion*), but rather the deep bond between them. The question is not whether freedom of choice is a legitimate part of freedom as such, but rather whether it is grounded in a deeper orientation. Is it simply an antinomian decision between good and evil, or is there something more? We highlighted the fact that, in several passages, Balthasar interprets Origen's freedom as indifferent regarding good and evil. We have seen one piece of evidence against the supremacy of this interpretation already. *Theo-Drama 2* offers another:

This strong emphasis on freedom as the core of the image of God – but a freedom which, fundamentally, must choose in order to possess itself – is continued in Origen, who can use both ways of speaking: he can distinguish image (as 'nature') from likeness (as 'assimilation') (...) and he can see 'image and likeness' as a unity. On the near side of this parting of the ways we find the two fundamental ideas: Christ is the authentic image of the invisible God; and man, at his best and most spiritual, is 'according to the image'. This spiritual dimension, of course, is what relates man to the Logos; thus it is also the dimension of freedom. For Origen, the latter is not (as is often said) a sublime indifference in choosing; that aspect is only emphasized for polemical, anti-Gnostic purposes. Rather, it is a clinging to God, such as, preeminently, what the soul of Jesus does.³³⁴

333 TD 2, 216. ThD 2/1, 195: "Sie festigen diesen Pol aber nie um seiner selbst willen (so wie ein moderner Philosoph einen Traktat über Willensfreiheit verfaßt), sondern um eine der Grundvoraussetzungen für das Theodrama zu gewinnen."

334 TD 2, 328. ThD 2/1, 299–300: "Diese starke Betonung der Freiheit als Zentrum des Gottesbildes – aber doch einer Freiheit, die grundlegend wählen muss, um sich selbst zu besitzen – setzt sich fort bei Origenes, der beide Redeweisen vertreten kann: jene, die Bild (als Natur) und Ähnlichkeit (als Angleichung) unterscheidet und jene, die 'Bild und Gleichnis' als Einheit sieht. Diesseits dieser Wegscheide stehen die beide Grundgedanken: Christus ist das eigentliche Bild des unsichtbaren Gottes; der Mensch ist in seinem Besten, Geistigen nach dem Bild. Dieses Geistige ist gewiss das Logoshafte, aber eben darin auch das

Balthasar quotes the distinction in Origen between image and likeness, finding there “an orientation of nature.”³³⁵ Man is created in the image of God; likeness is the goal to be reached. Balthasar seems to suggest that forgetting one of these two results in a distorted picture of humanity. By underlining the notion of image and forgetting the role of freedom we cannot understand the pre-lapsarian fall. On the other hand, by underlining freedom alone, we fall into that titanism which Balthasar constantly strives to avoid, forgetting that a direction is given in advance, through the image of the Son. Titanism is therefore ignorance of the divine initiative, an erasure of the difference between image and likeness. This divine initiative will historically take the shape of Jesus. For this reason, Balthasar calls Christ “concrete analogy of being”: Jesus is the concrete shape both of the distance and similarity between God and man. And, because he is created in the image of Christ, man is “the created mirroring of uncreated freedom.”³³⁶

It is striking that Balthasar is not willing to lose freedom of choice for the sake of saving freedom as heteronomy. He does not simply choose one pillar over the other, i. e. consent to God at the price of free choice. Consequently, we have to stop thinking about freedom of choice as “preserved” in the form of an arbitrary power to choose between good and evil. While the fact that we can, and did, fall is a consequence of freedom, this does not reflect the natural order and destination of the human will. As Balthasar highlights in the passage quoted above, the spirit in man (i. e. freedom) is a clinging to God: the natural order of the soul is not freedom as pure choice, but free desire for God, i.e. “what the soul of Jesus does”. Clinging to God is therefore the true essence of finite freedom, being the spirit created in the image of the Son/Logos. In this sense, we cannot speak of true indifference in choosing, since the only moment when freedom is fully itself (i. e. when the soul is itself) is when its desire for God is paramount. This does not mean dissolving self-determination into an irresistible choice for God. The choice must always be made by the individual; nothing is eliminated—the two pillars cannot be reduced to the one or to the other.³³⁷ A passage in *De principiis* makes this clear:

Freie. Dieses ist für Origenes nicht, wie öfter gesagt wurde, die erhabene Indifferenz des Wählenkönnens – dieses Moment wird nur polemisch antignostisch betont –, sondern das Gott-Anhängen, wie es vor allen Übrigen die Seele Jesu tut.”

335 CL 130. KL 126: “Eine vorgezeichnete Richtung, (die) sie nur mitzuvollziehen hat.”

336 TD 2, 397.

337 TD 4, 149: “We have already given an exhaustive treatment of the bipolar nature of finite freedom; it has shown that the two poles, that is, genuine autonomy, on the one hand, and the necessity of an express indebtedness on the other, cannot be reduced to the one or the other.” ThD 3, 136: “Die Doppelpoligkeit der endlichen Freiheit wurde ausführlich dargetan, die Pole: echte Autonomie und Notwendigkeit ausdrücklicher Verdankung, sind aufeinander nicht reduzierbar.”

Since all rational beings were made in the beginning, were made when before they did not exist, by this very fact that they did not exist and then began to exist they are of necessity subject to change and alteration. For whatever may have been the goodness that existed in their being, it existed in them not by nature but as a result of their Creator's beneficence. What they are, therefore, is something neither their own nor eternal, but given by God. 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.³³⁸

The real essence of the rational beings is not freedom as choice, but their original spirit, the "good that was in them", their natural desire to be with God. As Balthasar said with Maximus, freedom is "obedience to the flow of one's own natural movement toward God." This is not simply to say that finite freedom can be *fulfilled* only in God, as if to choose were only one moral option, among others. Finite freedom can *be itself* only in openness to God, in moving toward the One who gave, and gives, it power. In this sense, the goodness that is essential to God, is, for men, something to be freely chosen, something that can become "their own" only by free choice. The question at the core of Balthasar's concern should now be clear: why is this good and fitting? Why is it "better" for man to freely choose adherence to God rather than simply accepting it as a necessary imposition?

Crouzel has a similar interpretation. He is adamant in explaining that "the essence of man is not, for Origen, as sometimes has been said, freedom, the freedom of choice."³³⁹ This seems to contradict the analysis of Daniélou, who maintains that the essence of man is freedom indeed.³⁴⁰ There is, however, no substantial contradiction: it is true, the essence of human being is constituted by freedom—but it is, crucially, a *finite* freedom. There is a permanent element of distance, of non-identity. God is *libertas ingenita*³⁴¹, while man is created freedom.³⁴² Balthasar understands Origen's position very well. He can admit that Origen could be interpreted in line with modern positions like Sartre's, which construes man as a "failed God", the victim of a "useless passion" to become divine. But he also knows

338 Prin II 9,2: *Verum quoniam rationabiles istae naturae, quas in initio factas supra diximus, factae sunt cum ante non essent, hoc ipso, quia non erant et esse coeperunt, necessario conuertibiles et mutabiles substiterunt, quoniam quaecumque illa inerat substantiae earum uirtus, non naturaliter inerat sed beneficio conditoris effecta. Quod sunt ergo, non est proprium nec sempiternum, sed a deo datum. (...) Voluntarios enim et liberos motus a se conditis mentibus creator indulsit, quo scilicet bonum in eis proprium fieret, cum id uoluntate propria seruarietur.*

339 CROUZEL, *Théologie de l'image* 173: "L'essence de l'homme n'est pas pour Origène, comme on l'a dit parfois, le libre arbitre, la liberté-choix."

340 DANIÉLOU, *Origen* 204.

341 HLV 16,6.

342 Prin III 5,4.

that Origen's man not only is not without a precise goal in his uplifting passion, but is neither abandoned to himself in his attempt to achieve it—there is a God who, in His love and passion, has decided not to abandon him—not only by sending his Son to men, but first and foremost by creating man in the image of the Son. Because of this divine passion for humanity, manifested in the incarnation of the Son in whose image man is created, the soul can indeed become “divine” by virtue of her desire for God, without ever becoming God. Consequently, the essence of man is not freedom in and of itself, but rather freedom in relation to its origin.

We know that in Origen the innermost nature of man is the movement towards self-realization, but this movement (the spirit) is fueled by a particular desire: to participate in God. Natural desire is the place of a relationship with something given before choice itself, the sign of a real presence that precedes, and exceeds, all choice. It is true that, for Origen, “the creature is identical with freedom” and it is also true that this constitutive freedom is not simply arbitrary freedom in a moral sense, but has deep, ontological roots. I believe the pivotal point here is the doctrine of creation in Origen: God created *ex nihilo*, out of freedom, and created man in the image of his Logos.³⁴³ Human freedom to achieve the divine likeness is therefore always-already in relation to something given, to the image, the Son, God's Logos.

As further evidence of this, Balthasar claims, referring to Origen's treatise on free will in the third book of the *De principiis*, that “this insight has to be embedded in the total context of Origen's doctrine of salvation.”³⁴⁴ In this treatise, after first defining freedom of the will as autonomous motion endowed with reason, i. e. the power to embrace good or evil, Origen proceeds to discuss scriptural passages that seem to imply predestination. Following the biblical approach, “the scarlet thread running through these reflections is the idea of Providence.”³⁴⁵ Balthasar disagrees with the univocal vision of Hal Koch in *Pronoia und Paideusis*, which recognizes only one “providential” frame of freedom, the “Hellenistic notion of providence”. According to Balthasar, “J. Daniélou rightly emphasizes – in opposition to Hal Koch – that, beside the Hellenistic notion of providence there is a second pole that is decisive for Origen, namely, created freedom; that, in other words, his world view is essentially dramatic.”³⁴⁶ This is the heart of Balthasar's

343 On the creation “out of nothing” in Origen see TZAMALIKOS, Origen. *Cosmology And Ontology of Time*. The author strongly defends a dramatic vision of the God-world relationship: the world is created out of nothing by a free act of God's will, and time is the consequence of this act, a dimension that begins at the moment of creation.

344 TD 2, 218.

345 TD 2, 218–219. ThD 2/1, 197: “Der rote Faden, der durch die Überlegungen führt, ist, wie beim Irenäus, der Gedanke der Vorsehung.”

346 TD 2, 219 n. 27. ThD 2/1, 197 n. 27: “J. Daniélou betont gegenüber Hal Koch mit Recht, dass neben dem hellenistischen Vorsehungsgedanken ein zweiter Pol, der der geschaffenen

interpretation of Origen. To speak of created freedom means, for Balthasar, to recognize an ontological condition prior to choice itself; creaturehood is not a matter of disembodied, impersonal choice, but a being created in image of the Logos.³⁴⁷ This concept of created freedom relates to the idea of man as a “created god”, which Balthasar finds in Gregory of Nyssa, and can also be found in Origen. Balthasar’s explanation of Gregory’s idea of freedom is helpful for understanding Origen. For Gregory, “with regard to the exercise of freedom of choice, one can speak of man creating himself, for in this case (...) we are our own fathers, since we beget ourselves as the people we want to be.”³⁴⁸ Man is divine thanks to the gift of freedom, but this resemblance to God is dangerous: “it has the power to create something that even God cannot create: evil. Evil only attains reality in our will.”³⁴⁹ From this, Balthasar draws a fundamental conclusion:

True, Gregory will immediately discern and describe the mark of creatureliness in man’s freedom of the will, his ability to fall from God. But it is precisely man’s freedom to choose that makes him a genuine partner in dialogue with God. It is precisely because he is *not* God that he can be an image of God and godlike. Man’s godlikeness, of course, can only be finite, like its special product, evil.³⁵⁰

Freiheit, für Origenes entscheidend ist; dass mit anderen Worten sein Weltbild *wesentlich dramatisch* ist.”

- 347 On this dramatic notion of the man-god relation see the abovementioned work of TZAMALIKOS, Origen. *Cosmology and Ontology of Time*. The author, analyzing Origen’s notion of time in the key of the “dramatic relation between God and the world”, presents time as the dimension where “the divine and creaturely will encounter each other and come to a dialectical relation. Creatures learn what the will of God is through God’s own manifestations in the world in the various *kairoi*. Yet they are free to conform to it, or not to do so; they are free to obey or to disobey” (ibid. 371).
- 348 TD 2, 220. ThD 2/1, 199: “Man kann hinsichtlich des Vollzugs der Wahlfreiheit von einer Selbsterschaffung des Menschen reden, denn hier erfolgt die Geburt nicht aufgrund fremder Zwischenkunft, wie bei den körperlichen Wesen, die von außen hervorgebracht sind. Sie ist das restlose Erzeugnis der eigenen Wahlfreiheit; so sind wir in bestimmter Weise unsere eigenen Väter, indem wir uns als die, die wir sein wollen, erzeugen.” Quoting PG 44, 328B.
- 349 TD 2, 220–221. ThD 2/1, 199: “Diese Gottgleichheit trägt in sich eine Gefahr: sie hat die Macht, etwas zu erschaffen, was Gott selbst nicht erschaffen kann: das Böse: es gewinnt Wirklichkeit einzig in unserem Willen.” Quoting PG 44, 725BC.
- 350 TD 2, 221. ThD 2/1, 199–200: “Gewiss, Gregor wird in der menschlichen Willensfreiheit sogleich auch das Merkmal der Geschöpflichkeit, das Abfallenkönnen von Gott, wahrnehmen und beschreiben. Aber gerade sein Wahlfreiheit macht den Menschen zum wahren Gegenüber Gottes, gerade durch sein Nichtgottsein kann er ‘Bild Gottes’ und ‘gottgleich’ sein. Diese Gottgleichheit kann freilich nur innerlich endlich sein, damit aber auch ihr besonderes Produkt, das Böse.”

It is precisely man's finite freedom that makes him partner in the dialogue with God, an actor in a dramatic play. In Balthasar this tension is clear. It becomes evident in his personal way of presenting the argument: a continuous statement of the finitude of the image, coupled with an emphasis on the peculiarity of human finite freedom. Is this true only of Gregory? Balthasar always seems to move between two poles when he asks himself this question. On the one hand, the distance between divine and human is often forgotten in Origen; on the other hand, he concedes that the distance remains, and it is precisely in this distance that the infinite game of freedom takes place:

There is infinite proximity, a proximity that allows the eternal movement, proximity that the term *Parousia* 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' (Mat Com 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.³⁵¹

Creatures move in the space between presence (similarity) and becoming (dissimilarity). This space is the very site of freedom. It is clear that Balthasar believes Origen to have an essentially dramatic view of the world. Thus, freedom is not only a moral category, but also the center of the whole God-human relationship and so a fundamentally metaphysical category. Balthasar sees a deeper truth in Origen, a "real core" that will be passed down to Gregory and Maximus. This core, however forgotten and ignored by Origen's many critics, is, for Balthasar, indissoluble.

Before moving to an analysis of this core, it will be useful to study an example of Balthasar's attitude. In *Theo-drama 2* he mentions, along the same line as Origen and Gregory of Nyssa, the Renaissance philosopher Pico della Mirandola, whom he presents as more than a proclaimer of "a concept of freedom that is new and points forward to the modern age."³⁵² Balthasar, starting from Irenaeus and

351 MO (I) 521; PMO 21–22: "Proximité infinie, mais qui permet le mouvement éternel, proximité que le terme mystérieusement riche de l'Écriture *παρ-ουσία* 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: *Verba autem Christi semper sunt plena, et in actu impletionis sunt semper et quotidie implentur et nunquam perimplentur* (Mat Com Ser 54). C'est donc de cet intervalle toujours comblé et toujours ouvert que naît ce mouvement éternel de la creature, qui ne caractérise pas seulement l'anthropologie de Grégoire de Nysse et d'Augustin, mais déjà pleinement celle d'Origène."

352 TD 2, 226. ThD 2/1, 204: "Einen neuen, für die Neuzeit wegweisenden Freiheitsbegriff proklamiert zu haben scheint."

Origen, tracks a red thread across history.³⁵³ Following Henri de Lubac's analysis, he argues that, in Pico "no divinization [of man] is intended" because man is "*complexio mundi* and at the same time he is transcendent beyond the world", but also because "Pico stresses most strongly in his work that the perfection of man's freedom can only be brought about by the mediating Spirit of God."³⁵⁴ Pico, just like Origen and Gregory, "shows that the alleged Titan of human autonomy is thoroughly traditional; for him there is no difficulty in incorporating a link with absolute freedom in human autonomous motion."³⁵⁵ The greatness of these authors lies not, for Balthasar, in an allegedly modern idea of untied and unlimited freedom. Human autonomy is "thoroughly traditional". Balthasar does not want to deny freedom-as-autonomy in order to save the link with the divine. Paradoxically, autonomy is defined exactly along the boundary with its origin, the border between created and absolute freedom, the place where man is called to obedience. Here, obedience is not meant as an external or foreign element, but submission to a Logos who is our always-contemporary "other", dwelling in the very heart of a humanity shaped in His image. Once again, the space of freedom is the space of a drama, of a relationship. Created and absolute freedom are not two different orders of reality, separated by an insurmountable wall, but two realms that, thanks to the incarnation, have been united in dramatic partnership.

For Balthasar, when the Fathers discuss the first pillar it is never as an arbitrary freedom for its own sake, but always as the prelude to theo-drama; freedom of choice is not neutral *in se*, because no man can truly call himself free without a relation to the origin and goal of his power to choose. Even more: no man can call himself man without a relation to the Person whose image he bears. The presence of desire in the form of spirit makes freedom an ontological, not just a moral, determination. Without a relation to its goal, freedom would become a stagnant form of egoism, a solipsistic circulation, and not a directional progress. Self-possession without a transcendent referent (the "other"-pole of the drama) leads to a circular ethic; the telos dissolves into the self, the *autos*—freedom becomes a striving for self-interest, rather than the good. However, in the deep

353 On this line Balthasar collocates also Newman, TD 2, 227: "It is no surprise, therefore, to find that Newman occasionally designates man as the first cause, the principle of creativity in the moral world", referring to NEWMAN, Oxford University Sermons 6.

354 TD 2, 227. ThD 2/1, 205: "Damit ist aber gerade keine Vergöttlichung gemeint. Denn einerseits bleibt im Menschen die Spannung, dass er *complexio mundi* (Microcosmus) und darin gleichzeitig Transzendenz über die Welt hinaus ist und bleiben muss, andererseits betont Pico in seinen Werken aufs stärkste, dass die Vollendung seiner Freiheit einzig durch den Geist Gottes vermittelt werden kann."

355 TD 2, 227. ThD, 2/1, 205: "Damit hat der angebliche Titan der menschlichen Autonomie sich als durchaus traditionell erwiesen: für ihn (wie für Origenes, Gregor von Nyssa und Bernhard) bildet es keinerlei Schwierigkeit in die menschlichen Selbstbewegung den Bezug zur absoluten Freiheit einzuschließen."

union of the two pillars of finite freedom in Origen's Logos-cosmology, self-interest *coincides* with the good because the latter precedes and exceeds the former: the spirit is desire for the *summum bonum*. While freedom qua indifference is always thought within terms belonging to the realm of possibility, true freedom belongs to the realm of actuality: it is the *actual* goodness of God that moves men. To reduce freedom to brute choice among possibilities would, for Origen, mean to ignore the power that gives rise to, and actualizes, such choices, and therefore to betray the true goal of freedom: "libertas arbitrii nos ab eius caritate separare non poterit."³⁵⁶

6. The Roots of Freedom

a) *The Doctrine of Creation*

According to Origen, the principal "actor" of freedom in the human *compositum* is the *voûc*, not the soul. Even if, in the post-lapsarian condition, it is the embodied soul that chooses between flesh and spirit, the intelligences are created free in the prelapsarian condition. Origen believes that, in conceiving man, God created two natures: a visible bodily nature and an invisible bodiless nature. The invisible nature is "rational"; it is endowed with freedom of will and can therefore change its purpose. The visible nature is at the service of God, who can transform it "as the merits of things requires."³⁵⁷ As a creature, man is not essentially good: "The good and holy powers are not by essence in them [in the rational creatures], which we have clearly shown to be the case with Christ and the Holy Spirit alone, as also, undoubtedly, with the Father."³⁵⁸ Let us pause for a moment on Origen's claim that goodness is not in the rational creatures as part of their essence. How does this not collide with the idea that natural desire is an ontological feature of each being, deeply rooted in their constitution as image-bearers of the Son? Despite first appearances, we are not, I believe, facing an irreconcilable paradox. On the contrary, we find here a major clue. Goodness is not substantially but only *accidentally* in the creature. Man is created in the image of the Logos, but the likeness has yet to be reached, is not yet substantially present in him (as it is in God). Humans, however, are moved by a desire for this likeness. Consequently, freedom of choice is not *itself* the *summum bonum*, but the desire for it, in virtue of man's creation in the image of the Logos. Man is constituted by desire, but the fulfillment

356 CRm V 10.

357 Prin III 6,7.

358 Ibid. I 5,3: (...) *quomodo non etiam de bonis sanctisque uirtutibus cogimur similia confiteri, id est quia non substantiale sit in ipsis bonum, quod utique in solo Christo et in spiritu sancto euidenter ostendimus, sine dubio utique et in patre.*

of this desire cannot be infinitely desiring without an infinite object. Balthasar provides clear commentary on these passages:

We cannot simply systematize the Christian and Biblical Origen to make him conform with the Platonic Origen. The world and matter are not evil, only the free will can be evil. For this reason, the material state as a whole remains a good likeness and an indicator for the upward-striving spirit; and in Christ, in whose flesh there is nothing evil, the lower sensibility unqualifiedly points the way to the heavenly sensibility.³⁵⁹

The freedom of choice that man uses every day, the same freedom he possessed at the moment of creation, stands in constitutive relation to the creative act, or better, the Creator. Freedom is not itself good or evil, but grounded in a goodness that precedes it. This means that, for Origen, freedom of choice is never indifferent toward good and evil, being rooted in divine goodness. As Balthasar notes, “it is quite natural, on the basis of their belief in the personality and freedom of God, that the Fathers regarded the creature’s capacity for self-determination (both of angels and of men) as a power given and delegated by God.”³⁶⁰ The instability of the prelapsarian condition is mirrored in the free will of the embodied *νοῦς*, i. e., once it has become a soul stretched between flesh and spirit. On this point, Balthasar adds: “If the soul chooses the spiritual as its form of life, it is changed into spirit – not according to its essence but according to its most profound mode of being. It becomes ‘flesh’ if it chooses the material.”³⁶¹ Balthasar’s reading seems to focus on one statement in the *De principiis*: “We conclude then that the position of every created being is the result of his own work and his own motives.”³⁶² The consequence of a free act of the will is not a change in essence or substance, but in *modus operandi*. Or, if framed in prelapsarian terms, freedom can influence a creature’s relative position on the ladder of being, but not its God-given form. As in each postlapsarian decision freedom does not change essence but mode

359 GL 1, 360. H 1, 356: “Man kann nicht den christlichen und biblischen Origenes einfach auf den platonischen hin systematisieren; Welt und Materie sind nicht böse, einzig der freie Wille kann es sein, deshalb bleibt der materielle Zustand als ganzer ein gute Gleichnis und ein Verweis für den aufstrebenden Geist, und in Christus, in dessen Fleisch nichts Böses ist, wird die untere Sinnlichkeit schlechthin Wegweiser zur himmlischen.”

360 TD 2, 215. ThD 2/1, 194: “Dabei ist es vom Glauben an Gottes Personalität und Freiheit her selbstverständlich, daß die Väter das Selbstbestimmungsvermögen der Kreatur – Engel und Menschen – als ein von Gott geschenktes, übereignetes betrachten.”

361 SF 46. GF 75: “Wählt die Seele das Geistige als Lebensform, so wandelt sie sich in Geist: nicht ihrer Wesenheit, aber ihrer tiefsten Seinsweise nach. Sie wird ‘Fleisch’, wenn sie das Stoffliche wählt.”

362 Prin I 5,3: *Unde superest ut in omni creatura sui operis suorumque motuum fuerit quod uirtutes istae, quae uel principatum agere in aliis uel potestatem exercere uel dominationem uidentur, ex merito, et non per conditionis praerogatiuam praelatae sint et superpositae his, quibus praeesse uel his, in quos potestatem exarcere dicuntur.*

(ethical attitude), so in the prelapsarian decision freedom did not determine substance, but position, the mode of relation to the actual.

b) The Doctrine of the ἡγεμονικόν

The *νοῦς* is not only defined by being “free”. Origen believes that there are other elements at stake in the essence of man, which we can understand by looking at his description of the ἡγεμονικόν, translated by Rufinus as *principale cordis, principale animae*. Following Lieske, there are reasons to believe that this ἡγεμονικόν describes the inner man, since it is described with three functions (reason, freedom and spiritual sensitivity) present in the prelapsarian condition and the eschaton.³⁶³

The ἡγεμονικόν, for the Stoics, was the ruling faculty of human being, the directive principle, and coincides with reason.³⁶⁴ Origen's anthropology, however, is deeply rooted in his logos-theology. Man is created according to the image of God, and is *eikon eikonos, effigiem imaginis principalis*, insofar as he is created in the image of Christ-Logos.³⁶⁵ That which is created in the image and likeness of God is clearly not the fleshly but the inner, spiritual man. So, the ἡγεμονικόν, the constitutive essence of human being, is the home of man's resemblance to God. The ἡγεμονικόν is also described by Origen as the place where God can reach man: “loquitur Deus in mente hominis, in sensu rationabili et in principali cordis.”³⁶⁶ This is, (i) the substrate of intellectual life, since a first affinity between man and God is given by the rational element. Origen calls it overseer of the heart (*principale cordis*), rational understanding, or intellectual substance; it is that by which man has a capacity for God.³⁶⁷ Together with the intellectual faculty comes (ii) free will, since, for Origen, “the nature of this reason in human beings includes

363 I will follow here the considerations of LIESKE, *Theologie der Logosmystik* 101–116.

364 Hler 5,15: “For it is our heart which contains the governing power.” Origen is conscious of the Stoic use of this term; in CC IV 14 he states that “even the god of the Stoics, as being corporeal, at one time has his whole essence composed of the guiding principle when the conflagration (of the world) takes place.”

365 ClO II 3,19.

366 CRm VII 16. This is confirmed by a passage in HNm 10,3: *principale cordis dicemus, quod solum recipere potest mysteria veritatis et capax esse arcanorum Dei*. This idea of hosting God in the *principale cordis* is present also in CC VI 17, “those whose minds (ἡγεμονικόν) are enlightened by the Logos Himself and God”, and in Jerome's translation of the *Homilies on the Song of Songs*, HCt 2,3: *Quis ita beatus est, ut habeat hospitem in principali cordis, 'in medio uberum', in pectore suo sermonem Dei?* In the *Commentary on Romans* we find two more descriptions of the ἡγεμονικόν as the place where the law is imprinted (CRm VI 6: *Lex ab illo qui ab initio creavit hominem ita in principali cordis eius adscripta est*), and as the ruling principle of man (ibid. IX 23: *Caput uero principale cordis appellatur; et merito caput dicitur cuius intellectus et prudentia membra reguntur uniuersa*).

367 HEx 9,4: *Potest enim intra se agere pontificatum pars illa, quae in eo est pretiosior omnium, quod quidam principale cordis appellant, alii rationabilem sensum aut intellectualem sub-*

a faculty of distinguishing between good and evil.”³⁶⁸ When referring, for example, to the demons who have chosen the evil, Origen says that their *ἡγεμονικόν* remains: “and also what their origin was, so that they became beings of such a nature, that while converted into demons, the power of their *ἡγεμονικόν* remains.”³⁶⁹ The *ἡγεμονικόν* is therefore the cause of good or bad decisions, “for it is the mind (*ἡγεμονικόν*) of each individual which is the cause of the evil which arises in him, and this is evil (in the abstract); while the actions which proceed from it are wicked, and there is, to speak with accuracy, nothing else in our view that is evil.”³⁷⁰ By reason of this bond, Balthasar recognizes that “to deny that man has autonomous motion is to deny him rationality.”³⁷¹ Third, the *ἡγεμονικόν* is described by Origen with reference to (iii) spiritual sensitivity. Origen claims that the *ἡγεμονικόν* experiences sensations and receives impressions not only in dreams, but also in visions, as with the prophets.³⁷²

The *ἡγεμονικόν*, the inner man, is the noble ruler of human being. It is therefore the *ἡγεμονικόν* that needs to be enlightened by the Logos; our inner man is like a field where God has planted seeds that we, in turn, must cultivate.³⁷³ In a certain way, Origen suggests that the *ἡγεμονικόν* is not only an *image* of the Logos but can *itself* contain the Logos when totally conformed to God. In fact, Origen claims that the Logos is present in the inner man, who is indeed shaped in His image: “Jesus is the real word, present in every rational being. And because many believe that the reason lives inside us – and they call it *ἡγεμονικόν* –, so there lives also the Logos, thanks to whom we have a reason.”³⁷⁴

c) *The Doctrine of Christ's Soul*

What does it mean for the *ἡγεμονικόν* to be shaped in the image of the Logos? “Origen could not conceive of any state of affairs in which the Word did not remain the essential link between the Father and his creation.”³⁷⁵ The Logos adopted not only a human body, but also a soul. Origen does not see Christ as a “su-

stantiam vel quocumque modo appellari potest in nobis portio nostri illa, per quam capaces esse possumus Dei.

368 Prin III 1,3. The translation from the Greek text: “since there are in the nature of reason possibilities of contemplating good and evil.”

369 CC IV 66. Here the *ἡγεμονικόν* is also described as the element that can be “enlighted by the grace of God.”

370 Ibid.

371 TD 2, 218. ThD 2/1, 197: “Wer die Selbstbewegung des Menschen leugnet, muß ihm die Vernünftigkeit abstreiten.”

372 CC I 48.

373 Hler 5. Other relevant occurrences of the term *ἡγεμονικόν* are in CC I 46; III 61; IV 64; IV 95; V 16; VIII 74.

374 Clo Fr 8. See also *ibid.* II 3; II 15.

375 MCGINN, *Presence of God* 119.

per-human", deprived of free choice because of his perfection. Despite its ambiguity, the complex doctrine of the soul of Jesus should prove useful for our current purpose. According to Origen, the soul of Jesus is qualitatively identical to that of every other man, the only difference being that it did not fall away from God. The soul of Christ, as every human soul, has a free will; apart from every other, however, Christ's will is perfect, always choosing the good. There was in this soul no *neglegentia*, no *satietas*, and its relation to the Father was a perpetual "yes". For this reason, the Father chose this particular soul to be inhabited by the Logos and so to become the Christ. Leaving aside the complex theological implications of this doctrine, it can shed some light on the problem of freedom we have been discussing: by virtue of what did the soul of Christ avoid disobedience to the Father?

It is anointed, then, with the oil of gladness when it was united with the Word of God in an unblemished union and thereby alone of all souls it became incapable of sin, because it was well and fully capable of receiving the Son of God; and therefore it was made one with him and is addressed by his titles and called Jesus Christ, through whom all things are said to have been made.³⁷⁶

Christ's freedom is understood by Origen in terms of communion, of relation. It is not seen as absolute, untied to anything but itself. In opposition to the common idea of freedom as independence, Origen states that the most perfect soul is not free because of a power to change, but rather because of an unblemished union with the Father. In this sense, the notion of freedom seems to be related to the notion of a concrete given, more so than to a notion of absolute, unrelated possibility. The soul of Jesus is indeed the model for each human soul in its continuous "yes-saying" to the Father. The soul of Christ becomes the objective model of goodness for human imitation. Its perfection is not given by an abstract, absolute power of self-determination, or by an empty indifference of choice, but by a positive determination, i. e. habitual adherence to the Father. Human freedom finds its true place in a relationship that precedes it, the relation between Christ and the Father. Indeed, man was created to be in communion with them.

(i) Receiving his being as gift (ii) in the image of Christ, and (iii) sharing Christ's humanity, man is shaped, from beginning to end, in relation. These three elements bring Balthasar to consider Origen's idea of freedom in terms of dramatic relationship rather than absolute, and therefore tragic, potentiality. It is worth noticing that Balthasar, when reflecting on this in his own theological attempt, makes explicit reference to Origen:

376 Prin IV 4,4: *Oleo ergo laetitiae ungitur, cum uerbo dei immaculata foederatione coniuncta est et per hoc sola omnium animarum peccati incapax fuit, quia filii dei bene et plene capax fuit; ideoque et unum cum ipso est atque eius uocabulis nuncupatur et Iesus Christus appellatur, per quem omnia facta esse dicuntur.*

Theology should beware of trying to reduce to words this mystery of the Spirit and of materializing it through endless distinctions that provide no illumination. Theology will proceed on the basis of the given structures of man as creature, structures that already presuppose the mystery of the Trinity: only if, within the Godhead, the Father hands over to his Son both his entire divinity and the sovereign freedom that belongs to it can we understand that he is also able to endow man with selfsubsistence and freedom. This is already “grace” in a preliminary but valid sense, as Fathers like Tertullian and Origen have emphasized (while distinguishing this grace at the level of creation from divine grace as such).³⁷⁷

Balthasar mentions specifically Prin III I,18–19, where Origen explains with many examples that, when achieving something through free will, man will still say that it was God’s mercy that facilitated the achievement. This does not mean, for Balthasar, that Origen eliminates divine grace, but rather that human freedom is itself the first sign, the first gift, the first act of divine gratuitous love for the creature. This gift has its roots in the innermost core of the divine trinitarian mystery: the relationship between the Father and the Son, the “handing over” of divinity to the Son. In light of what has emerged we are now in a better position to understand the abovementioned Origenian passages on the role of freedom in creation. The distinction between image and likeness in the *De principiis* is clearly the key to understanding freedom in Origen. By the logic of this anthropology, God would appear to allow for the possibility of evil. Since the creature is on a winding path towards likeness, God opens up the possibility of suffering not only for man, but also for himself. The fundamental question will become therefore, for Balthasar: why is this good? Why is it good for man and for God to run the “risk” of evil? We see here how Origen discloses the pivotal question of Balthasar’s dramatic theology.

7. An Exemplar Case: the Fifth Book of the *Commentary on Romans*

An interesting case for the issue of human freedom is Origen’s *Commentary on Romans*, whose fifth book plays a fundamental role in Origen’s doctrine of free-

377 TL 3, 231, quoting Prin III 1,18. ThL 213: “Theologie sollte sich hüten, dieses Mysterium des Geistes zu logisieren und schließlich durch endlose Distinktionen, die zu dessen Erhellung nichts beibringen, zu materialisieren. Sie wird davon ausgehen, dass die Strukturen des Menschen als Geschöpf schon das trinitarischen Mysterium voraussetzen: nur wenn innergöttlich der Vater dem Sohn mit seiner ganzen Gottheit deren souveräne Freiheit tradiert, wird verständlich, dass er auch den Menschen mir Selbstsein und Freiheit begaben kann, was in einem ersten, aber bereits gültigen Sinn schon Gnade genannt werden darf, was schon Väter wie Tertullian und Origenes – diese Schöpfungsgnade von der göttlichen Gnade durchaus unterscheidend – betont haben.”

dom, ambiguous as it is. The particular issue at stake in this book is the character of human freedom: is it eternal or finite? Origen seems to repeat some conclusions drawn in *De principiis*, but instead of repeating them in the first person, he attributes these theories to “certain people”, who believe that “freedom of will shall always remain in rational natures.”³⁷⁸ When referring to such people, Origen always explains doctrines that are fully consonant with his own treatise on free will in *De principiis*. As we saw already, free will is there described as being present in the prelapsarian state as well as the restored condition, where the possibility of a second fall is not excluded. Among other things, for example, these people “want to claim, in contradiction to this absolutely clear pronouncement of Paul, that in the future age it should be necessary for Christ to suffer the same thing or similar things all over again.”³⁷⁹ This doctrine, Jerome explains, was indeed held to be true by the young Origen, and seems to be an adaptation of the Stoic belief of eternally repeating world-cycles.³⁸⁰ Some scholars, and among them the English translator of the *Commentary on Romans*, believe these doctrines, attributed to “certain people”, to be Origen’s ideas, but put into the mouths of “the other” by Rufinus: Origen would therefore simply be repeating what he articulated in *De principiis* with a particular expedient. Other scholars, however, claim that Origen is sincerely repudiating his earlier speculations, developing now more structured considerations.³⁸¹ The complexity of the passage is not only due to Rufinus’ mediation, but to the fact that both in *De principiis* and *Commentary on Romans* Origen speaks often in terms of hypothesis, rather than sure doctrine, when considering the future condition of souls. While the anonymous people hold an “absurd” idea of a time in which things will be “brought to a standstill and a profound silence remains”, Origen seems to claim that there comes a time of profound silence, when the souls’ movement up and down the ladder of being will cease. According to the people, even in the resurrected state, something must always happen, for “some things would be done rightly, some things less rightly, some would make progress and become better, others would become worse.” This, and the following explanation of the possible redemption of Lucifer, are clearly consonant with the *De principiis* images of apocatastasis and resurrection. When coming to reject this theory, however, the author of the text describes the restoration of the original condition (of the “first creation”) as a sort of profound silence. Despite the multiple levels of this passage (the opinion of certain people, the opinion of Origen in *De principiis*, the opinion of Origen in the “true” *Commentary on Romans* and the

378 CRm V 10,14.

379 Ibid. V 10,13.

380 Jerome, Ep 124,13. On this, see KOCH, Pronoia und Paideusis 92.

381 MOLLAND, Alexandrian Theology 161–164.

Origen filtered by Rufinus), one comment seems balanced enough to calibrate the different levels of the question:

We certainly do not deny that free will always will remain in rational natures, but we affirm that the power of the cross of Christ and of his death which he undertook at the end of ages is so great that it suffices for the healing and restoration not only of the present and the future but also for the past ages.³⁸²

In this passage the repetition of Christ's sacrifice is denied. Does this mean that there will be no free will in the resurrected condition? How is this possible, if free will was present before the fall and "the end is like the beginning"? How can rational natures "always have a free will" while, at the same time, transcending the repetition of Christ's sacrifice? The answer for Origen is once again Christological. It lies in the power of the divine sacrifice and, therefore, in the connection between the sacrifice and human freedom, i. e., the active use of free will. Origen explains that the impact of divine love has been so powerful that, in the resurrection state, it will be impossible to sin. He does not say that it will no longer be possible to make choices, or that free will must cease to exist. Indeed, according to Origen, "We certainly do not deny that free will always will remain in rational natures". Sin, not freedom, will be eliminated. It will therefore be possible to have freedom without sin, i. e., freedom that does not hover between good and evil, but always chooses in its best interest by adhering to Christ. Freedom, by this definition, exists independently of sin—just as it was in the prelapsarian state, where the soul is always "clinging to God", as the soul of Jesus does. Origen is clear:

For this is why love is said to be greater than faith and hope, because it will be the only thing through which it will no longer be possible to sin. For if the soul shall have ascended to this state of perfection, so that it loves God with all its heart and with all its mind and with all its strength, and loves its neighbor as itself, what room will there be for sin? [It will be] impossible for the freedom of will to separate us from his love.³⁸³

Because of considerations such as this, Balthasar believes the idea of freedom-as-indifference is only present in Origen's "youthful work", *De principiis*, where he "went so far in his reaction that he equated finite freedom with the unshakable ability to choose between good and evil."³⁸⁴ On the topic of free will, Balthasar separates the younger from the older Origen. The repeated insistence

382 CRm V 10,14.

383 Ibid. V 10,15.

384 TD 2, 234. ThD 2/1, 212: "(...) so war Origenes in seiner Reaktion so weit gegangen, die endliche Freiheit mit der unverlierbaren Möglichkeit der Wahl zwischen Gut und Böse gleichzusetzen."

of the young Origen on freedom of choice is, for Balthasar, due especially to anti-Gnostic polemic, but does not mean that freedom, for Origen, is reducible to freedom-as-indifference. According to Balthasar, this trend is undeniable, but is only one “pillar”, which always needs the second to be true and complete. This is also suggested in *Spirit and Fire* where, talking about the eschaton, Balthasar states that for Origen “earthly freedom of will is only an image of the heavenly freedom of love and grace.”³⁸⁵ What Origen seems to imply by affirming both the persistence of free will in rational natures and the impossibility of sin in the afterlife is that, in the divine eternal love, the “two pillars”, freedom of choice and freedom as consent, will be perfectly matched. Divine love will not erase the *liberum arbitrium*. On the contrary, it will bring it to fulfillment by way of transfiguration.³⁸⁶ Once in heaven, the transfigured creature keeps its free will, but it is always devoted to the good. This confirms our previous consideration—freedom is not only *morally* fulfilled when it chooses the good, but it becomes more truly *itself*. Freedom is truly free only when choosing the *summum bonum*, that love “through which it will no longer be possible to sin”. This interpretation is entirely coherent. It does not deny *De principiis*, or the cosmology of the end in the beginning, but includes, and reevaluates, the role of free will in Origen.

I believe this reading of Origen's doctrine of freedom to be particularly evident in one feature of his cosmology that we have already met, the spiritual body. Exploring this feature will help deepen our understanding of Origen's idea of freedom in both the pre-lapsarian and post-resurrected conditions. As was stated in the chapter on spiritual sensitivity, the spiritual body is one of the clearest examples of difference between the Trinitarian God and the rational creatures. Only God is bodiless, while every creature has some sort of body. If one accepts this interpretation of the pre-lapsarian condition as spiritually embodied, one must also affirm the presence of this spiritual body in the resurrected condition. Resurrection is not simply the destruction of the body, but a more articulated process. The relation between the spiritual and the corporeal body is not substitutionary; following Paul, the former is the fruit of the latter. If it is clear that the flesh has to “die”, it is also evident in the metaphor that what is grown is not completely dif-

385 SF 351. GF 522: “Und auch die irdische (Wahl-)Freiheit ist erst Gleichnis der himmlischen (Liebes- und Gnaden-)Freiheit”

386 The idea that freedom of choice is preserved only when the possibility of sin is present seems to construe sin as an original element, instead of a derived and post-lapsarian element. It is for this reason that it is so hard to understand the fall, for Origen, as for us: what could have brought the intelligences to fall, if there was nothing else than God, and no “evil” to choose? It is not insignificant, in my opinion, that on the few occasions when Origen describes the fall he does so in terms of negligence (Prin I 4,1) or satiety (ibid. I 3,8). These are not terms directly connected with the idea of choice, but more with the idea of failed preservation of a given gift or, paradoxically, with the idea of satiety with a superabundance gift.

ferent from what is sown; spirit does not substitute flesh, but stems from it. What has to die of the seed is the external skin, the “cloak of flesh”, the heavy qualities. From this death, the fresh core of spirituality will rise. For this reason, we can understand that the resurrection does not annihilate the physical condition, but literally brings “out” the full truth of the physical as such, as springtime brings out the sprout from the seed. What remains in the resurrected state is therefore what is “more essential”; not the heavy qualities, but the spiritual body, i. e. what God has personally shaped from the beginning. This spiritual body, we said, is the first evidence of man’s not being God. What happens in the resurrection is not fusion into an indistinct, transhuman pneuma. Individuality is fully preserved, and with it, I claim, individual freedom. Indeed, Origen insists that the pre-lapsarian spiritual body was capable of choice. God gave freedom of choice, *liberum arbitrium*, to the rational creatures from the very first moment of existence, just as He gave them a spiritual body. We analyzed this when looking at Origen’s doctrine of the *ἡγεμονικόν*: rationality, freedom, and spiritual sensitivity are always connected in the rational creatures. For this reason, the spiritual body can be seen as an exemplary locus of freedom of choice, and therefore of the unsurpassable and unforgettable distance between man and the Trinitarian God.

We can now better understand what Origen means in the passage we examined from the fifth book of *Commentary on Romans*. The preservation of the spiritual body proves, in fact, that even in the resurrected state rational creatures will maintain their freedom—not only as *libertas*, but also as *liberum arbitrium*, freedom of choice. When Origen says “we certainly do not deny that free will always will remain in rational natures” he is not simply trying to diminish a bold statement. The qualification perfectly fits his omnipresent idea of a pre-lapsarian fall and, therefore, of pre-lapsarian free will. However, following this statement, he adds that the power of the cross of Christ is so great that it suffices for the restoration of present, past, and future ages. Christ’s sacrifice is not only a moral example which can help every soul climb back to original unity, though it is that. His sacrifice healed and restored the fallen condition, allowing the transfiguration of the physical into the spiritual. This has also been made clear in Origen’s consideration of the Scriptures: the literal meaning is not destroyed, but fulfilled and transfigured by Christ, exactly as the physical body is not destroyed but transfigured in the spirit.

For this reason, freedom of choice will be present in heaven in a different way than in the prelapsarian condition. It will be transfigured, elevated, or, as Balthasar often says, *aufgehoben*. Despite how paradoxical it might sound, every creature will always retain the possibility of choice, but will always choose the same thing: a perfect submission to divine love. Regardless of the complicated issue of the plurality of the eons in Origen, he does believe in a final condition. There will ultimately come a moment when every rational creature will live in

perfect harmony with the divine love. Nor will this moment be artificially imposed: as stated in the 7th Homily on Leviticus, God will patiently wait for every creature to choose him, freely. Origen is clear: God does not want to be loved by slaves, but by free creatures; it is true that these creatures fell into slavery, but still he will patiently wait until each prodigal son returns home. Even more, God sent his firstborn Son to help the slaves regain their sonship. Again, as we have often stated, the incarnation of the Logos is not just a pedagogical tool used by God to help a poor, lost humanity. In the Incarnation, we see God's desire to leverage the physical into the spiritual realm, we see God's personal adoption of the "slave" condition and its transfiguration into the filial condition.³⁸⁷ Balthasar often insists on this idea of transfiguration in his own theology, as when commenting on the Book of Revelation 21:4:

These things ('the former things') have 'passed away', for the One who sits upon the throne says, 'Behold, I make all things new'. Not: Behold, I make a totally new set of things, But: Behold, I refashion and renew all that is. And our faith tells us that this 'new' reality was already present in the 'old', in our drama, though in a hidden form.³⁸⁸

Considering now Origen's cosmology of the eons, it is clear that the final condition is not a simple restoration of the prelapsarian state, as if the many eons played no formative role. In the same way, resurrection life is not a "new set of things", totally detached from history. The clearest example of this fact is the resurrected body of Christ, whose crucifixion wounds are not erased. The Cross, and the eternal presence of the Logos, have the power to transfigure all that was, is, and will be. Everything will be saved, not lost and recreated; the final condition is not, for Origen, an identical restoration of the initial eon, despite what has often been said. The progress of the souls plays a fundamental role—their choices, actions, and history of salvation. This is the meaning of *Aufhebung*: the free choice to love God is "superior" to the simple fact of being created into love. For this reason, even evil and suffering, not included in the original plan but somehow permitted, might also be transfigured:

387 I am not denying the superiority of the spiritual over the corporeal in Origen. On the contrary, I am claiming that, for Origen, it is exactly because of the superiority of the spiritual that even the corporeal can be elevated, thus establishing its true place in the economy of salvation. This cannot entail a simple, easy dismissal of the body, because of the chronological and ontological precedence of the spiritual body.

388 TD 4, 200. ThD 3, 185: "Dieses, 'das Frühere,' 'ist vergangen,' den der Thronende sprach: 'Siehe, ich mache alles neu.' Das heißt aber nicht: Siehe, ich mache lauter Neues, sondern: Siehe, ich gestalte alles, was ist, neu. Und hier sollte man sich im Glauben erinnern, dass dieses Neue schon immer im Alten, in unserem Drama, wenn auch verborgen, anwesend war."

What is guaranteed by the answer is this: existence in all its gravity can be embraced and kept safe by God's sphere. And it is not merely that its radiant moments are thus lifted into the divine sphere, while the painful moments are sifted out and thrown away. No: the totality is 'transfigured', and its meaning is shown in its true light.³⁸⁹

The condition of earthly life is preserved and yet elevated in the final condition, and with it every feature of the *ἡγεμονικόν*: freedom, spiritual embodiment, reason. The entire structure of being will be preserved, but in its numinous form. Every single aspect of this worldly condition will endure, both in its being qua image and in its being qua sacrament, its being *Offenbarung* and its being mystery. Even freedom of choice will be preserved, but transfigured into the perpetual choice for goodness and love:

The basic structure of being, its double aspect as both truth and image, is maintained in the eschatological for one last time (...) Everything that takes place in the earthly order of salvation is sign and sacrament, mirror and mystery of what is completed in the eternal order of salvation. (...) But even the sacraments of the church are, in all their true effectiveness, only shadows of the eternal sacrament (...) And earthly freedom of choice is only an image of the heavenly freedom of love and grace.³⁹⁰

8. Indifference or *Indifferentia*?

In light of these elements, we can now understand what Balthasar means when claiming that, in the Greek Fathers, "finite freedom is moved to center stage, but

389 TD 4, 134–135. ThD 3, 124: "Die Antwort verbürgt, dass die Existenz in ihrer ganzen Schwere in die Sphäre Gottes eingeborgen werden kann. Nicht nur ihre lichten Momente werden aufgehoben, während die schmerzlichen herausgepflückt und weggeworfen werden, sondern das Ganze wird in seinem Sinn aufgelichtet und verklärt." Balthasar defines this transfiguration of human freedom however as a mystery, SF 342: "This is how the mystery of purifying punishment flows into the ultimate mystery of the superior power of love over evil. Even human freedom is not so absolute that it can remain impervious to God's more absolute love. But this mystery remains veiled, and must remain so." GF 509: "Damit mündet das Geheimnis der reinigenden Strafe in das letzte Geheimnis der Übermacht der Liebe über das Böse. Auch die menschliche Freiheit ist nicht so absolut, dass sie nicht von Gottes absoluter Liebe umgriffen bliebe. Aber dies Geheimnis bleibt verhüllt und muss es bleiben."

390 SF 351 (translation slightly modified). GF 522: "Die Grundverfassung des Seins, seine Doppelheit als Wahrheit und Gleichnis, bewährt sich im Endzeitlichen ein letztes Mal. (...) Alles, was in der irdischen Heilsordnung geschieht, ist Zeichen und Sakrament, Spiegel und Rätsel dessen, was in der ewigen Heilsordnung sich vollzieht. (...) Aber auch die Sakramente der Kirche sind, in all ihrer echten Wirksamkeit, erst Schatten der ewigen Sakramente (...). Und auch die irdische (Wahl-) Freiheit ist erst Gleichnis der himmlischen (Liebes- und Gnaden-)Freiheit."

they never insist on this pole for its own sake (as a modern philosopher, for instance, might write a treatise on the freedom of the will), but in order to establish one of the fundamental premises for theo-drama.³⁹¹ If we want to understand freedom in Origen, suggests Balthasar, we cannot simply take one meaning over the other, just as Balthasar himself does not want to save the first pillar by demolishing the second. Rather, we need to understand the bond between them. The two pillars in Origen uphold a greater object: the divine gift of love. Within this relationship, even *indifference* finds its place:

Within finite freedom there is an element of infinity that we may call indifference toward all finite goods, or the absolute longing for what is always beyond our grasp. If this element of infinity is not to become a Tantalus' torment or to be smothered by the confines of finitude; if its progress toward self-realization is also to be free and not caught in the chains of some dialectical law, it needs to have an infinite freedom in and above itself, empowering it to realize itself as finite freedom.³⁹²

Balthasar, drawing from Ignatian spiritual exercises, does not grant metaphysical status to the practice of indifference. Indeed, Ignatius never formulated his notion of indifference in metaphysical terms. Unlike Eckhart's metaphysical indifference, which, according to Balthasar, comes dangerously close to pantheism, Ignatius draws from a univocal interpretation of being with roots in Duns Scotus.³⁹³

What is absolutely decisive, however, is that, though Ignatius continued the idea of abandonment in all its Christian radicalism, he did not adopt the metaphysical formulation given it by the German mystics, most notably Eckhart. Christian abandonment does not imply, even when conceptualised and lived in an uncompromising way, the ancient hylemorphic model whereby God is form and the creature is matter. The practice of indifference, as understood by Ignatius, does not therefore mean the inevitable annihilation of man's own being and will. That interpretation, which is to be found in varying degrees of

391 TD 2, 216. ThD 2/1, 195: "Sie festigen diesen Pol aber nie um seiner selbst willen (so wie ein moderner Philosoph einen Traktat über Willensfreiheit verfaßt), sondern um eine der Grundvoraussetzungen für das Theodrama zu gewinnen."

392 TD 2, 200. ThD 2/1, 180: "Denn wenn das Unendlichkeitsmoment innerhalb der endlichen Freiheit – nennen wir es Indifferenz allen endlichen Gütern gegenüber oder absolute Sehnsucht nach dem Uneinholbaren – nicht bei deren Anstrengung, sich einzuholen, entweder zur Tantalusqual werden oder von den Zwängen der Endlichkeit erstickt werden soll, wenn ihr Lauf zur Selbstverwirklichung selber frei und nicht in die Ketten einer gesetzhaften Dialektik gebannt werden soll, dann bedarf sie in und über sich einer unendlichen Freiheit, kraft deren und in der sie sich als endliche verwirklichen kann."

393 Balthasar sees Eckhart as a forerunner of Luther, Spinoza, Böhme, Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, not because he was formally an idealistic pantheist, but because he had sown the seeds of pantheism by claiming "Gott ist das Sein": H 3/1, 391–401.

strength in spirituality from Eckhart to Fénelon, is the symptom of a latent monothelitism, not to say eastern style pantheism.³⁹⁴

It is not hard to understand how this relates to Origen. Balthasar was always critical of Origen's spiritualism exactly because it risked transforming the soul into a *göttliche Fünklein*, mirroring Eckhart's mysticism of the *Seelenfünklein*. Indifference does not mean, for Balthasar, *substantial* indifference, to the point of making the interior life of the soul an extension of the life of the Logos; indifference is rather the collaboration between creature and Creator, the place of the *analogia libertatis*. As the *analogia entis* expresses the God-world relationship in terms of similarity, so does the *analogia libertatis*: on the stage of history we find both infinite divine freedom and finite human freedom. This shift from *analogia entis* to *analogia libertatis*, central to Balthasar's theological system, recalls the Ignatian exercises.³⁹⁵ How is it possible for man to reject God? How is it possible for God to respect human freedom to the point of sacrificing himself? Balthasar conducts his reflection on the *analogia libertatis* in the section of *The Glory of the Lord 2* dedicated to Anselm: *The Radiance of Freedom*.³⁹⁶ We could say that, in a certain way, the issue with Anselm is similar to the issue with Origen. The debate circling philosophical and theological interpretations of the *Proslogion* resembles the question about whether Origen should be considered a philosopher or a theologian. Balthasar, influenced by Barth, reads Anselm primarily as a theologian.³⁹⁷ Barth's claim, for its part, generated a never-ending debate, due especially to the inability of modern scholarship to overcome the separation between faith and reason, theology and philosophy. But these binary categories are foreign to the thought of Anselm. Something similar could be said of Origen, who did not separate theology and philosophy. At the same time, however, Balthasar seems to perceive a difference between Origen and Anselm on the issue of freedom. In Anselm, Balthasar sees the transformation of the philosophical *analogia entis* into the theological *analogia libertatis*. The analogy between God and creature, for

394 GL 5, 104. H 3/2, 457: "Völlig entscheidend aber ist, dass Ignatius, den Gelassenheitsgedanken in seiner ganzen christlichen Radikalität fortsetzend, dessen metaphysische Formulierung durch die Deutschen, durch Eckhart zumal, nicht mitübernommen hat. Christliche Gelassenheit impliziert, auch wo sie abstrichlos gedacht und gelebt wird, nicht die antike hylemorphistische Schematik von Form (Gott) und Materie (Geschöpf). So braucht Indifferenz nicht in Richtung auf Vernichtung des Eigenseins und Eigenwillens der Kreatur hin geübt zu werden, eine Richtung, die die Spiritualität von Eckhart bis Fénelon stärker oder schwächer unter ein verborgenes monotheletisches – und nicht zu sagen orientalistisch-pantheistisches – Vorzeichen gestellt hat."

395 LÖSER, Die Ignatianischen Exerzitien im Werk Hans Urs von Balthasars 152–174.

396 GL 2, 237–252. H 2/1, 241–257: "Der Glanz der Freiheit".

397 BARTH, Fides Quaerens Intellectum. On this see VILLAGRASA, L'Anselmo di Hans Urs von Balthasar 87–126.

Anselm, is an analogy of freedom. The creature is perfected as he draws closer to the absolute divine freedom, "and simply wills, in freedom and not through being overpowered, what God wills."³⁹⁸ This can happen only in relationship with the Creator, and so can only be fulfilled in the grace of God, through participation in the life of the Trinity. If freedom is given, then it can only be grounded in the freedom of the giver. Anselm, to his credit, defends the indispensable passage from *analogia entis* to *analogia libertatis*; Balthasar thinks this transformation is dangerously lacking in Origen. Origen, for his own part, calls God unbegotten freedom³⁹⁹: the archetypal reality of freedom (*ἐλευθερία*), defined, following the Stoics, as "power of independent action" (*ἐξουσία αὐτοπραγίας*).⁴⁰⁰ The problem for Balthasar is that Origen predicates freedom as "one and the same virtue in God and man."⁴⁰¹ Should freedom, for Balthasar, be univocally predicated in God and man like Origen suggests? Or is it rather an analogical relation? Like Origen, Balthasar tends to underline the "similarity" of the freedoms: he speaks of correspondence (*Entsprechung*) between the historical-manifestation of God in Christ, and human agency.⁴⁰² Nevertheless, the risk in Origen, for Balthasar, appears to be a forgotten distance. As we have discovered, Balthasar always sees in Origen the threat of a "victory" of "philosophical univocity" over "theological distance". But Balthasar does not hastily dismiss Origen's idea of freedom because of this univocity. Rather, he transposes the role of freedom in Origen to a new key: Christology, based on the free act of God towards man.

There is, in fact, one element that preserves the concept of analogy across both similarity and dissimilarity even when applied to freedom: the divine *passio caritatis*. God loved man to the point of incarnation, giving up his son for human salvation. The divine initiative reconfigures, for Balthasar, the whole meaning of freedom. Once the incarnation has taken place, freedom can no longer be spoken of in the same way. For this reason, even the meaning of indifference is

398 GL 2, 237–238. H 2, 241–242: "Alles gründet in einer einfachsten Vision der Analogie zwischen Gott und Geschöpf als Analogie der Freiheit: diese kann für das Geschöpf nur bedeuten: geschaffenes Gegenüberseindürfen (und darin Anteilnahme an Gottes Selbständig- und Personsein), was aber nur vollendbar ist durch ein je stärkeres gnadenhaftes Hineingezogenwerden der geschöpflichen in die absolute Freiheit, bis dahin, dass das Geschöpf seine letzte Freiheit dann erlangt hat, wenn es mit-frei mit Gott und in Gott geworden ist aus Freiheit und in keinerlei Übermächtigung einzig will, was Gott will. (...) Weil aber 'vollkommene concordia nur herrscht, wo diese zur einen identitas und unitas sich einigt, nämlich in der göttlichen Dreieinigkeit, ist die eschatologische Freiheitsanalogie zwischen Gott und Geschöpf nicht anders als in der Gnade als Teilnahme am dreieinigen Leben zu verwirklichen."

399 HEx 4,1; HLv 16,1.

400 Clo II 16,112.

401 CC V 29.

402 TD 3, 206–214.

transformed, as can be seen in Balthasar's explanation of the difference between Christian and non-Christian mysticism.⁴⁰³ In Christian mysticism, the point of departure is always God, who goes out in search of man, and not vice versa. Consequently, when Christianity took over terms like *apatheia/indifferentia/tranquility*, it was always with a new meaning: "If Christian 'readiness' is already a response to God's address, then it is not the point of departure for one's own undertaking but the presupposition for the arrival of God's undertaking, who wants to gain a foothold on earth and in the heart."⁴⁰⁴

9. The Law of Love

The clearest formulation of this deeper notion of freedom in Origen is the second part of the *Epilogue of Le Mystérion*. After a long passage on the similarity between Hegel and Origen, Balthasar makes a list of elements that enable Origen to surpass Hegel, Plato and, in general, the "daimonic struggle", which we know is a major problematic tendency for Balthasar:

(1) The texts that describes the final unity between God and the creature come from an inspiration that is far from the ancient Greek genius; (2) the unforgettable experience of the sin; (3) the eternal memory of the Passion (Clo 2,4) and (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' (Prin I,3,8). The eternally tragic and dualistic Eros leaves room to the love of Christ.⁴⁰⁵

These four elements show that the relation between God and man is no longer a tragic, dialectical opposition, but a dramatic game of two freedoms. Every element of necessity is given up, and freedom is fully at play—not only for the human side, but also the divine. In fact, these elements present human freedom in relation to divine freedom. (i) The final unity is achieved by man in the rela-

403 ET 4, 309–336, especially 324–325.

404 ET 4, 325. ST 4, 314: "Wenn christliche 'Bereitschaft' schon Antwort auf den Anruf Gottes ist, dann ist sie nicht der Ausgangspunkt eines eigenen Unternehmens, sondern Voraussetzung für das Ankommen des Unternehmens Gottes, der auf Erden, in den Herzen Fuß fassen will."

405 MO (II) 63–64; PMO 115: "Non seulement les textes pathétiques qui décrivent l'unité finale entre Dieu et les créatures sont issues 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 beatitude 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 à déjà céder à l'Amour du Christ."

tion between his freedom to follow Christ, and the divine freedom in dispensing grace. (ii) The experience of sin is the consequence of human freedom. (iii) 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 unique sacrifice of the Son so that we can become adoptive children. (iv) Freedom is continuously nourished by love: the more creatures experience the divine freedom of self-giving, the more they experience the desire to be with him. The ultimate unity between God and man; the experience of sin; the divine initiative in God's passion for man: each of these preserves the similarity between God and man without dissolving either agent into the other. For this reason, there is no longer a tragic opposition, but a dramatic interplay between freedoms. For Balthasar, as already for Ignatius, indifference means "love" before "self-determination"; the second must always be interpreted through the first. Underlying the two pillars is divine love, in which man can actively participate. Because of this original love, Balthasar maintains that we cannot think the two concepts of freedom (indifference and consent) apart from one another—they are mutually interdependent: "insofar as the twin poles of finite freedom inseparably coinhere, autonomy cannot be conceived apart from the dynamism of its 'whence' and 'whither'; it is this that makes it a real image and likeness of absolute freedom."⁴⁰⁶ In this sense, we can understand Balthasar's claim that the second pillar is primary. This, because "it enables us to affirm the value of things and reject their defects, to become involved with them or turn away from them [because it is] a new and a deeper indifference (...) to let the Good 'be', whether it be a finite or an infinite Good, simply for the sake of its goodness."⁴⁰⁷ Even freedom of choice in Origen, if understood correctly as "a new and deeper indifference", can be the affirmation of goodness as the true and perfect self-determination, a determination that is guided by the self in adherence to the good: "Finite freedom as autoexousion, as consent to oneself in the freedom of self-possession, is by no means alienated but rather inwardly fulfilled by consenting to Being-in-its-totality (...) as that which, in infinite freedom, creates finite freedom."⁴⁰⁸ This is the true meaning of freedom, for Balthasar, and is in perfect consonance with the deepest core of Origen's cos-

406 TD 4, 163. ThD 3, 149: "Sofern die beiden Pole der endlichen Freiheit aber untrennbar ineinander liegen, ist Autonomie nicht ungetrennt denkbar von der Dynamik ihres *Von-her-Zu-hin*, die sie erst eigentlich zu einem realen Bild und Gleichnis der absoluten Freiheit macht."

407 TD 2, 211. ThD 2/1, 190: "(...) so daß das Moment der Indifferenz, wodurch der in der Offenheit des Seinslichtes Strebende alle endlichen Gegenstände je schon überholt hat, in sich eine andere, tiefere Indifferenz enthüllt, in der er das Gute, ob endlich oder unendlich, um seiner Gutheit willen an sich selbst sein-lassen kann, ohne es für sich zu erstreben."

408 TD 2, 242. ThD 2/1, 219: "(...) dann wird ersichtlich, dass endliche Freiheit als autexousion, Zustimmung zu sich selbst in der Freiheit des Selbstbesitzes, sich keinesfalls entfremdet, sondern innerlich vollendet durch die Zustimmung zu jenem Sein-im-Ganzen, das sich

mology; namely, the spirit “clinging to God”. Creation, for Origen, is the history of a dynamic process, where creatures are not passive images/receivers of the good, but responsible actors and active co-players. In light of this, the Origenian maxim “the end will be like the beginning”⁴⁰⁹ means that rational creatures will, in the end, be free from sin as they were in the beginning, but now obtaining enrichment in goodness—exactly because of original freedom. This is what lies behind Origen’s idea of pedagogy, which Balthasar calls the “cosmic adventure” or progress as *Aufhebung*: choice will always be possible, but there will come a time when divine grace and human “exercise” in life will bring man to freely choose always and evermore for God.⁴¹⁰ Here, freedom reveals its dramatic aspect; it is first of all a relation with the supreme action, the goal of all movement, God. Freedom, from our perspective, exists in a sort of disequilibrium: while human freedom is composed of two pillars, meaning that the self does not always achieve its proper determination in God, the infinite freedom of God does not exhibit this bipolarity. In his freedom, God is pure actuality with no trace of unfulfilled potentiality: *actus purus*. His free choice always coincides with an act of superabundant love, a love that eternally consents to the world, to that which He created, and continues to create. This is the extreme paradox of love: the absolute freedom of God is nothing else than his loving “consent” to finite freedom, leaving man free to walk his own path in order to freely find salvation. For this reason, Balthasar considers the finite aspect of human freedom something positive. It is not a curse but a gift, the product of divine love. To leave aside the finitude of freedom and the necessity of choice would mean to deny the fundamental fact of creation:

The polar constitution of finite freedom becomes the reason why the self-actualization of this freedom, as its summit, must lead irresistibly to a choice: if it is authentically to lay hold on itself as freedom, it cannot see itself as purely autonomous but must also realize that that is a gift, owning its existence to some other source. The highest act of freedom in no way means that freedom should be defined as essentially ‘freedom to choose’ (*liberum arbitrium*) between good and evil. Man in God can possess a fully realized freedom and have this choice behind him; so it is, at least, the case of the blessed who behold the face of God. But as Henri de Lubac has shown in his *Surnaturel*, it does mean that God cannot create a freedom that is so confirmed in the good that it does not need to choose; such a freedom (...) would have been robbed of its supreme dignity.⁴¹¹

nummehr als das Dinge frei Begründende, in unendlicher Freiheit endliche Freiheit Stiftende enthüllt hat.”

409 Prin I 6,2; II 1,1.

410 MO (II) 62; PMO 113.

411 TD 4, 150, referring to DE LUBAC, *Surnaturel* 185–321. ThD 3, 137: “Die polare Wesensverfassung der endlichen Freiheit wird nun zum Grund, weshalb der Selbstvollzug dieser Freiheit auf seinem Höhepunkt unweigerlich zu einer Wahl führen muss: sie kann sich selbst nicht wahrhaft als Freiheit ergreifen, wenn sie sich nur als autonome und nicht

We fully understand Balthasar's rendition of freedom in Origen: even if sin will be absent from the resurrected condition, what will not, and cannot, be absent is the supreme dignity of man as an actor in the divine-human play—which is to say, his freedom. The process of development, the personal choices made throughout corporeal life, bring the soul to an upper, or better, *deeper* condition, where personal action towards salvation truly matters; it is not the recital of a script whose finale is already known to the director, but a real dramatic play, as revealed by the entire biblical narrative. Here, we start to see the answer to Balthasar's concern about the value of the finite element of freedom. Finitude is not only the negative consequence of a bad decision, nor is it simply a pedagogical tool that will be annihilated once the "truth" is obtained. The fact of being finite, of not-being-God, has an added value. It allows salvation to be truly participatory, not simply imposed. We are introduced to the deeper mystery of human freedom: "God does not want to be just contemplated and perceived by us, like a solitary actor by his public; no, from the beginning he has provided for a play in which we must all share."⁴¹² In Origen, Balthasar finds a certain risk of confusing the heroic and the Christian. It is, however, exactly this risk that fascinates Balthasar the most, bringing him to ask a recurrent personal question: why should this be good? Why is it good for both man and God to run the risk of human autonomy? Why does God allow the spiritual creatures to fall, giving them His image but not yet His likeness?

As we know, Origenian cosmology is permeated with the idea of suffering as *pathei mathos*, salvation gained through pedagogic suffering (where freedom is the tool we are given in order to learn through mistakes). Nonetheless, I believe Balthasar opens a new perspective for understanding freedom in Origen. Spiritual sensitivity and natural desire are two examples of admiration for the mystery of a God who chose the world as an expression of love, a God who loved man so much that he gave himself in human form, creating space for true, positive freedom. Natural desire and spiritual sensitivity, read in light of Balthasar's theological aesthetic, reveal the sacramental aspect of Origenian cosmology. The Balthasarian account of *analogia entis* reveals a deeper meaning, secured by distance: sacramental ontology means an ontology of mystery, of veiledness. God

zugleich als geschenkte und somit als sichverdankende ergreift. Dieser höchste Akt der Freiheit bedeutet keineswegs, dass Freiheit wesentlich als 'Wahlfreiheit' (*liberum arbitrium*) 'zwischen Gut und Böse' definiert werden müsste – es kann durchaus eine voll verwirklichte Freiheit (des Menschen in Gott) geben, der diese Wahl hinter sich hat, so jedenfalls bei den Seligen in der Anschauung Gottes – wohl aber, wie Henri de Lubac in seinem *Surnaturel* gezeigt hat, dass Gott keine im Guten verfestigte Freiheit erschaffen kann, die der Wahl nicht bedürfte; eine solche im Guten verfestigte Freiheit (und das gilt auch von den reinen Geistern!) wäre damit ihrer höchsten Würde beraubt."

412 MW 97. ZSW 82: "Gott will ja von uns nicht nur angesehen und wahrgenommen werden wie ein einsamer Schauspieler von seinem Publikum, sondern er hat es von vornherein auf das Zusammenspiel abgesehen."

moves towards man, but wills to remain veiled—not only because of human weakness, but because, by this veil, freedom, and so true love, are preserved. Mystery (sacramentality) is not only a means of teaching through simplified content. It is the way of veiledness, chosen by God to secure a hermeneutical process that allows for uncoerced salvation. As natural desire is not yet grace, but seeks it, as spiritual sensitivity mediates a presence that remains veiled, so God expresses himself in the world without being the world, respecting and stimulating human freedom. The relation established is therefore personal; the beloved receives the gift of love but is free to accept or reject it, at every instant. This was the wisdom that Balthasar discerned in Origenian cosmology, what moved him to entitle his monograph *Le Mystérion d'Origène*: “He was sent not only to be seen, but also to remain hidden.”⁴¹³ This is evidence of a dramatic relationship between God and man. The divine hiddenness, God’s decision to remain veiled, is the opening of a free decision posed to each and every man. For Origen, only through this veiledness can we reach God, no other way is possible: “to the gaze of answering love, the concealment is already the unveiling.”⁴¹⁴

If we look back at what we called “the law of love,” we see how Balthasar underlines especially the fact that “the eternally tragic and dualistic Eros leaves room to the love of Christ.”⁴¹⁵ The sacrifice on the cross enables the move from the tragic law of Eros as lack, to the dramatic experience of divine superabundance—an abundance that, for Balthasar, comes from the relational aspect of the Trinity: “There is not just the rising Eros of the creature, but also, preceding all created love, a mystery of love in God himself, and all love of the creature towards God always presupposes an invitation from God to enter into the mystery of the Trinity.”⁴¹⁶ Human freedom

413 Ibid. II 67.

414 GL 1, 653. H 1, 647: “Die Verhüllung ist schon, für den Blick der antwortenden Liebe, Enthüllung.” Referring to this statement, Balthasar affirms that Origen was not able to fully explain this relation between veiledness and revelation. GL 1, 653 n. 90: “No theologian, not even Origen, has developed this thought more effectively and magnificently than Cyril of Alexandria in his commentaries on Scripture, particularly on John.” H 1, 647 n. 2: “Kein Theologe, auch Origenes nicht, hat diesen Gedanken konsequenter und großartiger durchgeführt als Cyrill von Alexandrien in seinen Kommentaren zur Schrift, besonders zu Johannes.”

415 MO (II) 63–64; PMO 115: “L’Èros éternellement tragique puisqu’il se nourrit d’un dualism a déjà cédé à l’Amour du Christ.” Clo II 4,42 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.”

416 SF 213. GF 313: “Dies ist ja das Neue, das Plato noch nicht wußte: dass es nicht nur aufsteigenden Eros des Geschöpfes gibt, sondern ein alle Geschöpf-Liebe vorausliegendes

is grounded in the free relation between the persons of the Trinity. The same pattern can be seen with corporeality. There is a relation between the “otherness” of finite being in respect to God, and the “otherness” between the persons of the Trinity.⁴¹⁷ Such otherness lies in God himself, and is therefore positive: he generated the Son, he gave his Word to shape the world. In the Origenian doctrine of the divine arrow and the spiritual senses we have encountered aspects of the “positivity” of otherness. Similarly, human freedom has its origin in God’s love for men, a love that “precedes all created love” and is truly “a mystery in God himself”—the trinitarian mystery.

We can see why Balthasar claims that Origen goes “beyond” Hegel, never falling into his idea of *Aufhebung* tout court. In Hegel, we move from thesis to synthesis because of a dialectical antithesis. This means that movement, in Hegel, is always caused by a lack. 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 born out of lack. Consequently, the Covenant is not an act of a divine free love, but of a divine need.⁴¹⁸ Love, despite playing an important role, is not properly Johannine and agapic in Hegel; it does not come from an ontological abundance, but rather a desire whose only aim is to fulfil a lack. It is worth noting that Balthasar considered Plato’s idea of *penia* a key concept for modern Gnosticism (specifically Moltmann and the death of God theologies).⁴¹⁹ If in Hegel it is the Absolute who, in order to become himself, poses a negation, in Origen, the Creator does not create in order to become himself, but only for the sake of love. If for Hegel the antithesis is included in the thesis, it is only a moment in the absolute’s ultimate self-actualization. This is because, paradoxically, Hegel is more radically Neoplatonic than Origen. For Hegel, unity is more original than multiplicity, while Origen, with his decidedly Johannine theology, brings multiplicity into God from the very moment of the generation of the Word.⁴²⁰ What for Hegel is a tragic monism, is for Origen a dramatic relation. This is what Balthasar means when he claims that the Hegelian “tendency is counterbalanced by that what is deeper

Liebesgeheimnis in Gott selbst, und dass alle Liebe der Kreatur zu Gott immer schon eine Einladung Gottes voraussetzt, in das Mysterium der Dreieinigkeit einzutreten.”

417 HEALY, *The Eschatology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* 87. I would like to express my gratitude to professor Healy for his frequent input at the initial stage of this research, and for his interest in this endeavor.

418 Often, when presenting Hegel’s Trinitarian theology, Balthasar refers to Albert Chapelle. Even in *Le Mystère d’Origène* he seems to draw from Chapelle’s idea that Hegel, as many Fathers, thinks of the Trinity within the exitus-reditus scheme but, unlike them, he does not arrive at God’s love and abundance, but at God’s lack of these: CHAPELLE, *Hegel et la religion* (II) 106.

419 TD 2, 257. ThD 2/1, 233.

420 VON BALTHASAR, *Preface to Origen: An exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer and selected works* xi–xiv. Here Balthasar valorizes Origen for his profile as a decidedly Johannine theologian.

in Origen. He knows that the real knowledge is love: The friendship with Christ in the Holy Spirit, this is the knowledge of God.”⁴²¹ For this reason, Balthasar believes that Origen was already very close to discovering the solution of Gregory of Nyssa, a synthesis of movement and rest given by “excluding from the eternal vision of God the possibility of satiety”. The synthesis is achieved not by eliminating movement itself, but by eliminating its tragic dualism and by introducing movement into rest, i. e. God, not as lack but as superabundance. For Origen, more powerful than the law of sublation is the law of love, the generosity of God, the unique sacrifice of Christ:

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' (Jo.Com. I, 26). *Isn't it in fact that God made himself becoming for us?*⁴²²

Incarnation is therefore the pivot of freedom in Balthasar's interpretation of Origen. Human finite freedom finds in Origen a foundation in divine infinite freedom, in God's movement towards man, i. e. in the internal movement of the Logos who descends unto man. Only in this way, claims Balthasar, can we understand that the two pillars of freedom (self-determination and consent) are both supported by a deeper element—the divine love for creation, God's *passio caritatis*.

421 MO (II) 64; PMO 116: “Tendance (est) démentie par ce qu'il y avait de plus profond en lui. Origène sait que le vrai savoir est l'amour: Φιλία γάρ ἐστὶ πνευματικὴ γνῶσις Θεοῦ.”

422 MO (I) 562; PMO 76: “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: monnai et sac, manteau et bâton, 'car cette voie est assez riche pour subvenir par elle-même à toutes les nécessités du voyage' (Clo I 26). *N'est-elle pas Dieu, qui s'est fait Devenir pour nous?*”

IV. Conclusive Remarks: At the Core of the Tension within Balthasar's Appreciation of Origen

The preceding analysis of the three Origenian elements that most fascinated Balthasar has uncovered an idea that he developed in his later theology: human life is always a drama that begins in the initiative of Another. The natural desire to see God is first and foremost the result of a divine initiative: God fires his arrow at humanity to draw closer to us, and to provoke a response. The spiritual senses are the "tool" for perceiving the Logos as the person who comes to us in the incarnation (in its broader sense, including Scripture, Christ and the world). Human freedom is primarily a divine gift, the action of grace bestowed at creation. It is always a relationship with creation (image), fulfilled by following the example of Christ (likeness). What Balthasar seems to underline in every aspect of Origen's theology is the divine initiative, an idea that will become the center of his own theological vision.

After this analysis, one could be quite puzzled: if Balthasar really appreciates Origen, why does he always present him as the initiator of a pantheistic tendency, an Idealistic titanism? Admiration and criticism seem to merge in Balthasar's writing on Origen: open admiration in the dedicated works (*Spirit and Fire; Le Mystérion d'Origène*), and when remembering his work on the Alexandrian as his most beloved; criticism, when presenting other authors who draw from Origen (*Wendung nach Osten; The Glory of the Lord*). If it is true that Origen and the Fathers helped Balthasar out of the desert of Neo-Scholasticism, it was not without a certain tension with the opposite extreme (Idealism), and the "third way" he was planning for his own theology (the way of *analogia entis*). With the tools provided by Balthasar's analysis on Origen we can now focus one last time on the tension itself, in order to draw some conclusions.

1. Titanism and Pantheism

The first source of tension, titanism and pantheism, has already emerged several times, especially in the chapter on freedom. As noted at the very beginning, it is not insignificant that Balthasar, when introducing his three works on the Church Fathers, takes Origen as the lone example of the risks behind a blind acceptance of patristic thought: "We shall explain at length, in our study of the theology of Origen, why the thought of the Greek Fathers, taken in its materiality, often offers but little support to the task of the theologian today, why there might even be a

danger in wishing to rejuvenate it without a total critique.”⁴²³ The problematic aspect emerges particularly when Balthasar mentions Origen in relation to the inheritors of his thought. A brief sketch of Balthasar’s approach to these later authors will also provide an example of what he means when he says that “there is no thinker in the Church who is so invisibly all-present as Origen.”⁴²⁴ Exemplary are two authors presented in *The Glory of the Lord*: John Scotus Eriugena and Meister Eckhart. As McGinn notices, “none of these figures should be termed as Origenist (...) yet the encounter with Origen helps us to a better understanding of some key features of their contribution to the history of Christian theology, as well as illuminating Origen’s often invisible presence.”⁴²⁵ Interesting for us is not “how much Origen” was really in their thought, but rather how Balthasar approaches them: it is surprisingly similar to his approach to the Alexandrian.

The first figure is Scotus Eriugena, who “built from the heritage of Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, and Maximus, the most imposing intellectual edifice to rise before Aquinas.”⁴²⁶ There are strong similarities between some of the central doctrinal teachings, and especially the cast of mind of these authors. Among the more conspicuous shared doctrines are: the idea that creation is an eternal, and not a punctual, act of God; the idea of double creation; and a certain monistic tendency in conceiving the substance of God and man.⁴²⁷ Eriugena mentions Origen in his work, especially when evoking the idea of humanity’s return to God at the end of time.⁴²⁸ Using Origen, Eriugena explains that Christ took on the whole of humanity in the Incarnation, and therefore all things

423 PT 13. PP xi: “Nous expliquerons longuement dans notre étude sur la théologie d’Origène pourquoi la pensée des Pères Grecs, prise en sa matérialité, n’offre souvent que peu de secours à la tâche actuelle du théologien, pourquoi il y aurait même un danger à vouloir la rajeunir sans une critique totale.”

424 SF 2. GF 13: “Es gibt in der Kirche keinen Denker, der so unsichtbar-allgegenwärtig geblieben wäre als Origenes.”

425 MCGINN, *The Spiritual Heritage of Origen in the West* 265.

426 CL 29. KL 19: “Indes liegt wegen dieser Interferenz zwischen Form und Gehalt bis heute ein Schatten über dieser großen Gestalt, die zu Beginn des Mittelalters aus dem Erbe von Augustin, Gregor von Nyssa, dem Areopagiten und Maximus das großartigste Geistesgebäude vor dem Aquinaten aufgerichtet hat.”

427 MORAN, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*. A short section on Origen as source is to be found *ibid.* 107–108. On Eriugena and idealism see also BEIERWALTES, *Platonismus und Idealismus*, chap. 4; Meister Eckharts Begriff der Einheit und der Einung 100–129.

428 The fact that Eriugena’s *Homilia super Prologum Iohannis* circulated under the name of Origen in the Middle Ages shows how similar the two are on this issue. On Eriugena and Origen see MORAN, *Origen and Eriugena* 27–53; JEAUNEAU, *From Origen’s Periarchon to Eriugena’s Periphyseon* 139–182. See also the mentioned MCGINN, *The Spiritual Heritage of Origen in the West* 266–273. McGinn’s contribution points out the hidden presence of Origen in the Middle Ages (in the selected figures of Eriugena, Bernard of Clairvaux, Hildegard of Bingen and Meister Eckhart). Eriugena explicitly quotes Origen’s *De principiis* and *Commentarii in Epistolam ad Romanos* in his *Periphyseon*, where Origen is named

will be restored in him, not just a remnant. The affinity between Eriugena and Origen is not limited to their eschatology; it also involves their respective ideas about the relation between God and creation. The affinity is clear in how they imagine the Logos in relation to creation, which many would deem idealistic.⁴²⁹ Balthasar is one of them. At first he presents Eriugena's work as made of "intuitions and concepts provided by Plotinus" but "rendered dynamic in a biblical and historical way". Then, he recapitulates Eriugena's cosmology:

If God is at the beginning uncreated, creating nature, then the *archai* are created and creating nature, the sensible world created, but no longer creating nature, so that at the end, when everything has returned to him, God will be uncreated, but also uncreating nature: 'for what should the divine nature still create, when it will be all in all and will appear in nothing else than itself alone?'⁴³⁰

The core of the problem is the notion of creation and its origins: "Is God as it were exhausted by the process and is his explication at an end? Is Eriugena in his radicalization of Greek patristics to be seen as a precursor of Spinoza and Hegel, who also sought to offer a Christian philosophy?"⁴³¹ The interpretation of Eriugena as a forerunner of idealism was widespread in modern German scholarship; among the many important defenders of this interpretation we find Émile Bréhi-

summus sanctae scripturae expositor (Periphyseon IV 16, PL 122, 818B) and *diligentissimus rerum inquisitor* (ibid. V 27, PL 122, 982D).

429 The interpretation of Eriugena as a forerunner of idealism begins with the appearance in Germany of Schlüter's edition of the *Periphyseon* in 1838. In 1834 the Catholic theologian Franz Anton Staudenmaier, Hegel's intellectual sympathizer, published *STAUDENMAIER, Johannes Scotus Eriugena und die Wissenschaft seiner Zeit*. His interpretation of Eriugena as a "speculative theologian" was then followed by Huber and Christlieb, who identify Eriugena as a precursor of German Idealism, "father of speculative theology": *HUBER, Johannes Scotus Eriugena; CHRISTLIEB, Leben und Lehre des Johannes Scotus Eriugena*. On Eriugena's reception in German Idealism see *BEIERWALTES, The Revaluation of John Scottus Eriugena in German Idealism 190–199; Eriugena. Grundzüge seines Denkes 313–330*.

430 GL 4, 344. H 3/1, 31: "Ist Gott am Anfang ungeschaffene schaffende Natur, sind dann die Archai geschaffene und schaffende Natur, die sinnwelt geschaffene, aber nicht mehr schaffende Natur, so wird Gott am Ende, da alles zu ihm zurückgekehrt ist, ungeschaffene aber auch unerschaffende Natur sein: 'Denn was sollte die Gottnatur noch schaffen, da sie alles in allen sein wird und in keinem etwas anderes erscheinen wird als nur sie?'" Quoting: *De divisione Naturae V, 1019 BC*.

431 GL 4, 344. H 3/1, 310: "Ist etwa Gott durch den Prozeß gleichsam erschöpft und zu Ende ausgelegt? Ist Eriugena in seiner Radikalisierung der griechischen Patristik nach vorwärts auf Spinoza und auf Hegel hin auszudeuten, der ja auch eine christliche Philosophie bieten wollte?" On Eriugena's notion of creation *ex Deo*, see *DUCLOW, Divine Nothingness and Self-Creation in John Scotus Eriugena 109–123; SUSHKOV, Being and Creation in the Theology of John Scottus Eriugena; KOBUSCH, Selbstwerdung und Personalität 269–297*.

er.⁴³² In his attempt to find a third way between Neo-Scholasticism and German Idealism, Balthasar looks at Eriugena as he looked at Origen. As in Origen, the crux is the world-God relation, and with it the difference between creation *ex nihilo*, and *ex Deo*. This thought had already been tracked by Hugo Rahner in his research on the doctrine of the birth of Christ in the heart of the believer.⁴³³ Rahner presents Origen as one of the first thinkers of this notion, and counts Eriugena among his latter-day followers. Rahner underlines the “ontischen Grund” of this doctrine (Baptism), and the necessity for the Logos to grow and develop in virtue.⁴³⁴ Origen does not deny the baptismal birth. He is rather underlining that birth into the virtuous life must happen over and over again, every day. In Hugo Rahner’s exposition of the legacy of the doctrine, we find Eriugena, author of the “first attempt by an occidental thinker to build the old Christian doctrine of the birth of God into a mystical system of the divinization of man.”⁴³⁵ Rahner sees in Eriugena the same risk Balthasar had seen: “Eriugena fell into the danger of a system that sees the descent of the Logos as a cosmogonic, necessary process.”⁴³⁶ Despite the risk, both Rahner and Balthasar consider Eriugena a faithful follower of the Christian tradition. Balthasar explains how, in all theophanies, God is “the non-manifest that appears, the inconceivable that is conceived.”⁴³⁷ Transcendence is preserved; God is “certainly manifest as spirit but in its transcendence over its manifest form, in which its freedom becomes apparent, that is, its being able to be quite other and therefore its being quite other.”⁴³⁸ Once again we see Balthasar thinking in his typical framework of veiledness-unveiledness, mystery-symbol, just as with Origen. Eriugena, despite being close to a certain univocal thinking, is “saved” by Balthasar through his demonstration of the Irishman’s strong notion of mystery, of *occulti manifestatio*, *negati affirmatio*, *incomprehensibilis comprehension*. Balthasar also argues that this mystery is precisely God’s freedom, i. e. his

432 BRÉHIER, L’idée du néant et le problème de l’origine radicale dans le néoplatonisme grec 443–475.

433 RAHNER, Die Gottesgeburt.

434 Ibid. 356–357: “Das *semen divinum* in der Seele muss in sündenlosem Leben bewahrt werden, Christus muss immerdar zunehmen im Herzen.”

435 Ibid. 400: “(...) erste Versuch eines abendländischen Denkers, die altchristlichen Lehren von der Gottesgeburt in ein mystisches System der Vergöttlichung des Menschen einzubauen.”

436 Ibid. 401–402: “Eriugena ist in etwa der Gefahr eines Systems erlegen, das selbst diese Logosherabkunft als einen *kosmogonisch notwendigen Prozess* ansieht.”

437 GL 4, 345. H 3/1, 311: “(...) in allen Theophanien oder Epiphanien in Natur und Gnade, Kosmos und Heiliger Schrift das Nichterscheinende erscheint, das Unbegreifliche begriffen wird.”

438 GL 4, 346. H 3/1, 312: “Es erscheint also zwar der Geist, aber in seiner freien Erhabenheit über seine Erscheinungsgestalt, daran wird seine Freiheit sichtbar, das heißt sein Auch-ganz-anders-können und somit Ganz-anders-sein.”

love. The ultimate defense of God's otherness is, for Balthasar, Eriugena's brand of theodicy: "The absolute otherness of God is especially manifest in the fact that the world is put together from contraries, indeed from contradictories. 'God creates not only the like but also the unlike, for he is himself both the like and the unlike. He is therefore the ground of contradictory things.'⁴³⁹ In this explanation, "together with Maximus, Eriugena transcends the Origenist doctrine of the fall which traces the distinction and opposition between finite natures back to a cosmic fall (*veluti ex diametro sibi invicem e contrario reponent*)."⁴⁴⁰ The absolute transcendence of God is also used by Eriugena in order to secure God's freedom. The chief example is Eriugena's answer to the problem of predestination:

And the worldly *oppositio* of the elect and the reprobate must necessarily be dissolved in a final harmony, in which Eriugena (with Origen, both Gregories and Maximus, but also with support from Plotinus and Augustine) lets the damned be punished through the 'nonexistent' illusoriness of their sensible natures, a Hell, which as absolute finitude cannot therefore in any way be thought of as coextensive with the divine, infinite eternity.⁴⁴¹

Balthasar explains that the argument used by Eriugena comes directly from the Greek Fathers, and that this argument "only works if redemption in Christ is thought of cosmically, in the manner of the Greek Fathers, continued by Eriugena, grasped afresh by Nicolas of Cusa and taken still further by the Idealists."⁴⁴² Here emerges the concern we anticipated. Is Eriugena a forerunner of Spinoza and Hegel? The importance of this question is now clear: if Eriugena were proven to be a proto-idealist in his use of Greek Fathers, Balthasar could then trace a genealogy from the Greek Fathers through to Spinoza, Hegel, and Idealism. This is not cheap anachronism; it is, as always with Balthasar, the tracing of a

439 GL 4, 346–347. H 3/1, 312: "Das absolute Anders-sein Gottes erscheint vornehmlich daran, dass die Welt aus Gegensätzen, ja aus Widersprüchen zusammengesetzt ist. 'Gott schafft nicht nur Ähnliches, sondern ebenso Unähnliches, denn er selbst ist sowohl der Ähnliche wie der Unähnliche. Er ist auch der Grund der widersprüchlichen Dinge.'"

440 GL 4, 347. H 3/1, 312: "Mit Maximus zusammen überwindet Eriugena hier die origenistische Abfallslehre, die die Unterschiedenheit und Gegensätzlichkeit der endlichen Naturen (*veluti ex diametro sibi invicem e contrario reponent*) auf einen kosmischen Sündenfall zurückführt."

441 GL 4, 347–348. H 3/1, 313: "Und die innerweltliche *oppositio* von Erwählten und Verworfenen muss sich notwendig in eine letzte Harmonie auflösen, in welcher Eriugena (mit Origenes, den beiden Gregoren, Maximus, aber auch in Anlehnung an Plotin und Augustin) den Verdammten durch die 'nichtseiende' Scheinhaftigkeit seiner Sinnlichkeit gestraft werden lässt, einer Hölle, die somit als absolute Endlichkeit in keiner Hinsicht der göttlichen unendlichen Ewigkeit koextensiv gedacht werden kann."

442 GL 4, 348. H 3/1, 314: "Das griechische Argument – von Herklit bis Plotin – trägt aber nur, wenn man in der Weise der griechischen Väter, die Eriugena fortsetzt und Cusanus neu aufgreifen und den Idealisten weiterreichen wird, die Erlösung Christi allkosmisch denkt."

red thread across the history of human thought. Our goal is, once again, to understand whether Balthasar places Origen along this line. We can, I claim, come closer to an answer by analyzing his opinion of Eriugena. Regarding Eriugena, “the theological intention is clear,” but “the question remains open as to whether such modes of thought are appropriate to their Christian content or whether Eriugena, although he meant something else, was not compelled by the logic of his concepts to give expression to what he did not really mean.”⁴⁴³ According to Balthasar, this question applies especially to the issue of creation *ex nihilo* and the relation between God and matter. By refusing a preexistent matter, Eriugena ends up rejecting any matter at all, preferring the terminology of “radiations” of first principles. At stake for Balthasar is obviously the difference between creature and Creator: “The mediation of the ‘created-creating’ nature, (...) which as the flowing emanation of God achieves no consistency, is not adequate to express the free encounter between creator and creature of the biblical understanding.”⁴⁴⁴ In the creational scheme of Eriugena, the free encounter between creator and creature is at risk; his answers to the problem of evil and the harmony of the world are also risky. At least, that is what Balthasar argues. These issues in Eriugena’s thinking, and Balthasar’s problems with them, are to be found almost verbatim in his writings on Origen. The only thing that saves both human and divine freedom, when considering creation, is *creatio ex nihilo*, where the distance between the two is preserved. It is the same with the issue of evil and theodicy. If the answer to the question of evil is a hidden divine presence infusing the world, a spiritual ether “diluted” throughout the cosmos, lost is the distance that alone can preserve the freedom of both God and man. For these reasons Balthasar, who in *Cosmic Liturgy* presents Maximus the Confessor as a fundamental source for Eriugena, believes that Eriugena’s inclusion of the world in the divine process “begins to lend an almost pantheistic tone, which threatens to overshadow the positive Christian tradition.”⁴⁴⁵ The roots of this pantheism are the same as those perceptible in Origen, who indeed “left his mark on the underlying features of

443 GL 4, 352. H 3/1, 316: “Die Frage bleibt offen, ob solche Denksprache dem christlichen Inhalt angemessen ist, oder ob Eriugena (und später Cusanus), obwohl er anderes meint, durch die Logik seiner Begriffe gezwungen wird auszusagen, was er nicht meint.” We see here the same dualism Christian content/non-Christian form expressed in the introduction of SF.

444 GL 4, 352. H 3/1, 317: “Die Vermittlung dieser geschaffen-schaffenden Natur, die als fließende Emanation aus Gott keine Konsistenz gewinnt, reicht nicht aus, um das freie Gegenüber von Schöpfer und Schöpfung im biblischen Verstand auszudrücken.”

445 CL 85. KL 78: “Aber während hier die Hineinnahme der Welt in den göttlichen Prozeß zu beinahe pantheistischen Akzenten führt und das Positiv-Christliche fast ganz überblendet (...)”

Maximus's thought"⁴⁴⁶—and, consequently, Eriugena's. However, in *Cosmic Liturgy* Balthasar remains ambivalent: in Eriugena "the relationship of God and the world, the emergence of all things from God and their return to him, were seen, despite the pantheistic dress of Neoplatonism, with an essentially Christian eye" but, at the same time, "a shadow still lies across this great figure."⁴⁴⁷ The same ambiguity is also evident in the introduction to *Spirit and Fire*. When Balthasar characterizes the third stratum of Origen's thought as "not taken up by the tradition", he mentions Eriugena as an exception to this amnesia: the ideas from the third stratum (the love for and of the Word) "experience another brief flowering in later offshoots like Eriugena."⁴⁴⁸ Eriugena seems to be positively presented as a lover of the Word of God, despite the critiques. How does Balthasar cope with this ambiguity? We suspend here the answer, and move to the next "Origenian" author: Meister Eckhart.

Balthasar's presentation of Eckhart in *The Glory of the Lord* begins with the most obvious point of contact between him and Origen: despite ecclesiastical condemnation, their thoughts had a determining influence on later thinkers, whether esoterically or openly. Eckhart's case, Balthasar explains, bears a close resemblance to Origen's: "an originally very pure Christian piety clothes itself in an unsuitable garment that ill fits the body." Origen's "garments" were Gnostic-Hellenistic categories, Eckhart's were the technical language of Scholastic philosophy. Both thinkers used contemporary (and prior) philosophical speculation "in the way the Christians of Rome used the ruined temples of their city: as quarries."⁴⁴⁹ Besides the similar reception history and form-content strategy, there are many

446 CL 85. KL 78: "Über das Areopagitische hinaus greift Origenes in die Grundzüge seines Denkens ein. Maximus bleibt hierin ein Kind seiner Zeit und ein Jünger seiner Lehrer."

447 CL 29. KL 19: "Dies war ein guter Griff, denn hier war in pantheisierend-neuplatonischer Einkleidung das Verhältnis Gottes und der Welt, der Prozeß der Dinge aus Gott und ihr Rückgang in ihn, mit einem wesentlich christlichen Geistauge angeschaut."

448 SF 10. GF 25: "Solche Vorstellungen schwirren noch lange Zeit in der Luft, bevor sie (...) bei späten Abseitern wie Eriugena noch eine kurze Nachblüte erfahren."

449 GL 5, 29–30. H 3/2, 390: "Und vielleicht liegt Eckharts Fall auch persönlich ähnlich wie der des Origenes: eine ursprünglich lauterste christliche Frömmigkeit kleidet sich selbst in ein ungemäßes Gewand, das dem Leib nicht zugeschnitten ist. (...) So wenig wie Origenes ist er eine ursprüngliche philosophische Potenz wie sein Mitbruder Thomas, er behandelt die riesige Menge der überlieferten Philosophoumena – platonische, aristotelische, arabische, patristische, thomanische – wie die christliche Römer die zerfallenden Tempel ihrer Stadt: als Steinbrüche." On Balthasar's attitude towards Eckhart see O'REGAN, Balthasar and Eckhart 203–239. O'Regan tracks five elements in Eckhart's thought that caught Balthasar's attention: aesthetic disposition, the sameness of Being and God, the whylessness of the divine, *Gelassenheit*, and *Gottesgeburt*. Particularly relevant for us is O'Regan's explanation of "Balthasar's positive remarks being imbricated with the negative and vice versa" – an attitude typical of Balthasar's approach to Origen too.

affinities between Origen's and Eckhart's doctrines.⁴⁵⁰ A first affinity is the doctrine of the eternal birth of Christ in the soul of man (*Gottesgeburt*). Fundamental, again, is Hugo Rahner's essay, where he clearly states that Eckhart cannot be understood without the influence of Eriugena.⁴⁵¹ Linked to this is the doctrine of the divine spark in the soul. Eckhart's idea that "God's ground and the soul's ground is one ground" brings us closer to the paradigm of emanation, radiation, and identity. It is not surprising that Balthasar calls Eckhart's "an extreme Neoplatonic ontology" resulting in a philosophy of identity.⁴⁵² Balthasar is clear: what brought Eckhart to call God "Being" was an act of religious devotion, a language rooted in venerable antiquity. The problem, however, lies in the fact that "he applied it directly to God and the creature's immediate dependence on God in such a way that the derivation of a reality of being from God seems to him like God's coming to being, as being's coming out of God."⁴⁵³ We see exactly the same problem that Balthasar found in Eriugena: God is apparently exhausted by the process of eternal creation and therefore assimilated to that which is created. A few pages later Balthasar explains how Eckhart's cosmology runs a risk of idealistic pantheism, exactly as Eriugena's and Origen's:

If God is Being, Not-God is Non-Being. (...) This is the Plotinian: the inferior can never adequately express the superior. (...) The creature relates to God like pure matter to form. (...) He [Eckhart] sees the depths of God as absolute identity that comes to be. Now if this

450 On Eckhart and Origen, see MCGINN, *The Spiritual Heritage of Origen in the West* 263–289; RUBINO, *Eckhart e Origene* 141–152; QUERO-SÁNCHEZ, *Origen of Alexandria and Meister Eckhart* 117–145. The most influential study for Balthasar must have been that of his friend RAHNER, *Die Gottesgeburt*. See also TARDIEU, *Histoire d'une métaphore dans la tradition platonicienne jusqu'à Eckhart* 225–255; WEBER, *Maître Eckhart et la Grande Tradition Théologique* 97–125.

451 RAHNER, *Die Gottesgeburt* 406.

452 TD 5, 434. ThD 4, 398: "seine extrem neuplatonische Ontologie". The recent study of QUERO-SÁNCHEZ, *Origen of Alexandria and Meister Eckhart*, demonstrates the affinities between Eckhart and Origen's idea of the imperfectability of Being. It shows how Eckhart quotes Origen when presenting this idea based on both the doctrine of the eternal birth of Christ in the heart of man, and the doctrine of the presence of divine eternity in the soul. The study is very relevant to us for three reasons. First, it shows the spiritual affinities between Origen and Eckhart, those affinities that Balthasar will consider problematic, if not fully and systematically shaped. A second reason is that the author shows these affinities in term of Idealism, especially referring to the notion of moral reason. Finally, it shows how focusing on a reading of Origen and Eckhart in light of their notion of "progress" might expand the notion of Godward progress to an extreme point, thus downplaying their strong notion of the imperfectability of God.

453 GL 5, 31. H 3/2, 391: "Ihm aber ging es so unmittelbar um Gott und um die unvermittelte Abhängigkeit des Geschöpfes von Gott, dass die Herkunft der Seinswirklichkeit von Gott ihm als das Herkommen Gottes selbst zu ihm, als sein Herkommen von Gott erschien."

depth is spirit and freedom, something of the spiritual creature must be grounded in its ineffability. Eckhart calls this the spark: the intellect as such is uncreatable.⁴⁵⁴

Paradoxically, the creature is not only morally opposed to God, but ontologically reduced to a spark of the divine radiation. To be clear: for Eckhart, since all things are made through the Logos, if something does not conform to reason it is, somehow, “nothing”. A similar thought could be found in Origen’s *Commentary on the Gospel of John* where, taking the example of a murderer, he says that “it is as if we should say that a murderer is not a creation of God, while we do not annul the fact that *qua* man he has been made by God.”⁴⁵⁵ It is important to underline that Eckhart’s notion of reason has to be understood morally, practically, and Christologically.⁴⁵⁶ Unlike Eckhart, Origen does not expand this strong thesis (the prioritization of moral reason over being) to encompass God’s being. Nevertheless, a reading of Origen in this direction is not hard to justify, considering especially the prologue to the *Commentary on the Gospel of John*. It is therefore easy to see how this thesis becomes, for Balthasar, a Christian version of idealistic pantheism. Conceiving being as moral reason, and therefore ultimately freedom/love, is acceptable for Balthasar *only* in the frame of an analogical notion of being, where creation and difference are preserved. Even if we accept the division, present in Eckhart, between “proper being” as free to eternally determine itself and “being merely there” as temporally and substantially determined being; even if we bring this reading back until Origen’s notion of the freedom of the mind to move away from God; even if we accept this reading of being as (moral) freedom—the question for Balthasar still remains: where does this freedom come from? Are the rational creatures created, or are they Gods themselves, uncreated? If we accept their being created *ex nihilo*, we are led to recognize a distance between them and God. It is exactly this distance, says Balthasar, that allows them to be partners with God, to freely return to him (or not). Balthasar plants himself on this interpretative line. He is able to do so in his reading of Origen by focusing on the notion of mystery, i. e. God’s freedom which is always-already love. There is an ultimate difference/distance, between God and man, a veiledness that will never be overcome. The symbol of this distance, as we noted, is the spiritual body of man.

454 GL 5, 42–44. H 3/2, 401–403: “Wenn Gott das Sein ist, dann ist Nichtgott das Nichtsein. (...) Das letztere ist plotinisch: nie kann das Niedrigere das Höhere adäquat ausdrücken. (...) Die Kreatur verhält sich zu Gott wie die reine Materie zur Form (...). Die Tiefe Gottes erscheint jetzt als absolute sich ereignende Identität, ist aber diese Tiefe Geist und Freiheit, dann muss etwas von der Geist-Kreatur in diesem Unvordenklichen gründen, Eckhart nennt es das Fünklein oder Bürglein: die Vernunft als solche ist unerschaffbar.”

455 Clo II 13,97.

456 QUERO-SÁNCHEZ, Origen of Alexandria and Meister Eckhart 133.

According to Balthasar, the ideas of God as being, and creature as divine spark, converge, against Eckhart's intention, "towards the abolition of created natures and their proper operations towards an Indian kind of doctrine that everything is God. (...) And though he knows and says that the innermost point within God is the infinite free 'I' of the God of Israel, it is only a question of time before the move is made to construe all being in terms of that point of identity in the intellect where God and creature coincide."⁴⁵⁷ Balthasar's concern is always the same: preserving both human and divine freedom in their ontological difference. Eckhart, he thinks, is too fascinated by the absolute point of identity with the divine within the subject, blurring the distinctions between theism, pantheism, and atheism. The long-term consequence of this thought on the history of theology is the loss of a sacramental, exterior approach in favour of a subjective interiority. Balthasar does with Eckhart what he did with Origen. While seeing some risks and ambiguities, he still considers his thought a valuable theological proposal (especially the notion of *Gelassenheit*, read as the total gift of oneself). In his typical methodology, Balthasar shows the distance between the common reception and the author's real intention: "The future will not think, as he does, with a worshipping heart, and so will misuse his words and insights for the purposes of its Titanic Idealism."⁴⁵⁸ Balthasar said the same of the third stratum of Origen, which was lost over time, leaving only the ascent-descent scheme. As with Origen, Balthasar describes this Eckhartian trajectory as a mode of titanic Idealism.

We can now draw closer to a conclusion regarding this issue in Origen and, by deduction, many of the authors involved in this stream of thought. The most complete list is provided by Balthasar when considering Eckhart; his legacy runs through Luther, but also Nicolas of Cusa, Spinoza, Böhme, Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. In tracing this line, Balthasar reveals an insight that is fundamental for our inquiry into the reception of Origenian ideas: "Emphasizing this in no way implies that Eckhart was 'really' a pantheistic Idealist or a Protestant with a forensic doctrine of justification. However, ideas have their own historical dynamic; they are governed by and obey their own laws, regardless of the meaning they had for their originator."⁴⁵⁹ This passage provides an important answer to the

457 GL 5, 45. H 3/2, 404: "Dies alles konvergiert wider Eckharts Absicht hin zu einer Aufhebung der geschöpflichen Naturen und ihrer Eigentätigkeiten, zu einer indischen Allgottlehre. (...) Und wenn er auch den innersten Punkt in Gott als das unendliche freie Ego des Gottes Israels kennt und beschreibt, so ist das Vorrücken zu einer Konstruktion alles Seins aus dem Identitätspunkt der Vernunft, worin Gott und Geschöpf zusammenfallen, nur noch eine Frage der Zeit."

458 GL 5, 41. H 3/2, 401: "(...) eine Zukunft, die nicht mehr wie er anbetend denken und deshalb seine Formeln und Funde zu ihrem titanischen Idealismus mißbrauchen wird."

459 GL 5, 30. H 3/2, 391: "Dies feststellen heißt keineswegs statuieren, dass Eckhart 'eigentlich' idealistischer Pantheist oder Protestant mit forensischer Rechtfertigungslehre sei. Aber

question we posed at the beginning of this section: how can Balthasar love and admire Origen to the extent that he does, if he also deems Origen the root of a pantheistic, and pseudo-Christian, vision of God and the world? The answer lies in the difference between Origen himself and the historical dynamic of his ideas, embodied in later epigones. The latter, for Balthasar, are not always faithful to the meaning intended by the original thinker. We are led to think, once again, of what was stated in *Spirit and Fire* regarding Origen's risk of spiritualism: it is a very small opening, only a tendency. But, as Balthasar often said, a tendency can creep into the last little crevices of an idea. Eriugena and Eckhart are two examples of how the tendency was mobile enough to become a stream, a current of thought underlying history. These two authors have offered a good synthesis of the problems that Balthasar has with a certain Neoplatonism that draws close to Idealism. Not all forms of Neoplatonism are in fact Christianly acceptable, for Balthasar.⁴⁶⁰ If Plotinus is accepted, Proclean Neoplatonism is not—and we have seen that Proclus's theurgy inspired many French scholars in the first half of the century. This second kind of Neoplatonism assumes a necessity in the God-world relationship that goes against God's freedom. The first topic analyzed, desire, comes here to a central point. Divine love is, for Balthasar, both Agape and Eros in sense of abundance, not in an Hegelian sense of lack. Even divine sufferance, admitted by Balthasar's theology of the Cross and Holy Saturday, is absolutely not to be understood as a divine need, but a divine agapic abundance. This has become visible in the exposition of Hegel and Origen: Hegel thinks in terms of the rule of process, movement towards realization, while Origen's rule is ultimately the law of love, the divine *passio caritatis*. In a similar way to Proclean Neoplatonism, German Idealism introduces a logic of necessity into God, who "needs" the world; for Origen, on the contrary, not only incarnation, but already creation, is nothing else than the fruit of divine abundance. God does not create the rational creatures because of a need, but out of free love—indeed, because of this love he creates them free.

2. *Analogia Entis, Analogia Libertatis*

Balthasar's real concern with pantheism is the double loss of human and divine freedom. In the chapter on freedom we focused on the importance of *analogia libertatis* for Balthasar, finding therein a difference with Origen, who predicates freedom univocally of God and man. Despite this difference, it can be said that

Denkformen haben ihre eigene geschichtliche Dynamik; sie folgen dem Gesetz, nach dem sie angetreten, unbekümmert um die Meinung dessen, der sie in Umlauf gesetzt hat."

460 GL 4, 238–241; GL 5, 43–45.

Balthasar's talk of *analogia libertatis* is especially meant to underline the positive aspect of the relationship, as already Origen. Overcoming the idealistic risk, Balthasar deepens the *analogia entis*, turning it into *analogia libertatis*. At their core, he discovers the *analogia caritatis*—the same discovery he made when reading Origen and finding his core in the *passio caritatis*. As Nichols points out, “in the theological dramatics, the analogy of being is made to serve an analogy of liberty, placed at the disposal of a dogmatic theology, and more specifically a theology of redemption. Ultimately, the analogy of liberty will turn into an analogy of charity, where the moral life and the mystical life find their issue in the endless life of the Age to Come.”⁴⁶¹ In the 1930s, from the confrontation with Przywara, Barth, and the Fathers, Balthasar indeed develops his personal interpretation of analogy in terms of Trinitarian analogy, and therefore in terms of intra-Trinitarian freedom.⁴⁶²

In the history of philosophy there are two meanings of analogy: analogy of attribution and analogy of proportionality. In the frame of logic and analytic philosophy, one speaks of analogy as *analogia attributionis*: we give to God the attribution of “father”, knowing that God is not father in the same way as a man is to his child. It is only in “shades” that the attribution is given. In metaphysics, analogy is thought as *analogia proportionalitatis*: “life” is said to be an attribute

461 NICHOLS, A Key to Balthasar 61.

462 An important resource on this issue is Balthasar's correspondence with LOCHBRUNNER, author of *Analogia caritatis*. Darstellung und Deutung der Theologie Hans Urs von Balthasars. This text was the doctoral dissertation of the author, who wrote it in close contact with Balthasar himself. The meetings between the two and their letters are reported by LOCHBRUNNER, Balthasariana 321–366. The importance of this notion will then be acknowledged by many other scholars: SCHMID, Im Ausstrahl der Schönheit Gottes; SCHRIJVER, Le Merveilleux accord (the major elements of his research had already been published in a German article: id., Die Analogia Entis in der Theologie Hans Urs von Balthasars 249–281). The author analyzes the fundamental role of this doctrine in relation to three elements: German Idealism, Karl Barth, and the Patristic thought. It is especially in the Church Fathers that Balthasar found what he has been looking for in Idealism and the theology of Karl Barth: the *connubium* between God and man, instead of an indistinct unity or an insuperable distance. Lochbrunner reviewed (not fully positively) this work and sent the review to Balthasar himself; his comment, agreeing with Lochbrunner, contains the core of his thought on analogy, Letter, 19.05.1985, in: LOCHBRUNNER, Balthasariana 360: “Sie haben recht: *expressio* ist zentral, auf der Grundlage einer Positivität des Begriffs des Anderen in Gott: nur dieser (trinitarische) Begriff erlaubt das Denken einer guten endlichen Schöpfung. In diesem Sinn ist die Theologie Voraussetzung (oder Beleuchtung) einer wahrhaft philosophischen Analogie, gewiss sowohl *attributionis* wie *proportionis*, wobei die ethischen Begriffe (Gelassenheit etc.) erst Folgen aus einer grundlegenden Ontologie sind.” A more recent contribution on this issue is HEALY, The Eschatology of Hans Urs von Balthasar 19–90. Healy not only presents an explanation of Balthasar's position toward Thomas, but stresses the importance of Aquinas's doctrine of the analogy of being for Balthasar's own theology.

of a flower, of a man, and of God, but, in each subject, life is proportioned to the degree of being. Two elements are put together in virtue of a certain *proportio*. In the analogy between God and man, the analogy is based on the category of being. Balthasar, for his part, gives analogy a specific meaning. In his words, we could say that, as God is infinite freedom, man is finite freedom—both are free, but in different degrees, by virtue of their different origins. In Origen's words, God is *libertas ingenita*, while man is *created* freedom. The ultimate foundation of this analogy is the accordance (*Stimmigkeit*) between the two individual proportions (God and man in their participation in being). Against a certain tendency of modern philosophy to read analogy only in logical terms, Balthasar's notion of analogy is strongly metaphysical and mystical: how can human will correspond with God's will? The answer lies for him in obedience as unity, specifically in Jesus' obedience to the Father. Christ is the "concrete *analogia entis*" because he himself is the accordance between God and man; this accordance takes place because of his relationship of love with the Father, to the point of ultimate obedience. Balthasar speaks in this case of *analogia personalitatis*: man becomes more himself the more he engages in the relation with God. Already in 1925, in his first work *Die Entwicklung der musikalischen Idee*, Balthasar states that Catholic metaphysics differs both from Idealism and from dialectical theology because of a different notion of the God-World relation. If Idealism affirms the identity of the two, dialectical theology affirms the absolute difference. Catholic theology, for Balthasar, is the only "system" that, through the notion of analogy, preserves at once similarity and difference, proximity and distance. The occasion for understanding this was given to Balthasar in his confrontation with Karl Barth.

Balthasar first wrote on Karl Barth in 1939, in the third volume of *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele*. In the same year, he published the article *Karl Barth und der Katholizismus*.⁴⁶³ The two met in Basel in 1940, and in 1941 Balthasar attended Barth's seminar on the Council of Trent; soon after, Balthasar completed his monograph on Karl Barth, which was never published in this early shape because of Neo-Scholastic censorship.⁴⁶⁴ A consistent extract of this book was revised and

463 VON BALTHASAR, Karl Barth und der Katholizismus 126–132.

464 Information about this manuscript are in LOCHBRUNNER, Hans Urs von Balthasar und seine Theologenkollegen 410–413. Lochbrunner states that Balthasar showed the manuscript to Karl Rahner and Dominikus Thalhammer. LONG, Saving Karl Barth 20 n. 33, claims that only one copy of this manuscript remains, in Balthasar's archives in Basel – no one has yet compared this to the 1951 book. The manuscript was sent to the Jesuits Provincial (Gutzwiller) and to four censors (Mario von Galli, Franz Lakner, Johannes Umberg and Dominikus Thalhammer). All neoscholastics theologians, they did not consent to the publication without significant revisions. Lochbrunner explains the objections were of two kinds. First, theologically Balthasar did not respect the *duplex ordo* of Vatican I and was not clear enough about the value of natural reason – basically, it was guilty of Modernism. The second problem was Catholicism in Switzerland: the book, if published, would

accepted for publication in the Dominican journal *Divus Thomas* in 1944.⁴⁶⁵ The main arguments remain the same in *Karl Barth. Darstellung und Deutung seiner Theologie*, published in 1951. Balthasar's first interest in Barth was due to his teacher, Erich Przywara: the discussion on *analogia entis* had begun with Przywara's visit to Barth's class in Münster in 1929. Three years later, Przywara published *Analogia Entis*; in the same year, Barth published the first volume of the *Church Dogmatics* (where he called the *analogia entis* the invention of the Antichrist and the only serious reason not to become Catholic). Przywara's book is a middle way between pure identity and pure dialectic. As Aquinas's recourse to analogy was rooted in the desire to avoid both univocal and equivocal predication, Przywara's *Analogia Entis* sought to find an alternative to both the theophanies of Luther and Barth (which deprive creation of any value), and the total rejection of metaphysics in Nietzsche and Kant. He argues that every form of existence points toward God, whose presence in the world is therefore analogical. Barth rejected Przywara's position, claiming that it forgets the distance between creation and God, between philosophy and theology, a distance "proved" by the necessity of the incarnation. There is, however, a difference between Przywara and Balthasar, a difference that allows the latter to entertain a fruitful dialogue with Karl Barth. In fact, Balthasar claimed that the Lateran IV formula of analogy commented on by Przywara was found in an altered form in the new edition of Denzinger. "What he [Przywara] read was this: 'Inter Creatorem et creaturam non potest tanta similitudo notari, quin inter eos maior sit dissimilitudo notanda'. The *tanta* on which Przywara laid such stress (in *tanta* similitudine maior dissimilitudo; *however great* the similarity even by supernatural agency – the dissimilarity is *even greater*) is no longer there in DS 806. It is no accident that Przywara never produced a Christology."⁴⁶⁶ In emphasizing the dissimilitudo "to the point of exaggeration", Przywara almost undermines the possibility of a bridge between man and God. Christology is, indeed, the point of contact between Balthasar and Barth. The close friendship between the two is acknowledged by every relevant scholar as important to understanding the development of their respective theologies; a recent publication, with the

probably have been placed on the Index for being too close to Protestantism. Gutzwiller suggested that Balthasar publish only an extract of the book as a "test"; after an initial refusal, Balthasar agreed and published two essays in the Dominican journal *Divus Thomas*. More about the censorship of Barth's reference in Balthasar's works and sermons can be found in LONG, *ibid.* 23–36. The following chapter, *ibid.* 38–88, thoroughly presents the development of Balthasar's interpretation of Barth.

465 VON BALTHASAR, *Analogie und Dialektik* 171–216; *Analogie und Natur* 3–56.

466 TD 3, 220 n. 51. ThD 3/2, 202 n. 1: "Er las 'Inter Creatorem et creaturam non potest tanta similitudo notari, quin inter eos maior sit dissimilitudo notanda'. Das von Przywara so stark hervorgehobene *tanta* steht in DS 806 nicht mehr da. Es ist wohl kein Zufall, dass Przywara nie den Entwurf einer Christologie vorgelegt hat."

provocative title *Saving Karl Barth: Hans Urs von Balthasar's Preoccupation*, explores the development of this relationship from a theological perspective.⁴⁶⁷

Barth's critique of the *analogia entis* was, for Balthasar, based on a misunderstanding.⁴⁶⁸ Barth, according to Balthasar, accused Catholic theology of locating its systematic principle in the abstract *analogia entis* rather than in Christ. Barth believed that a natural pre-revelation of philosophical truth would deprive God's revelation in Christ of importance and singularity. What Barth critiqued as analogy was in reality, Balthasar claims, a notion of pure nature that Balthasar himself rejected, as we saw in the chapter on Eros and natural desire. Barth's critique of the *analogia entis* (as he understood it) resembles indeed Balthasar's critique of the *natura pura* of Neo-Scholasticism. For this reason, Balthasar's "mission" was to convince Barth of the deep goodness of the *analogia entis*. The friendship between the two theologians bore fruit: Karl Barth was drawn closer to analogy—through what he came to call *analogia fidei*—while Balthasar made Christology more and more central to his thought. Balthasar believes that Barth's slight turn from dialectic to dogmatics "presupposes and expresses the *analogia entis*."⁴⁶⁹ According to Balthasar, this turn was due to the fact that Barth's theology was first and foremost based on Christ, the person in whom similarity and dissimilarity coexist.

It is also notable that Balthasar's use of analogy is strongly Trinitarian. The otherness between the persons of the Trinity is the most fundamental otherness, grounding the distance between God and creation. Within the Trinity, otherness is not a privation, but the possibility for love: the "not" (the Son is not the Father, and so forth) has an infinitely positive sense. Herein Balthasar finds the roots of the analogy between man and God: the infinite distance between the world and God finds its analogue in the prototypical distance between God and God. Similarly, the unity of two natures in Christ serves as the icon of all continuities and discontinuities between God and creation. As man, Christ fulfills his freedom in the infinite freedom of God; as God, Christ freely gives himself in free dependence. As concrete *analogia entis*, Christ embodies the relation between necessity and freedom as a dramatic struggle:

And so our only option is to recognize a certain kind of *analogia* between the two uses of the concept of nature. This analogy represents the middle ground between two extremes: 1) a metaphysics (which is necessarily pantheistic) that does not distinguish between philosophy and theology; and 2) a radical Protestant dialectic in which the concept of nature actually diverges into and denotes two utterly distinct meanings.⁴⁷⁰

467 LONG, *Saving Karl Barth*.

468 BARTH, *Church Dogmatics* 1/1, xiii.

469 Apokalypse 3, 380.

470 TKB 273, KB 284: "(Es) bleibt nur übrig, eine gewisse Analogie im Gebrauch des Naturbegriffs anzuerkennen. Diese Analogie muss die Mitte darstellen zwischen einer notwendig

We can now think back to the schematic presentation of analogy, where it was the medium between a stark opposition of nature and grace, i. e. between identity and dualism. Analogy is chosen as alternative not only to a Neo-Scholasticism of *duplex ordo* and a Protestant dialectic, but also to the *Dynamismus* of Blondel and Maréchal. As Balthasar states, his analogical approach “is, contrary to the psychological dynamism of Blondel and Maréchal, a fundamental-ontological dynamism.”⁴⁷¹ The way of analogy allowed Balthasar to avoid both a notion of being as God and a notion of being as nothing, evading therefore both the collapse into pantheism or nihilism: “Between these two dialectics of a becoming God and becoming Nothing stands the true, mysteriously given becoming of the creature, which (from the beginning) comes contemporary from Nothing and from God, which moves (towards the goal) at the same time in the Nothing and to God. This is the meaning of analogy.”⁴⁷² Movement is truly and mysteriously given, exactly as human freedom in Origen’s cosmology: it comes *ex nihilo* through God, and it gravitates toward the “Nothing” of Apocatastasis and God.

Balthasar’s attention to analogy emerges as early as his first works on the Fathers. Here, however, he fairly acknowledges that Eastern thought cannot be considered an unambiguous “friend” of the notion of analogy, permeated as it was by an “ineradicable mistrust for an autonomous, objective nature—a mistrust for a fundamental analogy between God and the creature” and related “to all forms of self-transcendence, absorption, release of the finite into the finite.”⁴⁷³ Nevertheless, Origen’s attention to human freedom acts as a sort of counterbalance to this mistrust in autonomous nature. Balthasar concedes the risk of spiritualism in Eastern thought, but he also sees in Origen the risk of titanism. It is for this very reason that Origen was placed by Balthasar at the beginning of Eastern thought, as a wellspring from which two streams will develop. In the wellspring itself, the waters of the two streams are indistinguishable, they are not yet two but one. The

pantheistischen Metaphysik, die zwischen Philosophie und Theologie nicht unterschiede, und einer radikal-protestantischen Dialektik, für die der Naturbegriff in zwei unterschiedene Begriffe auseinanderfiel.“

471 Die Metaphysik Erich Przywaras 496: “Es ist, im Gegensatz zum *psychologischen* Dynamismus Blondels und Maréchals (...) ein fundamental-*ontologischer*.”

472 Ibid. 497: “Zwischen diesen zwei Dialektiken eines Gotteswerdens und Nichts-werdens steht das wahre, im Gegebenen, wenn auch Rätselhaften wurzelnde Werden des Geschöpfes, das (zum Ursprung hin) zugleich aus dem Nichts wie aus Gott, das (zum Ziel vorwärts) zugleich in das Nichts wie zu Gott wird. So klärt sich der Sinn von *ana-logia*.”

473 CL 190. KL 187–188: “Ein gewisses unausrottbares Mißtrauen gegen eine eigenständige, gegenständige und aller Gnadenteilhabe vorausliegende, nicht nur seelische, auch leibliche Natur, ja gegen die wurzelhafte Analogie zwischen Gott und Geschöpf hat dem östlichen Denken immer nahegelegt und ihm alle Formen der Aufhebung, Auflösung, Entschränkung des Endlichen ins Unendliche als stammverwandt fühlen lassen.”

very same element that, if left to drift, will become spiritualism, is counterbalanced in Origen by his attention to human freedom.

Answering Löser's question: "Can Origen be considered a thinker of *analogia entis*?" is challenging.⁴⁷⁴ Although it would be too much to call Origen a thinker of the *analogia entis* tout court, Balthasar's interpretation is not unfounded. The extreme tension between titanism and analogy had been linked to Origen already by Przywara in 1932, in his *Analogia entis*. Introducing the Platonic analogy as tacitly grounded by a golden mean between pantheism and theophanism, he provides a description of Origenism that mirrors Balthasar's later words. Przywara defines Origenism as the final and most acute expression of Platonism: what is immortal is not really God, but the Godward struggle. There can be therefore nothing definitive, because "it is freedom's nature to be ever and again capable of the opposite, even and precisely with regard to the antithesis of good and evil."⁴⁷⁵ Przywara depicts the same image of titanism found in Balthasar's considerations on Origen. Freedom is seen as an eternal struggle, where victory becomes almost a *Grenzbegriff*. Balthasar, however, does not stop here: he delves deeper into the notion of analogy in Origen. In *Le Mystérion d'Origène*, when explaining the heritage of the platonic theory of ideas, Balthasar acknowledges a certain intellectualism, but claims that the theory also introduces precious elements into thought: the notion of truth in its analogical sense, and the impossibility of reducing the truth of the spirit to matter. Balthasar quotes Origen: "the sensible world is in his essence sign and image (HGn 9,1; CRm 3,7; CC 7,31), precursor of truth (CCt 3, Bae 8, 208–210), *future formae liniamenta tenuis stili adumbratione*. 'Things are in analogy with the intelligible' (Cio 1,24)."⁴⁷⁶ We have already considered the role of symbol in Origen; for Balthasar: the object "is more than symbolic, it is symbol"; for, in fact, "symbol means then a thing that really is what it signifies."⁴⁷⁷

Another place where Balthasar presents his thought on analogy in Origen emerged in our analysis of *Wendung nach Osten*; besides a spiritualistic-gnostic stream, Origen also inaugurates a sacramental-liturgical stream. For Balthasar, the core of Origen's thought is not a mystical union in which the soul abandons every negativity in order to become godly. Its core is rather the incarnation of the Word, who alone can bring man into unity with God. By virtue of this inversion of priority in the Alexandrian's thought, we can read Origen as a step on Balthasar's way towards analogy. When excavating the core of Origen's religiosity,

474 LÖSER, *Im Geiste des Origenes* 97.

475 PRZYWARA, *Analogia Entis* 243–244.

476 MO (I) 518; PMO 19: "Ainsi tout le sensible est dans son essence même, signe et image, précurseur de vérité, 'esquisse au trait léger, préparatoire au tableau future'. Par essence, et non par convention. Tout son être est un geste qui monte vers son Idée spirituelle."

477 Ibid.: "(...) est plus que symbolique, il est symbole"; "on entendait alors par symbole une chose qui était réellement ce qu'elle signifiait."

Balthasar finds more than “Platonism”. Origen was a Christian and wanted to be so—as Balthasar clearly states in the epigraph to *Spirit and Fire*. Balthasar wants an answer that can explain Origen’s “Christian Platonism” without denying either of the two elements. We dare say that transparency, *Durchsichtigkeit*, is more fitting to Origen than analogy. The idea of transparency supports the moderate idea that the flesh is, indeed, a sort of veil, but a veil that paradoxically reveals, that shows and can even magnify the object behind it, the Spirit, giving it occasion to manifest. It is similar to the image of “clothes” used by Clement and quoted by Balthasar as missing in Origen. While, for Clement, there is enjoyment in this veiledness, in the presence of something between the object and the subject, it is harder to state this for Origen without making many qualifications. However, examples of *Durchsichtigkeit* and the positive role of mediation in Origen do exist. One example is the transparency of the spiritual body, the first evidence of an eternal mediation in the God-man relationship. Even in the pre-lapsarian super-time, the contemplation of God is always mediated, never direct. A second example is the role of beauty, the fact of a divine arrow opening man to God. If Scripture is in some way the body of the Logos, if the Church is the body of Jesus, if nature can be a way to know the divine, we can say that corporeality is not only a pedagogical tool for activating our spiritual senses, but already an expression and manifestation of the divine glory. Every dualism is avoided; the corporeal senses can become truly spiritual (without losing their corporeality) because God, without losing his divinity, became corporeal. The ascending movement of the soul is possible through the God who first descended.

We can now begin to draw some conclusions on this issue. Does Balthasar in the end read Origen as part of the tradition of titanic Idealism, as it appears in *The Glory of the Lord*? Or does he read him as a thinker of analogy, as it seems in his reflections on natural desire, the doctrine of the spiritual senses, and even the doctrine of freedom? Löser is right in presenting the positivity of the finite as one of Balthasar’s major concerns: “There is, *in the final analysis*, one single question for human thought at every time and in every place: whether, and under what conditions, the world can be affirmed in all its finitude. (...) The value that von Balthasar attaches to the work of a thinker is *ultimately* determined by his answer to this question.”⁴⁷⁸ Is there value in the flesh of Christ, in the Incarnation, in our human condition? Is there, in this incarnation, a value that is not simply pedagog-

478 LÖSER, Im Geiste des Origenes 211: “Von Balthasar hat die Bedeutung des Bekenners im Horizont des patristischen Denkens, aber auch der weitesten geistesgeschichtlichen Zusammenhänge herausgearbeitet. Das hält er darum für möglich, weil er davon ausgeht, dass es dem menschlichen Denken zu allen Zeiten und in allen Räumen im letzten um die eine Frage geht, ob und unter welchen Bedingungen die Welt in all ihrer Endlichkeit bejaht werden kann. Die Einschätzung, die von Balthasar dem Werk eines Denkers zuteil werden lässt, das zeigt sich hier, richtet sich letztlich nach dessen Antwort auf diese Frage.”

ical and finite? That is to ask, in Origenian terms: is the gift of incarnation simply a restoration of the pre-lapsarian condition, or is it something completely new? To answer this, we need to face Balthasar's last, and most complex, negotiation with Origen, the pivotal "silence" in relation to Origen's trinitarian thought.

3. A Way out of the Tension: Origen's "großartiger heilsgeschichtlicher Trinitarismus"

To enter into the trinitarian question we can start from the basic difference between God and every created being: the latter are embodied, the former is not. Related to this difference is the fact that every created being is formed *ex nihilo*, while the Son and the Spirit are generated *ex Deo*. Origen not only accepts creation *ex nihilo* as *praedicatio apostolica, depositum fidei*;⁴⁷⁹ he also argues against the idea of uncreated matter.⁴⁸⁰ Generation *ex Deo* only applies to the Trinity, and not to the world. As Balthasar suggests, Origen "clearly distinguishes the internal divine processions from the creation of the world."⁴⁸¹ Balthasar seems to be sure when stating this, but he excludes the texts on subordinationism from *Spirit and Fire*—it would appear that, from Balthasar's perspective, Origen was still lacking something in his trinitarian theology. Elsewhere he claims, for example, that "in Origen's Trinity, the Son and the Spirit, even though they were formally affirmed as being God, served as ontological mediators between the Father and the world."⁴⁸² Despite these doubts, Balthasar speaks of Origen's *großartigen heilsgeschichtlichen Trinitarismus*. What does Balthasar mean? Answering this question will require presenting one of the most complex notions of Balthasar's human-divine drama: the notion of kenosis.⁴⁸³ Notably, despite the fact that Balthasar formulates it much later in his life, the two works on Origen already contain some reflections on it. If it is wrong to claim Origen as the main source of Balthasar's notion of kenosis, it cannot be ignored that, already in 1936, the Swiss theologian could glimpse this doctrine in the Alexandrian. Balthasar will develop his notion of kenosis many years later, in a broad trinitarian sense, and in close affiliation with

479 Prin. I praef. 4.

480 He does so by reducing to absurdity the possibility of uncreated matter existing before God (ibid. II 1,4); he also rejects the idea that one could deny the uncreatedness of matter by denying that matter even exists (ibid. IV 4,6).

481 SF 14. GF 31: "Deutlich scheidet er die innergöttlichen Prozessionen von der Weltschöpfung."

482 PT 18. PP xvii: "Dans la trinité d'Origène, le Fils et l'Esprit, bien que formellement affirmés comme Dieu, servaient de médiateurs ontologiques entre le Père et le monde."

483 On Balthasar's notion of *kenosis*, see especially PUJOS, La "Kénose" du Père chez H. U. von Balthasar.

the notion of Urkenosis developed by Bulgakov, who was curiously called by his pupil Léon Zander “a second Origen.”⁴⁸⁴

I will not fully delve into this vast and complicated Balthasarian notion, which he considered “specifically Christian,”⁴⁸⁵ mainly because Origen plays only a relative part in it. Nevertheless, Balthasar quotes Origen two times in relation to the issue. (i) When in *Mysterium Paschale* he lists the thinkers of kenosis, Origen is, chronologically, the first named. (ii) Balthasar’s attitude was clear already in 1936, when he dealt with Origen’s notion of kenosis in *Spirit and Fire*. If, following Ide, we interpret Balthasar’s work on the Fathers as a first draft of his theology of love, Origen plays the role of the proto-kenotic theologian, despite not having a full doctrine of kenosis himself.⁴⁸⁶ The ultimate reason for this lack consists in the fact that kenosis, for Origen, does not reveal the intra-Trinitarian difference between the Father and the Son—what is missing, for Balthasar, is a strong notion of obedience in the sense of communion between the trinitarian persons. As we will see, there is, however, an aspect in Origen that allows Balthasar to see an emergent kenosis, though not fully developed in an intra-trinitarian sense. This was already visible in the section on freedom called “Law of Love”, i.e. the same event that allowed Balthasar to proclaim the *analogia libertatis*: the divine *passio caritatis*.⁴⁸⁷

A first reflection on kenosis in Origen is present in *Mysterium Paschale*, where Balthasar lists him among those who forged the idea, quoting CIO I,32: “One must dare to say that the goodness of Christ appears greater, more divine, and truly the image of the Father, when he humbles himself in obedience unto death – the death of the Cross – that had he clung onto his equality with the Father as an inalienable gift, and had refused to become a slave for the world’s salvation.”⁴⁸⁸ Jesus’

484 BOUYER, *Sophia ou Le monde en Dieu* 147. He quotes the biography of L. A. ZANDER, Bog I Mir. Mirosozertsanie Otsa S. Bulgakova, Paris 1945. The deep bond between Balthasar and Russian thought has been the object of study of NEWSOME MARTIN, Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Critical Appropriation of Russian Religious Thought. Another recent work compares Balthasar, Barth, and Bulgakov on the notion of freedom: GALLAHER, *Freedom and Necessity*.

485 TL 3, 300. Quoting KOBUSCH, *Freiheit und Tod* 187.

486 IDE, *La trilogie patristique de Balthasar* 711–744. Ide also analyzes the notion of *kenosis* in Balthasar: id., *La kénose selon Balthasar* 39–53. The full exposition of Balthasar’s thought as a theology of love and gift by Ide is id., *Une Théologie du Don*.

487 There are only a few studies on the notion of *kenosis* in Origen. The most specific are the chapter “Le mystère de la kénose” of FÉDOU, *La Sagesse et le monde* 311–332, and BOSTOCK, *Origen’s Exegesis of the Kenosis Hymn* 531–554. On Origen’s *passio caritatis*, see: PSEPHTOGAS, *La passion de Notre-Seigneur Jésus-Christ dans la théologie d’Origène* 309–321; FROHNHOFEN, ‘Apatheia Tou Theou’ 246–250; KOBUSCH, *Kann Gott leiden?*; FÉDOU, *La souffrance de Dieu selon Origène* 246–250; PERRONE, *La passione della carità* 223–235; FERNÁNDEZ, *Passio Caritatis According to Origen* 135–147.

488 MP 29–30. TDT 34: “Man muss es wagen, zu sagen, dass die Güte Christi größer und göttlicher und wahrhaft nach dem Bilde des Vaters dann erscheint, wenn er sich ihm Gehor-

obedience to the Father is the pivot-point: the goodness of Christ is “more divine” and “greater” when he obeys the Father.⁴⁸⁹ The second, more articulated reflection on kenosis is contained in *Spirit and Fire*. Here, Balthasar underlines how Origen is one of the first who dares to speak the “monstrous word about suffering in God, the form of the very emptying of God”, i.e. kenosis as Christ's fulfillment and redemption of the world.⁴⁹⁰ Moreover, when introducing the idea of a third level in Origen, Balthasar re-modulates the passion of the WORD, noting “the insight that the thrust of the lance on Golgotha was only the sacramental likeness of another spear which spiritually struck the WORD and caused it to flow out.” For Balthasar, Origen is one of the only thinkers to “crawl into the corner” and to give “lightning-like insights into the mystery of kenosis and self-emptying of God.”⁴⁹¹ These thoughts are rare, Balthasar admits; while Origen reveals that “emptying is wisdom, descent wisdom, fruitlessness wisdom, weakness and powerlessness wisdom”, it would have been necessary to give more attention to the *descensiones in corde* not as “hidden means and preparations for a complex sophisticated ascent, but the genuine pouring out of one's substantial spiritual blood.”⁴⁹² Origen does mention kenosis, but for him it means the pedagogical preparation for hu-

sam bis zum Tod, ja zum Kreuzestod demütigt, eher als wenn er es für ein unaufgebbares Gut gehalten hätte, Gott gleich zu sein, und sich geweiigert hätte, Knecht zu werden um des Weltheiles willen.”

489 FÉDOU, *La sagesse et le monde* 311, shows how not only there is in Origen a thought of kenosis already as incarnation, but also that kenosis is the real root of his subordinationism.

490 SF 120–121. GF 185: “Menschwerdung ist vor allem Sichtbarwerden und Darstellung des Liebes-Leidens Gottes: Origenes spricht das für einen Griechen ungeheuerliche Wort vom Pathos in Gott aus. Diese Darstellung ist die Form der Entleerung und Vereitelung Gottes, der Sieg der Weisheit ist Sieg über die Weisheit Und nur in dieser Kenosis erfüllt und erlöst Christus die Welt, in dem Er in Seinen Gliedern Seine Erlösung fortsetzt.”

491 SF 11–12. GF 27: “Ein letzter Gedanke aus dem Kreise der Wortmystik, und der innerste: die Passion des WORTES. Es ist die Einsicht, dass der Lanzenstich von Golgotha nur das sakramentale Gleichnis eines andern Speeres war, der geistig das WORT traf und es zum Ausfließen brachte. Die Ahnung, dass alles in der Welt vergossene Gotteswort dieser Lanze verdankt wird. In diesen Winkel des Origenismus ist kein Schüler gekrochen. Darum sind später ähnlich blitzhafte Einsichten in das Geheimnis der Kenosis, der Selbstentleerung Gottes, selten.”

492 SF 12. GF 27–28: “Auch bei Origenes tauchen sie ja nur kurz auf und das nur gegen den Strich und die Richtung des Gedankenstroms: Dass Entleerung Weisheit sei, Abstieg Weisheit, Vergeblichkeit Weisheit, Schwäche und Ohnmacht Weisheit, – aber ausgeleerte, vergossene, gekreuzigte Weisheit, das musste in seltenen Augenblicken diesem höchsten Liebhaber der Weisheit aufdämmern. Aber müssten dann nicht, um der Richtung der Weisheit Gottes zu folgen, ‘descensiones in corde’ bereitet werden? Und zwar ‘descensiones’, die nicht schon heimliche Mittel und Vorbereitungen zu einem komplizierteren, raffinierteren ‘ascensus’ wären, sondern Mitvergossenwerden des substantiellen geistigen Blutes?”

man ascent, rather than the most genuine step of divine love. Balthasar plays his usual game; he acknowledges the presence in Origen of a certain feature usually ignored by scholarship and reception but recognizes that its importance was not underlined enough by the author himself. Although Origen discovered the unfathomable truth of kenotic outpouring, he never drew the final conclusion. Remembering that the notion of kenosis is associated with incarnation, Balthasar explains the missing piece of Origen's thought with an image:

The Alexandrian idea of incarnation always reminds one of the action of a ball which, thrown from great height, in an instant strikes against the ground only to spring up from the earth with tremendous force and return to its starting point. But kenosis – to remain with images for the moment – is more properly to be compared with a wave of the sea which, rushing up on the flat beach, runs out, ever thinner and more transparent, and does not return to its source but sinks into the sand and disappears. The sinking in and the disappearing of the emptied-out WORD is as such, immediately and without any degrees of difference, regression, the 'giving over of the kingdom to the Father.' The emptying of death and its humiliation is as such already the elimination of the multiplicity of the images and letters, of the law and the prophets, and is the transitory process of making room for the Glory of the Lord. This 'I must decrease' is the growth of Christ in us, and only in this form does the whole Pneuma-theology and spiritualizing theology in Origen have its fundamental right to existence.⁴⁹³

It is evident that Balthasar, already in the 30s, is starting to think of kenosis, and the death and humiliation of Christ, in a way that will mature into his theology of Holy Saturday. Even more, he is acknowledging kenosis as the lone element that gives Origen's spiritualizing theology a right to exist. Despite his common critique of Origen's spiritualism, the doctrine of the birth of Christ in the earth of the believer ("the growth of Christ in us") is seen as a consequence of kenosis, the self-emptying of God himself. Balthasar seems to mitigate his own critique

493 SF 17–18. GF 36–37: "Immer gemahnt die alexandrinische Menschwerdungs-idee an die Bewegung eines Balls, der, aus großer Höhe geworfen, eine Sekunde auf dem Boden auffällt, um mit größter Wucht von der Erde abzuschneiden und zum Ausgangspunkt zurückzukehren. Aber die Kenosis müsste richtiger der Meereswoge verglichen werden, die überstürzend am flachen Strande ausläuft, immer dünner, durchsichtiger, und in ihrem Ausmünden nicht zurückkehrt, sondern im Sande versinkt und untergeht. Das Versinken und Untergehen des ausgeleerten WORTES ist als solches, unmittelbar und ohne stufenweisen Regrefß, die 'Übergabe des Reiches an den Vater'. Die Ausleerung des Todes und der Schmach ist als solche schon das Ausräumen der Vielheit, der Gleichnisse und Buchstaben, des Gesetzes und der Propheten und das vergehende und vergeleitende Raumschaffen für die Glorie des Herrn. Dieses 'Ich muss abnehmen' ist das Wachstum Christi in uns, und nur in dieser Form hat die ganze Pneuma- und Vergeistigungs-Theologie bei Origenes ihr gegründetes Recht."

of spiritualism in light of the notion of kenosis. How, then, does this doctrine emerge in Origen?

In Origen, expressions of divine *passio* and impassibility coexist. As for the divine passion, the main Origenian text on this issue is HEz 6,5–6. Here, Origen explains that God came to earth out of compassion for the human race. Divine suffering is not restricted to the cross; it is evident in God's longstanding compassion for humanity. Origen calls this kind of sufferance *passio caritatis*. The order is clear for Origen: first God suffered the suffering of love, then he came to earth:

The Father, too, himself, the God of the universe, "patient and abounding in mercy" [Ps 103:8] and compassionate, does he not in some way suffer? Or do you not know that when he directs human affairs he suffers human suffering? The Father himself is not without suffering. When he is prayed to, he has pity and compassion; he suffers something of love (*passio caritatis*) and comes into those in whom he cannot be, in view of the greatness of his nature, and on account of us he endures human sufferings.⁴⁹⁴

Later, in HEz 13,2, Origen wonders at how "good God is, who weeps even for those who have denied him! And this comes from a passion of love (*amoris affectu*)."⁴⁹⁵ Admitting that not even God is impassible (*passio, affectus*), Origen explains that, would the Logos not have suffered, he would not have fully shared in human life. Another reference is CMt X 23: "The impassible, as a lover of men, has suffered through pitying (*σπλαγχνισθῆναι*)"⁴⁹⁶; "due to his love for men (*philantropia*) Jesus leaves his house and goes to those who are unable to come to Him."⁴⁹⁷ Origen speaks of the Word emptying himself: "[The Word] *emptied* himself to sojourn in this life in order that in his *emptying* the world might be filled. But if that one who sojourned *emptied* himself in this life, that empty vessel was wisdom itself."⁴⁹⁸ Finally, Origen speaks of Jesus who, moved by a *motus misericordiae*, assumes the image of man.⁴⁹⁹ At the same time, however, in many passages Origen defends the idea of divine impassibility. In *De principiis* Origen states that "God must be understood as completely impassible and devoid of all these passions";⁵⁰⁰

494 HEz 6,6.

495 Ibid. 13,2: *Quam bonus Deus, qui etiam eos qui se negaverunt, deflet! Et hoc venit ex amoris affectu.*

496 CMt X 23: Ὡς φιλόανθρωπος πέπονθεν ὁ ἀπαθὴς τῷ σπλαγχνισθῆναι.

497 Ibid. X 1.

498 Hler 8,8.

499 HGn 1,13: "Our Saviour who is the image of God, moved by his mercy towards man whom he had created in his resemblance, seeing that he, degrading such image, had taken that of the devil, impelled by mercy, assumed the image of man and came to him (*ipse motus misericordiae imagine hominis assumpta venit ad eum*)."

500 Prin II 4,4: *Adfirmantes Deum penitus impassibilem atque his omnibus carentem affectibus sentiendum.*

in the *Commentary on Ezekiel* he declares that “God [is] impassible, as well as immutable and uncreated.”⁵⁰¹

How should we interpret this ambivalence? There is something in the divine Logos that impels him to leave the Father and descend towards those who cannot reach Him on their own—it is love, divine mercy, philanthropy. The language of passion is clearly modified and somehow metaphoric; but metaphor, mediation, is the only language by which God can communicate with man: “It is impossible for man, who lives in the flesh, to know what is hidden and invisible if he does not conceive an image or resemblance based upon what is invisible.”⁵⁰² *Nisi imaginem aliquam*: the language of image is not only for the uneducated, but for everyone. As Fernández suggests, “there is a reality in God himself, which is imperfectly expressed by means of metaphors, symbols, anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms. (...) The anthropomorphic language in the Scripture is not only a gift for the ruder and ignorant, it is the only way by which God can address man in his current condition. Even those who have known God with the nous, only manage a partial knowledge during this life.”⁵⁰³ Speaking in metaphor should not prevent us from seeing that there is something in God that “suffers”, something that is touched by the human condition. There is a certain “interest” in man in the pre-existent Logos. Origen traces a difference between how God is in himself, and how he appears to men. Without delving into the complex doctrine of the *ἐπίνοιαί*, we can only hint at Origen’s idea that “as God, when managing men, is called man in parables, he perhaps, in a certain way, also becomes [a man].”⁵⁰⁴ Fernández suggests that, despite the caution, “in the current situation we know what God has become for us, on account of his economy. But this is not a problem concerning only God’s language, it concerns the very being of God as well. (...) For Origen the problem does not lie exclusively in what is said about God but, also, in what happens in God, that is to say, in the very being of God.”⁵⁰⁵ Already in Origen the metaphoric language of “passion” has its foundation in God’s being; there is something in God that moves him to come to man. Balthasar shares the same idea. The descent reveals something of God himself, of his very being: “A new voice, personal, affective, is heard with Origen: his commentary on the *Song of Songs* will influence Bede and Bernard directly, Francis and the Rhenish

501 SelEz 16. For other statements on the divine impassibility, see FERNÁNDEZ, *Passio Caritatis* 140–141.

502 CCt III 13,17.

503 FERNÁNDEZ, *Passio Caritatis* 146.

504 CMt XVII 20: Ὡσπερ ὁ θεὸς ἀνθρώπους οἰκονομῶν ὡς ἐν παραβολαῖς ἀνθρώπος λέγεται, τάχα δὲ πῶς καὶ γίνεται.

505 FERNÁNDEZ, *Passio Caritatis* 145.

mystics indirectly.⁵⁰⁶ Balthasar's reference point is the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*; the main evidence of the divine *passio caritatis* in the *Song* is the personal love of the groom for the bride. The image of the divine arrow inflicting the wound of love, drawing the bride towards the groom, symbolizes the movement of God's love towards man. The suffering in God cannot be reduced to the humanity of Jesus; it is God himself who suffered of love for man. This *passio caritatis* is the very reason for the Incarnation, not a consequence thereof. The kenosis is found at the center of a passage in the *Commentary on Matthew*, where Origen seems to present the death on the Cross as a full epiphany of the mystery of the embodied logos: both kenosis, abasement, and upraising, elevation. The cross is here deemed a *spectaculum verbi*.⁵⁰⁷ The glorious dimension of the cross is deeply entangled with the kenotic dimension. It mingles with the cry of Jesus, which, in its being a sign of sufferance, is also a prayer to the Father that awakes the dead.⁵⁰⁸ Paradoxically, in the moment of abandonment, Jesus reveals the whole of his mystery, i. e. the relationship with the Father.

When thinking the *passio caritatis*, Balthasar does not stop at the apparent contradiction between passibility and impassibility in God, but rather moves into the very essence of God. If we now consider the classic issue in Origen's Trinitarianism—the subordination of the Son—in light of the notion of kenosis, we understand that subordination is not a form of inequality, so much as a sign of the greater mystery of the divine love for man.⁵⁰⁹ As Balthasar suggests in *Spirit and Fire*, “subordinationism in Origen has a stronger salvation-history aspect and thus can be better brought into harmony with Nicean theology.”⁵¹⁰ Balthasar explains that the Son, for Origen, is not just a tool of creation/redemption, but rather the eternal birth of love in the Father, i. e. the same passion of love that will lead the Father to send the Son. In a claim that mirrors exactly what Balthasar will state later in life, Fédou suggests that Origen's kenosis is not only the mystery of the sacrifice of the Cross, but the mystery of the Logos itself.⁵¹¹ He shows that Origen's subordinationism is not a form of inequality, but related to the mystery of

506 MP 38. TDT 4: “Ein neuer personal-affektiver Ton taucht bei Origenes auf: von seinem Hoheliedkommentar geht ein unmittelbarer Einfluß zu Beda und Bernhard und indirekt zu Franziskus und zur rheinischen Mystik.”

507 CMTS 141. On this passage, I follow the considerations of PERRONE, *La morte in croce di Gesù* 286–307.

508 CMTS 135. 138.

509 FÉDOU, *La sagesse et le monde* 311.

510 SF 14. GF 31: “Die Subordination hat bei Origenes ein stärker heilsgeschichtliches Gesicht und lässt sich so besser mit der nicänischen Theologie vereinbaren.” Balthasar's interpretation of “subordinationism” is confirmed by McDONNEL, *Does Origen Have a Trinitarian Doctrine of the Holy Spirit?* 5–35.

511 FÉDOU, *La sagesse et le monde* 317.

the kenosis.⁵¹² Fédou seems to confirm Balthasar's idea that "what was still lacking in Origen's inner-trinitarian theology he makes up for with his magnificent salvation-history trinitarianism."⁵¹³ Origen's focus was not on the dynamism among the three persons, as it will become in later theological reflections, but on the economic Trinity. If one disparages Origen as a strict subordinationist, one will never understand his idea of kenosis as the "annihilation" of the Son of God, who became a servant, while, at the same time, remaining totally united with God.⁵¹⁴ But because, as we have seen in Balthasar's reading, Origen understood the divinity of Christ, it becomes possible to see in the Alexandrian an affirmation of kenosis: it is the Logos, the Son of God himself, who descended to humanity through an original act of love.

The role given by Balthasar to Origenian kenosis can also be seen in his estimation of Maximus the Confessor as a corrective to Origen on the notion of movement, such as we already considered in the section on freedom. In that section, we saw that freedom-as-consent was the central truth of Origen's notion of freedom. Kenosis, we have learned, allows us to see the *passio caritatis* as that which allows Origen to surpass titanism. Balthasar confirms this when he claims that only by virtue of this kenosis "does the whole Pneuma-theology and spiritualizing theology in Origen have its fundamental right to existence." Despite apparently following Maximus in his critique of Origen's idea of the Fall, and despite often criticizing Origen's spiritualism, Balthasar shows that Origen already contains the seeds of an answer to these critiques. These seeds have emerged in our inquiry into the Origenian notions that Balthasar develops in his theology: Eros, freedom, and spiritual sensitivity. At the roots of these, we find, for Balthasar, the third Origen—the Origen of the law of love, of the *passio caritatis*, of the sacrifice of the Word. That which allows Maximus to surpass Hegelian titanism is indeed enclosed in this statement: "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."⁵¹⁵ In Maximus, the origin of becoming lies in a free divine act, in the divine initiative. With the mystery of the *passio caritatis*, Balthasar finds already in Origen the "free act of the person who steers the struggle from above" and the

512 Ibid. 311.

513 SF 14. GF 31: "Was also an innertrinitarischer Theologie bei Origenes noch fehlt, das ersetzt er durch seinen großartigen heilsgeschichtlichen Trinitarismus."

514 FÉDOU, *La sagesse et le monde* 317–318.

515 CL 268–269. KL 266: "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."

“voluntary character of that persons’ ineffable self-immolation.” Discovering such freedom in the Trinity, Balthasar believes Origen to have already formulated the solution that Maximus will later consummate: in the unique sacrifice of Christ God made himself *becoming* for us. The *passio caritatis*, the law of love, allows Origen to surpass the risk of titanism and therefore secure his position as a genuine inspiration for Balthasar: “[The Hegelian] tendency is counterbalanced by that is deeper in Origen. He knows that the real knowledge is love: ‘The friendship with Christ in the Holy Spirit, this is the knowledge of God.’”⁵¹⁶ God created man free, therefore running the risk of a fall with all its consequences. 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. In the space opened by the *passio caritatis*, man is truly free. The next necessary step is for Balthasar to understand the reason behind God’s “making himself becoming/movement for us”, and the eternal generation of the Son. We find here the beginning of what will become Balthasar’s own theology. It lies in the question: why is it good not only for man, but also for God, to run the risk of becoming?

4. *Kenosis* and Freedom: Some Considerations

Behind the entire sweep of salvation history, Origen perceives the love that is God’s nature.⁵¹⁷ The God who strikes and pierces the soul is He who first allowed himself to be struck and pierced. Origen does not go further than this; Balthasar develops the idea in a trinitarian way. Balthasar strongly believes that “there is something in God that can develop into suffering”, a suffering occurring when “the recklessness with which the Father gives away himself encounter a freedom

516 MO (II) 64; PMO 116: “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.’”

517 RATZINGER/CIAPPI, *The Paschal Mystery* 154: “In the patristic period it was Origen who most profoundly grasped the theme of the suffering God, and who also most straightforwardly declared that this theme cannot be reduced to the suffering humanity of Jesus, but that it colors the Christian conception of God himself. The fact that the Father allows the Son to suffer constitutes the Father’s own Passion, and this is also the suffering of the Spirit, of whom Paul says that he (...) bears the passion of our longing for the fullness of redemption (Rom. 8:26). And it was also Origen, moreover, who formulated the normative hermeneutic on the theme of the suffering God: whenever you hear of God’s passions and sufferings, says Origen, you must always relate these to love. God is a sufferer only because he is first a lover; the theme of the suffering God flows from the theme of the loving God and continually points to it. The decisive step that the Christian concept of God takes beyond that of the ancients is the realization that God is love.”

that, instead of responding in kind to this magnanimity, changes it into a calculating, cautious self-preservation.⁵¹⁸ As for Origen, God's suffering is a *passio caritatis*, a suffering of love, caused by the human rejection of the divine self-giving. The kenosis, rooted in the *passio caritatis*, is therefore fundamental to Balthasar's notion of freedom. Here he clearly goes beyond Origen, who is not mentioned in Balthasar's later development of the notion. Nevertheless, Balthasar's understanding of this event can help us in drawing some conclusions about his account of Origen, especially concerning freedom.

The creature can refuse to acknowledge that it owes its freedom to the Creator. This is because freedom has no other origin but itself; it is not 'caused' by anything but itself. (...) Man's refusal reveals that abyss in the creature whereby it contradicts its own character as analogy and image, a character that arises necessarily from its position within the trinitarian relations.⁵¹⁹

The analogical character of man—and therefore of his freedom—is rooted in the dynamic of the trinitarian relations. As we saw in the chapter on freedom, autonomy is not sinful per se; sin comes with forgetfulness of the divine origin of freedom, its nature as *gift*. Strikingly, for Balthasar, it is not only the analogy and image that are rooted in the trinitarian relations, but the very possibility of our "no". Man's freedom, his distance from God, is rooted in a real distance between the persons of the Trinity. The intra-trinitarian dynamism, the *passio caritatis*, tells us something about human freedom. It is clear for Origen that we cannot know the essence of the Trinity, i. e. God, but only the divine power mediated by the Son.⁵²⁰ We know that the Father suffers, but does Balthasar read the *passio caritatis* as a defining element of God's essence? It is true that, in the Fathers, Balthasar found resources for his mature ontology of the trinitarian relations. However, our research has shown that Balthasar encountered the opposite risk, when avoiding Neo-Scholasticism, namely, Idealism. This risk is also acknowledged as relevant to the issue of kenosis: "Only if we maintain a twofold – christological and trini-

518 TD 4, 327–328. ThD 3, 305: "Man kann nicht sagen, der Vater 'riskiere' etwas, wenn er denn Sohn ans Kreuz gehen lässt; erst dann sei er des Ernstes der sohnlichen Verdankung sicher. Fragt man aber, ob Leiden in Gott sei, so lautet die Antwort: in Gott ist der Ansatzpunkt für das, was Leiden werden kann, wenn die Vorsichtslosigkeit, mit der der Vater sich (und alles Seinige) weggibt auf eine Freiheit stößt, die diese Vorsichtslosigkeit nicht beantwortet, sondern in die Vorsicht des Bei-sich-selber-beginnen-Wollens verwandelt."

519 TD 4, 329. ThD 3, 305–306: "Das Nein der Kreatur zur Verdankung ihrer Freiheit begründet sich dadurch, dass sie Freiheit als Ursprung aus sich selbst ist, durch keinen andern Grund als sie selber verursacht (...). In diesem Nein klafft in der Kreatur der Widerspruch auf gegen ihren Analogie- und Imago-Charakter, den sie aufgrund ihrer Ortung innerhalb der trinitarischen Relationen notwendig haben muss."

520 Orat 25,3.

tarian – dramatic tension here we can avoid the gnosticism that leads from rabbinic thought to the cabbala, to Bohme and ultimately to Hegel.”⁵²¹ When Rahner accused Balthasar of formulating a gnostic death-of-God theology,⁵²² Balthasar answered that, despite sometimes resembling Hegel’s work on the pain of God, his thought is, in fact, very different. One can see this in his decision to quote Kierkegaard’s *Diary* in the opening of the last volume of *Theo-Drama*: “We must hold fast to the belief that when God decides to write a play, he does not do it simply in order to pass the time, as the pagans thought. No, no: indeed, the utterly serious point here is that loving and being loved is God’s passion.”⁵²³ We can hear the echo of Origen’s *passio caritatis*. Balthasar approaches the discussion of the Trinity in a similar manner as he approached the problem of Hegelian titanism. He says that “two approaches are barred to us: the idea of a Father who generates the Son in order to come to know himself as God and the idea of a Father who, because he has already known himself perfectly, generates the Son.”⁵²⁴ The first approach is Hegelianism—the absence of distance between God and the world; the second approach is Arianism—the claim that the Father preceded the Trinity. The third way between these two alternatives is the recognition of the ontological difference between (a) the world and its creatures, i. e. the *analogia entis*, and (b) the intra-Trinitarian difference, a trinitarian analogy.⁵²⁵

Despite acknowledging the presence in Origen of a possible tendency towards idealism, Balthasar does not ignore the abyssal distance between God and man rooted in the very notion of creation and, most importantly, does not forget that the roots of creation are in love, not necessity. If it is true that both Origen and Balthasar are interested in freedom, the goal is not to deconstruct analogy in favour of idealism, but to discover the roots of the mystery of incarnation in the in-

521 TD 3, 136. ThD 2/2, 125: “Nur unter der Bedingung einer doppelten – christologischen und trinitarischen – Dramatik läßt sich an dieser Stelle die Gnosis vermeiden, die vom Rabbinismus zu Kabbala, zu Böhme und schließlich zu Hegel führt.”

522 RAHNER, Karl Rahner in *Dialogue* 126–127: “I would say that there is a modern tendency (...) to develop a theology of the death of God that, in the last analysis, seems to me to be gnostic. One can find this in Hans Urs von Balthasar and in Adrienne von Speyr, although naturally much more marked in her than in him.”

523 TD 5, 12. ThD 4, 5: “Nur dies ist festzuhalten, dass dort, wo Gott – wenn ich so sagen darf, dichten zu wollen beschließt, es nicht, wie das Heidentum meinte, zum Zeitvertreib geschieht. Nein, nein, just darin liegt der Ernst, dass lieben und geliebt werden wollen. Gottes Leidenschaft ist, fast – unendliche Liebe! – als wäre er selber gebunden an diese Leidenschaft, fast als wäre dies eine mächtige Liebe, so sehr, dass seine Liebe keiner Veränderung unterliegt.”

524 TL 2, 177. ThL 2, 162–163: “(...) so sind ja beide Wege ungangbar: der eines Vaters, der den Sohn zeugte, um sich als Gott zu erkennen, wie der eines Vaters, der, weil er sich selbst vollkommen erkennt, den Sohn zeugt: das erste wäre hegelianisch, das zweite, ernsthaft durchgedacht, arianisch.”

525 FRANKS, *Trinitarian Analogia Entis* in Hans Urs von Balthasar 533–559.

tra-trinitarian relations. Origen's thought remains, for Balthasar, within a strongly analogical frame, and so is not univocal. Balthasar therefore never stumbles from the thought of kenosis into kenoticism or a pantheism of freedom.⁵²⁶ This is confirmed by his consideration of the *passio caritatis* and the direction this will take in his theology. It is true that something in God "moves him", that something within God "happens"; "there is", however, "only one way to approach the trinitarian life in God: on the basis of what is manifested in God's kenosis in the theology of the covenant – and hence in the theology of the Cross – we must feel our way back into the mystery of the absolute."⁵²⁷ The incarnation is therefore the key to understanding the Trinity. The mystery of God, what remains ungraspable, is exactly the coincidence of essence and freedom. While in the creature these two differ because of a distance between essence and freedom (in Origen, a distance between image and likeness), in God the act of generation coincides with its nature. Divine love is not the product of an act; generation is not something that God "does", but rather his very nature. In intra-trinitarian terms, for Balthasar God is the eternal generation of the Son, he is an eternal act of generation. Here lies for Balthasar the divine ungraspability: God *is* pure actuality, pure generation, gratuitous gift; the Father "*is* the movement of self-giving that holds nothing back."⁵²⁸ In God there is no specific act of will that generates the essence of the Son (therefore shaping his essence as "Father"): generation is eternal, his being Father is his very being, as the Son's sonship is his very nature.

Despite the hints of subordinationism, this is true also for Origen, who knows that the generation of the Son is eternal: the Son is coeternal with the Father. The Son is not the product of an act of the will, for he is not a creature. The essence of the Son is not contingent, as a creature's is. Balthasar never attributes the word "person" or "freedom" univocally to God and humanity. Pantheism of freedom is thus avoided; only the Son is eternally (and necessarily) generated, while creatures result from an act of will, different from the begottenness of the Son—which is not an act. The *passio caritatis* opens the space for human freedom; as Balthasar would say, the whole creation is an expression of the love between the Trinitarian Persons. As the Son is "other" to the Father, so *analogously* the creature is "oth-

526 The trinitarian analogy makes it possible for Balthasar to shape a trinitarian ontology that does not fall into voluntarism or pantheism. On this, besides the mentioned article of Franks, see IDE, *La kénose selon Balthasar* 48–49. On Balthasar's solution to the issue of divine immutability and *kenosis*, see O'HANLON, *The Immutability of God*.

527 TD 4, 324. ThD 3, 301: "Es gibt, um das trinitarische Geschehen in Gott anzunähern, keinen andern Weg, als sich von dem, was in der Kenose Gottes in der Theologie des Bundes – und von dorthier des Kreuzes – offenbar wird, zurückzutasten ins Geheimnis des Absoluten."

528 TD 4, 323. ThD 3, 301: "Der Vater (...) ist diese Hingabebewegung, ohne etwas berechnend zurückzuhalten."

er” to the Creator. While the expression (creation) is not necessary but free, the intra-trinitarian reality is a perfect coincidence of necessity and freedom—it is eternal donation. If the essence of the Trinity truly is donation/gift, this does not apply to the whole of creation without an analogical distinction: being-God *is* donation, while being is gift only analogically.⁵²⁹ Even “subordinationism” should be read in these terms. The Son, co-eternal with the Father, remains Son. In this sonship is no inferiority, but rather equality, since the very being of the Son is eternal generation from the Father. The intra-trinitarian relation is therefore not an act of will, but pure actuality, the eternal gratuitous gift of the Father. God is eternal donation; *passio caritatis* is the proof of the foundation of the intra-trinitarian process in divine love, not the priority of freedom over nature in God. For Balthasar, the *passio caritatis*, rather than revealing a divine “act of will” over the essence, is a “choice” for existence initiated by the Father, proving the centrality of the incarnation in Origen.

Taken together, the notion of kenosis and the analysis of *passio caritatis* shed new light on Balthasar’s own development of the possibility of a finite freedom in relation to infinite freedom. He sees within the Trinity an “otherness” (a passion) which is not a privation, but a moment of love. The Son is not the Father, but this “not” has a positive content. As the Son is “not” God, so, analogically, the creature’s finite freedom is not absorbed but anchored by infinite freedom. The “not” of the creature and the “not” of the Son are analogical, not univocal; the *analogia entis* encompasses the *analogia libertatis*. As seen in the section on Eros, Balthasar, while avoiding Idealism, also steers away from its existentialist form. In refuting the pure nature of Neo-Scholasticism, he does not argue for a destruction of nature tout court, nor for an alleged priority of freedom over nature. Similarly, when apophatically thinking the nature of the Trinity, he does not separate and/or counterpose the divine essence to the divine personhood, but rather sees the very essence of God as coincident with the act of giving.

To conclude on kenosis, it is interesting to notice that Balthasar expressed his personalistic reading of Origen long before developing his own theology of the *Urkenosis*. It is tempting to read Balthasar as “forcing” Origen into a kenotic frame by virtue of his later thought on kenosis, but we should not forget that forty years passed between Balthasar’s first note on Origen’s kenosis in *Le Mystérion d’Origène* and his later endorsement of the *Urkenosis*. It would be too much to say that Origen is fundamental to Balthasarian kenosis. Balthasar does, however, pay attention to a certain element in Origen that will later influence his approach to kenosis. Specifically, divine kenosis is Balthasar’s answer to the question of the relation

529 Balthasar would therefore disagree with HOLZ, *Über den Begriff des Willens* 83, who claims “Mitteilung” to be the divine essence that “muss sich, da er wesenhaft Mitteilung ist, auch in anderer Weise als nur an sich selbst mitteilen, d. h. an eine Welt.”

between human freedom and necessity, and to the question on God's "need" for the world. In the relationship between the Father and the Son (eternal generation, eternal gift), the model of freedom is given as the fruit of a relationship—the mutual reciprocity, and therefore obedience, of the Son to the Father by virtue of their essential unity. This is fully in line with Balthasar's statement that subordination is acceptable in Origen because of its importance to salvation-history. Jesus is the model of God's plan for creation: "In the person of the incarnate Son, his being begotten and his being created form a unity, so too the created world is, as it were, drawn into the beginning."⁵³⁰ The relationship between Son and Father in Origen mirrors the true kind of freedom possible for human being. Christ is, for Balthasar, the "concrete analogy of Being", the ultimate mediation between created and uncreated, between human (finite) freedom and divine (infinite) freedom; Christ is the measure of, and distance from, God. Balthasar sees this distance as the space of love; it grounds his invariable rejection of titanism and spiritualism as Christian temptations: "The Eastern Church became heretical because she handed herself over to the absolutization of the inner dynamism of the act of seeing, which points ultimately, in its upward flight, to identity with God and to negation of the world."⁵³¹ Including difference in the Trinity itself, and therefore a positive distance between God and man, Balthasar turns the classic idea that "God became man so that man could become divine" into "God becomes man so that man can live the communion of life with God."⁵³² The pivotal point is the communion of life with God: in this communion, man never loses his fully human freedom, and God never ceases to give his fully divine love. Although Origen does not develop this notion of intra-trinitarian community, it is interesting to notice how 20th-century Catholic theology will often read Origen for his mystical doctrines. These doctrines, which can also be the most risky, present Origen as a thinker of the personal relationship between God and man, a thinker of the dramatic play between creator and creature, where human freedom is not just a temporary tool to be discarded once man reaches God. God wants to be loved freely, not to dissolve human freedom into undifferentiated union. He creates man as a partner in a drama; all the elements emerged in this section, from natural desire to spiritual senses, speak of this dramatic relationship. The word that governs the God-world relation must therefore be a rationality that is always-already love, which is to say, a person.

530 TD 5, 80–81. ThD 4, 74: "Und weil Gezeugtsein und Geschaffensein im menschengewordenen Sohn eine Einheit werden wird, ist die geschaffene Welt gleichsam zurückgeholt in die Zeugung hinein."

531 ET 2, 483. ST 2, 494: "Die Ostkirche ist darum häretisch geworden, weil sie sich der Verabsolutierung der inneren Dynamik des Schauens überließ, die in ihrem Auftrieb zuletzt auf Identität mit Gott und auf Weltverneinung ausgeht."

532 BENEDICT XVI, Message for the Centenary of the Birth of Hans Urs von Balthasar, 6 October 2005.

V. Balthasar's Inspiration: Apocatastasis

When thinking of Origen and Hans Urs von Balthasar, the first topic that comes to mind is probably apocatastasis.⁵³³ Why does it come then only at the end of this research? The reason is more than chronological, though Balthasar did articulate his hope for universal salvation relatively late in his life. I have waited until now because the role of Origen's apocatastasis in Balthasar's eschatology is closer to "inspiration" than heavy influence. In this section, I will show the common elements of the two "doctrines" (neither openly established universal salvation as a doctrine) and their dissimilarities. The main link between the two thinkers on this issue is not just eschatological but has deep Trinitarian roots. As we have seen, Origen is quoted by Balthasar in many of his works, but, given this fact, his doctrine of apocatastasis is not as present as one might expect.⁵³⁴ Or, better, it is not in the common understanding of apocatastasis that Balthasar is interested. His study of Origen, together with the fundamental work of Henri de Lubac, will bring him to a different understanding of salvation in the Alexandrian. The importance of Origen for Balthasar on the issue is, however, openly declared; when talking about universalism, Origen is described as "the most powerful thinker [of the pre-Augustine patrology], one who, through his universalism, has affected, more than anyone else, his own and subsequent generations"—a thinker who, particularly on this issue, must be approached with an unbiased mind.

Balthasar's explicit work on the universality of salvation comes late in his career. The first explicit formulation of his infamously misunderstood statement on the emptiness of hell came in 1984; his explanation of the issue, *Was dürfen wir hoffen?*, was published in 1986, followed in 1987 by *Kleiner Diskurs über die Hölle*, and in 1988 by *Apokatastasis*. Not only had the possibility of universal salvation been the object of theological reflection for many years before these publications, but also an object of doctrinal interest. A pivotal moment in the history of this reflection was Vatican II, which affirmed, with *Gaudium et Spes* § 22, that because of Christ's death for all men, and because of the identical ultimate vocation of men, the paschal mystery holds true not only for Christians, "but for all men of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way". Does this statement

533 Among the critiques of Balthasar's eschatology, one title draws a direct connection with Origen: HAUKE, *Auf den Spuren des Origenes. Größe und Grenzen Hans Urs von Balthasars* 554–562. Balthasar's closeness to Origen's apocatastasis puts for Hauke Balthasar's entire theology at risk.

534 A direct comparison of Origen and Balthasar on eschatology can be found in MALI, *Origenes – Balthasars Lehrer des Endes?* 280–290. This, however, is limited to Balthasar's early text *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele*, without touching therefore the later texts on the hope for universal salvation; the short essay does not touch the main issues of the two thinkers' eschatology.

contradict the classic doctrine of the existence of hell affirmed in the *Laetentur caeli*: “the souls of those who depart this life in actual mortal sin, or in original sin alone, go down straightaway to hell to be punished, albeit with unequal pains”?⁵³⁵ The answer is negative: *Gaudium et Spes* affirms that we can believe (not know for sure) that God offers every man the possibility of redemption: Christ died for all men, and the Church's catholicity embraces the entire humanity. Despite not contradicting the previous statements of the Church, *Gaudium et Spes* does seem to reveal a new kind of sensibility. Many contemporary thinkers, especially the theologians of the *Nouvelle Théologie*, shared this sensibility. The relationship between their thoughts on the catholicity of salvation, and patristic studies, is evident.⁵³⁶ Balthasar himself openly admits the importance of the eschatological question from the very beginning of his patristic reflections. In fact, referring to his time in Lyon, he claims that “Patristics meant to us a Christendom that still carried its thoughts into the limitless space of the nations and still trusted in the world's salvation.”⁵³⁷ Before delving into Balthasar's texts on this issue, it will prove helpful to briefly survey the notion and role of apocatastasis in Origen's thought.

1. Apocatastasis in Origen

The importance of the doctrine of apocatastasis for Origen and, even more, for Origen's reception history, is unquestionable.⁵³⁸ Origen himself, however, rarely used the term; “these things are spoken about by us with great fear and caution, discussing and investigating rather than establishing as fixed and certain.”⁵³⁹ The main reference for Origen's notion of apocatastasis is *De principiis*. Rufinus translates it with *restitutio omnium, perfecta universae creaturae restitutio*. Origen identifies the end with the restoration of the initial condition of the world, at which point everyone will be punished according to their sins: “We think, indeed, that the goodness of God through Christ may recall his whole creation to one end, with even his enemies

535 DENZINGER, *Enchiridion* 1306.

536 An example of this connection is studied by LUDLOW, *Universal Salvation*.

537 MW 49. The question of apocatastasis was very popular at the time of Balthasar's education, with several monographs published at the beginning of the century: RIEMANN, *Die Lehre von der Apokatastasis*; SCHRADER, *Die Lehre von der Apokatastasis*.

538 A broad history of the notion of apocatastasis is traced in DALEY, *The Hope of the Early Church*; SACHS, *Apocatastasis in Patristic Theology* 617–640; RAMELLI, *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis. On apocatastasis in Origen*, see RABINOWITZ, *Personal and Cosmic Salvation in Origen* 319–329; CROUZEL, *L'apocatastase chez Origène* 282–290; *Les fins dernières selon Origène*; PRINZIVALLI, *Apocatastasi* 24–29; SCOTT, *Journey Back to God*.

539 Prin I 6,1. “*Quae quidem etiam a nobis cum magno metu et cautela dicuntur, discutientibus magis et pertractantibus quam pro certo ac definitione statuentibus*”.

being overcome and subdued.”⁵⁴⁰ The ambivalence of the Greek *telos* is preserved; the end and the goal of every creature is one and the same. One should not forget that Origen's apocatastasis has a strong anti-gnostic slant. Against the idea that only some people, the “spirituals”, will achieve salvation, he argues that all creatures will become spiritual, and so be saved. Salvation will be achieved after the submission of all creatures to God, even the last enemy, death.⁵⁴¹ Moreover, the devil will, in the end, return to God; evil will be eschatologically null and good will reign eternally. To reach a different conclusion, Origen would have to deny divine omnipotence. In *Contra Celsum* he explains that no mind can be so evil that it may not be converted by the divine Logos, who applies his healing to every man according to the will of God: “The consummation of all things is the destruction of evil, although as to the question whether it shall be so destroyed that it can never anywhere arise again, it is beyond our present purpose to say.”⁵⁴² God is depicted as a good doctor who has the power to heal every evil. Despite this divine power, Origen seems to acknowledge the risk, in this doctrine, of diminishing human freedom. He therefore specifies that the choice for perfection is made freely. Origen often uses the metaphor of the doctor to describe the divine action on man; the submission of every creature to divine love is implemented for their benefit.⁵⁴³ The principle behind apocatastasis is, for Origen, the coincidence of goodness and justice in God. Apocatastasis is therefore the result of God's salvific action, stemming from his love and desire for the salvation of all. Moreover, God's is a goodness that coincides fully with his love for creaturely freedom. The final salvation is not in fact accomplished by ignoring the free actions of men: every creature is subject to the fire of judgment in proportion to their sin, but fire destroys the sin, not the creatures. For this reason, even in the case of the devil, what will be destroyed is “not its substance, which was made by God”, but “the hostile purpose and will which proceeded not from God but from itself.”⁵⁴⁴ As Christ is subjected to the Father, so the creatures and the totality of creation, as mystical body of Christ, will, in the end, be subjected to God. Apocatastasis is the fulfilment of Christ's mediation and marks the universal effect of his sacrifice. Punishment finds its place in this salvific plan as a pedagogical, or medical, instrument used by God; every sinner, through the baptism of a purifying fire, will reach salvation.⁵⁴⁵ Punishment is not simply a measure to provoke fear or remorse, but a staff to guide souls toward responsibility; the Divine judgment is therefore ordered to man's freedom, and freedom ordered to life with God.

540 Ibid.

541 Ibid. III 6,5.

542 CC VIII 27.

543 Prin III 5,7.

544 Ibid. III 6,5.

545 CC IV 13; V 15; HIer 2,3.

2. Apocatastasis in *Spirit and Fire*

The issue of universal salvation appears in *Spirit and Fire* in the fourth section of the book, *God*, in a chapter called *God-Fire*. Considering this title, we might expect the fire of damnation to play an important role in Balthasar's presentation of Origen. And, indeed, we read that "the fire that must consume them is the fire of God himself. This truth, that God is consuming fire and fiery sword, Origen thought through the end with a consuming passion. The fire of God is either the mystical, purifying fire in those who commit themselves to him, or the punishing fire in sinners."⁵⁴⁶ Despite Origen being known for the doctrine of apocatastasis, Balthasar reminds the reader that every soul will be subject to judgment. But what is the true nature of judgment—eternal punishment, or a redemptive act of purification? Balthasar is clear, "it is inconceivable for Origen that God's fire in a soul should only punish and not also purify. With this idea, which has already been touched on several times, as in the 'universal salvation' of the world through the suffering of the Word, Origen expresses his doctrine of the universality of salvation."⁵⁴⁷ Apocatastasis is directly related to the divine passion for humanity. What for Balthasar sheds light on this doctrine is not Origen's philosophical account of the end and the beginning, so much as the scriptural account of the suffering of the Word. The notion of universal salvation finds its place in Balthasar's dramatic interpretation of Origen's thought: "Sin appears as an episode in the mystery of love."⁵⁴⁸ Origen turns evil into a divine pedagogical tool, a sort of *felix culpa*: "It has the task of providing opportunity for battle and perseverance, and in God's hand it is changed into a means of good. Thus, within this (contingent) world order, one can call it 'not-wendig' [necessary for the transformation]."⁵⁴⁹ Evil assumes a necessary character, while remaining the fruit of a contingent act of the soul. On this topic, Balthasar appears to draw a comparison with Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*, published ten years before *Spirit and Fire*:

546 SF 325. GF 484: "Das Feuer, das sie ausbrennen muss, ist das Feuer Gottes selbst. Origenes hat diese Wahrheit, dass Gott 'verzehrendes Feuer' und 'feuriges Schwert' ist, mir einer selbst verzehrenden Leidenschaft zu Ende gedacht. Das Feuer Gottes ist entweder das mystisch-reinigende, in denen, die sich ihm überlassen, oder das strafende, in den Sündern."

547 SF 330. GF 492: "Es ist aber für Origenes unvorstellbar, dass das Feuer Gottes in einer Seele nur strafe, nicht auch reinige. Mit diesem Gedanken (der bereits mehrfach durchklang, so bei der Allererlösung der Welt durch das Leiden des WORTES) spricht Origenes seine Lehre von der Wiederbringung aller Dinge aus."

548 SF 330. GF 492: "Denn jetzt erscheint die Sünde wie eine Episode in diesem Liebesgeheimnis."

549 SF 336. GF 500: "Es hat die Aufgabe, Gelegenheit zu Kampf und Bewährung zu geben und verwandelt sich in Gottes Hand in ein Mittel zum Guten. Not-wendig kann man es innerhalb dieser (kontingenten) Weltordnung nennen."

In the same measure that, within a descriptive philosophy of essence, the human being appears as 'being unto death' and cannot appear otherwise, to the same degree, then, evil appears as necessary. That this necessity can, to a higher theological consideration, appear as contingent, this cannot be determined, not even be suspected, by philosophy.⁵⁵⁰

The key to this complex statement is once again the suffering of the Word. The very necessity of evil can only be reversed in the theological (scriptural) frame of the divine sacrifice: "Even human freedom is not so absolute that it can remain impervious to God's more absolute love."⁵⁵¹ The divine sacrifice disrupts the apparent necessity of evil, presenting an unanticipated alternative, and turning a tragic necessity into a dramatic contingency. To be clear, there is no necessity in universal salvation, just as there is no necessary damnation. Already in 1938, Balthasar had begun to formulate what would become a recurrent statement in his later eschatology: "The Church has never declared any human being to be damned with certainty."⁵⁵² As the tragic necessity of damnation is made contingent thanks to the divine sacrifice, so the final destination of each soul is rendered indeterminate: "This mystery remains veiled, and must remain so. For only when life is an absolute choice does it maintain its seriousness and its tension."⁵⁵³ Consequently, Balthasar believes it is clear that Origen is *not* affirming the necessity of universal salvation, which would depend on sure knowledge. This is apparently confirmed by Origen's idea that God prevents human beings from knowing the things to come, because foreknowledge would cripple man's efforts: "With this is expressed a principle which does not explain this whole theory of salvation as something false, but does indeed remove it from the grasp of human beings and of any theology (which is necessarily objective and, as doctrine, itself never 'existential')."⁵⁵⁴

550 SF 338 n. 1. GF 504 n. 1: "Im selben Maße, wie innerhalb einer beschreibenden Wesensphilosophie der Mensch als Dasein zum Tode erscheint und nicht anders erscheinen kann, im gleichen Grade erscheint das Böse dann als notwendig. Dass diese Notwendigkeit einer höheren theologischen Betrachtung als kontingent erscheinen kann, dies kann von der Philosophie aus nicht ausgemacht, nicht einmal geahnt werden."

551 SF 342. GF 509: "Auch die menschliche Freiheit ist nicht so absolut, dass sie nicht von Gottes absoluter Liebe umgriffen bliebe."

552 SF 334. GF 498: "Die Kirche hat keinen Menschen als mit Sicherheit verdammt erklärt."

553 SF 342. GF 509: "Aber dies Geheimnis bleibt verhüllt und muss es bleiben. Denn nur wenn das Leben eine absolute Wahl ist, behält es seinen Ernst und seine Spannung."

554 SF 344 n. 1. GF 513: "Hiermit ist ein Prinzip ausgesprochen, das die gesamte Wiederbringungslehre nicht als falsch erklärt, wohl aber dem Zugriff des Menschen und einer (notwendig objektiven, als Lehre selbst nie existentiellen) Theologie entzieht."

3. Voices on Universal Salvation

The interest in apocalyptic and eschatology in the late 19th-early 20th century is an incredibly broad topic to assess, but an undeniable part of Balthasar's education. Balthasar's familiarity has its roots in two elements: his study of *Germanistik* and his contact with the thinkers of the *Nouvelle théologie*. Balthasar explains that he found himself "in the best company", mentioning Erich Przywara, de Lubac, Rondet, Fessard, Blondel, Péguy, Claudel, Gabriel Marcel, Leon Bloy, Ratzinger, Hermann-Josef Lauter, Walter Kasper, Gisbert Greshake, Hans-Jürgen Verweyen, Guardini and, "last but not least, Karl Rahner."⁵⁵⁵ It is hard to draw a full picture of Balthasar's position on eschatology without scrutinizing each mentioned thinker. Two are especially worth considering for their similar construal of Origen's doctrine: Karl Rahner and Henri de Lubac.

Karl Rahner wrote little on apocatastasis, but formulated principles referring directly to the doctrine of universal salvation. In fact, towards the end of his life he explained that he would like to have written something "orthodox" and "acceptable" about apocatastasis.⁵⁵⁶ The heart of Rahner's "theology of hope" is human freedom, which he traces to the event of divine self-communication. Freedom, for Rahner, is the human capacity to choose God. Man can say yes or no to God, but his capacity is not neutral; it is weighted in the positive direction. Any other choice would be contrary to the nature of freedom. This capacity, he claims, is crystallized through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Rahner poses a question: is it possible for man to completely deny God and still be called free? This kind of freedom would, he thinks, amount to self-isolation, a circular, frustrated freedom. This is what Rahner calls "hell": not an externally imposed punishment, but "a connatural consequence of guilt flowing from the proper nature of guilt and need not to be specially added by God."⁵⁵⁷ Punishment is immanent in sin itself, and hell is nothing but the loss of real freedom through the (mis)use of freedom. The choice for hell remains a possibility, but Rahner wonders how someone could willfully move away from the source of their own life and freedom. Therefore, he believes we can, at least, hope for universal salvation. The Church can only speak of the *possibility* of damnation, while it can speak with *certainty* of salvation: "It must be made clear in theology and in preaching that what is said about heaven and what is said about hell are not on the same plane."⁵⁵⁸ Rahner also develops his idea of hope from his complex notion of God as *Vorgriff*, the horizon of human

555 DWH 133–134.

556 O'DONOVAN, Interview. *Living into Mystery* 179.

557 RAHNER, Guilt-Responsibility-Punishment within the View of Catholic Theology 215.

558 Id., *Eschatology*, SM 2, 245.

knowledge. God, as *Vorgriff*, grounds the possibility of every yes/no.⁵⁵⁹ Thus, even the denial of God remains a tacit affirmation of the horizon that He *is*.⁵⁶⁰ Universal salvation might therefore be seen as an unthematic acceptance of God as *Vorgriff*. At the same time, however, Rahner refuses apocatastasis as a doctrine; even if we can guarantee God's love and grace, we cannot risk eclipsing human freedom.

Next to Rahner, Henri de Lubac is another important voice regarding apocatastasis in Origen. If other contemporary thinkers acquired their taste for universal salvation from many sources, de Lubac is more explicit in quoting Origen on this topos. Three works are particularly interesting: *Catholicisme* (1938), *History and Spirit* (1950) and the essay "*Tu m'as trompé, Seigneur*". *Le commentaire d'Origène sur Jérémie 20,7* (published in 1979 but coming from a draft of 1950). The chronology of these works helps us to see how this was an abiding concern for Balthasar's friend and teacher.⁵⁶¹

a) *Catholicisme*

Catholicisme: les aspects sociaux du dogme is symbolic of a social sensibility diffusing in theology in the 1930s. For de Lubac, Christianity corrected two extreme historical/existential paradigms: Hellenism and Marxism. Hellenism, with its circular view of history, saw salvation as an escape from temporality, depriving time of its value. Marxism, while avoiding the circular view and showing respect for history, lacked a transcendental goal. But Christianity, especially as understood by the Fathers of the Church, affirms both history and transcendence, paying special attention to the social aspect. De Lubac pinpoints individualism, which identifies the individual as the center of value rather than participation in God's creation, as the antithesis of Church teaching. Christianity is essentially "social". Salvation is not a problem for the individual alone, but involves the entire mystical body of Christ, the whole Church. Considering that God creates the whole of humanity, the Church is "catholic" insofar as it seeks the salvation of all. As de Lubac reads it, *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus* does not mean that those outside the Church are excluded from salvation; it is rather a statement of her irreducible catholicity. In

559 Id., *Foundations of Christian Faith* 98: "But since in every act of freedom which is concerned on the categorial level with a quite definite object, a quite definite person, there is always present, as the condition of possibility for such an act, transcendence towards the absolute term and source of all our intellectual and spiritual acts and hence towards God, there can and must be present in every such act an unthematic 'yes' or 'no' to this God of original, transcendental experience."

560 The complexity of this paradox is object of the chapter "The Consummation of an Individual History of Freedom" in LUDLOW, *Universal Salvation* 169–207.

561 On the importance of Origen's allegory in de Lubac's eschatology, see chapter three of FLIPPER, *Between Apocalypse and Eschaton* 91–128. The aim of Flipper's book is to prove eschatology to be the hidden *leitmotiv* of de Lubac's entire theological production; he also acknowledges the pivotal role of Origen.

Catholicisme Origen is frequently cited; the most famous quotation comes from the seventh Homily on Leviticus, where Jesus is said to weep for sinners while awaiting the conversion of all. Christ's work will only be finished when the last of sinners has been perfected: "when all have been saved and when with the abolition of the death of sin it will no longer be necessary for him to offer sacrifice for sin."⁵⁶² In explaining this passage, de Lubac underlines that salvation comes from the sacrifice of Christ alone. The total submission of the Son, through which the Kingdom is delivered into the hands of the Father, will persist until all of the elect are gathered into Christ, and the whole world is brought to perfection. The core of universal salvation is clearly Christological. The decision to quote from the *Homily on Leviticus* rather than from *De principiis* is significant, and not simply because of the Church's condemnation of the doctrine of apocatastasis: in *Histoire et Esprit* de Lubac openly disputes the condemnation. It would, however, be unrealistic to imagine that this concern deterred him from making an explicit reference. The reason for his choice must therefore lie in the very center of Origen's homily: we have an advocate in the Father, and it is by virtue of this advocacy that salvation must be universal.

Balthasar openly acknowledges this Christocentrism in de Lubac's use of Origen. When recapitulating de Lubac's eschatological argument, Balthasar refers to Origen together with "what is of lasting significance in Origen's conception: that Christ and the blessed attain their ultimate beatitude only when the entire Body of Christ, the redeemed creation, is gathered together in the transfiguration, is given its due place in its spiritual meaning."⁵⁶³ *Catholicisme* was published in 1938, just after Balthasar's publications on Origen. It is therefore highly possible that these topics had been discussed in Lyon, as suggested by Balthasar's personal memories.⁵⁶⁴

b) *History and Spirit*

In *History and Spirit*, de Lubac claims that the real meaning of apocatastasis in Origen can be found in his notion of the spiritual understanding of Scripture; this understanding consists of endless assimilation to the mystery of God. Spiritual understanding "is itself this apocatastasis in which God does not appear as a distant third part with whom we could discourse or as the object of an impersonal

562 Hlv 7,2.

563 VON BALTHASAR, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac* 37 (translation slightly modified). Henri de Lubac. *Sein organisches Lebenswerk* 32: "Der origenische Gedanke, der so starken Widerhall durch die Geschichte fand (und schließlich in seiner Wörtlichkeit abgewiesen werden mußte), dass Christus und die Seligen ihre letzte Seligkeit erst finden, wenn der ganze 'Leib Christi', die erlöste Schöpfung in der Verklärung beisammen sein wird, wird in seiner bleibenden geistigen Bedeutung gewürdigt."

564 See above n. 119.

contemplation; rather he presents himself to the soul in view of a dialogue of love.”⁵⁶⁵ Apocatastasis is, in this interpretation, our spiritual growth and conversion to God unto the final cosmic fulfillment. This fulfillment is not individual; the subject of apocatastasis is the entire mystical body of Christ, the Church. Once again, Origen is a source for de Lubac's eschatology, not in his account of apocatastasis as a logic principle, but in his account of *anagogy*. In the spiritual meaning of Scripture, de Lubac finds the object of eschatological hope: the heavenly realities exist in the future-tense and cannot be exhausted with analytical certainty, just as Christ was present in the Old Testament without his incarnation being analytically anticipated and exhausted. For de Lubac, Origen's eschatology is the hope for history's transfiguration into eternity, without sealing it off from participation in the future mysteries. Origen is, for de Lubac, a corrective to the understanding of eschatology as an individual escape from a negative historical condition. Furthermore, Origen provides de Lubac with tools against the immanentism of a secular understanding of history. In de Lubac's original understanding of Origen, salvation is not a future event achieved by rising above time and space. Salvation, on the contrary, unfolds within the fabric of the world: not only do the events of the Old Testament bear witness to divine interaction with human history, but also indicate the future reality of Christ. The spiritual interpretation of the Scriptures commended by Origen reveals his understanding of salvation as an historical unfolding of God's good intentions toward humanity. Once again, Christocentrism is of fundamental importance. The Incarnation is not only the fulfilment of the Old Testament, but also the historical inauguration of a grounding principle, a principle that reorients the past in a completely unexpected way.

c) “*Tu m'as trompé, Seigneur*”. *Le commentaire d'Origène sur Jérémie 20,7*

This text, republished in 1979 at the initiative of Père Marcel Régner, is the final version of a draft written in 1950 for *Mémorial Joseph Chaine*, a collaborative work published by the Catholic faculty of Lyon. The direct connection between de Lubac's teaching, Balthasar's interest in apocatastasis, and the “social” aspect of Origen's eschatology, is clearly proven by Balthasar's decision to translate de Lubac's text a few years after its publication, with the addition of a short preface.⁵⁶⁶

565 DE LUBAC, *History and Spirit* 384. *Histoire et Esprit* 334: “Elle (i. e. l'intelligence de l'Écriture) est elle-même cette apocatastase où Dieu n'apparaît pas comme un tiers lointain dont on puisse discourir ni comme l'objet d'une contemplation impersonnelle, mais se présente à l'âme en vue d'un dialogue d'amour.”

566 Id., “Du hast mich betrogen, Herr!” *Der Origenes-Kommentar über Jeremia 20,7*. On this see FÜRST, who follows de Lubac's interpretation in the introduction to the new German edition of *Die Homilien zum Buch Jeremia*, 88–105.

The essay, "short and of great weight", has the goal of correcting the misunderstanding of Origen as "initiator of the doctrine of the abolishment of hell."⁵⁶⁷

Considering this is most urgent today, since we can no longer follow the same understanding of the counter-argument of Augustine, who certainly believes a great number of people are condemned to hell. Should the true Origen (in the face of the false and of his adversaries) not have been thought of in the last deeper, biblical, Christian sense, and should he have not expressed himself in his bold and cautious manner?⁵⁶⁸

In this short introduction, we find Balthasar taking his first stand against Augustinian infernalism. His connection with De Lubac became an occasion for Balthasar to think through this issue in dialogue with Origen.

De Lubac structures his essay dealing with Origen's commentary around a confession of the prophet Jeremiah: "You have deceived me, oh Lord", in which Origen "has discovered, in an unimagined shape, the revelation of deep doctrines."⁵⁶⁹ In the Homilies he examines at the beginning of the essay (Hler 19,15 and Hler 20,1-4), Origen deals with two delicate issues: the possibility of God deceiving man, and the use of words like "rage" and "regret" when talking of God. How can God deceive? How can he be anything other than truth? How can he be angry or experience regret? Origen uses two classic images: the father and the doctor who, in order to comfort/heal, might "deceive" their child/patient. At stake here is the theory of the "*mensonge utile*", "*mensonge pédagogique*", Origen's explanation of "divine deceit" as a mode of providence. In the 20th Homily, citing Paul's letter to Philemon, Origen explains that God could have created a necessary good, instilled in man an irresistible goodness, but did not want to. Rather, "He looks for a way, if one can say it, in which we can voluntarily do what he wants."⁵⁷⁰ In a section of the essay entitled "Ésotérisme ou pédagogie?", the question for

567 Vorbemerkung des Übersetzers, in: "Du hast mich betrogen, Herr!" 7: "(...) klein und von größtem Gewicht"; "Initiator der Lehre von der Aufhebung der Hölle".

568 Vorbemerkung des Übersetzers, in: "Du hast mich betrogen, Herr!" 8: "Das zu bedenken, ist heute um so dringlicher, als wir auch der 'Gegenthese' Augustins, der mit Gewissheit eine Grosszahl von Menschen zur Hölle verurteilt sieht, schwerlich mehr mit der gleichen Selbstverständlichkeit zu folgen vermögen. Sollte der wahre Origenes (gegenüber dem falschen und seinen Gegnern) nicht im letzten tiefer, biblischer, christlicher gedacht und in seiner zugleich kühnen und vorsichtigen Weise sich ausgedrückt haben?"

569 "Tu m'as trompé, Seigneur!" 10: "(...) a découvert, souns une forme imagée, la revelation de doctrines profondes."

570 Origen, Hler 20,2: "Il cherche donc une voi, si je puis dire, par laquelle nous fassions volontairement ce qu'il veut." De Lubac explains that the Hebrew word could mean "persuader, séduire ou tromper", excluding the first meaning, too light in this context. The Septuagint has *Ἠπάτησάς με*: the verb *ἀπατάν* means "seduce", "deceive". Jerome translates *seduxisti me, sive, decepisti me*. The same passage of Jeremiah is present in Prin III 1,12; Rufinus's translation is the same: *seduxisti me*.

de Lubac becomes whether this doctrine hides a “suspect esoterism.”⁵⁷¹ First, he shows that when, in *De principiis*, Origen speaks of an “elementary teaching,” he always refers to biblical passages (Heb. 6:1; 1 Cor. 2:6–7). As for the *Homilies on Jeremiah*, de Lubac explains that Origen means every man to be like a child in the eyes of God—with no difference between simples and perfects. Disagreeing with Bultmann, who claims the idea of *paideia* to be uniquely Greek, de Lubac demonstrates that Origen had biblical reasons for considering the God of Israel to be an “educator” of his people.⁵⁷² In the end, “the divine deception not only is a deception for the good, but was not a full deception,” so much as “a mixed mistake (*une erreur mêlée*).”⁵⁷³ De Lubac also mentions his disagreement with Balthasar’s explanation of the silence of God on some doctrines as a precaution against human abuse. Balthasar maintained that knowledge of eternal happiness would be compromised if it were predicated on vice. For de Lubac, this does not apply to the homilies under consideration; God is not hiding the complete truth because of man’s imperfect disposition, but because of the nature of human knowing. De Lubac here introduces the idea of the many names of Jesus; Christ made himself “grass for one, milk for the other, bread and meat for someone else.”⁵⁷⁴ Only in this sense we can use the word “esotericism.” Indeed, this is precisely Balthasar’s meaning, as de Lubac himself acknowledges: “In this sense, one can use the word esotericism – but that will not be the meaning that we have so often attributed to Origen. In a page of his introduction to a selection of texts of the Alexandrian, Hans Urs von Balthasar has perfectly explained it.”⁵⁷⁵ In the introduction to *Spirit and Fire* Balthasar counsels readers not to reject Origen’s esotericism tout court, as some might be inclined to do. For, “this esotericism is grounded in his doctrine of being itself and is thus not to be disposed of by an external comparison with pagan mystery cults.”⁵⁷⁶ Origen’s esotericism, claims Balthasar, comes from the idea that true knowledge is attained through action, and that every stage of life corresponds to a certain degree of maturity vis-à-vis knowledge of the truth:

571 “Tu m’as trompé, Seigneur!” 40: “ésotérisme suspect”.

572 On the idea that there is a time for everything: Eccl. 3:1 (quoted in Origen, CMt I 10); on Christ as the fulfillment of the fruits of the prophets (C1o I 1,2); on the idea that the Law and the Prophets are tools to lead the perfect intelligence to the Gospel (CMt I 10).

573 “Tu m’as trompé, Seigneur!” 50: “La tromperie divine n’était pas seulement une tromperie pour le bien, mais quelle n’était pas complètement tromperie.”

574 DE LUBAC, “Tu m’as trompé, Seigneur!” 53.

575 Ibid. 56: “En ce sens, on pourra reprendre, si l’on y tient, le mot d’ésotérisme – mais ce ne sera plus du tout le sens que l’on a si souvent imputé à Origène. Dans une page de son introduction aux textes choisis de l’Alexandrin, Hans Urs von Balthasar l’a parfaitement expliqué.”

576 SF 17. De Lubac quotes the french edition: *Esprit et Feu* 43–44. GF 35: “Dieser Esoterismus liegt in seiner Seinslehre selbst grundgelegt und ist darum durch eine äußerliche Vergleichung mit heidnischen Mysterienbünden nicht abzutun.”

“But to this philosophical truth corresponds the theological one that the Word of God in its incarnation adapts itself to each of these stages of existence and thus becomes all to all.”⁵⁷⁷ De Lubac's disagreement with Balthasar does not actually hold—Balthasar does not reject the idea of divine adaptation. Celsus had accused Origen of relativism because of this very notion, and Balthasar agrees: a “kind of truth-relativism (...) is not to be denied.”⁵⁷⁸ However, he claims, Origen also emphasizes that this adaptation of the Word does not make Him a liar, “otherwise childhood and the age of youth would be lies as such because they are not adulthood.”⁵⁷⁹ Balthasar does not put esotericism and pedagogy in opposition, as de Lubac's title appears to suggest (*ésotérisme ou pédagogie?*). The divine pedagogy of adaptation, what de Lubac calls “*mensonge utile*”, is a form of esotericism that later theology jettisoned at the price of a separation between school theology and mystical theology; these schools were, for Origen, strictly united. One could say that, while de Lubac seems to separate the “intellectual, esoteric, rationalist Origen” from “the spiritual man, the apostle, the man of the Church”⁵⁸⁰, Balthasar rejects any such separation. Rather, he sees Origen as a river wherein these two attitudes, which will later fork into two streams, coexist. In Origen, the “philosophical truth corresponds the theological one”—there is not opposition, but correspondence. His esotericism is grounded in the “personal, absolute and sole truth” of the Word of God. Despite the difference of accent (correspondence vs. separation), it is clear that both de Lubac and Balthasar link Origen's esotericism to his doctrine of the Word becoming “all to all”.

The idea of an esoteric Origen was especially associated with the construal of apocatastasis as a mysterious doctrine reserved for the perfects. Following this logic, the idea of eternal punishment would be no more than a “pedagogical lie, destined to maintain in the fence of morality the mass of the flock, incapable of a more disinterested conduct.”⁵⁸¹ This interpretation is especially based on a passage of HIER 19,15, where Origen hypothesizes that the fires of Gehenna are a punishment for involuntary sins, which can be purified by fire. As for greater sins, however, Origen specifies that fire will not consume them. Citing the sin of adultery, Origen explains that, although he cannot imagine a worse punishment

577 SF 17. GF 35: “Dieser philosophischen Wahrheit aber entspricht die theologische, dass das WORT Gottes in Seiner Menschwerdung jeder dieser Existenzstufen Sich anpasst und so allen alles wird.”

578 SF 17. GF 35: “(...) eine Art von Wahrheits-Relativismus (...) ist als Tatsache nicht zu leugnen.”

579 SF 17. GF 35–36: “Sonst wären Kindheit und Knabenalter als solche Lüge, weil sie nicht Mannestum sind.”

580 DE LUBAC, Introduction to the Torchbook edition of *De principiis* x.

581 “Tu m'as trompé, Seigneur!” 46: “Mensonge pédagogique, destinée à maintenir dans la moralité la masse du troupeau, incapable d'une conduite plus désintéressée.”

than Gehenna, something greater (*μείζων*) is waiting for those who commit it. De Lubac underscores the fact that Origen repeats *μείζων* six times in the lines that follow: "He confesses that he cannot conceive this greater torment, the central object of his reflection – but in his words there is nothing skeptical about it."⁵⁸² De Lubac is clear: the characterization of Origen as thinker of finite hell is "an error of interpretation."⁵⁸³ He repeats this conclusion a few pages later: the truth of beatitude or damnation is not "something that God, in the economy of his goodness, had decided to hide from us for fear of our abuse of it."⁵⁸⁴ Beatitude and damnation exceed the bounds of human knowledge: *μειζόν τῶν λεγομένων, μείζον τῶν ἀκουομένων, μείζον τῶν νοουμένων*.⁵⁸⁵

The last section of de Lubac's essay (with the meaningful title "*Le silence d'Origen*") delves into "what is called his theory of apocatastasis"—a word that, according to de Lubac, Origen never used in the manner that is usually attributed to him.⁵⁸⁶ De Lubac is aware that the two relevant homilies are not enough to definitively answer the question of apocatastasis; however, they do offer a new hermeneutical tool, viz. demythologization. De Lubac explains the three concerns of Origen's exegetical work: (1) answering pagans, like Celsus; (2) fighting against the literalism of a chiliastic tendency in the church; (3) "finally, in teaching his hearers the ways of divine pedagogy, he seeks to awaken and maintain in them a salutary anxiety, without renouncing to elevate their hearts above servile fear."⁵⁸⁷ This third concern is pivotal in the homilies on Jeremiah. Despite the impossibility of grasping the whole truth about salvation and damnation, Origen explains that one can orient the spirit in the right direction, so that feelings of fear or hope do not become unworthy of God. Fear is the object of the two homilies addressed by de Lubac, while hope is central to Hler 18. When considering the hope of future rewards, Origen explains that these should not be imagined in material

582 Ibid. 47: "Ce supplice plus grand, qui fait l'objet central de sa réflexion, il avoue qu'il ne peut le concevoir – mais dans sa bouche pareil aveau n'a rien de sceptique."

583 Ibid. 48: "Une erreur d'interprétation."

584 Ibid. 54: "(...) quelque chose qui Dieu, dans l'économie de sa bonté, aurait décidé de nous tenir cache de peur que nous en abusions."

585 Hler 19,5.

586 DE LUBAC, "Tu m'as trompé, Seigneur!" 67: "Ce qu'on a appelée sa théorie de l'apocatastase"; ibid. 68: "(...) ne l'a jamais employé au sens qu'on lui attribue". De Lubac quotes here CROUZEL, *Origène est-il un systématique?* 66, claiming that the thesis of Origen preaching the conversion of demons is insufficiently proofed, despite being so spread. De Lubac quotes also DUPUIS, *L'esprit de l'homme* 210–211, and LAEUCHLI, Origen's interpretation of Judas Iscariot 62. Before these three, de Lubac mentions, as previous deniers of apocatastasis in Origen, Claude-François Nonnette and Pico della Mirandola.

587 "Tu m'as trompé, Seigneur!" 70: "Enfin, en instruisant ses auditeurs des voies de la pédagogie divine, il cherche à éveiller et à entretenir en eux une inquiétude salutaire, sans renoncer à élever leur coeur au-dessus de la crainte servile."

terms, but as the bliss of divine contemplation. If this is the case, de Lubac suggests, then punishment consists in its opposite: ignorance of God. He continues his reflections on punishment by exploring Origen's multifarious images for the accrual of sin: during life on earth, man collects a ballast of sins which needs to be burned like wood; we have corrupted our gold with lead, which must be purged; a burning fever remains in the body until the cause of illness, sin, is eliminated. According to Origen, everything must pass through fire in order to be redeemed: the fire of the Word of God. De Lubac explains that the double-meaning of fire (that which burns and destroys, and that which warms and brings light) are in reality one and the same—God is both the fire of rage and the fire of love. Origen often repeated this trope, says de Lubac: there is a divine rage, but this rage is nothing like human rage. His rage *is* his mercy. We fear the rage of God, when we should in fact desire it; his rage is the good medicine that heals us from our sin. For de Lubac, it is clear that these homilies do not allow us to say that punishment is only a doctrine for the simple (as a means of frightening into virtue), while the wise knows that punishment will end and all will be restored: "In reality, Origen's thought, which is not hidden, is deeper. We are invited to place ourselves on a completely different level in order to understand it."⁵⁸⁸ The deeper thought is the mystery of divine love, manifested in incarnation *and* in fire. After the barrage of threats and promises, says de Lubac, comes the hour of a silence which is more marvelous than the promises and more terrible than the threats: "the bottom of the mystery, held by simple faith or contemplated, scrutinized by intelligence, is inaccessible to us all."⁵⁸⁹ But as always when dealing with this issue, de Lubac suggests that we can still, with Origen himself, meditate on the words of Christ: "Come to me, the blessed of my Father (...) Move away from me, cursed."⁵⁹⁰ De Lubac quotes Charles Péguy, Georges Bernanos, and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin on the idea of souls being "lost"; Origen never dears to make a sure statement on this. Nevertheless, faithful to the Gospel, he presents it as a possibility: "The vengeance of the Lord is always medicinal; the correction of the Lord always bears a fruit of peace and justice. But what must be feared well, what must be feared only, to fear as absolute evil, is his forgetfulness."⁵⁹¹

588 Ibid. 77: "En réalité, la pensée d'Origène, qui ne se cache pas, est plus profonde. C'est sur un tout autre plan que nous sommes invités à nous placer pour la comprendre."

589 Ibid.: "Le fond du mystère, tenu par la simple foi ou contemplé, scruté par l'intelligence, nous est inaccessible à tous."

590 Ibid.: "Venez à moi, les bénis de mon Père (...). Redirez-vous de moi, maudits." Cf. Origen, CMtS 72.

591 Ibid. 78: "Les vengeances du Seigneur sont toujours médicinales; la correction du Seigneur porte toujours un fruit de paix et de justice. Mais ce qu'il faut craindre bien davantage, ce qu'il faut craindre uniquement, craindre comme le mal absolu, c'est son oubli."

So, as we have seen, de Lubac rejects the idea of Origen as a thinker of the classic notion of apocatastasis. Be that as it may, it remains clear that, from de Lubac's perspective, the central point of Origen's eschatology is the divine care for man shown through the manifold names of the Word. Christ comes to every man in order to become all to all. This reminds us of *Catholicisme*: Christ will refrain from joining the Father until every last soul is joined to him. Christ, the advocate we have by the Father, wants every creature to join the beatitude of the Father, and, for this reason, adopts many names. In this we foresee Balthasar's idea of Holy Saturday as the extremity of Christ's descent—his love for humanity and his desire to hand all creation to the Father brings him to the ultimate sacrifice, even unto hell itself. Here, we also catch a glimpse of the pivotal issue of the possibility of divine compassion for man, and of the thesis we have yet to prove: that behind apocatastasis lies not a philosophical principle, but rather the divine love for man in the incarnation and passion.

4. Balthasar's Development of Universal Salvation

The hope for universal redemption is one of the most important elements of Balthasar's late theology.⁵⁹² Its systematic formulation began in 1984, when he won the Paul VI International Prize. At the press conference, a journalist asked him about his most hazardous position. His answer soon became infamous: "Hell exists, but no one knows who and how many people are there—it could even be empty." The press presented his position as radical: for Balthasar, hell is empty. To clarify his position, he published a text in Italian.⁵⁹³ This was immediately republished in the German edition of *L'Osservatore Romano* (without Balthasar's consent) with the title *Kleine Katechese über die Hölle*.⁵⁹⁴ The reaction was immediate: Gerhard Hermes, editor of *Der Fels*, wrote an open letter to Balthasar

592 The bibliography on this issue is massive, especially due to the many critiques of Balthasar, who was accused of forgetting the Church's doctrine on the topic. Exemplary cases of these critiques are MARTIN, *Will Many Be Saved?*; PITSTICK, *Light in Darkness*. A general overview on Balthasar's doctrine and the many possible critiques thereof is given by OAKES, *Christ's Descent into Hell* 382–399. SACHS, *Current Eschatology*, presents Balthasar's position as close to that of Karl Rahner. Other classic contributions are STANCZYK, *Konzeptionen der Hölle* 139–239; KRENSKI, *Hölle, Höllenfahrt und universale Hoffnung im Werk Hans Urs von Balthasars* 27–29; SERVAIS, *Communion, Universalité et Apocatastase* 49–67; TÜCK, *Höllenabstieg Christi und Hoffnung für alle*. Hans Urs von Balthasars eschatologischer Vorstoß 60–65; HAUKE, *I santi e l'inferno vuoto*. Note critiche sull'ultima grande controversia di Hans Urs von Balthasar 229–260.

593 VON BALTHASAR, *Eppure la Chiesa proclama i santi non i dannati* 36–41.

594 Id., *Kleine Katechese über die Hölle*, in: *L'Osservatore Romano*, Deutsche Ausgabe 14, Nr. 38, 21 (21.09.1984).

demanding clarification.⁵⁹⁵ Balthasar promptly replied that the Italian journalists had over-exaggerated his statements. Nevertheless, he also defended his position by noting that the Church has never declared with certainty that any person is in hell. As often in his texts on this issue, Balthasar turns to the experience of a saint: "The question is whether people can radically state that for eternity they do not want anything to do with the love of God. You should read the little Therese."⁵⁹⁶ The controversy continued to grow, and in 1985 the journal *Theologisches* (a theological insert of a monthly newspaper delivered for free in almost every Catholic parish in Western Germany) published a polemical intervention from Heribert Schauf, peritus at the II Vatican Council.⁵⁹⁷ To answer Schauf's critiques, among others, Balthasar published *Was dürfen wir hoffen?* in 1986. Here, he presents two sets of New Testament texts: one supporting the idea of salvation/condemnation, the other supporting the possibility of hope for universal salvation. After a chapter on Origen and Augustine, and another on Thomas, he presents many authors who support the hypothesis of hope for universal salvation. After this publication, the controversy became unstoppable. For example, in September 1986 Karl Besler, in the pages of *Theologisches*, claimed that none of the names listed by Balthasar in *Was dürfen wir hoffen?* really supported Balthasar's thesis.⁵⁹⁸ In his defense against these accusations, especially those concerning the influence of Adrienne von Speyr on his thought, Balthasar answered that the major inspiration for this idea actually came from Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and Maximus the Confessor.⁵⁹⁹ To provide another answer to his critics, Balthasar published *Kleiner Diskurs über die Hölle*. In this last text he comes across as more resolute than in the first essays: it is a *duty* to hope for universal salvation—we are called to love and therefore we *must* hope that each person is saved. Those who do not hope,

595 HERMES, 24.07.1984. The letter is published as: Ist die Hölle leer? Kardinal Newman antwortet Hans Urs von Balthasar, in: Der Fels 15 (1984) 250–256.

596 VON BALTHASAR, Letter, 27.07.1984, in: HERMES, Ist die Hölle leer? 250: "Die Frage ist, ob Menschen radikal sagen können, sie wollten auf ewig nichts mit der Liebe Gottes zu tun haben. Lesen Sie genau die kleine Therese."

597 SCHAUF, Die ewige Verwerfung in neueren und älteren kirchlichen Verlautbarungen 6253–6258; Selbstverzehrung des Bösen? Einige Fragen an Hans Urs von Balthasar 6394–6396.

598 BESLER, Die Hölle leer hoffen?, in: Theologisches 16 (1986) 7255–7264; id., Die Hölle ist nicht leer oder: Grenzen der Hoffnung, in: *ibid.* 7329–7333. 7359–7363. 7455–7458; *ibid.* 17 (1987) 30–36. 42–44. 46–50. A similar demonstration is made by SCHÖNBERGER, Die Hölle: Realität? Oder nur reale Möglichkeit? 74–77. HAUKE, Il ricorso all'esperienza dei santi nell'ultima grande controversia di Hans Urs von Balthasar 195–220, shows that not all the saints and mystics named by Balthasar were univocal supporters of the hypothesis of universal salvation, since each of them also had visions of the damned, or otherwise specified that all can be saved if, before dying, they ask for forgiveness and/or recognized God.

599 VON BALTHASAR, Zur Frage: Hoffnung für alle? 7362–7366.

do not love as they ought. One year later, Balthasar published his last text on this issue: *Apokatastasis*.⁶⁰⁰

a) *Dare we Hope*

In *Was dürfen wir hoffen?* Balthasar's argument is straightforward: since the Church does not proclaim the damnation of any soul, we are free to hope for universal salvation. Facing the evident ambiguity of Scripture on this topic, Balthasar does not rely on the biblical witness alone, but refers also to the mystical experiences of saints and to theological tradition. The third chapter is dedicated to Origen and Augustine, two thinkers whose positions are usually held up as exemplary of the classic eschatological visions of Christian theology. Origen is generally known as the first great repudiator of an eternal hell: "Might the fire meant by Christ be a spiritual one, consisting of the tortures of conscience in the sinful soul that knows itself to have fallen away from God's order forever? (...) It was Origen who first clearly elaborated the idea."⁶⁰¹ Balthasar is cautious, however, in attributing this belief to Origen, repeating multiple times that Origen "speaks largely hypothetically", "with prudence", "with great solicitude and caution", "more in the manner of an investigation and discussion than in that of fixed and certain decision."⁶⁰² When attacked for this idea, Origen denied having held this position as a fixed truth, but "yet some passages in his works allow at least a glimmer of hope for all man to shine through, almost always supported by words from Holy Scripture."⁶⁰³ Balthasar is therefore "saving" Origen from the accusation of "pure" apocatastasis, openly following Henri de Lubac⁶⁰⁴ and

600 Id., *Apokatastasis* 169–182.

601 DWH 35. WH, 41: "Sollte das von Christus gemeinte Feuer ein geistiges sein, das in den Gewissensqualen der sündigen Seele besteht, die weiß, dass sie endgültig aus der Ordnung Gottes herausgefallen ist? (...) Erst Origenes wird den Gedanken klar ausbreiten." Quoting Prin II 10,4–5. Close to Origen Balthasar quotes Ratzinger, Bernanos, Luise Rinser, Lewis, Dostoevski – saying that Hell is not the place of perdition inflicted by God, but rather perdition comes when one "is no longer able to love", "distances himself from Christ", "shuts himself in his own mind": DWH 40.

602 DWH 42. WH 47–48: "Einmal spricht er in dem Werk, das hierfür am klarsten zeugt, weithin hypothetisch (...). Auch will er die Frage mit Klugheit, ja mit Furcht und Vorsicht angehen, mehr um sie zu untersuchen und zu besprechen, als um irgend etwas zu definieren und festzulegen."

603 DWH 43. WH 48: "Aber manche Stellen seiner Werke lassen die Hoffnung für alle Menschen wenigstens durchscheinen, fast immer auf Worte der Hl. Schriften gestützt."

604 DWH 43: "The opinion that Origen, in his *apokatastasis*, had taught a return to grace on the part of the devil and the damned is so widespread that no one any longer dares to question the assumptions behind it. And yet, precise and sufficiently attentive inquiry into the question would show that the opinion is not adequately justified." Quoting DE LUBAC, "Tu m'as trompé, Seigneur!" 68.

Henri Crouzel.⁶⁰⁵ Balthasar proceeds by presenting Origen's real soteriological argument, based on two fundamental texts. The first text focusses on human freedom. 1 Cor. 3:12–13 states that all men will go through fire: their work will survive or burn, but they will be saved. The second text, 1 Cor. 2:9, focusses on the divine aspect of salvation, claiming that the heart of man cannot conceive what God has prepared. Balthasar positions himself among those patrologists who believe Origen to have held apocatastasis as a tentative hypothesis, rather than part of the *regula fidei*, such as was handed down to Augustine. In light of Origen's condemnation, it is understandable why Augustine could put so much emphasis on the reality of hell. Nevertheless, Balthasar sees Augustine's infernalism as a turning point in the history of theology and the Church. Balthasar is shocked by Augustine's solution to the scriptural passage suggesting God's desire that all be saved, as well as by his proposed rationale for the Church's invitation to pray for all men. Augustine's answer (the Church invites us to pray for all men because we do not know who will be saved and who damned; if we would know the names of the doomed, we would not need to pray for them) "really takes one's breath away."⁶⁰⁶ More than the argument itself, Balthasar stands against the absolute certainty that Augustine, and many after him (Gregory the great, Anselm, Bonaventure, Thomas, the reformers, the Jansenists) display regarding the damnation of many souls.

b) *Kleiner Diskurs über die Hölle*

One year after *Was dürfen wir hoffen?* Balthasar had to defend himself from many who accused him of professing heresy. Once again, Balthasar brings evidences of the reasonableness of hope in the Scriptures and the testimonies of the saints. Throughout the whole text, Balthasar points to the longstanding Christian tradition of hope for universal salvation, relying especially (but not exclusively) on mystical experiences (Mechtilde of Hackeborn, Thérèse of Lisieux, Angela of Foligno, Julian of Norwich, Teresa of Avila). Scholars, noting that the vast majority of these persons maintained the existence of a populated hell, have often criticized Balthasar's technique.⁶⁰⁷ His answer was the paradox of Christian love: "The hell

605 DWH 44 n. 31, quoting CROUZEL, Geist 152: "Henri Crouzel, probably the best contemporary authority on Origen, shows that the Alexandrian's anthropology was essentially trichotomous: body-soul-pneuma, the last being the element in man that is oriented toward God. But, says Crouzel, 'the damned man no longer has a pneuma. Accordingly, Origen seems to deny him any possibility of conversion, a strong argument against his 'apocatastasis' as a return of the demons and the damned to God's grace.'"

606 DWH 49. WH 54: "Hierauf eine Distinktion, die einem wirklich den Atem verschlägt."

607 HAUKE, Il ricorso all'esperienza dei santi nell'ultima grande controversia di Hans Urs von Balthasar.

that is brought before their eyes does not at all produce resignation in them but fires their resolve to resist it more strongly than ever.”⁶⁰⁸

Here, Balthasar once again responds to the accusation of endorsing apocatastasis, distinguishing “knowing” from “hoping”: “The transformation from real possibility to objective certainty occurred with the great Church Father Augustine, whose opinion (whether traceable back to his ten years of Manichaeism may be left open here) has cast an enormous shadow over the history of Western theology, to the extent that the biblical warnings against taking our ultimate fate lightly have been transformed – indeed, actually vitiated – into information about the outcome of the judgment by God that awaits us.”⁶⁰⁹ It is clear that Balthasar did not deny the possibility of hell; however, just as one must acknowledge the possibility of damnation, so too must one acknowledge the opposite possibility, i. e. that God will save everyone. While certainty cannot be attained, hope is justified. Hope for universal salvation and the possibility of damnation are therefore not mutually exclusive. Both can remain reasonable possibilities, so long as we stop conceiving human and divine freedom in opposition to each other:

Seen in this way, what were described earlier as limits to divine omnipotence are also canceled out again. They exist only as long as we oppose divine and human freedom to each other and fail to consider the sphere that forms the basis of human freedom. Human freedom can be neither broken nor neutralized by divine freedom, but it may well be, so to speak, outwitted. The descent of grace to the human soul is a free act of divine love. And there are *no limits* to how far it may extend.⁶¹⁰

608 DWH 173. KDH 45: “Die ihnen vor Augen geführte Hölle erzeugt in ihnen keineswegs Resignation, sondern entzündet sie erst recht zum Widerstand dagegen.” It clearly remains problematic to include the visions of a populated hell into an idea of universal salvation.

609 DWH 130. KDH 8: “Ich habe die Verwandlung dieser realen Möglichkeit in objektive Sicherheit vom großen Kirchenvater Augustinus übernommen, dessen Meinung (ob von seinen zehn Jahren Manichäismus herzuleiten, sei hier dahingestellt) einen ungeheuren Schatten auf die Geschichte der westlichen Theologie geworfen hat, bis dahin, daß die Warnungen der Bibel davor, unser Endschicksal leichtzunehmen, in Informationen über den Ausgang des uns erwartenden Gottesgerichts verwandelt – ja: wirklich verharmlost – wurden.”

610 DWH 176–177, quoting STEIN, *Welt und Person* 158. KDH 49–50: “So betrachtet heben sich auch die früher bezeichneten Schranken der göttlichen Allmacht wieder auf. Sie bestehen nur, solange man allein göttliche und menschliche Freiheit einander gegenüberstellt und die Sphäre außer acht läßt, die das Fundament der menschlichen Freiheit bildet. Die menschliche Freiheit kann von der göttlichen nicht gebrochen und nicht ausgeschaltet, wohl aber gleichsam überlistet werden. Das Herabsteigen der Gnade zur menschlichen Seele ist freie Tat der göttlichen Liebe. Und für ihre Ausbreitung gibt es keine Grenzen.”

c) *Apokatastasis*

In this last text, Balthasar first explains the historical meaning of the term apokatastasis, referring to its unique appearance in Scripture (Acts 3:21). Two translations are possible: (i) “until universal restoration, of which God spoke”; or (ii) “until everything predicted by God’s prophets has come about”. The first translation implies a notion of time as a recurring cycle. Balthasar mentions Iamblichus, Neoplatonism, and even Origen, in league with the principle *semper similis est finis initiis*. The second translation implies a linear vision of time. For Balthasar, there can be no clear-cut separation between linear and cyclical understandings of time, and therefore between the two meanings of apokatastasis. Both in Old and New Testament, he explains, the verb ἀποκαθίστημι points to the restoration of Israel. Generally, scholars accept the Biblical narrative as temporally linear as opposed to non-Christian cyclic time. Balthasar explains, however, that recurrence and restoration are present in the Bible in the form of expectation of a return to the original integrity and purity of the Covenant: “The more the theological reflection on the Christ-event develops, the more we see the linear chronology of promise-to-fulfillment almost wrapped in a cyclical conception.”⁶¹¹

After framing the question of apokatastasis, Balthasar moves to the Church Fathers, identifying the presence of cyclical and linear understandings of time in their thought. He presents Irenaeus as an opponent of the gnostic-cyclical system. For Irenaeus, all flesh is created and therefore good. Furthermore, the Old Testament is a prelude to the New Testament—a linear sequence prevails. Balthasar next moves to the Alexandrian School, which “tried to reclaim from the cyclical Gnostic world view those Christian elements that could be integrated into a true New Testament theology. Clement and also Origen raise the question about the disposition of evil at the return of the universe to God; since evil has been absent in the Alpha, it would not seem possible to tolerate it in the Omega.”⁶¹² He presents three logical models that sought to integrate the linear and cyclical understandings. The first model is Origen’s, who “follows a Platonic-Gnostic conception without abandoning the notion of creation.”⁶¹³ Balthasar explains Origen’s *exitus-reditus* cycle: man was “created with a subtle, spirit-like body in God’s *im-*

611 DWH 184. Apokatastasis 171: “Und je weiter die theologische Reflexion über das Christusereignis fortschreitet, um so mehr wird die Linie Verheißung-Erfüllung durch ein zyklisches Moment gleichsam umfaßt.”

612 DWH 186. Apokatastasis 172: “Von hier taucht nun, zumal wenn man in Alexandria versucht, das Christliche im zyklischen Weltbild der Gnosis für eine echt neutestamentliche Theologie wiederzugewinnen, bei Clemens also und bei Origenes die Frage auf, was bei der Rückkehr der Welt zu Gott aus dem Bösen wird, das, weil es im Alpha abwesend war, im Omega nicht zulässig erscheint.”

613 DWH 186. Apokatastasis 172: “Das erste ist der origenische, der, ohne den Schöpfungsgedanken aufzugeben, sich das platonisch-gnostische Schema aneignet.”

age, which was to become also God's *likeness* through the exercise of freedom. (...) Only after man had turned away from God and toward the material world did his body condense materially. (...) And yet it is human destiny – Origen said it first, not Augustine or Bernard – to take the place of the fallen angels in God's kingdom; this will happen at the resurrection of the dead, effected by the saving work of the Logos.⁶¹⁴ In Origen, claims Balthasar, apocatastasis is understood cyclically: "As the matter-bound, earthly body reverts back into the spirit-like resurrected body, all evil disappears as well."⁶¹⁵ A second model is proposed by Gregory of Nyssa, who seems to integrate Irenaeus and Origen. Gregory abandons the distinction between material and spiritual bodies, claiming that the only difference between the pre- and post-lapsarian body is procreation: procreation through sex is the fruit of sin. In this vision, apocatastasis implies a mixture of the cyclical and linear notions of time; Adam's offspring are destined to return to the blissful state of Eden and, given that the entire historical order is temporal, so too is evil. The third model, still a cyclical one, is given by Maximus the Confessor. His starting point is not, as for Origen and Gregory, the preexistence of mankind in God, but rather God's original conception of his creatures. In Maximus there is no original paradise because man, only just created, fell away from God, triggering linear history. Christ, who is both man and God, upholds the original Idea of man in the mind of God. Striving for perfection means therefore striving to conform oneself to this Idea in God's mind, i. e. to conform oneself to Christ as model.⁶¹⁶

Following this overview of eschatological models, Balthasar looks at theological responses to apocatastasis. The first centuries, he explains, outlined a possible resolution: "God's purpose must be fulfilled even against all opposing obstacles."⁶¹⁷

614 DWH 187. Apokatastasis 172–173: "Der Mensch ist zunächst bei Gott geschaffen, nicht leiblos, sondern mit einem feinen, geisthaften Leib, als Bild Gottes, das sich durch Freiheit auf die Ähnlichkeit zu entwickeln sollte (...). Erst als der Mensch sich von Gott abwandte und sich dem Materiellen zuwandte, verdichtete sich sein Leib. (...) Die Bestimmung der Menschheit aber ist es – so sagt Origenes als erster, nicht Augustinus und nicht Bernhard –, durch das Erlösungswerk des Logos bei der Auferstehung befähigt, im Reich Gottes den Platz der gefallen Engel einzunehmen."

615 DWH 187. Apokatastasis 173: "Mit der Rückwendung der groben Stofflichkeit in den vergeistigten Auferstehungsleib verschwindet auch alles Böse."

616 It is interesting to notice that, concluding on these three models of integration, Balthasar, DWH 189, states that their history, especially in the third form, "would lead us first to John Scotus Eriugena, then to Meister Eckhart, who identifies the true human reality with the divine Idea (which, in essence, is God), then on to the Christological monism of Blondel and Teilhard de Chardin." Apokatastasis 174: "Vom letzten würden wir über Scotus Eriugena zu Eckhart gelangen, für den die wahre Wirklichkeit des Menschen identisch ist mit der göttlichen Idee (die wesenhaft Gott ist), und weiter bis zum Christomonismus von Blondel und Teilhard de Chardin."

617 DWH 191. Apokatastasis 175: "Gottes Heil muss über alle sich bäumenden Widerstände hinweg erreicht werden."

Listing Origen together with Clement, Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus the Confessor, and Scotus Eriugena, Balthasar focuses especially on the Alexandrian. He insists that Origen's claims were always tentative, and, furthermore, that Origen considered apocatastasis unsuitable for public sermons and non-initiated thinkers. Balthasar does not take this to mean, however, that Origen saw apocatastasis as an esoteric doctrine:

We would thoroughly misunderstand Origen, however, if we thought him to hold that the perfect were privileged to know that everything will end well eventually, while the common believers were to be kept in the fear of hell. We should note here that already the apologists considered God alone to be immortal and eternal, and man could achieve such a state only through God's grace and by participation in him. So when Origen speaks of "aeonic punishments", it implies that they may end after long aeons since they do not participate in God. No, Origen's silence on the *apokatastasis* has other reasons, reasons which lead us to the second response.⁶¹⁸

The second answer, which Balthasar finds in Origen's writing (and was earlier identified by de Lubac), refers to 1 Cor. 2:9. If the human heart cannot grasp the good gifts God prepared for its sake, should the same not be said of its unplanned punishment? Origen insists that the beginning and the end of all things remains hidden from mortal understanding. We know that "we all need purification", but even this purification is "mysterious and inexpressible."⁶¹⁹ For this reason, the ambiguity behind apocatastasis is not, for Origen, due to the difference between the wise and simple-minded, but to the radical mystery that purification itself is. Indeed, Origen presented his position with great reserve, denying in his letters from Athens that he taught the salvation of the devil. A third solution is offered by Gregory of Nyssa: hell cannot be co-eternal with God because of the essential superiority of good over evil. The sinner reaches an unsurpassable limit, just as the night, after its peak, turns inevitably towards day. Balthasar sees this third solution as being close to Karl Rahner; the possibility of refusing God "is not of equal right and stature in relation to a 'yes' to God. For every 'no' always derives the life which it has from a 'yes' because the 'no' always becomes intelligible only

618 DWH 193. Apokatastasis 176: "Man würde sich aber gründlich täuschen, wenn man Origenes dahin verstehen wollte, dass die Vollkommenen wissen dürfen, alles werde gut ausgehen, die gewöhnlichen Christen dagegen die Furcht vor der Hölle zu bewahren hätten. Man muss hier beachten, dass schon für die Apologeten Gott allein unsterblich und restlos überzeitlich ist, dass man in Gnaden an ihm teilhaben muss, um es ebenfalls zu werden; dass somit, wenn Origenes von 'äonischen Strafen' redet, diese nach sehr langen Äonen in Ende haben können, da sie nicht göttlich sind. Das Schweigen über die Apokatastasis hat bei ihm eine andere Ursache, die uns zur zweiten Haltung ihr gegenüber weiterführt."

619 Origen, HNm 25,6.

in light of the 'yes', and not vice versa."⁶²⁰ Another possible response presented by Balthasar comes from the Origenian statement "that the Mystical Body of Christ will not achieve complete perfection until he [Origen], the lowest and meanest sinner, has repented."⁶²¹ Balthasar quotes an anecdote about Anthony of Egypt, as adapted by Kierkegaard: facing the question of salvation, every man is sure that all will be saved, except themselves: "Such a frame of mind is the ultimate consequence of Origen's position: the Last Things are and will be forever hidden; we cannot deal with them by constructing impersonal theories."⁶²² Balthasar explains that, before the question of salvation, the Gospel is not an objective description or prediction, but a promise: what remains for us is not knowledge, but hope. Finally, Balthasar mentions one final aspect. If the sum of all speculations were derived from human thought, a final answer could still come from God's own mind—"can God really suffer the loss of even the least of the sheep in his fold?"⁶²³ God's nature is love; even when he judges, he never hates. Balthasar's final point is therefore clear: we all stand under God's absolute judgment, but we may have confidence in his love. It is by virtue of the preservation of both divine and human freedom as integral parts of the Trinitarian mystery of love, that Balthasar can see absolutely no contradiction between certainty of judgment and hope for salvation.

5. Holy Saturday

Given that *Origen* did not endorse the certitude of universalism, the *Origenistic* apocatastasis condemned by the Church could be seen as a logical apocatastasis, whereas Balthasar's would be Christological. Indeed, Balthasar's hope is ultimately based on Christ's descent into hell on Holy Saturday.⁶²⁴ To understand this, we need to look more closely at Balthasar's eschatology.

620 RAHNER, *Foundations of Christian Faith* 102.

621 DWH 200. Apokatastasis 180: "Es gibt aber noch eine andere Haltung der Apokatastasislehre gegenüber, die man von des Origenes' Aussage her verstehen lernt: der mystische Leib Christi werde erst dann die vollendete Glückseligkeit erlangt haben, wenn er, der letzte und schlimmste Sünder, sich bekehrt hat."

622 DWH 202. Apokatastasis 181: "Diese Haltung ist eine letzte Konsequenz aus der oben entwickelten des Origenes: die letzten Dinge sind und bleiben verhüllt, man kann keine neutralen Theorien darüber bauen."

623 DWH 202–203. Apokatastasis 182: "Kann Gott das letzte seiner verlorenen Schafe in seiner Hürde vermissen?"

624 The issue of the descent of Christ into hell has been the special object of a recent scholarly controversy around PITSTICK, *Light in Darkness*. See the debate between Pitstick and Oakes in *First Things: Responses to Balthasar, Hell, and Heresy*, in: *First Things* (2007) 12–14; More on Balthasar Hell, and Heresy, in: *ibid.* 16–18; Balthasar, Hell, and Heresy: An Exchange, in: *ibid.* (2006) 25–29. Pitstick claims that Balthasar is only formally retaining

The Catechism of the Catholic Church professes that Jesus did not descend into hell to deliver the damned, nor to destroy the hell of damnation, but to free the just who had gone before him. This catechism, despite being written after Balthasar's death, articulates the popular doctrine of his time: the goal of Christ's descent was to redeem the just who died before the Incarnation. Aquinas' idea that those who die in mortal sin go straight to hell (ScG IV 91–95) became dogma in 1332 with the *Benedictus Deus*. According to this dogma, death is the end of the human pilgrimage; it is therefore impossible for one who dies in mortal sin to steer away from the hell that is their destiny. Traditionally, Christ's descent on Holy Saturday is considered the beginning of his triumph over death and the first sign of redemption. Jesus did not suffer in hell. He was already triumphant. The purpose of his descent was to open the gates of heaven for the dead, that had been closed by sin. Balthasar, against this tradition, considers Holy Saturday to have marked the actual death of Christ. The traditional doctrine does not grasp the depth of Christ's humanity, nor the suffering implied in the redemption. If Christ died as every man dies, he will also have experienced the same hell as every man: complete rejection by the Father with its consequent despair, and loss of hope for reconciliation. Being the very Son of God, the rejection is worse for Jesus than for any other man: the greater the love, the worse the pain of rejection.

In this way, sin enters the Trinitarian relationship: one of the Trinity endures it, is literally "made sin" in hell. Even so, the Trinity remains; each divine person gives himself to the other, out of love. Sin is overcome and destroyed by the Trinitarian love, and Holy Saturday is the glorious moment where love is revealed as invincible. The consequence of this Christological reflection is the offer of salvation to every soul in hell, not only the just. The sinner in hell discovers God in the absolute impotence of love, now shared by God. Christ shatters the prison-bars of sin, and, rising from death, breaks free of Hades, the state in which humanity is apart from God, taking Hell along with him "as the expression of his power

the form of the Church's doctrine of Christ's descent into hell, but radically changing the content, to the point of contradicting the Church's teaching. Edward T. Oakes denies the strict interpretation of the Church's traditional reading, bringing the example of Joseph Ratzinger's eschatology, that affirms Christ's sufferance. Oakes's answer received many critiques, collected (together with a few critiques of Pitstick) in: Responses to Balthasar, Hell, and Heresy | Various, in: First Things, accessed 7 December 2018, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2007/03/responses-to-balthasar-hell-and-heresy>. This article also contains Oakes's and Pitstick's answers to the critiques. The controversy was later summarized again by OAKES, *Descensus and Development: A Response to Recent Rejoinders* 3–24; LAUBER, *Response to Alyssa Lyra Pitstick* 195–201. Recent contributions to Balthasar's eschatology are HEALY, *The Eschatology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, and KARLSON, *The Eschatological Judgment of Christ*.

to dispose, as judge, the everlasting salvation or the everlasting loss of man.”⁶²⁵ Balthasar is clear: the descent is a saving event, and Origen “was theologically correct: in being with the dead Christ brought mercy into what is imagined as the fire of divine wrath.”⁶²⁶ With Christ’s exit from *infern*, purgatory is opened, i. e. the possibility of salvation for those who, despite their sin, have said their “yes” to God before dying. It is Christ who, with his descent, separates (and therefore creates) hell and purgatory; formerly, there was only Sheol, where the dead could not see God. The question is therefore whether any soul remains in hell. For Balthasar, it is going too far to answer in the negative. It is clear why many remain perplexed by his theology of Holy Saturday, especially vis-à-vis his hope for universal salvation. It is hard to reconcile the idea of Christ assuming the dead’s “eschatological ‘No’ in regard to the event of salvation which came about in him” while, at the same time, accepting the Church’s teaching that “the absolute decision must be made in one’s earthly life; in the hereafter, it will be too late.”⁶²⁷ For this reason, the Catholic dogma speaks of a universal purpose of redemption, without however claiming the sure knowledge of universal salvation: this “does go beyond what theology can affirm.”⁶²⁸

The mysteries of Holy Saturday and universal salvation are grounded in Balthasar’s idea of freedom as relation: human freedom is finite, founded upon the mystery of divine freedom itself. This sheds light on his clear rejection of apocatastasis: the “simple version” of this doctrine is refused because it would annihilate one of the two actors of the theo-drama: namely, man. As Balthasar so often repeats, God cannot override human freedom: “Human freedom, which lives and operates entirely within the inspiration pouring forth from the God, who is always eternally free, is not in any way a puppet play, the deterministic result of string-pulling; this is evident from the Christology that speaks of two wills in the incarnate Son.”⁶²⁹ Despite God’s unceasing efforts to persuade man, the possibility of a human “no” must remain if freedom is to be preserved. For Balthasar, as for

625 MP 177. TDT 171: “Mit der Auferstehung läßt Christus den Hades hinter sich: die Zugangslosigkeit der Menschheit zu Gott; er nimmt aber aus seiner tiefsten trinitarischen Erfahrung die Hölle mit sich: als Ausdruck seiner Macht, als Richter über das ewige Heil oder Unheil des Menschen zu verfügen.”

626 MP 179. TDT 172: “Theologisch behält er recht: im Sein mit den Toten stiftet Christus dem, was bildlich als Zornfeuer Gottes beschrieben wird, das Moment der Barmherzigkeit ein.”

627 DWH 145. KDH 21: “Die absolute Entscheidung muss im irdischen Leben fallen, drüben wäre es zu spät.” On this objection to Balthasar’s theology of the Holy Saturday, see especially DOYLE, *He Descended into Hell. The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar and Catholic Doctrine* 845–878.

628 MP 181. TDT 176: “(...) überschreitet aber die Aussagemöglichkeiten der Theologie.”

629 TD 5, 410. ThD 4, 376: “Menschliche Freiheit, die ganz innerhalb der je vom ewig freien Gott ausströmenden Inspiration lebt und wirkt, ist – wie die Christologie der zwei Willen im menschgewordenen Sohn zeigt – in keiner Weise marionettenhaft determiniert, denn

Origen, man's original state, while foundational, is not yet final. Or, as Origen would say, man is created in image of God but has yet to achieve likeness. The distance between image and likeness is the necessary space for Adam to freely love God. For this reason, a naïve apocatastasis would imply that God overrides human freedom. On the other hand, it would seem to reduce divine freedom. For, if the salvation of all souls were certain, God would then be obliged to save by virtue of a principle. This objection is the same that Balthasar makes against supporters of infernalism: no one can set a principle higher than divine freedom. Balthasar's solution respects God's prerogative: no one can know in advance what God will decide. What we do have are good reasons to hope that God will save all.

Christ's identification with hell-bound sinners is therefore the extreme mystery of God accompanying man to the depths of his most terrible choice. The possibility of universal salvation seems to depend on Balthasar's conviction that human beings "are free within the greater freedom of God."⁶³⁰ The core question here is whether there are legitimate reasons to think that human freedom can truly reject God. For Balthasar, as for Rahner, it is clear that our "yes" and "no" to God are unequal.⁶³¹ There is a fundamental asymmetry between "yes" and "no", mirroring the asymmetry between God's grace and human sin. This is what we have called *disproportioned equilibrium* between God's initiative and the human response. On the theoretical plane there seem to be two truths, neither of which can be negated. The tension remains in Balthasar, who considers human freedom finite beside God's freedom, but not less real. As Sachs notes, "It seems that, for Balthasar, part of the 'precarious' nature of human freedom is the questionable-ness of its ability to definitely reject God, not because of divine brute force, but because of the far greater compelling 'power' of God's loving self-surrender in powerlessness."⁶³² The universal hope would seem therefore to correlate to the divine initiative in the grace-freedom play. Consequently, we speak of *disproportioned equilibrium*: the first initiative is, for Balthasar, always divine (the mother's smile, the arrow ...). After this initiative, the game opens up between the two actors at play, where human freedom can always say "no" to the divine initiative. Hope for salvation *despite* human refusal can be seen in parallel to this unbalance, stressing the divine superabundance: as we experience his "primacy" in the beginning, so can we reasonably hope for his primacy in the end.

der inspirierende Gott ist ja immer der freigebende, in erweiterte Möglichkeiten entlassende."

630 TD 5, 284. ThD 4, 258: "Sie sind frei innerhalb der größeren Freiheit Gottes." Balthasar quotes here Adrienne VON SPEYR, Johannes II, Einsiedeln 1949, 143.

631 SACHS, Current Eschatology 247; HIGHFIELD, The Freedom to Say "No"? Karl Rahner's Doctrine of Sin 485-505.

632 SACHS, *ibid.* 245-246 n. 83.

Balthasar's interpretation of Holy Saturday has its foundation in Iraeneus. The latter's theology of hell, of the *descensus ad inferos*, fuels the core of *Mysterium Paschale*. At the same time, however, Balthasar's interest in the Origenian ideas of *passio caritatis*, and the divine love for man seems to constitute the real point of contact between Patristic universalism and Balthasar's universal hope. Therefore, we speak of inspiration rather than direct influence. If Balthasar's hope comes from Origen, it does not derive from a simplified picture of Origen's apocatastasis. Still less does it derive from the Platonic principle that the end is like the beginning. Rather, it is grounded in the biblical Origen of the *passio caritatis*.⁶³³

6. Origen and Balthasar: Similarity and Dissimilarities

If we consider Origen's apocatastasis as it is commonly understood, namely, as a philosophical doctrine, Balthasar's hope for universal salvation cannot be considered a linear development thereof. In this Origen, the possibility of universal salvation is grounded on creaturely freedom and the soul's ascent to God, as Balthasar explains in his presentation of the cyclical conception of time. Creaturely freedom can be exercised, thinks Origen, even after death; the soul's journey does not end with death. This is the major difference with Balthasar, who, faithful to the Church's teaching of his age, claims that conversion is impossible after death and that divine judgment pertains to the soul's earthly life. For Origen, on the contrary, the postmortem soul retains the possibility of redemption and divinization. According to Balthasar, Origen's doctrine is built upon a moral foundation; in *Presence et Pensée* he claims that only Gregory established an ontological foundation: "In the work of Origen himself, the real unity of human nature, or rather of all spiritual nature, keeps too many of the characteristics of a moral unity to constitute a philosophical basis for his theological and mystical idea of the suppression of all evil at the end of time."⁶³⁴ The real foundation of apocatastasis, in Gregory, is the unity of human nature in the mystical body of Christ—a unity not yet realized in Origen. The latter is missing, in Balthasar's estimation, a properly trinitarian ontological foundation. For Balthasar, the hope for universal salvation is based on the relationship between human and divine freedom: it is a Christological and Trinitarian doctrine. Human freedom, Balthasar argues, finds its origin in the Intra-trinitarian relationship, and, by virtue of the Trinitarian

633 On this thesis I draw from and agree with IDE, *L'espérance d'un enfer vide selon Balthasar* 723–738.

634 PT 85–86. PP 59: "Chez Origène lui-même l'unité réelle de la nature humaine ou plutôt de toute la nature spirituelle garde trop le caractère d'une unité morale pour constituer une base philosophique à son idée théologique et mystique de la suppression de tout mal à la fin des temps."

foundation of anthropology, he is able to articulate an eschatology of salvation that holds for every soul.

If, however, we consider Origen's notion of *passio caritatis* in the manner we have presented it, we can reverse the above characterization. In this sense, apocatastasis is *fundamentally* a Christological doctrine: it fulfils the universal effect of Christ's sacrifice. For this reason, I claim that Balthasar's hope has, indeed, deep roots in Origen—not in Origenian apocatastasis, but in the notion of *passio caritatis*. For Balthasar, it is reasonable to hope that all men be saved by virtue of Christ's sacrifice. Considering the importance of the doctrine of kenosis and the many citations of Origen's *heilsgeschichtlichen Trinitarismus* in Balthasar's account of Origen, one understands how the spirit of the Alexandrian was truly present in Balthasar's formulation of the universal hope. Not the spirit of the Origen spurned by history, nor the Origen of apocatastasis as mere restoration of original bliss, but rather the "third Origen", the thinker of reciprocal love between man and the Word. In Origen, there is no clear identification of Christ with human sin, as in Balthasar, but he does recognize something in God that stirs him to compassion for human being. For this reason, in Balthasar's interpretation of Origen, it is the notion of *passio caritatis*, and not that of apocatastasis, that plays the pivotal role. This is further confirmed by the explicit parallel Balthasar traces between Barth and Origen on the issue of universal salvation in the 1956 essay *Christian Universalism*.

7. Barth and Origen

The question of whether Barth is a "universalist" has divided scholars.⁶³⁵ Barth has often been labelled as such because he rejects double predestination, and because

635 A general overview on the issue is presented in BETTIS, Is Karl Barth a Universalist? 423–436. Bettis defends Barth against the accusation of universalism. On this line is also COLWELL, The Contemporaneity of Divine Decision. Reflections on Barth's Denial of Universalism 139–160. The contrary position is held by many theologians, among whom BLOESCH, Jesus Is Victor! Karl Barth's Doctrine of Salvation; BRUNNER, Dogmatics 1, 346–353; BERKOUWER, The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth 287–296. Brunner accuses Barth of destroying the meaning of human freedom with his definition of divine love's sovereignty. The human decision of faith is reduced to an acknowledgment of that which was always-already decided: namely, salvation. By this logic, Barth's thought leads necessarily to universalism. Berkouwer agrees with Brunner that the role of the decision of faith is nullified in Barth, but his critique is different. He argues that universalism is a distortion of the scriptural understanding of God, and that Barth's interpretation limits God's freedom. Those who accuse Barth of universalism, in general, acknowledge that he never openly affirm it, but argue that it was a logical implication of his doctrine of election. On a similar position we find KRECK, Grundentscheidungen in Karl Barths Dogmatik

his soteriology points in a universalist direction: "Christ is the Rejected, as and because He is the Elect. In view of His election, there is no other rejected but Himself"⁶³⁶; "His election is the original and all-inclusive election."⁶³⁷ At the same time, Barth anticipates the critique of universalism in a section of his *Church Dogmatics*, where he explicitly and firmly denies that he teaches apocatastasis, the reason being God's freedom and the gratuity of grace: "Just as the gracious God does not need to elect or call any single man, so He does not need to elect or call all mankind."⁶³⁸ However, Barth claims that, just as we cannot limit the freedom of God by assuming that he must save all, neither can we limit his freedom by saying that there cannot be a "final opening up and enlargement of the circle of election and calling."⁶³⁹ By limiting God's freedom, universalism limits his goodness: it defines his love exclusively in terms of human redemption, claiming that every man *must* be saved. The problem of universalism is not merely that it ties God to the salvation of all men, but that it ties God to men at all, defining his freedom and love in relation to *human* salvation. Universalism is therefore rejected by Barth because it defines God in terms of what he can do for humanity. Nevertheless, as we said, universal salvation remains a possibility by virtue of God's freedom. Barth makes a similar argument in *The Humanity of God*: "This much is certain, that we have no theological right to set any sort of limits to the loving-kindness of God which has appeared in Jesus Christ. Our theological duty is to see and understand it as being still greater than we had seen before."⁶⁴⁰ The argument is similar to Balthasar's: because of God's freedom, universalism should not be denied in and of itself, but only insofar as it is deemed necessary. At the same time, however, exactly because God is free, we cannot deny him the *possibility* of actually saving everybody. It is the replacement of the person of Jesus Christ with an abstract principle that Barth dismisses in rejecting apocatastasis, exactly as he dismissed *analogia entis* as a principle above God. In the end, Barth is not denying universal salvation, but only its necessity. He is not rejecting Christ's victory, but a wrong understanding of the means by which this is achieved. As Greggs notes, "Barth rejects universalism because 'universalism' itself can never be the victor: this victory is Jesus Christ's."⁶⁴¹ This approach makes it hard to frame Barth within the yes/no

213–214. More direct is CRISP, *The Universalism of Karl Barth* 305–324, who decisively puts Barth in the category of universalism.

636 BARTH, *Church Dogmatic 2/2*, 353.

637 *Ibid.* 117.

638 *Ibid.* 417.

639 *Ibid.* 418.

640 *Id.*, *The Humanity of God* 62.

641 GREGGS, *Passing the Impasse of Barth on Universalism* 206. Greggs explicitly faces the issue of apocatastasis, finding a "political" reason behind Barth's denial thereof: not only did Barth want to avoid being associated with a heretical doctrine, but especially to avoid the reification of "universalism" as a principle more fundamental than Christ himself. At

dichotomy implied in the question "is Karl Barth a universalist?" Here, the similarity with Balthasar is quite clear: both approach the question of salvation from a completely new angle. If Balthasar was known for "Hell exists, but it might be empty", Barth stated that "the dogma is that Hell exists, not that people are in it."⁶⁴²

What does Balthasar think of Barth and apocatastasis? The answer is hard to nail down. On multiple occasions Balthasar considers Barth "dangerously near to the apocatastasis panton, where I do not wish to follow him,"⁶⁴³ but he also calls himself a student of Barth concerning "some version of the doctrine of apocatastasis."⁶⁴⁴ In 1956, in the essay *Christian Universalism*, Balthasar compares Barth and Origen directly on this notion:

Karl Barth, in going back beyond Augustine (...) in the field of pre-Augustine patrology, is confronted with its most powerful thinker, one who, through his universalism, has affected, more than anyone else, his own and subsequent generations. Anyone who approaches the great Alexandrian with unbiased mind, and compares him with Barth, while allowing for the obvious differences and the centuries that separate them, will be struck at once by their affinity.⁶⁴⁵

the same time, Greggs is clear: Barth points towards universal salvation, but does so in a radically new way, so that he can dismiss the problematic elements associated with universalism, grounding salvation in the person of Christ rather than on an abstract universal principle.

642 Ibid. 362.

643 TKB 185–187.

644 In a letter to Maritain on August 9, 1945, Journet describes a letter he received from Balthasar, in which he describes himself as a student of Barth, and claims to follow him in holding to some version of the doctrine of apocatastasis, as reinterpreted in light of the mystery of Holy Saturday: JOURNET/MARITAIN, Correspondance 3, 336–337.

645 ET 1, 246. ST 1, 265: "Indem Karl Barth hinter die Klammer zurückgeht, die sich bei Augustinus schließt und über die ganze offizielle Theologie der Folgezeit bis zu Calvin und zum Jansenismus reicht, taucht er unversehens im Raum der voraugustinischen Patristik auf und tritt in eine Konfrontation mit ihrem kraftvollsten theologischen Denker, der wie kein anderer durch seinen Universalismus die Umwelt und Nachwelt bestimmt hat. Wer von Vorturteilen umbelastet an den großen Alexandriner herantritt, wer die evidenten Unterschiede und den Abstand der Jahrtausende in Kauf nehmend vergleicht, wird alsbald von der auffallenden Verwandtschaft frappiert." The parallel between Origen and Barth on salvation is the object of GREGGS, Barth, Origen, and Universal Salvation. On the same line as Balthasar's argument, Greggs claims that Barth's and Origen's respective universalisms are grounded in particularity, i. e. in Christ. Greggs also introduces Origen's notion of Nothingness to interpret his universalism in a particular way. Greggs considers some Origenian passages that suggest universal restoration being reserved for the rational creatures, because only the rational truly *is* (due to its participation in the Logos). Origen, CIO II 13,98: "All, therefore, who share in being would properly be called 'those who are'. But those who have turned away from sharing in 'being' have, by having deprived themselves of 'being', become 'those who are not'." This suggests a limitation to universalism, linked to moral behavior: who truly 'is' is only who participates in the Logos's rational-

Balthasar draws the parallel between Origen and Barth, using his usual template of “the real core” of a thinker. The similarity between the two consists, for Balthasar, in the “third stratum” of Origen’s reading: their theology of the embodied Word. As he says, “we are indebted to Origen and Karl Barth for the two most coherent outlines of a theology of the Word, the Word that is the eternal Son of the Father – not, however, the Logos *nudus*, but *incarnandus* and *incarnatus*.”⁶⁴⁶ The comparison does not stop here; Balthasar brings the two names together again, when, in his memoirs, he mentions Origen as “the key to the entire Greek patristics, the early Middle Ages and, indeed, even to Hegel and Karl Barth.”⁶⁴⁷ Balthasar’s admiration for Barth mirrors his admiration for Origen. He finds, at the core of both thinkers, a deep passion for the Incarnation, for the descent of God towards humanity. At the center of every issue, even of apocatastasis, is the fundamental role of Christ, rather than a logical principle. For Origen, the center of world history is the process of redemption inaugurated by Jesus. This history has three elements: (i) the inseparability of the Logos as Christ from the Logos as Scripture; (ii) the reciprocal relationship between universalism and divine election in the economy of salvation; (iii) the contemporaneous character of revelation. Especially this third element offers Balthasar an occasion for comparison:

We, as person, should encounter the Word as a person. It is this characteristic which imparts the whole of Origen’s theology a dynamism enabling it to penetrate through every external covering, every rite, institution and outward historical circumstance to the spiritual truth, so that he almost comes to view as merely phenomenal the outer envelope of flesh, letter, sacrament and institution. Yet it is the same dynamism that, if we abstract from confessional differences, we find in Karl Barth.⁶⁴⁸

Balthasar links this personalist dynamism, present in both Origen and Barth, to the existential dialectic of judgment and grace. Balthasar explains how Origen

ity. At the same time however, Origen states that God can save “man and beasts” (ibid. I 20,122), once again affirming that salvation can be extended to anyone by will of God.

646 ET 1, 246. ST 1, 265–266: “Origenes und Karl Barth verdanken wir die zwei konsequentesten Entwürfe einer Theologie des Wortes, des Wortes, das der ewige Sohn des Vaters ist, aber nicht der Logos *nudus*, sondern *incarnandus* und *incarnatus*.”

647 MW 89.

648 ET 1, 247. ST 1, 267: “Endlich betont Origenes sehr stark den aktualistischen Charakter der Offenbarung, des je jetzt vom Vater her ankommenden Wortes: sie ist dauernde Forderung, sich ihm als Person personal zu stellen, durch den Buchstaben hindurch ihn als Geist zu fassen und zu vollziehen, ein Zug, der der ganzen Theologie des Origenes eine durch jede Hülle, jeden Ritus, jede Institution, jede äußere geschichtliche Situation zur geistigen Wahrheit hindurchdrängende Dynamik verleiht, bis zur Grenze einer Phänomenalisierung der Hülle von Fleisch, Buchstabe, Sakrament und Institution: doch wohl formal die gleiche Dynamik, die wir, nun einmal von allen Konfessionsunterschieden abstrahierend, bei Karl Barth wiederfinden.”

avoided downplaying judgment in favour of grace, without darkening the picture to the point of minimizing grace. He is clear, “we cannot just solve the question by the shibboleth ‘apokatastasis.’” For Origen this term has a more restrained inflection that it will have in the pantheist systems of later disciples, where “the Hellenic principle of decline and restoration prevails everywhere, even in the history of salvation.”⁶⁴⁹ Origen, attentive to Scripture, used the term more cautiously. Once again, then, Balthasar looks to Origen for his Christocentric perspective, by virtue of which he compares him with Barth: “Yet, since for both the person of Christ, who represents the *autobasileia*, is in his sovereign freedom the judgment and pronounces it, the assertion does not prejudice the future, but remains open and full of hope – which, being a theological virtue, excludes no possibility.”⁶⁵⁰ The rejection of universalism is therefore based on the divine love revealed in Christ, a love that is freedom itself. Finally, the parallel is also chronological: Balthasar compares Barth’s youthful work *Epistle to the Romans* to Origen’s *De principiis*, where he “succumbed to the temptation of a systematic exposition of this double aspect.” Nonetheless, in their later production, they both “strove to harmonize his treatment with that of Scripture.”⁶⁵¹ Origen, like the Barth of the second *Epistle to the Romans*, “manifests a decided sense of the dialectic, the hazardous quality of the election of the individual in the Church (see commentary on Ez 16).” Balthasar recognizes that Origen, more than Barth, stresses the spiritual battle between light and darkness, but at the same time “he is conscious of the inequality of the two opponents, of the ontological nothingness of the evil principle, so strongly emphasized by Barth.”⁶⁵²

We can conclude that Barth and Balthasar reject the normative definition of apocatastasis. This is because, in their understanding, it does not adequately express the free participation of man in the life of divine love. Universalism implies

649 ET 1, 248.

650 ET 1, 248. ST 1, 268: “Aber da für beide die Person Jesu Christi, die die *Autobasileia* darstellt, in ihrer souveränen Freiheit das Gericht ist und verkündet, greift die Aussage nicht vor, sondern verbleibt in einer offenen Hoffnung, die aber, ihrem Wesen als theologischer Tugend entsprechend, die äußerste Möglichkeit miteinschließt.”

651 ET 1, 248. ST 1, 267: “Wenn Origenes (wie übrigens auch Karl Barth: vgl. seinen ersten Römerbrief) zunächst im *Peri Archon* der Versuchung einer systematischen Darstellung dieser Zweiseitigkeit erlag – sie kam ihm teuer zu stehen –, so hat er sich in der Folge dauernd und zuchtvoll bemüht, seine Aussageweise streng der biblischen anzupassen.”

652 ET 1, 248–249. ST 1, 268: “Origenes (bekundet) ähnlich wie der Karl Barth des zweiten Römerbriefs einen ausgesprochenen Sinn für die Dialektik, die Gefährlichkeit der Erwählung des kirchlichen Menschen. Und wenn bei Origenes – stärker noch als bei Karl Barth – das Agonische der christlichen Existenz betont wird, das Einbezogenheit des geistlichen Menschen in den Kampf zwischen Licht und Finsternis, Christus und den dunkeln Mächten, so weiß er gleichzeitig um die Unvergleichbarkeit dieser Gegner, um die ontologische Nichtigkeit des bösen Prinzips, die Karl Barth so stark unterstreicht.”

salvation as a cosmic rearrangement wherein new life will come through knowledge of eternal salvation. In this vision, knowledge is substituted for the personal reality of Christ; as Barth feared, apocatastasis is at risk of becoming a principle more fundamental than Christ himself. Moreover, according to universalist logic, Christ might well be reduced to a cog in the machine of cosmic restoration. The impropriety of this outcome brings Balthasar to deny normative apocatastasis, preferring, as he does, the expression of hope based on the supreme act of love, Christ's incarnation. It is this very Christological perspective that Balthasar inherits from Origen, and not merely the external mechanism of apocatastasis. This does not mean denying apocatastasis in Origen tout court, but rather approaching it from the angle of *passio caritatis*. This reading, the key to Balthasar's theology, is also, in his estimation, the real core of Origen's thought. Apocatastasis is a clear example: at the core of Balthasar's reception is not a principle of "restoration", but the salvific act of Christ and the internal freedom of the Trinity. Balthasar's hope for universal salvation can therefore be read as a development of Origen's thought, but only if we understand the version of Origen he had in mind: an Origen whose "optimism" for God's salvific plan developed, first and foremost, from the scriptural witness of divine mercy and philanthropy. The Scriptures reveal history as a dramatic relationship between divine and human freedom. The immense paradox of the Cross, the mystery of divine suffering, the miracle of a God who freely loves those who reject him, are central to Balthasar's idea of salvation.

Is Balthasar "forcing" Origen to fit into his own personalistic reading of the issue? In answering, it is important to remember that Balthasar immersed himself in Origen long before developing his own theology in detail. Forty years passed between his first note on Origen's *passio caritatis* and his later articulation of intra-trinitarian love. It would be too much to say that Origen epitomizes Balthasar's thought on universal salvation. So too would it be wrong to claim that Balthasar willfully distorts Origen to fit his own theological biases. Rather, Balthasar shaped his own theology by reading Origen. In so doing, he encountered a new mode of doing theology, a vital spirit that would never abandon him.

CONCLUSION

1. Harvesting the Seed

The notion of *passio caritatis* will serve as a good point of reference for our summarizing conclusion of Balthasar's interpretation of Origen. At the risk of sounding obvious, we can say that, when reading the Fathers in the 20th century, each of the many theologians we examined at the beginning of this work was deeply influenced by the theological, philosophical, cultural, and political background of modern Europe. The issue of *passio caritatis*, touching the most deeply apophatic and speculative elements of Origen, can be read as a barometer for the influences at play upon the various interpreters of Origen. For example, Balthasar's enthusiasm for intra-trinitarian relationality, wherein the *passio* occurs, is part of his criticism of a certain scholastic notion of generation, and clearly exalts the idea of relation. In this case, we can see the positive importance of Hegel for Balthasar, despite the problematic aspects of Idealism. Nevertheless, Balthasar never falls into a tout court idealistic and/or anti-essentialist position. This is thanks in large part to the fundamental importance of Erich Przywara (and, through him, of Thomas) for his thought, together with his transformative encounter with Karl Barth. The latter offers Balthasar the occasion for deepening his thought on the *analogia entis*, which he inherited from the former. The strong influence of *analogia entis* allows Balthasar to remain anchored in Origen's idea of creatio *ex nihilo* without slipping into creatio *ex Deo* (which, as we have seen in this last section, plays an important role in the possible risk of Origenism).

The idealistic interpretation of the Fathers "à la Fichte", popular in the 1930s (and rejected by Balthasar) would, in the later years, develop into an interpretation of the Fathers "à la Sartre", with the rise of idealistic existentialism. Balthasar had already acknowledged this possibility when working through his interpretation of Origen's doctrine of freedom. As we have seen, he maintained that Origen could indeed be read as close to Sartre or Sècretan. What, then, makes Balthasar's interpretation unique, steering it away from these trends? At the end of our inquiry, we can say that the fundamental elements informing Balthasar's reading Origen are two: the doctrine of the *analogia entis* and Christology. Methodologically, Balthasar stands at a threshold. He is both shaping his own thought in dialogue with Origen and reading Origen in the context of elements inherited from his 20th century education. This is particularly clear with the issue of analogy. Origen would not, in and of himself, be listed as a "thinker of *analogia entis*", and yet

Balthasar is fascinated by elements of his thought that *tend* towards this doctrine. The second element of his interpretation, balancing the many factors and influences at play, is Christology. The very issue of *analogia entis* bears its ripest fruit in Balthasar's later idea of Christ as the concrete *analogia entis* and, therefore, as the key to the notion of *analogia libertatis*. This is evident in all the main topics that comprise Balthasar's interest in Origen: Eros, freedom, the spiritual senses, and apokatastasis. The notion of Eros is explained by Balthasar through the image of the wound of love: human desire is provoked by an arrow shot by God, and this arrow is the Word. The beauty in the world, in the Scriptures, and in Christ himself, is nothing but the person of Christ, and it is by virtue of this divine personalism that the notion of desire plays such a pivotal role in Balthasar's fascination with Origen. In Balthasar's attention to the notion of freedom, we have discovered his interpretation of Origen's cosmology as openly dramatic. Freedom is the key element of the relationship between Creator and creature, wherein the human role is not erased. In the analysis of two pillars of finite freedom, we have seen how Origen is, for Balthasar, an example of the importance of holding freedom as self-determination, and freedom as consent, in balance. Moreover, Origen reveals that these two freedoms are supported by a more fundamental element—what Balthasar called the “law of love”. The divine primacy in this drama is seen, first and foremost, in the Incarnation. The doctrine of the spiritual senses showed us the importance of personalism in Balthasar's reading of Origen; these senses are not merely a metaphor, but proof of a deeply personal, relational aspect of exegetical work. This, as we have seen, is not only true of textual exegesis, but also of the exegesis of every manifestation of the Word who, in creation, has become empirically sensorial. If the two key elements of Balthasar's interpretation are *analogia entis* and Christology, so are there two opposite elements, sitting in productive tension. These have emerged in each section of this study: spiritualism vs. symbolism, pantheism vs. dualism, titanic idealism vs. *analogia libertatis*. At the very core of this tension lies the element of Origen's thought that struck Balthasar the most: the *passio caritatis*. Even Balthasar's interpretation of apocatastasis, we argued, was informed by this notion, more so than by a cosmological or logical principle. For this reason, we have defined Balthasar's later idea of “hoping for everyone's salvation” as being *inspired* by Origen, and not directly influenced.

We can now look back at one of the initial hypotheses of this research regarding Balthasar's critiques of Origen. After outlining three areas of Origen's thought that Balthasar perceived as problematic (i) the ontological status of nature; (ii) the ascension-descension problem; and (iii) the Christological problem and the kenosis, we claimed that Balthasar was able to detect a counter-balance to these risks throughout Origen's writings. As for (i), in the chapter on Eros we discovered that Balthasar finds arguments for a positive account of nature in Origen; this, together with the doctrine of the spiritual senses, demonstrates the priority

given by Origen to divine initiative (ii). Finally, (iii) Origen's notion of *passio caritatis* reveals the presence of an intuition of the divine kenosis that will become fundamental to Balthasar's theology.

We can also confirm the other hypothesis formulated at the beginning of this research vis-à-vis Balthasar's silences on the doctrines of (i) the preexistence of souls, (ii) the Trinity and (iii) the sacraments. We claimed that, despite openly denying his will to explore these doctrines, Balthasar implicitly addresses them; moreover, we claimed that examining these doctrines offers the possibility of casting a sidelong glance at Balthasar's personal theological development. (i) The chapter on freedom revealed the relevance of the doctrine of preexistence for our understanding of Origen, and of Balthasar's attitude towards him. If it is true that Balthasar prefers Maximus' solution to the problem of pre-lapsarian motion, he finds in Origen the seed of that solution. As we saw in the section on spiritual sensitivity, the spiritual body, in its sensitive relation to God, signifies a value hidden in the doctrine of preexistence, one that (again) Balthasar locates in Origen. Even if the Origenian doctrine itself is not thematically present in *Spirit and Fire*, its true seed flourishes in Balthasar's interpretation of freedom as the dramatic relationship of God and man. As we have seen, the risk of a voluntarist drift in Origen is acknowledged by Balthasar, but, in the latter's opinion, it is overcome by the biblical analogical interpretation. (ii) A similar process attends the doctrine of the Trinity. The doctrine is not presented as a system, especially due to the classic accusation of subordinationism; Balthasar never hides, however, his interpretation of Origen's thought as a "*großartigen heilsgeschichtlichen Trinitarismus*." The relationship between the Father and the Logos is the hidden music that plays throughout the entire *Le Mystérion d'Origène*, and the law of love is, without doubt, the element that bolstered Balthasar's defense of Origen against those who would conscript him into Idealism. This, furthermore, offered us the possibility of seeing Balthasar's concept of an original kenosis and intra-Trinitarian communion of love and freedom. (iii) Finally, the absence of a clear doctrine of the sacraments has emerged as more of a thematic silence; in fact, Balthasar's entire reading of Origen, from beginning to end, is illuminated by a sacramental ontology. The idea of Eros as a wound provoked by Christ, an arrow shot by God, together with the suggestion that natural beauty follows the same erotic dynamism, have revealed a deep sacramentalism at play in Balthasar's interpretation.

These three silences reveal, in turn, a parallel connection with the three main "appreciations" that have structured our research—if correctly understood, they are the "inner core" of each topic. Behind the doctrine of Eros lies the idea of a sacramental structure of reality. Behind Origen's doctrine of freedom, when understood as a drama between human and divine freedom, lies Origen's trinitarian salvation history. Behind the doctrine of the spiritual senses, lies the idea of spiritual bodies, and therefore the doctrine of preexistence. Balthasar's silences are

therefore a conscious decision to delve into the deep core of Origen's doctrine, to go deeper than surface-level, conventional interpretation. Balthasar submits that, once the deep core of Origen is reached, we can understand his fundamental contribution for the modern age.

At the end of our analysis of the tensions in Balthasar's reception of Origen, it has become clear that Balthasar does not appreciate the Alexandrian because he has the "right" answers to the gamut of modern theological problems. Rather, he appreciates Origen because he saw him as living, *mutatis mutandis*, through the same sort of tensions that Balthasar saw in his own age—those between France and Germany, *Nouvelle Théologie* and Idealism. Balthasar openly acknowledges the conflicting tendencies and risks in Origen; remarkably, it would appear that he appreciates Origen not *despite* this inner conflict, but exactly *by virtue* of it. The reason for this appreciation is not Origen's "orthodoxy", but the paradoxical tensions that his thought exhibits. It is the tension between spiritualism and sacramentalism that so fascinates Balthasar, the presence of a "double current" in Origen. Balthasar, for his part, will ultimately choose the way of analogy as a third possibility between Idealism and Neo-Scholasticism—this, he thought, was the best path for modern theology to take in order to find its way through the many rising disputes. Origen was a stronger defender of freedom when debating the Gnostics, and a stronger defender of analogy when debating the platonic Celsus. What made Origen such a good companion for Balthasar was that, in his own time, Origen had faced, and embodied, the same problems Balthasar was currently facing. The Idealistic titanism that Balthasar saw in Hegel, Eckhart, and Eriugena, was also a temptation for Origen. Origen *could* be read in an idealistic, Hegelian fashion (as Balthasar sometimes did himself). He *could* be seen as a thinker before being a Christian. This last point is a matter of deep concern for Balthasar, who, like Origen, was both a thinker *and* a Christian; as Origen made ample use of Neoplatonism, so Balthasar, who never denied his strong interest in Hegel, drew upon Idealism. He was also particularly fascinated by Greek thought and, as we know, had a strong love for Plotinus.

The tension in Origen that made him such a useful companion for Balthasar's theological adventure might be construed as a series of paradoxical dyads: analogy and identity? Spiritualism and sacramentalism? Platonism and Christianity? How can these unstable pairs co-exist? Indeed, on any given page of the Alexandrian one half might win over the other. It is true that Balthasar's selection of texts in *Spirit and Fire* positions Origen more on the side of analogy, while his critiques in the 1939 texts, and in *The Glory of the Lord*, position him on the idealistic side. These tensions do not shock Balthasar—on the contrary, they are the source of his love for Origen. Balthasar is convinced that such tension can bear fruit, so long as it remains rooted in the human love for God and the divine love for man. The divine-human relation is at the core of this tension, making it

sustainable, for Balthasar. Stability comes from the divine *passio caritatis*, which explains the “passive” and the “active” aspect of human freedom by virtue of the same aspects in the Trinity. Balthasar seems to realize more and more what was already stated in *Wendung nach Osten*: Origen is the beginning of two rivers that will characterize the whole history of theology. Origen “embodies all the questions of Catholic theologies” because he embodies the radical drama implicit in every attempt to think man and God—e.g. similarity in dissimilarity, divinity in flesh, communion in difference. As we see in every aspect of his account of Origen, Balthasar is deeply enamored of the Alexandrian because of the continuous tension between the two poles. There is no dualism or easy contraposition—we can, and should, remain undecided, Origen suggests, between human desire and divine love, between reason and faith, between human freedom and God’s grace. On the contrary, the more one delves into one, the more the other increases. Hence Balthasar’s use of the word transparency (*Durchsichtigkeit*) to describe Origen’s thought; the object, the material world (and so human desire, human freedom, human reason) is not merely symbol of something else, but already an expression and part of what is manifesting in it. This opens up, for Balthasar, the very heart of the Christian life. The dramatic tensions between spirit and body, between faith and reason, are nothing else than the face of the greater tension of life: the drama between God and man, between his and our freedom. It is certainly God who takes the initiative: the created world, the Scripture, and the Incarnation, are the fundamental steps of this initiative, the moment of his revelation, his gift of grace. This gift, exactly because it is a gift, never violates the freedom of the receiver—on the contrary, it transforms human freedom into an everlasting, personal (and therefore dramatic) relationship. The divine-human relationship, as every relationship, manifests a tension that never resolves into static equilibrium: it is a *disproportioned balance*, because, at its very beginning, we find the most unbalanced and superabundant wellspring of all, the *passio caritatis*.

Finally, Balthasar’s relation to Origen could be encapsulated in the Pauline image of the seed. What Balthasar does with Origen recalls the process of harvesting. Many Origenian doctrines would surely have been rejected by Balthasar had he lived through a different historical moment, just as they were rejected by other eminent theologians in other times. At the right season, however, Origen’s productive tensions grew into their maturity, and Balthasar, as farmer, could now proceed to harvest the ripe fruit. In the process something had to die, as the husk of a seed—something that is no longer “good” to be eaten. But, without that something, the grain could not have been raised in the first place. Without the doctrine of pre-existence, the entire Origenian system would likely have failed. Nevertheless, it is for Balthasar acceptable to leave this doctrine aside and take “the best” yield. A seed cannot ripen without soil, and it will ripen at different times, and in different ways, depending on the character of that soil. In the times of Eriugena

and Eckhart, the soil made possible the idealistic interpretation of Origen; the fertilization of Neo-Scholasticism made the fruit grow, and, by the time of de Lubac and Balthasar, it had emerged with a stronger sacramental taste. What the seed originally was is a perennial question for Origenists; the present research was interested in the fruits thereof. The work of harvesting means that the fruit obtained, despite a genetic resemblance, will differ from the seed that was planted. Something has to die for something else to live. But what is obtained, despite its divergence from the original, retains the same DNA as the planted seed.

2. The Fathers Today?

In the 1976 interview entitled *Geist und Feuer*, Balthasar provides an interpretative key to his entire work on Origen. Balthasar here declares that he sought to present Origen as a thinker primarily interested in discovering the divine love for man, manifested in spirit (Logos) and fire (love); a thinker who, moreover, answered God with spirit (knowledge) and fire (action). Throughout a lifetime of reflection on Origen, Balthasar acknowledged the risks of separating these two elements, but, nevertheless, he always presented Origen to his contemporaries as an exemplary figure of deep unity. There can be no choice of spirit *or* fire, but only spirit *and* fire. This, he reasons, is because God himself is both spirit *and* fire, knowledge *and* action, logos *and* love. Balthasar believed this risk of division to be greater in 1976 than it was in the 30s. In the bifurcation of knowledge and action, Balthasar sees, in fact, a pressing issue for the post-conciliar Church. If, in his youth, he condemned the dry desert of Neo-Scholasticism, in the wake of the *ressourcement* the problem seemed slightly different to him, as he makes clear in the interview. In 1952 Balthasar used the image of a bastion to describe the Church; in 1976 he suggested another image: "The Church appears to me somewhat like a watering can that has a hole. When the gardener arrives at the bed he would like to water, there is nothing left. The Church pays too little attention to the treasure in the field. She has sold a lot, but has she really exchanged it for a treasure? She has democratically descended into a valley. But can she still be the city on the hill?"¹ The context of the question is the post-conciliar Church. The interviewer suggests that the Church is now, once again, closing her bastions. Balthasar believes the contrary. As he sees it, the problem is that the Church "has forgotten that she must reflect on what is distinctively her own if she is to be mis-

1 Spirit and Fire. An interview 586. ZSW 121: "Die Kirche kommt mir ein wenig vor wie eine Gießkanne, die ein Loch hat. Wenn der Gärtner an das Beet kommt, das er begießen wollte, ist nichts mehr drin. Die Kirche besinnt sich zu wenig auf den Schatz im Acker. Verkauft hat sie vieles. Aber hat sie den Schatz wirklich eingetauscht? Sie ist demokratisch ins Tal gestiegen. Aber kann sie dann noch die Stadt auf dem Berg sein?"

sionary.”² Balthasar explains that, despite possessing fresh water for the irrigation of dry lands, the Church seems to have a hole in her watering-can, so that, by the time she moves to evangelize, she has lost all her water along the way.

The image of the watering-can recalls the idea of *ressourcement*. The Fathers were often described by Balthasar with aquatic imagery; they were for him “fresh water” to bring to thirsty Christians, a “living fountain” in a dry desert. However, while looking for water, the Church might have compromised the tool required to carry this message. Moving to the Gospel image of treasure in a field, Balthasar suggests that the Church had indeed found such a treasure. But, he wonders, has she traded it for something less precious? The Church had descended into the democratic field of discussion. But, following this descent, can she still remain the strong city on the mountain, to be cherished and respected by virtue of her divine election? While out in the mission-field, the Church risks forgetting “ihr Eigentliches”, its core. These questions seem today more pressing than ever. The democratization of the Church is debated and criticized on many sides; has the Church, in her missionary impulse and her ecumenical zeal, lost the ultimate treasure, that which makes her unique? Even more than the other, the image of the leaky watering can seems to describe the situation of the Church in the last years, wounded by many internal scars and scandals. The effort made by the many *ressourcement* theologians to find a new source of fresh water will be in vain if the can is not fixed, if the Church does not reevaluate her treasure, if she becomes lost in the valley, forgetting her exemplary vocation—exemplary not in a moralistic sense, but in her living, sacramental relation to the Word.

In this trying situation, tradition is still a reservoir of fresh water. When asked why such water is scarce today, Balthasar was adamant: “The reason is that people do not know and love the tradition. (...) The problem is this: it takes a certain time to enter into the mind of a Church Father or mystic or spiritual figure, and it takes a certain art of transposition to translate the speech of the 12th century into our time. But it is certainly possible.”³ Balthasar believes that the answer will not come from conventional mysticism or spirituality. Priests, theologians, and also laymen, must renew the effort of mining the riches of their tradition and transposing an ancient speech into modern language. Origen is listed among many names as an example of a thinker in whom mysticism and activism are inseparable, in whom contemplative spirituality and active works of mercy are not opposed. In another interview, in 1984, when asked how the Fathers could still be exemplary today, Balthasar provides a clear answer: “Perhaps really only through [their] courage to believe. There is of course a political side. There was one then

2 Spirit and Fire. An interview 586. ZSW 121: “(...) hat wohl vergessen, dass sie sich auf ihr Eigentliches besinnen muss, um missionarisch sein zu können.”

3 Spirit and Fire. An interview 588.

too, which is completely different from the one today. But the fact that the individual stands firm (...) I think that individuals decide the fate of the world.”⁴ In this sense, tradition remains a priceless tool not only for finding water, but also for acquiring the means and attitude to “fix the hole”. The current problems, according to Balthasar, have been caused by an exaggerated activism that has lost sight of spiritual need; in this case, Christian tradition helps one to see that mysticism and activism can, and must be, united, not separated, in the shaping of the human person. In Christ, the treasure himself, Origen found the key to holding together spirituality and activism—namely, a personal relation with God so strong that it outpours in active work for the proclamation of that very relation. Origen, who in his homilies and teaching exhibited no seam between thinking and praying, is, for Balthasar, exemplary. Spirit and life, knowledge and action, reflection and predication, mysticism and activism—spirit and fire. In the unity of these, the fresh water of tradition can once again be discovered: “It takes a certain time, but it is certainly possible.”

4 Interview to Erwin Koller for the Swiss television program *Zeugen des Jahrhunderts*, aired on Good Friday, April 20, 1984. The transcription has been published in Italian: Cento domande a von Balthasar, in: *Trenta Giorni* 2 (6) 8–18. 75–78. The video, with English subtitles, can be found on Youtube.

List of Abbreviations

Hans Urs von Balthasar

CL	Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe according to Maximus the Confessor
KL	Kosmische Liturgie: Das Weltbild Maximus' des Bekenners
ET	Explorations in Theology, vols. 1-5
ST	Skizzen zur Theologie, vols. 1-5
GL 1-7	The Glory of the Lord, vols. 1-7
H 1-3	Herrlichkeit, vols. 1-3
LA	Love Alone is Credible
GNL	Glaubhaft ist nur Liebe
FSO	The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves
PSW	Patristik, Scholastik und wir
MO	Le Mystère d'Origène (I); (II) (1936)
PMO	Parole et Mystère chez Origène (1957)
MP	Mysterium Paschale
TDT	Theologie der Drei Tage
MW	My Work: in Retrospect
ZSW	Zu Seinem Werk
TD 1-5	Theo-Drama, vols. 1-5
ThD 1-4	Theodramatik, vols. 1-4
TL 1-3	Theo-logic, vols. 1-3
ThL 1-3	Theologik, vols. 1-3
TKB	The Theology of Karl Barth
KB	Karl Barth: Darstellung und Deutung seiner Theologie
PP	Présence et Pensée
PT	Presence and Thought
RB	Razing the Bastions
SB	Schleifung der Bastionen
SF	Origen. Spirit and Fire. A Thematic Anthology of His Writings
GF	Origenes. Geist und Feuer. Ein Aufbau aus seinen Schriften
DWH	Dare We Hope 'That All Men Be Saved'? With a Short Discourse on Hell
WH	Was dürfen wir hoffen?
WO	Wendung nach Osten
KDH	Kleine Diskurs über die Hölle
KP	Von den Aufgaben der Katholischen Philosophie in der Zeit
CP	On the tasks of Catholic Philosophy in our Time

Origen

CC	Contra Celsum
CCt	Commentarii in Canticum Canticorum
CIo	Commentarii in Iohannem
CMt	Commentarii in Matthaëum
CMtS	Commentariorum series in Matthaëum
CPs	Commentarii in Psalmos
CRm	Commentarii in Epistolam ad Romanos
Dial	Dialogus cum Heracleides
EM	Exortatio ad martyrium
FrCt	Fragmenta in Canticum Canticorum
HCt	In Canticum Canticorum homiliae
HEx	In Exodum homiliae
HEz	In Ezechielem homiliae
HGn	In Genesim homiliae
HIer	In Ieremiam homiliae
HLv	In Leviticum homiliae
HLc	In Lucam homiliae
HNm	In Numeros homiliae
H15Ps	In Psalmum XV homiliae
H36Ps	In Psalmum XXXVI homiliae
H37Ps	In Psalmum XXXVII homiliae
H38Ps	In Psalmum XXXVIII homiliae
H81Ps	In Psalmum LXXXI homilia
Orat	De oratione
Prin	De principiis

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