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ORIGENISM
IN III-rd TO VIII-th CENTURIES

DOCTORAL THESIS

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CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS	5
INTRODUCTION	9
PART I. ORIGEN (185-254)	12
1.1. LIFE OF ORIGEN	12
1.1.1. <i>Sources</i>	13
1.1.2. <i>Childhood</i>	14
1.1.3. <i>Origen at Alexandria</i>	17
1.1.4. <i>Origen at Caesarea in Palestine</i>	23
1.1.5. <i>Work of Origen</i>	27
1.2. DOCTRINE OF ORIGEN	28
1.2.1. <i>Subordinationism</i>	30
1.2.2. <i>The divine monad, beginning and end of all existences</i>	32
1.2.3. <i>Pre-existence of the souls</i>	32
1.2.4. <i>Metempsychosis</i>	34
1.2.5. <i>The soul of Christ</i>	37
1.2.6. <i>The resurrection of the bodies</i>	38
1.2.7. <i>Apocatastasis</i>	39
1.2.8. <i>Christ will be crucified for the demons</i>	42
1.2.9. <i>The Kingdom of Christ will end</i>	42
1.2.10. <i>The power of God is limited</i>	43
1.2.11. <i>The animated stars</i>	43
1.2.12. <i>The loss of God's face</i>	43
1.2.13. <i>Allegorization of Heaven</i>	44
PART II. ORIGENIST CONTROVERSIES (III-RD TO V-TH CENTURIES). THE MAIN ANTI-ORIGENISTS	46
<i>Origenism</i>	46
2.1. ORIGENISM IN THE III-RD CENTURY (THE ALEXANDRIAN DISPUTES)	47
2.1.1. <i>The disputes of canonical right. Demetrius and Heraclas</i>	48
Demetrius of Alexandria (189-232)	49
Heraclas, Bishop of Alexandria († 247)	53
2.1.2. <i>The theoretical, fragmentary and un-contemporary disputes</i>	55
Dionysus, Bishop of Alexandria (248-264)	56
Nepos of Arsinoe	59
Tryphon	59
2.2. ANTI-ORIGENISM AT THE END OF THE III-RD CENTURY AND BEGINNING OF THE IV-TH CENTURY	60
2.2.1 <i>Peter of Alexandria († 311)</i>	61
2.2.2. <i>Methodius of Olympus († 311)</i>	64
2.2.3. <i>Adamantius</i>	71
2.2.4. <i>Pamphilus the martyr († 309/310)</i>	73

2.3. ANTI-ORIGENISM IN THE IV-TH CENTURY	81
2.3.1. <i>Eustathius of Antioch (†337)</i>	82
2.3.2. <i>Aetius of Antioch (†366)</i>	86
2.3.3. <i>Marcellus of Ancyra (†280?- †374)</i>	88
2.3.4. <i>Apollinaris of Laodicea (310-†390)</i>	91
2.4. ANTI-ORIGENISM IN THE V-TH CENTURY	94
<i>Antipater of Bostra († after 451)</i>	94

PART III. THE FIRST ORIGENIST DISPUTE (IV-TH TO V-TH CENTURIES) .. 96

3.1. PERSONS INVOLVED IN THE DISPUTE	
3.1.1. <i>Epiphanius of Salamis (315-†403)</i>	97
3.1.2. <i>Rufinus of Aquileia (345-†410/411)</i>	102
3.1.3. <i>Hieronymus of Stridon (345/347-†419/420)</i>	102
3.1.4. <i>Theophilus of Alexandria (345-†412)</i>	106
3.1.5. <i>Saint John Chrysostom (344/345-†407)</i>	107
3.2. THE FIRST ORIGENIST DISPUTE	110
3.2.1. <i>Denunciation of Origenism - Epiphanius of Salamis (373-377)</i>	110
3.2.2. <i>Epiphanius and John. Hiernonymus and Rufinus I (393-397)</i>	125
3.2.3. <i>Hieronymus and Rufinus II (398-410)</i>	133
3.2.4. <i>Epiphanius, Theophilus and John (399-438)</i>	144

PART. IV. THE SECOND ORIGENIST DISPUTE. CONDEMNATION OF ORIGENISM (VI-TH CENTURY)

4.1. ORIGENIST DISPUTES IN THE VI-TH CENTURY	173
4.1.1. <i>Preliminaries</i>	173
4.1.2. <i>Historical context</i>	173
4.1.3. <i>Outbreak of the conflict</i>	174
4.2. JUSTINIAN AND HIS ROLE IN CONDEMNING ORIGENISM	177
4.2.1. <i>The treaty of Emperor Justinian</i>	179
4.2.2. <i>The Synod at Constantinople in 534, regarding Origen</i>	185
4.2.3. <i>From the Synod in 543 to the V-th Ecumenical Council</i>	185
4.2.4. <i>The letter of emperor Justinian to the Holy Synod, regarding Origen and his followers</i>	187
4.3. THE V-TH ECUMENICAL COUNCIL (553)	189
4.3.1. <i>Meetings of the council</i>	190
4.4. ORIGEN AND THE V-TH ECUMENICAL COUNCIL	194
4.4.1. <i>Testimonies in favor of Origen's condemnation</i>	196
4.4.2. <i>Testimonies against Origen's condemnation</i>	201
4.4.3. <i>The thesis of intercalating Origen's name</i>	204
4.4.4. <i>Didymus the Blind, Evagrius Ponticus and the v-th ecumenical council ..</i>	206
4.5. THE END OF THE ORIGENIST CONTROVERSIES	206

PART V. ORIGENISM AT THE HOLY FATHERS (III-RD TO VIII-TH CENTURIES)

.....	209
5.1. <i>Didymus the Blind (313-†398)</i>	209
<i>Didymus the Blind and Origenism</i>	218

5.2. <i>Saint Basil the Great (329/330-†379)</i>	226
Saint Basil the Great and Origenism	231
5.3. <i>Saint Gregory of Nazianz (330-†389/390)</i>	235
Saint Gregory of Nazianz and Origenism	239
5.4. <i>Saint Gregory of Nyssa (335-†394)</i>	241
Saint Gregory of Nyssa and Origenism	243
5.5. <i>Evagrius Ponticus (345-†399)</i>	255
Evagrius Ponticus and Origenism	260
Evagrius Ponticus and the condemnation of Origenism during the IV-th to VI-th centuries	264
5.6. <i>Saint Maxim the Confessor (580-†662)</i>	265
Saint Maxim the Confessor and Origenism	268
CONCLUSIONS	276
BIBLIOGRAPHY	279
I. SOURCES	279
A. <i>Work of Origen</i>	279
B. <i>Other sources</i>	285
II. DICTIONARIES / ENCYCLOPEDIAS	303
III. BOOKS	305
IV. STUDIES	311
V. WEB	328
CURRICULUM VITAE	329

Key-words

Origen, origenism, origenist, Subordinationism, Pre-existence of the souls, Metempsychosis, Apocatastasis, Allegorization, origenist disputes, origenist controversies, the V-th Ecumenical Council, Epiphanius of Salamis, Rufinus of Aquileia, Hieronymus of Stridon, Theophilus of Alexandria, Saint John Chrysostom, Emperor Justinian, Didymus the Blind, Saint Basil the Great, Saint Gregory of Nazianz, Saint Gregory of Nyssa, Evagrius Ponticus, Saint Maxim the Confessor.

Abstract

Along the history, within the Church there were many people who continued to exist in the conscience of their contemporaries and successors until these days as special people, great personalities, memorable for what they had done, prescriptive for the Church for a defined or undefined period of time. The process of accepting or rejecting them was short for some of them, or long for others. The straight or sinuous way often brought pro and con debates, which were formed most of the times of passionate supporters or rejectors, who sometimes misinterpreted the words or lines of the one analyzed, trying to argue their own ideas or views, not considering the substance of the teaching, but insisting upon the form it was spoken, written or preserved.

Origen, the „tireless” preacher, „fearless” in front of any challenges of the world (external and internal), continued to be for centuries the founder of the exegetical theology and the starting point of the dogmatic theology. Being a source in research and a researcher himself, a „pioneer”, a path breaker in the consolidation and preservation of the treasure of Orthodoxy, Origen generated, short time after his death, great waves of controversies and interminable disputes.

Part I. Origen (185 – † 254)

Origen was born in 185 in Alexandria. He becomes, at only 17 years old, catechist in the *didascalia* in this town, during Bishop Demetrius. Along his formation process, he studied hard the Scripture and he listened to the philosophers of his time.

One can reproach him with an inconsiderate gesture from his youth: castration, gesture which did not cause reactions of denial at time of its performance. His rich activity at the school department, as well as the fame gained due to his vast preparation determined some of the bishops of that age to honor him and call him to solve some difficult questions of faith and even to preach in the church, during his secular period.

His ordination to the priesthood by Teoctist of Caesarea in Palestine would cause the anger of Bishop Demetrius and the need of his leaving at Caesarea in Palestine in 231.

Origen continues freely his teaching and missionary activity in his new residence.

Weakened from the tortures suffered during the persecutions of the age of Deciu, he died when he was 69, in 254, in Tyr of Fenicia, and he was buried in the cathedral in this town.

Origen was a prolific writer. His work is varied, the only certainty being that he wrote very much. From the testimonies kept about Origen’s works, it seems that there wasn’t and there still isn’t a complete catalogue of those. The great number of his works remains until today in the shadow of time. From the 770 titles mentioned by Hieronymus in *Epistle XXXIII, to Paula*, until the 6000 mentioned by Epiphanius, and the loss of the listing from *Apology for Origen* of Eusebius and Pamphilus which, according to Hieronymus, was not complete, none of these can make light in this matter.

Origen is the founder of the biblical science and the first great interpreter of the Bible, he initiates the systematic treatment of theology. Among his biblical works, we mention the *critical*

ones, out of which only one is known to us, *Hexapla*, and the exegetical ones, under three forms: scholia, homilies and commentaries. He uses excessively the allegorical exegesis.

Among his apologetical and polemical books we mention *Against Celsus*, in 8 books, and *Origen's dialogue against Candidus Valentinian*, and among his theological books his most important is considered to be *Περὶ Ἀρχῶν*.

Among his ascetical works we mention *Exhortation to martyrdom* and *On prayer*; he also wrote a hundred letters, *Stromate*, *Monobibla*, *Onomasticon*, *On Resurrection*, *Dialogue with Heraclides* and *On Easter*.

Part II. Origenist controversies (III-rd to V-th centuries). The main anti-origenists. Origenism

Even from the time of Origen's life, objections against his teaching were formulated. He complains of being accused of false blasphemous doctrines and allegorical interpretation of the texts from the Old Testament, because, according to the opinion of J. Tixeront, „some manuscripts were stolen from him and published without him revising them”.

The term *origenian* refers strictly to Origen and his teaching, and for the term *origenist* Pierre Hadot gives the following definition, which we consider the most adequate and explicit: *Origenism* is „the theological system attributed to Origen in some doctrinal conflicts which split the Greek Church during the IV-th and V-th centuries”; then he notes that Origenism „corresponds, on one hand, to the systematization which some of Origen's disciples imposed to their teacher's doctrine, and on the other hand, to the distortions his enemies imposed to the doctrine for a better condemnation”.

Origenism in the III-rd century (the Alexandrian disputes)

The canonical disputes. Demetrius (189 – 232) and Heraclas, Bishop of Alexandria (†247)

The origenist disputes developed in two different manners, in two distinct stages, both as a historical period and as a motivation.

The first „disputes” – if we may call them this way – or discussions regarding Origen, took place during his life. They had canonical character and were about his ordination to the priesthood by the Palestinian bishops from other congregation than the one he belonged to, as well as about the surpassing of his responsibilities of the „laymen”, and then about his youth mistake. The beginning of these disputes takes place during a period when the „canon” or „canonical right” concept was not established yet, in a moment when Christian didascalies were lay and most of the times they acted independently, without the direct supervision of the Episcopal authority from that area.

These so-called „disputes” were always limited to the above mentioned aspects, to the confirmation of the invalidity of Origen's ordination and to his rejection from Alexandria. This was the attitude of the Alexandrian bishops and of the catechism school there, which only after Origen had left came under the strict supervision of the Church.

Briefly, Origen leaves for Greece. When he comes back, he passes through Caesarea in Palestine, where he is ordained to the priesthood. After he comes back to Alexandria, Demetrius takes from him the school management and excommunicates him in a first synod, and then defrocks him after a second synod, in 231.

The reasons of Origen's condemnation were the following: 1) Origen, although still a layman, had preached to the faithful in front of the bishops in Caesarea and Jerusalem; 2) he had been ordained to the priesthood by these ones, although he did not belong to their jurisdiction; 3) the castration he had done to himself made uncanonical this ordination. Thus, in no way we could speak of heresy, even if some anti-origenists see in Justinian's decision in 543 the reflection of

Demetrius' and Heraclas' sentence, and they take – and misinterpret – the testimony of Eusebius that Origen defended his Orthodoxy by Epistles in front of Fabianus of Rome and others.

The second anti-origenist is considered to be Bishop of Alexandria, Heraclas. He is firstly associate with and then successor of Origen at the department of the catechetical school in Alexandria. He became bishop when Demetrius died, in 232, and he shepherded the Church until 247 or 248.

These are the reasons which might determine us to consider Demetrius and Heraclas „canonical” anti-origenists, as their „discontentment” was „canonical”.

The „disputes” mentioned were only discussions regarding this subject, because Origen's „condemnation” by Demetrius' synods did not have a universal acceptance, due to the reputation and fame the great Alexandrian had in other imperial areas.

Theoretical, fragmentary and non-contemporary disputes

We have chosen this subtitle in order to suggest the *theoretical* „disputes”, based on works, between Origen's enemies and defenders, who either were not his contemporaries or never met him.

These disputes *are not always contemporary* and they are similar to the polemics of the apologists from the II-nd and III-rd centuries, when opinions of some pagan or philosophers were confuted, concerning Christianity or the true teaching, even after their death. Such an example we find in Origen's work itself, *Κατὰ Κέλσου*, a vast work in eight books. Here the work *Λόγος ἀληθῆς* of philosopher Celsus is confuted, who had died before Origen wrote the mentioned paper.

The specific character of these disputes surpasses the frame of the *canonical right*, reaching the dogmatic one. A basic characteristic of these „first disputes”, which regard Origen's doctrine, is the fact that they are fragmentary and partial, referring only to some parts of Origen's doctrine and not to his entire doctrinal system – if we can speak of a doctrinal system at Origen.

Partly, these disputes are primarily *indirect* – chronologically speaking – and then *direct*, as at the beginning of the dogmatic disputes his „enemies”, his „accusers” do not even mention the name of the great Alexandrian, but they only mention some ideas taken from his works or to which one can add references from his work, and then, gradually, Origen's name is brought within these disputes.

In the section *Origenism in the III-rd century* (the Alexandrian disputes) we point out the relation of Origen to Dionysius (Bishop of Alexandria between 248 – 264), to Nepos of Arsinoe who writes around year 260 the work *Refutation of the allegorists* and to the writer Tryphon.

All these disputes referring to Origen form the prelude of the origenist controversies from the IV-th to VI-th centuries, which actually brought the definitive condemnation of Origen and his including among the heretics.

The second part also includes two sections dedicated to the study of the most important origenists and anti-origenists from the III-rd and IV-th centuries. The first of them, *Antiorigenism at the end of the III-rd century and beginning of the IV-th century*, presents Peter of Alexandria (†311), along with his papers *On soul and body* and *On Resurrection*; Methodius of Olympus (†311), along with his papers *On the Resurrection*, *On the creatures*, *On the will* and *On the witch*; Adamantius with his dialogue *On the true faith in God* and Pamphilus the martyr (†309/310) with his paper *Apologia Pamphili Martyris Pro Origene*. The second section, *Antiorigenism in the IV-th century*, deals with Eustathius of Antioch (†337), with his paper *On the witch of Endor against Origen*, Aetius of Antioch (†366), Marcellus of Ancyra (280? - †374) and Apollinaris of Laodicea (310-†390), who wrote *Against Origen*.

We do not have until now a direct dispute between origenists and anti-origenists, only isolated cases, schools with different tradition in interpreting the Scripture and thus with a certain

conflict, yet the conflict is limited to the method and does not surpass its frame towards the dogma. In this way, we have an opposition based on purely hermeneutical principles, a theoretical war against other views than theirs.

The name of Origen is not often mentioned (except for Methodius), he is not called heretic and thus he is not condemned as such. Nevertheless, the allegorical interpretation – whose main exponent was Origen – suffers, diminishing its importance and field of practice, in favor of the literal and grammatical interpretation shared by the antiochs and extended by them, becoming then prescriptive.

This is the academic origenist dispute, theoretically, through speeches and writings, without condemnations and acts of violence against the origenists or anti-origenists.

Part III. The first origenist dispute (IV-th to V-th centuries)

Under the name of origenist disputes, we can include only those occurred in the last decade of the IV-th century and the first decade of the V-th christian century.

The front of the disputes is growing, moving from Origen and his doctrine – his theology – to the origenists – successors, followers and admirers of Origen – and their doctrine. One of the small causes is that Origen is one-sided read, after the interpretation given by his pretended disciples.

The specific character of these disputes is the *direct confrontation* and the *personal attack*. The polemics address *directly* naming the addressants, and the intentions are given *openly*. They condemn not only Origen – or his doctrine – but the polemic enemy, that on Origen's side, admirer of his or the one who only abstains from his condemnation. Therefore, within these disputes, along with the „honour”, fame and reputation of Origen, innocent people are victims of the disparagement or exile.

In this period (390-410) we can notice four distinct stages with different evolution and results which are sometimes incredible. From the public announcement of origenism (the first stage: 373-377), to reasons extracted from Origen's work (the second stage: 392-397), to vanities regarding the „honour” and „pride” of Orthodox (the third stage: 398-410) and until the disroffing out of envy under pretext of origenism (the fourth stage: 399-404).

The persons involved in the dispute are: Epiphanius of Salamis (315-†403), Rufinus of Aquileia (345-†410/411), Hieronymus of Stridon (345/347-†419/420), Theophilus of Alexandria (345-†412) and Saint John Chrysostom (344/354-†407).

The first origenist dispute

1. Denunciation of origenism - Epiphanius of Salamis (373 – 377)

The only effective participant to this moment is Bishop Epiphanius of Salamis. The frame of the dispute is the denunciation made public by Epiphanius of Salamis between 373 – 377, in two chapters of his writings *Ancoratos* (chapter 63) and *Panarios* (heresy 64), but this did not cause immediate reactions.

2. Epiphanius and John. Hieronymus and Rufinus I (393 – 397)

In 393 Atarbius arrives to Jerusalem and asks Rufinus of Aquileia and Hieronymus of Stridon to condemn origenism. Epiphanius of Salamis ordains to the priesthood Paulinian, brother of Hieronymus, after he had preached against Origenism and John of Jerusalem against the anthropomorphic.

In 397 Hieronymus and Rufinus reconcile openly in the Resurrection Church. In the same year, after the Pentecost, Rufinus leaves towards West definitively.

Vigilantius accuses Hieronymus of origenism, fact for which the latter writes in order to defend himself.

3. Hieronymus and Rufinus II (398 – 410)

Rufinus translates from Pamphilus's *Apology for Origen* and Origen's *On first principles* for Macarius in 397 – 398. In the fall of 398, Eusebius of Cremona receives a copy of the translation from *On first principles* and accuses Rufinus of heresy.

Pammachius and Oceanus wrote to Hieronymus (in 399), asking him to bring into notice the true Origen, through an accurate translation, and move away from approving the doctrinal errors, fact carried out by Hieronymus, who explains his movement. Rufinus retires to Aquileia.

In the spring of 400, Theophilus writes to Anastasius against Origenism. Anastasius calls Rufinus to Rome, and the latter writes *Apologia as Anastasium* in order to prove his Orthodoxy and ask forgiveness for not showing up in Rome.

Anastasius writes to Simplicianus, Bishop of Milan and to his successor Venerius, asking them to reject Origenism. Venerius and Chromatius of Aquileia write to Anastasius to draw up a condemnation letter against Origenism. Anastasius prohibits the reading of Origen's works.

Rufinus finishes his *Apology against Hieronymus* in the spring of 401, and Hieronymus writes his *Apology against Rufinus* in two books in the same year.

Hieronymus also completes the anti-origenist file, which includes *Epistles XCII, XCIII, XCIV, XC, XCI, XCVI, XCVIII* and *XCVII*, translating into Latin Theophilus's epistles. Then he sends his *Apology* to Augustine, and Chromatius, Bishop of Aquileia, urge him to make peace.

In 408, Rufinus returns to Pinetum in Aquileia, then in the North of Italy and Sicily, taking care of some writings, especially the translations from Origen. He dies in 410 or 411, as a witness of the depredation left by Alaric in Sicily.

With the death of Rufinus, the dispute remains in the accuser's hands, who will continue the disparagement work, his and Origen's.

4. Epiphanius, Theophilus and John (399 – 438)

Theophilus of Alexandria passes on the side of the anthropomorphics, becoming anti-origenist, and fights with Isidorus, who retires in the desert of Nitria, where he is sheltered by the origenists.

In 399, Theophilus, in a synod held at Alexandria – with an escort of bullies, having agreed with the anthropomorphic ascetics, using terror, persecution, burning and destroying cells and books – anathemized the principles of Origen and of his partisans, especially of the „the Tall Brothers”, except Dioscorus and, later, he banished from Egypt more than three hundred origenist monks. After the synod, Theophilus sent a synodical epistle to the bishops gathered at Jerusalem and to those in Cyprus.

Shortly after that (400), a synod held at Jerusalem with the purpose to fight Origenism, adopted the decision of the synod of Alexandria in 399 and sent an answer epistle (XCIII) to Theophilus, in September 400.

Theophilus continues to combat the origenists through the paschal epistles in 401, 402 and 403.

John friendly welcomes them, provides shelter for the origenist monks, banished by Theophilus, and waits for their reconciliation, without admitting them in community. Then he writes to Theophilus, asking for their forgiveness. But Theophilus refuses them and sends delegates to Constantinople in order to send the complaint against them. He shows his discontent towards John Chrysostom, for the reason of formally admitting the runaway monks to the ecclesial communion.

The monks, revolted in their turn, addressed empress Eudoxia, presenting her a memoir and asking that the emperor arranged a high judgement reunion with the participation of Theophilus. According to their desire, the emperor was to assign as supreme judge the Archbishop of the capital.

As a consequence of the serious accusations brought by the origenist monks against Theophilus before emperor Arcadius, the bishop of Alexandria was called to Constantinople in order to explain himself before John Chrysostom.

Theophilus voluntarily delays his leaving for Constantinople, with the purpose to prepare the field in view of replacing John. Using a stratagem, Epiphanius was determined by Theophilus of Alexandria to go to Constantinople in order to condemn Origenism from there too. Epiphanius, arrived to Constantinople in the winter of 402 or in the beginning of 403, refuses the communion with John and, noticing that Theophilus took advantage of his good faith, having remorse, leaves in a hurry the capital, without waiting the arrival of the other bishops.

Theophilus finally obtains the emperor's accord that, instead of a synod directed by John Chrysostom, take place a synod directed by himself and where he could quote the bishop of Constantinople.

With the court's help, Saint John Chrysostom is condemned in 403 in the synod called „from the Oak”, near Chalcedon, presided by Paul of Heraclea, but not because of Origenism, but because many of the 36 bishops who accused him were personal enemies of John's. The number of bishops grew then to 44 or 45.

Due to the people on the point of starting a rebellion, but only for a few days, John was re-introduced triumphantly in his church, and Theophilus was compelled to run away from the revolted crowd.

The bishop illicitly defrocked for the second time stayed away temporarily from his responsibilities. Then, in the synod held at Constantinople in 404, he is again defrocked, being compelled to leave the second time in exile, following the order of emperor Arcadius. This occurred in 9-th of June 404, and he died in exile, on 14-th of September 407, near Comana.

Finally Theophilus reconciled with the origenist monks.

A new condemnation of origenism takes place in 404, after the disputes in this matter were finished. Now Theophilus writes a new paschal epistle (C), where he deals again with two of the origenist errors, and in 409 Hieronymus writes the *Epistle CXXIV to Avitus*, which is the Hieronymus's most complete list, of Origen's heresies and not only a list, but a treaty reminding chapter 64 from the *Κατὰ ἀιρέσεων* of Epiphanius.

The disputes regarding Origen and the Orthodoxy of his teachings enter a period of peace and silence, yet he continues to be the object of many controversies which will end with his condemnation by an ecumenical council, preceded by that of a local synod in Constantinople, from 543, and by the edict of Emperor Justinian.

Thus, these disputes will hold the theologians' attention again beginning with the VI-th century, un-finished yet, and later, some philologists will join one of the two sides, *pro* or *against* Origen. Therefore, we notice that „Origen payed for the excess of origenism, but he was also victim of the jealous ambition of Theophilus and of the disputes between Hieronymus and Rufinus”.

Part IV. The second origenist dispute. Condemnation of Origenism (VI-th century)

For 100 years Origen was sporadically mentioned and combated in writing – according to the existing testimonies – only by the Bishop Antipater of Bostra.

It seems that the Origenism of this period was influenced by the thinking of a mystical pantheist of Edesa, named Stephen Bar-Sudaili, who comes in Palestine around 512. This one had a system of thinking which presented apparent links with Origen's teaching.

Around 514-515, Nonnus, an origenist monk, together with other three origenist monks, were received in the *New Laura*, promoting their doctrine around Jerusalem. Scandalized by this,

hegumen Agapetus asks for the consent of Elias, patriarch of Jerusalem, and banishes them from the monastery.

Short time after that, in 519 or 520, the origenist monks Nonnus and his companions, are welcomed again in the monastery by Mammias. In 531, as a consequence of a Samaritan ingression, Saint Sava goes to Constantinople to ask relief of taxes and, taking the opportunity, complains to emperor Justinian against the origenists, asking him to provide order in Palestine, by measures against them, as well as against the arians and nestorians.

Two origenist monks, Theodorus Askidas, deacon in the New Laura, and Domitianus, hegumen of Martirius monastery, became very close to the emperor with the help of Leontius.

In 537, Gelasius, the second successor of Sava in the Great Laura, tried to stop their propaganda, reading to these monks the books of Atipater of Bostra, written in the precedent century, against Origen. Considering that he did not achieve his purpose by conviction, he used strictness and banished from the Great Laura 40 origenist monks. The controversies between lauras ended up in violence, so that the origenists attacked the Great Laura, and Gelasius was compelled to welcome back the origenist monks, which in fact occurred. The anti-origenists, discontented, delegated 6 monks to Ephraim, patriarch of Antioch, in order to show him the origenist heresy, reading to him from the writings of Antipater of Bostra. Patriarch Ephraim, hardened during a Synod in Antioch in the summer of 542, condemned Origen and „published a synodic against his teachings”, in the summer of the same year.

After the synod in 542, the origenists forced patriarch Peter of Jerusalem to erase Ephraim of Antioch from the diptych. Peter charged then hegumen of New Laura, Gelasius and monk Sophronius to write a complaint against the origenists. They wrote it and for its defense drew up a list of quotations from Origen's writings. Justinian approved the *libellus* and sent Mina a long letter – which is in fact a long theological treaty, having the tone and effect of an edict.

In 543, emperor Justinian, in the form of a letter towards the bishops of the five major sees (Constantinople, Rome, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem) gave a condemnation verdict against Origen and his writings, accompanied by 10 anathemas, asking them to hold a synod for the general condemnation of Origenism. The four bishops signed Justinian's edict, just like Mina did.

The *treaty of emperor Justinian* includes the enumeration of Origen's errors and testimonies from the Holy Fathers against some of these; the quotations from Origen's work, in order to explain and argue the existence of the above mentioned errors; the ten anathemas against some errors and against Origen himself, mentioned in the last of them.

Nonnus, origenist from the beginning, refused to subscribe the condemnation of Origen and was banished from the New Laura, together with his partisans. He caused disorder and, strongly supported by Theodorus Askidas, obtained from the patriarch his re-integration. The hate divided the origenist monks from the New Laura – named isocrists – and those in the Laura of Firmin, named protocrists or tetraedits.

In the summer of 552, the protocrists gave up the pre-existence of the souls, unified with the orthodox and fought against the isocrists. Then they hurriedly sent one of them, Isidorus, with the prior of the Great Laura, Conon, to Constantinople, in order to present a letter to the emperor against the isocrists and to request the imperial protection against the intrigues of their enemies.

The origenist polemics in Palestine at the end of year 552 ask for a new decision, in spite of the edict against Origen and against Origenism in 543.

The V-th ecumenical council opened in the 5-th of May 553, at Constantinople, in the *secretarium* of Saint Sophia, under the direction of Eutychius. At the opening the emperor's letter was read by Theodorus *silentarius*, by which Justinian explained the meeting of the Synod,

recognized the authority of the four ecumenical councils, and proposed the condemnation of the „three Chapters”, so that the authority of the decision at Chalcedon are not at all injured.

By the eighth reunion from the 2-nd of June 553, the synod concluded its works. It was then when the condemnation decision was done, in an orthodox sense, of the „three chapters” and Arius, Macedonius, Apollinaris, Nestorius, Eutithius and Origen were anathemized. The entire condemnation was comprised in 14 anathemas and published by the 13 lines in the edict of emperor Justinian. Canon 11 condemned the heretics already condemned in the precedent synods, like for example Arius, Nestorius and Apollinaris. Origen is called for the first time heretic in the 11-th canon.

The Greek documents of the synod are lost, but we have a contemporary Latin translation, probably used by Vigilus and by his successor, Pope Pelagius II (578-590) until a certain level.

Cyril of Schytopolis, Evagrius the Scholar, Eulogius of Alexandria, Sophronius of Jerusalem, the Paschal Chronicle, Anastasius the Sinaite, the Lateran council of 649, the VI-th Ecumenical Council of 680, Trulan Synod of 692, the VII-th Ecumenical Council 787, Epistle of Tarasius, Patriarch Nikeforos of Constantinople, George the monk, the byzantine chronicler (†842), Patriarch Photius, Teophanus and Zonara (†1118) mention Origen’s condemnation at the V-th ecumenical council.

The integrity of the decisions of the V-th ecumenical council, the Summon edicts of the V-th ecumenical council, the letter of Vigilus to Eustathius and his Constitutum, the abstract elaborated by Eustathius of Constantinople of the decisions of the V-th ecumenical council, priest Eustratius in his Obituary to patriarch Eustathius, the Latin chronicler Victor of Tununna, Pelagius the II-nd (678-590), Gregory the Great, do not speak about Origen’s condemnation at this council. And at the VI-th ecumenical council of 680 the decisions of the V-th council were analyzed and found unabridged.

The V-th ecumenical council truly anathemized Origen, not in a special session, but only mentioning his name among the others heretics condemned in the eleventh anathema. The names of Evagrius and Didymus are not found in the synod’s documents.

The VI-th century brought the universal condemnation of Origen, by including him among the heretics and mentioning him in the following synodicons.

The V-th ecumenical council decides the precedent condemnations, writing Origen’s name in the 11-th anathema, together with Sibelius, Arius, Apollinaris, Nestorius, Eustathius, Dioscorus, Timothy Eluros, Peter Mongos, Antimus of Trapezunda, Theodosius of Alexandria, Peter of Antioch, Peter of Apamea and Severus of Antioch, condemned at the first four ecumenical councils or at other endemic synods.

Part V. Origenism at the Holy Fathers (III-rd to VIII-th centuries)

A first point where the Fathers meet Origen is the allegorical exegesis. Direct or secret admirers of the great Alexandrian, the fathers of the IV-th century inspired from the origenian writings, choosing most of the times the wheat from chaff.

A second point where the Great Fathers of the IV-th century meet are the two big origenist errors: the pre-existence of the soul and the apocatastasis. Didymus the Blind and Evagrius Ponticus were anathemized for these two, together with Origen, at the V-th ecumenical council in 553.

1. Didymus the Blind (313 – †398)

Didymus formed in an origenist environment and, as such, he remained in history as one of the great origenists of the IV-th century, together with Evagrius Ponticus. His formation will reflect along his entire written or unwritten work. He has been a „fearless defender” of Origen at the department of the Catechetical School of Alexandria. He uses him in his written works, yet

most of the times without mentioning him, probably as a measure of caution, for two of those who had heard him – Hiernoymus and Rufinus – were already „quarreled” about Origen’s work.

One of his major works, major for his relationship with Origenism, is *Defence of Origen*, which is but a presentation of Origen’s writing *On first principles*, where he correctly explains the trinitarian dogma and approves the origenist errors: about the sin of the angels, the pre-existence of souls and the apocatastasis.

Tightly close to Didymus’ eschatology is the apocatastasis (ἀποκατάστασις), which shows that Didymus’ eschatology is a mixture of origenism and orthodoxy. The word ἀποκατάστασις is found once in *Comment at Zacharias*, but the context given suggests us that it does not deal with apocatastasis in the sense of the origenist controversy. He rejects the fable of metempsychosis too.

Didymus defends the pre-existence of souls, he „thinks that, although created by God, the soul pre-existed the body where it was then put as in a prison, punished for the sins committed before, idea which is present in the treaty addressed to Rufinus on *Why do children die after they get bodies for sins?*”.

2. Saint Basil the Great (329/330 – †379)

One of the great Cappadocians with a certain relation to Origen and his work is Saint Basil the Great.

Basil mentions only once Origen, and „puts in a special place Dionysius [of Alexandria], together with other famous origenists Gregory the Thaumaturgus, Firmilianus, Diano, Meletius and Eusebius of Palestine himself” and „... without accepting the origenist trinitarian formulas, quotes Origen as a witness of the Church faith in the divinity of the Holy Ghost (in *On the Holy Ghost*)”.

Saint Basil the Great does not hide the fact that some trinitarian formulas of Origen leave much to be desired, but this does not prevent him from quoting them in *Philocalia*, in collaboration with his friend Gregory of Nazianz, a collection of special fragments of Origen and then mention them as a testimony of the divinity of the Holy Ghost.

What is worthy of being mentioned in the *Philocalia of Origen* is „the intention of indirect apology of Origen, as well as of literary answer to the action and rationality of emperor Julianus”.

„Basil excelled in the homiletic genre. He took every opportunity to inspire from Origen, especially in explaining the Old Testament”, taking many times Origen’s method or his interpretation in some circumstances. One can notice this especially in the homilies to psalms and proverbs, but not in the *Hexameron*, as we see that he rejects Origen’s suggestion regarding the temporary beginning, the first day, the concept of matter. Even though, Basil uses more Origen’s *Hexapla* and less his *Homilies to Creation*.

3. Saint Gregory of Nazianz (330 – †389/390)

Along with Basil the Great, he extracted from Origen’s works a „flowerage” named *Philocalia*, a selection cautiously made. In *Teaching on the opinions of Origen, Evagrius and Didymus*, assigned to Barsanuphius of Gaza, we find the accusation brought to Gregory of Nazianz that „... him too supported the pre-existence [of the soul] in his writings, that is in his sermons at Birth of God and Easter” and gives a quotation from Gregory of Nazianz, adding „punishing him too because of those who had sinned before. And in other various writings, Gregory hoped to show himself very clean in his teaching”. In *Oratio 37, 14-15*, Gregory of Nazianz explicitly rejects the idea of pre-existence.

Thus the accusation is not grounded, since Gregory does not state nor defends the pre-existence of the soul in the mentioned writings or in others preserved under his name.

Gregory of Nazianz has a major contribution to the elaboration of *Philocalia* from Origen's writings and, through this, he is worthily included among the origenists. Concerning the doctrines condemned as origenist, one can find any confession in his work about him teaching or defending both apocatastasis and pre-existence.

4. Saint Gregory of Nyssa (335 – †394)

In *Teaching on the opinions of Origen, Evagrius and Didymus*, assigned to Barsanuphius of Gaza, one can find the mentioned accusation brought to Gregory of Nyssa on him defending the pre-existence of souls, but Barsanuphius argues that Gregory, in his writing *On creation of man* „strongly combats the opinions about existence and rejects them”, as other Holy Fathers, without referring specifically to the texts he speaks about.

The question of the pre-existence of the soul is fought by Gregory in the writing *On soul and resurrection* and explicitly shows that the *soul and body simultaneously begin their existence*, thus the souls did not pre-exist the bodies.

In the same writing of Barsanuphius, Gregory of Nyssa is accused of defending the apocatastasis. His works point out that he speaks about a restoration of the „forms of good” which were „replaced by their contrary”.

Saint Maxim the Confessor states, referring to the restoration of Gregory of Nyssa, that „is the restoration of the powers of the soul, fallen by sin, in the estate they had been created. For as all will receive uncorruptiveness through the resurrection of the body when time comes, so they have to leave the perverted powers of the soul, along the prolongation of centuries, the memories of sin dwelling in them and, crossing (the soul) all the centuries and not finding peace, come to God the Endless One. Thus, by the recognition of the goods, not by sharing them, receive again (the soul) his powers and be restored and show that the Creator is not the cause for evil”.

5. Evagrius Ponticus (345 – †399)

Antoine Guillaumont writes: „Evagrius was more origenist than Origen himself”, and Francisc X. Murphy: „it is obvious that between Origen and origenism one can feel the shadow of another theological genius, a champion of asceticism in the Desert of the Fathers and a defender of the mystical tradition which crosses the Christian religion until today, Evagrius Ponticus.” We can understand from here that Evagrius Ponticus has had one of the most important parts in concretizing what is called today Origenism.

In *Teaching on opinions of Origen, Evagrius and Didymus*, one can find the accusation brought to Evagrius, saying that he defended the pre-existence of the soul and the apocatastasis. Barsanuphius does not deny this thing and advises the correspondent not to receive this kind of opinions.

Guillaumont writes in 1961 a study dealing with the link between the Evagrian christology and that condemned in the 15 anathemas assigned to the V-th ecumenical council. Next to the study published next year, A. Guillaumont proves that the edict in 543 refers exclusively to Origen, the anathemas are directed directly against the origenists, and „the 15 anathemas present the doctrine of the origenist monks in Palestine and especially that practiced in 553 by isocrists.”

To conclude, A. Guillaumont states that within the Evagrian works, and especially in the *Gnostic chapters*, „the opinions considered as belonging to the origenists, regarding the pre-existence, apocatastasis, and even metempsychosis” are certified.

6. Saint Maxim the Confessor (580 – †662)

P. Sherwood has proved that especially in *Ambigua* one can find the basic rejection of the origenist myth about the original unity of all spirits in God (*henad*), how they were dispersed in this unity, about their taking a corporeal form of existence and about their return to the original

unity. At the same time, Sherwood pointed out the some chapters among the 200 chapters on knowledge (I, 1, 2, 3, 10) include the same rejection of Origenism as *Ambigua*, but focusedly, suggesting they are subsequent to this writing. After Sherwood, only Maxim fully and definitively underlay the true teaching of the Church against Origenism.

Saint Maxim unifies the fight against the origenist error about the pre-existent spirits in the primordial unity and fallen in bodies, from which they are brought back to that unity, stating the positive role of the movement, thus of the human work. He switches the Origenist three-fold: the henad, the movement by sin, the birth in the corporeal world (*γένεσις*) and the rest in the original henad where the spirits fell from. For Saint Maxim, the creation is first (*γένεσις*), then the movement and at last, as a consequence, the endless rest in God, “all the difficulty is in a philosophical rejection of the pre-existence and post-existence of the souls”.

Although „Maxim correctly uses and explains the texts usurped in a heterodox sense by Origen”, he continues to be a precocious origenist, orthodox at the same time. He uses concepts and sometimes origenian terminology, especially that concerning the Biblical exegesis, fact which determined P. M. Blowers to state that „many of Origen’s fundamental postulates are pointed out in the presentation of the symbolical structure of the Bible at Maxim” and „many of Origen’s theories regarding the inspired text of the Scripture also show up in Maxim”.

One can often notice at Maxim the Confessor a dependence upon Origen. For example in *Answers to Talasius* 28, in *Capita theologica et oeconomica* 2, 66-70 and in various origenian correlations, as well as in *Answers to Talasius* 48 and 65.

Maxim the Confessor is the last Church father to reject the Origenism of his time. After his death, the condemnation of Origen, Didymus and Evagrius is mentioned in the dogmatic decree of the VI-th council, as having occurred in the V-th council. The same thing at the Trullan synod of 692, when the condemnation of Origen, Evagrius and Didymus is reaffirmed by the first canon during Justinian; the VII-th ecumenical council also mentions Origen’s condemnation at the V-th Council but does not mention the one of the Three Chapters.

The origenist disputes cease in the VI-th century, with the V-th ecumenical council. In the VII-th century Maxim the Confessor takes a stand against some origenist ideas, and along the VIII-th century Origen’s condemnation is rarely mentioned, the disputes being practically nonexistent.

Conclusions

The terminology used by Origen will be tacitly exploited by the „origenist” fathers, in thinking, and put to the service of the Church. Thus, Origen is among the first authors using the term *homoousios*, term which will be then used in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed. In addition, we have from him various testimonies about prayer and about its times. In his presentation, Origen uses various hypotheses, which he does not impose to the others. Even though he borrowed most of his doctrinal mistakes from Neoplatonism, „he was never formally or voluntarily heretic, because he was always ready to obey the teachings of the Church”.

He was one of the most ardent enemies of the heretics of his time, fact easily noticeable from Eusebius’ testimonies, and it is unlikely that he was condemned for heresy during his life, as T. M. Popescu points out: „But if Origen was not heretic in his life, he becomes heretic after his death, and that is why, as he could not be condemned in his life as a heretic, because he had been not, he was condemned after his death, because he had become.” Origen had not been found „heretic” in his life as it did not exist the unity of theological measure and evaluation, which is outlined only during the ecumenical councils, and which, considering differently Origen’s hypotheses, the anti-origenists find in them „heretic” teachings. Thus, Origen becomes heretic after his death, by the process of formation and shaping of Orthodoxy.

Origen's history was denatured, according to T. M. Popescu, and his merits continue to be incontestable, in spite of his „erroneous opinions”. Father Isidor Todoran, in his study on Origen, states that „Origen is generally a great thinker and the greatest Christian thinker in the first patristic period. He is, in the East, true father of the systematic theology” and that is why „we believe that Origen can not be considered a heretic. Or, if we make the difference, common in theology, between material heretic and formal heretic – material heretic being that who mistakes the dogma of faith, but not voluntarily and not in conscious and deliberate opposition towards the Church; and the formal heretic is that who persistently defends a dogma of faith contrary to the teaching of the Church, known as such – Origen can only be considered a material heretic. But the material heretic is not a proper heretic”. Furthermore, we can add that „There isn't in the Church any thinker to continue to be so unseen, omnipresent as Origen.”

The „man of steel” – as Origen was called – is the name that fits him, continuing to exist in history as the first systematizer of the dogma of faith, as a prime exegete. He dedicated his entire life to the Church, teaching the catechumens and fighting against the heretics of his time, always awake, living according to the arrangements of the Church and desiring to remain in the Church.

He is a pioneer in exegesis by his allegorical method, which will become the method of the school in Alexandria, as well as by his numerous „opinions” or „hypotheses”, out of which only some will prove to be in full accordance with the teaching of the Church fixed in dogmas during the ecumenical councils.

Origen was a source of inspiration for his successors, from East and West, among whom we mention: Basil the Great, Evagrius Ponticus, Didymus the Blind, Gregory of Nazianz, Gregory of Nyssa, John the Chrysostom, Hieronymus, Rufinus and Augustine, so that we can state, together with father Ioan Ică jr. That „there isn't in the Church any thinker to continue to be so unseen, omnipresent as Origen.” However, he has, in his immense work, doctrinal mistakes which are partially due to his pioneer work, as well as to the historical context where he activates, at the two Catechetical schools, the period before the ecumenical councils, where the dogma of faith was established in a few lines, period when the philosophy, by its followers, attacked and combated Christianity.

Origen was the subject of many disputes which ended by condemning him by an endemic synod in 553, preceded by the condemnation of a local synod of Constantinople in 543 and by the edict of emperor Justinian. He was not considered heretic during his life due to the respect he had, even after his death, in the other Churches, except those in Alexandria and Rome, due to his authority in the Christian world and to his good intentions. He was a firm opposer of heresies and heretics, his entire work being full of the polemic spirit against them. Yet the polemics often lead Origen to abuses of expressions, where anti-origenists discovered later condemnable errors.

The last protagonists who tried to rehabilitate Origen's person are Pierre Nautin, Jean Daniélou and Henri Crouzel. The disputes about Origen and his Orthodoxy will hold the attention of theologians again beginning with the XVI-th century, un-finished yet, and later a series of philologists will join too one of the two sides, pro or against Origen.