

Progress in Origen and the Origenian Tradition

EARLY CHRISTIANITY IN THE CONTEXT OF ANTIQUITY

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PETER LANG

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Progress: A Key Idea for Origen and Its Inheritance

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

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

To Manlio Simonetti

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3 See Or., princ. 2.1,1–3; 2.3,1–7.

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

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

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

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

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

6 Or., princ. 4.3,12.

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

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

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

8 See Or., Cels. 6.58.

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

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

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

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

11 See Or., Cels. 4.67–69.

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

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

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

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

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

15 See Or., Joh. 13.236–246.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

²² See Or., Joh. 1.91–93; 1. 216–225.

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

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

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

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

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

24 Or., Joh. 10.21: “Therefore Jesus too is many things in his aspects (Καὶ ὁ Ἰησοῦς τοίνυν πολλά ἐστὶν ταῖς ἐπινοίαις); it is likely that the different evangelists took their thoughts from these aspects and wrote the Gospels (ὧν ἐπινοιῶν εἰκὸς τοὺς εὐαγγελιστὰς διαφόρους ἐννοίας λαμβάνοντας), sometimes also being in agreement with one another concerning certain things (ἐσθ’ ὅτε καὶ συμφερομένους ἄλλους περὶ τινων ἀναγεγραφέναι τὰ εὐαγγέλια).”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

37 See Or., Joh. 1.197–199.

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

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

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

40 Or., princ. 1.6.8: “*In qua [sancta et beata vita], cum post agones multos in eam perveniri potuerit, ita perdurare debemus, ut nulla umquam nos boni illius satietas capiat, sed quanto magis de illa beatitudine percipimus, tanto magis in nobis vel dilatetur eius desiderium vel augeatur, dum semper ardentius et capacius Patrem et Filium ac Spiritum Sanctum vel capimus vel tenemus* / And when after many struggles we have been able to attain to it [the holy and blessed life], we ought so to continue that no satiety of that blessing may ever possess us; but the more we partake of its blessedness, the more may the loving desire for it deepen and increase within us, as ever our hearts grow in fervor and eagerness to receive and hold fast the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.” It should be noted that even the opposite process of the fall, initiated by the satiety in the fruition of God, is prospected as gradual and “progressive”: *Si autem aliquando satietas cepit aliquem ex his, qui in summo perfectoque constitierunt, gradu, non arbitror quod ad subitum quis evacuetur ac decidat, sed paulatim et per partes defluere eum necesse est (ita ut fieri possit interdum, si brevis aliquis lapsus acciderit, ut cito resipiscat atque in se revertatur), non penitus ruere, sed revocare pedem et redire ad statum suum ac rursum statuere posse id, quod per negligentiam fuerat elapsum* / But if at any time satiety should possess the heart of one of those who have come to occupy the perfect and highest stage, I do not think that such a one will be removed and fall from his place all of a sudden. Rather must he decline by slow degrees, so that it may sometimes happen, when a slight fall has occurred, that the man quickly recovers and returns to himself. A fall does not therefore involve utter ruin, but a man may retrace his steps and return to his former state and once more set his mind on that which through negligence had slipped from his grasp” (1.6,8).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

45 See Or., Joh. 2.174.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

52 Or., Cels. 4.32; see 7.26.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

61 See Or., Joh. 32. 344–353.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁶⁵ See Or., Cels. 4.63 and 4.69.