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The Doctrinal Position of the Christology of Evagrius Ponticus in the Teaching of the Eastern Church and its Correction by the Eastern Fathers and Theologians

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Abstract

The doctrinal position of the Christology of Evagrius Ponticus is reflected in the dogmatic decisions of the Fifth Ecumenical Council (553) and reconfirmed by the rediscovery and translation in the modern period of the authentic text of the Gnostic Centuries of Evagrius. This has shown once again that the dogmatic decision of the Fifth Ecumenical Council was a just one with respect to the heterodox Christology of Evagrius, conceived in terms of philosophical myth. The theological correction of this Christology was continued by Eastern Fathers and theologians such as Dionysius the Areopagite, St. Maximus the Confessor and St. John of Sinai. The same correction made by the Eastern Fathers concerns the intellectualist spiritual doctrine of Evagrius.

Keywords

Evagrius Ponticus, Christology, nous, unity, spirituality, incarnation

I. The Christology of the Gnostic Heads of Evagrius Ponticus identified in the anathematisms of the Fifth Ecumenical Synod.

In a work renowned for its rigorous documentation, Professor Antoine Guillaumont has researched the doctrinal sources of the condemnation of Origenism at the Fifth Ecumenical Council¹, recognizing part of them in the authentic text of the *Kephalaia Gnostika* of Evagrius Ponticus, found in the Syriac manuscript, newly discovered by him together with Claire Guillaumont in the British Museum². This text differs from that published by W. Frankenberg, corresponding without the slightest doubt to the Greek original, the earlier version being known as a “corrected version”. According to A. Guillaumont, the Synod’s condemnation does not differ essentially from the previous anathematisms, pronounced at Alexandria in 400 and at Constantinople in 553, except in matters of Christology.

Evagrius “heterodox”³ and “curious Christology”⁴ conceived in terms of philosophical myth has the following line: in the beginning there was a henad, a unity, made up of the totality of rational beings (λογικοί). They were created as equal intellects to each other (νόες) and were uniquely to know God, i.e. to acquire original knowledge or Reason and to be united with the divine monad.

These beings were united in the love, knowledge and contemplation of God until a drama occurred: a movement or upheaval touched the original unity and introduced a separation. Rational beings in centrifugal motion have moved away from the original center represented by the direct contemplation of God, according to the speed of their movement conceived as original sin.

¹ A. GUILLAUMONT, *Les “Kephalaia Gnostica” d’Évagre le Pontique et l’histoire de l’Origénisme chez les Grecs et les Syriens*, Paris, 1962, p. 147.

² A. GUILLAUMONT and C. GUILLAUMONT, “Le texte véritable des «Gnostica» d’Évagre le Pontique”, in: *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 142/2 (1952), p. 156-205.

³ A. GUILLAUMONT, “Evagrius Ponticus”, in: *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, Band X, hrsg. von G. Krause und G. Müller, Berlin-New York, 1982, p. 569.

⁴ A. GUILLAUMONT, *Les “Kephalaia Gnostica” d’Évagre le Pontique et l’histoire de l’Origénisme chez les Grecs et les Syriens*, p. 147.

If the primary unity was characterized by direct knowledge of God, different movements have led beings into ever darker realms of unknowing. The movement is seen by Evagrius as a result of the carelessness of primary rational beings in their contemplation. With the birth of this “movement” both the union of the intellects with the monad and the unity existing between them were shattered and brought about distinctions, for fallen rational beings became “souls” and each took upon itself a special destiny to the extent that it departed from God. In His mercy God did not leave them stranded.

Unlike the λογικοί, the first beings, God created the second, material beings. Every fallen rational being has been endowed with a body and moved to a corresponding world. Robbed of true knowledge the fallen intellects have been given a knowledge related to the body and their world. Christ Himself was a rational being equal to those who formed the primordial unity. It knew no movement and remained united with true knowledge, i.e. with Reason. As a rational being it has remained stable and unchanged in the universal turmoil. This mind, having no name of its own, was anointed “King of all rational beings”, for which reason it was also called Christ⁵.

This view of Christ was condemned by the Fifth Ecumenical Council. According to the doctrine condemned by the Synod, this “Christ-intellect” is the one who became the direct creator of the material universe who gave bodies to rational beings according to the analogy of their movements, who became incarnate in matter to save rational beings who were lost, who suffered the death of crucifixion, descended into hell and rose again, and who at the final apocatastasis will restore all to their original unity and they will find their equality with him⁶. These doctrinal aspects presented above are shown in two sources: *the Epistle of Justinian to the Holy Synod and to those who think like him*, preserved by George the Monk (*Chronicon IX, 17*)⁷, and *the 15 Canons of the 165 Holy Fathers of the Holy Synod of*

⁵ I. PERCZEL, “Notes sur la pensée systématique d’Évagre le Pontique”, in: *Origene e l’alessandrinismo cappadoce: III-IV secolo: atti del 5. Convegno del Gruppo italiano di ricerca su “Origene e la tradizione alessandrina”*, Bari, 20-22 settembre 2000, Bari, 2000, p. 278.

⁶ I. PERCZEL, “Notes sur la pensée systématique d’Évagre le Pontique”, p. 278.

⁷ George CEDRENU, *Historiarum compendium*, PG 121, 720-724 b.

Constantinople, published by Fr. Lambeck⁸, and reprinted by Mansi⁹ and Straub¹⁰.

II. The Christology of Evagrius Ponticus in the vision of modern Western theologians

The doctrine condemned by the Fifth Ecumenical Council is also found in Evagrius and he elaborated it with a “consistency of the basic idea pushed to the point of fanaticism”¹¹. Urs von Balthasar who makes this remark adds that this consistency of Evagrius has not been fully discovered in the studies of M. Viller, K. Rahner¹² and Melcher.

It appears more clearly in Hausherr’s studies, without, however, the last veil over Evagrius’ metaphysical conception of the world being drawn aside here¹³. Bousset’s study¹⁴ discovers this metaphysics in its basic principles, but his vision lacks final precision¹⁵. According to Balthasar, Evagrius is “more Origenist than Origen, and from this Origenism (...) Evagrius’ mysticism must be understood”¹⁶.

It is significant what fate befell the fundamental Christian expressions. Evagrius knows creation out of nothing, but this is practically overcome by a totally pantheistic relation of God and mind¹⁷. He knows the Trinity, but it becomes practically an unlimited superpower of the Unity over the Trinity, with clear traces of the subordination of the Persons¹⁸.

⁸ P. LAMBECK, *Commentarius de augustissima bibliotheca Caesarea Vindobonensi, liber VIII*, Wien, 1676, pp. 435-438.

⁹ MANSI, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio*, vol. 9, Veneti, 1763, pp. 396-400.

¹⁰ J. STRAUB, *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum, IV*, Berlin, 1971, pp. 248-249.

¹¹ Hans Urs VON BALTHASAR, “Metaphysik und Mystik des Evagrius Ponticus”, in: *Zeitschrift für Ascese und Mystik* 14 (1939), p. 31.

¹² K. RAHNER, “Die geistliche Lehre des Evagrius Ponticus”, in: *Zeitschrift für Ascese und Mystik* (8) 1933, pp. 21-38.

¹³ Hans Urs VON BALTHASAR, “Metaphysik und Mystik des Evagrius Ponticus”, p. 31.

¹⁴ W. BOUSSET, *Apophtegmata*, Tübingen, 1923.

¹⁵ Hans Urs VON BALTHASAR, “Metaphysik und Mystik des Evagrius Ponticus”, p. 31.

¹⁶ Hans Urs VON BALTHASAR, “Metaphysik und Mystik des Evagrius Ponticus”, p. 32.

¹⁷ Hans Urs VON BALTHASAR, “Metaphysik und Mystik des Evagrius Ponticus”, p. 32.

¹⁸ Hans Urs VON BALTHASAR, “Metaphysik und Mystik des Evagrius Ponticus”, p. 32.

In this way he declares it in words. “In reality, however, he is much closer to Eunomius than to Basil and Nyssian”¹⁹. He knows the Incarnation of Christ, but only as an intermediate episode of cosmic development, which is not definitive: on the contrary, it must be sought beyond the bodily Christ, who is only the penultimate. Not the incarnate Christ, but the Logos is the ultimate to which they aspire²⁰. Christ is only an intermediate step between the pure spirit and the pure spirit²¹. His bodily transformation is only an instruction of the beginning²².

III. The Christology of Evagrius Ponticus expounded in the work *Kephalaia Gnostika*

In chapter 4 of the *Kephalaia Gnostika* we encounter Evagrius’ deviant Christology. According to Evagrius, God cannot be born and die, only Christ who is His Envoy and Anointed can. Evagrie was thus able to read the prologue to the Gospel of John: He was a man of God sent with the name John. He was not the light, but only bore witness to it. (*Another envoy*) was the true light, who enlightened all mankind, who came into the world ... To those who received him and believed in him, he empowered them to become children of God...who were born of God. (*Through him*) the Word became flesh, we have seen his glory, (only) full of grace and truth: “Who can count the grace of God, and search out the reasons of providence, and how Christ leads rational nature through different worlds to union with holy unity?”²³. Only angels have been entrusted with the reasons of providence and the judgment of men²⁴.

¹⁹ Hans Urs VON BALTHASAR, “Metaphysik und Mystik des Evagrius Ponticus”, p. 40.

²⁰ Saint BASIL THE GREAT, *Epistole*, 8, PG 32, 257 A.

²¹ EVAGRIUS PONTICUS, “Kephalaia Gnostica”, III, 55, in: A. GUILLAUMONT (ed.), *Les six Centuries des “Kephalaia Gnostica” d’Évagre le Pontique*, coll. *Patrologia Orientalis* 28, fasc. 1, Paris, 1958, p. 118.

²² EVAGRIUS PONTICUS, “Kephalaia Gnostica”, III, 57, in: A. GUILLAUMONT (ed.), *Les six Centuries des “Kephalaia Gnostica” d’Évagre le Pontique*, p. 120.

²³ EVAGRIUS PONTICUS, “Kephalaia Gnostica” IV, 89, in: A. GUILLAUMONT (ed.), *Les six Centuries des “Kephalaia Gnostica” d’Évagre le Pontique*, p. 174.

²⁴ EVAGRIUS PONTICUS, “Kephalaia Gnostica” V, 7, in: A. GUILLAUMONT (ed.), *Les six Centuries des “Kephalaia Gnostica” d’Évagre le Pontique*, p.178

Christ is King and Head of the angels. His name, the Anointed One, is to be understood as spiritual anointing, as *union with the existing knowledge itself*. He is not the Word, not being consubstantial with the Trinity...he is not science existing in himself, he has it always inseparable in himself, because he is not separated from the contemplation of God and His love. He came together with the Word of God and in the Holy Spirit, only in union with them does He receive the essential science and thus becomes personal science²⁵. "The metaphysics of knowledge and the science of formation together establish the becoming of God, the becoming of the Son"²⁶.

It is not the Word made flesh to make us holy, but the first enlightened and chosen is our true life. He inherited the Word. But the heir is something other than the inheritance. It is not the Word that is the Heir, but Christ. The Word is free from this union²⁷. What can be known spiritually is from Christ, can be known from the whole incarnation of spirits, what is not known is from Him, rests in the Father, i.e. His sending²⁸.

Christ is also the Firstborn from the dead, first risen with a spiritual body, appearing with the body of an angel before appearing among men, as He appeared on the heavenly ladder to James. To the people he appeared as the new high Archpriest after the order of Melchizedek. The Word cannot be a priest. The Archpriest's vestments must be understood spiritually, his crown as steadfast faith, as the true joy of the knowledge of salvation and true love. Christ's miracles bear witness to his appropriation by the Creator together: "As the Creator of spiritual things God was in nothing, but when He created the fleshly nature and the worlds that come from it, He was in His Christ"²⁹.

²⁵ EVAGRIUS PONTICUS, "Kephalaia Gnostica" IV, 14, in: A. GUILLAUMONT (ed.), *Les six Centuries des "Kephalaia Gnostica" d'Évagre le Pontique*, p. 140.

²⁶ A. DEMPE, "Evagrius Pontikos als Methaphysiker und Mystiker", in: *Philosophisches Jahrbuch der Görresgesellschaft*, Bd. 77 (1970), p. 307.

²⁷ EVAGRIUS PONTICUS, "Kephalaia Gnostica" IV, 9, in: A. GUILLAUMONT (ed.), *Les six Centuries des "Kephalaia Gnostica" d'Évagre le Pontique*, p. 139.

²⁸ EVAGRIUS PONTICUS, "Kephalaia Gnostica" IV, 2, 3, 4, in: A. GUILLAUMONT (ed.), *Les six Centuries des "Kephalaia Gnostica" d'Évagre le Pontique*, p. 137.

²⁹ EVAGRIUS PONTICUS, "Kephalaia Gnostica" IV, 58, in: A. GUILLAUMONT (ed.), *Les six Centuries des "Kephalaia Gnostica" d'Évagre le Pontique*, p. 161.

The explained symbolism of Christ's Hierarchy proclaims Him as Teacher and Enlightener of His brethren. It was not the Word who came to earth, descended into hell and ascended into heaven, but Christ, who has the Word in Himself. Not a divine nature, only his love compelled him to it³⁰.

Hans Urs von Balthasar rightly observes that Evagrius knows the mystery of suffering: cross, burial, Resurrection, but these are only symbols for the double process of knowledge: death to the sensuous side and resurrection of the spiritual³¹. Balthasar speaks of an idealism in Evagrius³². The human spirit reaches "from itself" to the negation of the relative because of the Absolute. But it is from the Absolute, revealed in Christ, that he receives the power to affirm the relative about God³³.

IV. Christology and eschatology in the *Kephalaia Gnostika* of Evagrius.

The multitude of the world's reasons disappears through knowledge and the "kingdom of the Son", i.e. the kingdom of the world's manifold reason, which has an end and will be subject to the "kingdom of the Father", i.e. absolute unity³⁴, for the kingdom of the Son is material, that of the Father immaterial knowledge³⁵. Only the Word is natural knowledge in itself. Christ can only receive it and thereby become the image of the Word. Only in this way does He experience deification as the first created and risen from the dead, and only in this way can He be the brother and model of men. The spiritual being of men is equivalent to Him only through the same science.

Humans have flesh only in this world, outside of it they are non-embodied. When Christ is no longer before the Lord in charge of the

³⁰ EVAGRIUS PONTICUS, "Kephalaia Gnostica" IV, 80, in: A. GUILLAUMONT (ed.), *Les six Centuries des "Kephalaia Gnostica" d'Évagre le Pontique*, p. 170.

³¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Metaphysik und Mystik des Evagrius Ponticus", p. 39.

³² Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Metaphysik und Mystik des Evagrius Ponticus", p. 40.

³³ Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Metaphysik und Mystik des Evagrius Ponticus", p. 40.

³⁴ EVAGRIUS PONTICUS, "Kephalaia Gnostica" II, 2, in: A. GUILLAUMONT (ed.), *Les six Centuries des "Kephalaia Gnostica" d'Évagre le Pontique*, p. 60.

³⁵ Sfântul VASILE CEL MARE, *Epistole*, 8, PG 32, 257 B.

various appointments and worlds of all kinds, He will submit to God the Father and give Him His kingdom. After the disappearance of all worlds and time, He becomes like us, the image of His Son, making us like Him, ἰσόχριστοι, partakers of the Father's divine science³⁶.

As can be seen in chapter 5 of the *Kephalaia Gnostika*, Evagrius systematized Origen's eschatology. Decisive are the forms of higher science, superior to the science of understanding the external world and its existence, first of all the theory of the communion of spirits as a primordial and remaining unity, of the unity of the first created in the Spirit of God.

The knowledge of their differentiated incarnations, also Origen's own conception, arises from the revealed saving knowledge of Christ and the angels in their descent from *the heavenly Jerusalem of Revelation* to *the earthly Jerusalem of God* for the enlightenment and guidance of men. The earthly Jerusalem lasts until the coming judgment, the end of the world and the resurrection of the dead with a changed body. The present state of all spirits is the kingdom of heaven which all must inherit in a last time of repentance until every oblation is paid³⁷.

In this unique future world, all spirits see the holy Oneness, the temple of God³⁸. The unity of spirits must become the communion of saints when all nations, to which demons also belong, are cast down before the Lord. Then follows the annulment of all bodily reality, the resurrection of the spirit for the living spirit in the contemplation of God as co-inheritance with Christ. It is not existing science in itself, but borrowed.

The whole teaching about the Church is covered by the universal history of salvation. But it lacks the constitution of the Church, the hierarchy and the mysteries: "It is only a speculative mysticism, a Christocentric mysticism, not a Logocentric one"³⁹. Balthasar rightly states that Evagrius

³⁶ EVAGRIUS PONTICUS, "Kephalaia Gnostica" VI, 33, in: A. GUILLAUMONT (ed.), *Les six Centuries des "Kephalaia Gnostica" d'Évagre le Pontique*, p. 33.

³⁷ EVAGRIUS PONTICUS, "Kephalaia Gnostica" V, 89, in: A. GUILLAUMONT (ed.), *Les six Centuries des "Kephalaia Gnostica" d'Évagre le Pontique*, p. 215.

³⁸ EVAGRIUS PONTICUS, "Kephalaia Gnostica" V, 84, in: A. GUILLAUMONT (ed.), *Les six Centuries des "Kephalaia Gnostica" d'Évagre le Pontique*, p. 212.

³⁹ A. DEMPE, "Evagrius Pontikos als Methaphysiker und Mystiker", p. 309.

knows of a Church but “it has no role or in the highest degree appears as a mystical-celestial monad of pure spirits”⁴⁰.

“Of course, Balthasar points out, he knows the priesthood-but the true meaning of the holy mysteries is an interior-mystical one and the true priesthood is a purely spiritual one.... Of course, he knows the Eucharist, but he spiritualizes it much further than Origen. Of course, he knows the resurrection of the body, the double sentence judgment, hell, but all this only as exoteric teaching, behind which is hidden the esoteric teaching of the becoming of the spirit and the apocatastasis”⁴¹.

V. Correction of the Christology of Evagrius the Pontic by Dionysius the Areopagite

The one who corrected Evagrius theologically is Dionysius the Areopagite. To Evagrius’ doctrine of angels, which includes both Christ as the original and definitive pure spirit and humans, Dionysius opposes the heavenly hierarchy. In the same way, Dionysius opposes to Evagrius’ spiritualist teaching on the Church the hierarchy of the Church with its sacramental fulfilment, but not without its spiritual meaning⁴². From Dionysius there is a mystagogical theology, an understanding of sacramental hierarchy, worship and the mysteries of the Church. By this he completed Evagrius’ statement concerning the leadership of earthly Jerusalem in the heavenly hierarchy of the choirs of angels and in the communion of saints.

A. Dempf wants to attribute the authorship of the Areopagite treatises to the Monophysite patriarch Peter Fullo. It is difficult to support this thesis, especially since we see in Dionysius’ text the affirmation of the dogma of Chalcedon, which Peter Fullus as a Monophysite could not

⁴⁰ Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Metaphysik und Mystik des Evagrius Ponticus”, p. 39. EVAGRIUS PONTICUS, “Kephalaia Gnostica” V, 2, in: A. GUILLAUMONT (ed.), *Les six Centuries des “Kephalaia Gnostica” d’Évagre le Pontique*, p. 177.

⁴¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Metaphysik und Mystik des Evagrius Ponticus”, p. 39.

⁴² A. DEMPf, “Evagrius Pontikos als Methaphysiker und Mystiker”, p. 315.

accept. Dempf states that it would be of particular importance if Peter Fullo's Christological formula could be proved: *unus de trinitatea passus est in carne*, as the opposite thesis to that of Evagrius: *Christus unus ex henade*: "This overcomes the main obstacle of the Kephalaia Gnostica"⁴³.

Dempf wonders if there is any evidence for his assumption. In this direction he points out that just as Evagrius rarely names Origen, on the contrary he praises as coming from him the elucidation of the teaching about the will of universal salvation and the fulfillment of salvation, so Dionysius does not mention either of the two anathematized leaders (Origen and Evagrius)⁴⁴: "In the confessional dispute over Chalcedon's Christology, first by appeal to the Bible and the places of the Fathers, the philosophical determination of the dispute must lead to reconciliation, without authority"⁴⁵.

This interpretation of Dionysius by Dempf, however, does not correspond to Dionysius' theology. If Dionysius had achieved this reconciliation on philosophical grounds alone, to the exclusion of the teaching authority of the Church, meaning here the Bible and the Fathers, he would no longer be in line with the teaching of the Eastern Church and would not have become normative for its theology, as we see for example in the *Ambigua* of St Maxim the Confessor, in which Dionysius together with St Gregory of Nazianz are the great normative theologians of the Eastern Church. It is precisely by using the teaching of the Bible and the Fathers that Dionysius differs decisively from both Origen and Evagrius.

Dempf believes that Dionysius would have discovered an authority similar to that of the Apostles through his pseudonym and that of Jerome, another disciple of the Apostle Paul. He is a great connoisseur of the Bible and has interpreted through inspiration the mystical experience and understanding of Jesus' life. But it is not for authority, as Dempf says, that Dionysius uses the name Areopagite, but for the confidence that he receives directly the teaching of the Apostles and recognizes it as normative, and through Jerome, for the humility that he is in line with the Eastern tradition

⁴³ A. DEMPF, "Evagrius Pontikos als Methaphysiker und Mystiker", p. 315.

⁴⁴ A. DEMPF, "Evagrius Pontikos als Methaphysiker und Mystiker", p. 315.

⁴⁵ A. DEMPF, "Evagrius Pontikos als Methaphysiker und Mystiker", p. 315.

and its teaching, just as we see that St Maxim the Confessor also uses this mode when he speaks in his writings, for example in the *Ambigua* and in the *Answers to Thalassius*, of an inspired elder of the divine mysteries, representing by this mystical name the tradition of the Church Fathers which St Maxim like Dionysius recognizes as normative.

In his work *On Divine Appointments*, Dionysius quotes from the Elementary Theological Teachings of the Most Reverend Jerome:

“The Universal Cause which filleth all things is the Deity of Jesus, whereof the parts are in such wise tempered to the whole that It is neither whole nor part, and yet is at the same time whole and also part, containing in Its all-embracing unity both part and whole, and being transcendent and antecedent to both. This Deity is perfect in those Beings that are imperfect as a Fount of Perfection; It is Perfectionless in those that are perfect as transcending and previousing their Perfection; It is the Form producing Form in the formless, as a Fount of every form; and it is Formless in the Forms, as being beyond all form; It is the Being that pervades all beings at once though not affected by them; and It is Super-Essential, as transcending every being; It sets all bounds of Authority and Order, and yet It has Its seal beyond all Authority and Order. It is the Measure of the Universe and it is Eternity, and above Eternity and before Eternity. It is an Abundance in those Beings that lack, and a Super-Abundance in those that abound; unutterable, ineffable; beyond Mind, beyond Life, beyond Being; It supernaturally possesses the supernatural and superessentially possesses the super-essential. And since that Supra-Divine Being hath in loving kindness come down from thence unto the Natural Estate, and verily took substance and assumed the name of Man (we must speak with reverence of those things which we utter beyond human thought and language), even in this act He possesses His Supernatural and Super-Essential Existence-not only in that He hath without change or confusion of Attributes shared in our human lot

while remaining unaffected by that unutterable Self-Emptying as regards the fullness of His Godhead, but also because (most wonderful of all wonders!) He passed in His Supernatural and Super-Essential state through conditions of Nature and Being, and receiving from us all things that are ours, exalted them far above us”⁴⁶.

VI. The rewriting and redemption of the Evagrian henna through the Christology of Dionysius

This text is a theological confession of Dionysius and at the same time a correction of Evagrius in which the teaching of the incarnate Word takes the place of the doctrine of man or spirit made God found in Evagrius. For Dionysius theology is linked to iconomy: deity and humanity are united in Jesus in an unchanging and unmixed way, existing and being present in spiritual realities as in other things. The Godhead of Jesus keeps the parts in harmony with the whole, adding and exceeding, and having both the part and the whole in itself.

This rewrites the *henad* (ἡ ἐνὰς) of the primordial and definitive communion of saints affirmed by Evagrius. It is redeemed through Jesus, God and man, Evagrius’ claim that deity is in Christ as nous, equal to other rational beings, is corrected. Dionysius has in mind the fundamental goal of salvation history before the world, in the world, beyond the world and after its end. The Godhead is full in the lacking, overflowing in the full. Moved by the love of man, God became truly human, making His own our things common to Himself, unchanged and unmixed. Unchanged and unmixed is a clear confession of Chalcedon. Dionysius silently corrected the heterodox Christology of Evagrius.

⁴⁶ C. E. ROLT, *Dionysius the Areopagite: On the Divine Names and the Mystical Theology*, London, 1920, pp. 42-43. See also the Romanian translation “Dionysius the Areopagite: On the Divine Names and the Mystical Theology”, II, 10, in vol. *Saint Dionysius the Areopagite. Complete works and schools of Saint Maxim the Martyr*, translation, introduction and notes by Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Paideia Publishing House, Bucharest, 1996, pp. 142-143.

A paraphrase of Evagrius' heterodox gnostic Headings is preserved by Stephan Bar Saudhaili, which he published pseudonymously under the name of Jerotei from the Areopagite writings as hidden mysteries of the Church, after appearing *On Divine Names*⁴⁷. An Evagrian replaced the 150 heterodox *Kephalaia Gnostika* of Evagrius with the orthodox ones and thus created the simple conception of Evagrius' mystical work, which was soon translated into Syriac and led to the translation of the original edition. It is not known who, when and where the orthodox edition of Evagrius' *Kephalaia Gnostika* was silently produced. In this way, Evagrius remained for the Syrian Monophysites and Nestorians a celebrated and commented "saint". Dempf justly observes: "It must be elucidated that soon theologians who turn to the reason that symbolizes and not to the old symbolic theology, will worship the heterodox Evagrius"⁴⁸.

It should be noted that the Syriac translator of the Orthodox edition of Evagrius' *Kephalaia Gnostika* is Philoxenus, who was appointed Bishop of Hierapolis by the Monophysite Patriarch Peter Fullo of Antioch.

VII. The correction of the Christology of Evagrius by the Scythian monks and the Eastern Fathers (Saint Maximus the Confessor)

Regarding Peter Fullo's Christological formula, *unus* de trinitate passus est in carne, which Dempf proposes as the opposite thesis to that of Evagrius: Christus *unus* ex henade, it should be pointed out that more proper, deeply orthodox and more suitable to be the actual thesis opposed to Evagrius' Christology is the Christology of the Scythian monks with their formula "*Unus* de trinitate passus est".

Through it the Scythian monks proved to be strong defenders of the dogma of Chalcedon, their Christological formula being based on Scripture and the Church Fathers. The contribution of the Scythian monks to the deepening and elucidation of the expression compound hypostasis (ὑπόστασις σύνθετος) in Christology is remarkable. On the basis of the doctrinal authority of the Fourth Ecumenical Council and the theology

⁴⁷ A. DEMPf, "Evagrius Pontikos als Methaphysiker und Mystiker", p. 316.

⁴⁸ A. DEMPf, "Evagrius Pontikos als Methaphysiker und Mystiker", p. 312.

of St. Cyril of Alexandria, the Scythian monks also linked it to their Christological formula “*One* of the Trinity suffered”, thus affirming its profound meaning concerning the structure of the person of Christ and His saving action. In doing so they also gave a decisive response to the Monophysite and Nestorian heresies.

The one who took the correction of Evagrius’ Christology to new heights is Saint Maximus Confessor. St. Maxim had Dionysius the Areopagite, the Cappadocian Fathers, St. Macarius the Egyptian and St. Diadoch of Photium as models of inspiration in this work.

The modern Western theologians P. Sherwood and A. von Ivanka found in St. Maxim’s explanations a rejection of the originism condemned at the Fifth Ecumenical Council of 553. In the East, Pr. Prof. D. Stăniloae pointed this out in the preface to the translation of the work of St. Maxim *Ambigua*, but also in other theological studies. The teaching contained in the anathematisms of the Fifth Ecumenical Council is not confined to the Evagrian *Kephalaia Gnostika*, but also includes the teachings of Origen. Therefore St. Maxim’s explanations are made not only with strict reference to the doctrine of Evagrius, but also with reference to the doctrine of Origen.

The issues analyzed in depth touch with great precision on the main points of both Origen’s and Evagrius’ teaching, especially the doctrine of movement. In Evagrius this doctrine underlies both his cosmology and his eschatology. Traversing the Origenism of Anathematisms, Saint Maxim theologically corrects both Origen and Evagrius. Evagrius is targeted, because his intellectualist Christology opened the field to a gnosis that eliminates what is essential to Christianity: salvation open to people in sin through the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ, the incarnate Word. The rectification is necessary here on two levels⁴⁹.

For Evagrius, Christ is a pre-existent nous, a rational nature, distinct from all others in that he alone remained united with the Trinity:

“Christ is not the connatural of the Trinity, for he is neither the essential science, but alone always has in him the essential

⁴⁹ I. H. DALMAIS, “L’ héritage évagrien dans la synthèse de Saint Maxime le Confesseur”, in: *Studia Patristica* VIII/2, Berlin, 1966, p. 361.

science inseparably. But Christ, I mean He who came with the Word of God and in spirit is Lord, is inseparable from his body and by union is connatural to his Father, for he is at the same time essential science”⁵⁰.

St Maximus resolutely opposes this dichotomy between Christ and the Word of God. The firm doctrine of Chalcedon enables him to assume all that the Origenian Henada can be and the manner of creatures outside it can. This Henade is replaced by Saint Maximus with the divine Logos because it bears in itself the reasons of all creatures. Christ is this Logos Himself assuming the condition of the creature in His humanity in order to restore it to its original condition, and moreover, to lead it to the final goal, which is Him as the incarnate, dead, and risen One.

This condition is that of man who cannot find fulfilment in himself, but only in God, with whom he unites himself by opening himself to divine love and thereby overcoming self-love. In this perspective, Christ’s suffering, death and resurrection are essential events in his saving work, for in them God’s love as self-giving love is fully revealed. Saint Maxim’s *Ascetic word* reveals the mystery of true knowledge by showing the deep connection between his spiritual work and the increasingly decisive part he takes in the theological disputes in defence of Chalcedonian Christology.

In the end it is a matter of theologically fulfilling the ultimate removal of Origenism anathematized at the Fifth Ecumenical Council of 553, correcting Origen’s and Evagrius’ claims of primordial unity and affirming the Church’s teaching of the hypostatic union of God and human nature in one person in Christ from whom comes the grace of God that transfigures the movement inscribed by God in man since his creation. Thus the movement has its point of departure not in the fall, in the removal, but in God’s creative act by which he inscribes from the beginning in beings their movement towards God as their final goal.

The difference between Saint Maximus and Evagrius Ponticus is most clearly shown in the *Ambigua*, taking on an extent that “puts into play the whole of the Evagrian systematization as a whole from which it is

⁵⁰ EVAGRIUS PONTICUS, “Kephalaia Gnostica” VI, 14, in: A. GUILLAUMONT (ed.), *Les six Centuries des “Kephalaia Gnostica” d’Évagre le Pontique*, p. 223.

impossible to extract some elements without causing them to undergo profound transformations”⁵¹.

But the Eastern Fathers corrected not only Evagrius’ Christology, but also his spirituality in the *Kephalaia Gnostika*. On Evagrius and his work, Fr. Refoule rightly states that “to a certain extent Evagrius is undoubtedly a product of Origenism which was condemned in 400, and it was his work which in a preponderant way would inspire the Origenism of the Palestinian monks of the 6th century”⁵². “The doctrine of Evagrius is therefore incontestably Origenist...His condemnation was justified”⁵³.

This condemnation was made official by the Eastern Church at the Fifth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople in 553.

VIII. The relationship between spirituality and Christology in Evagrius. Their position in the teaching of the Eastern Fathers

In Evagrius the Western researchers saw a mysticism in the literal sense of the word⁵⁴. The question that arises, however, is whether this mysticism can be dissociated from the cosmological framework and metaphysics in which it is expressed. This is because “its place in a system in which the return of the intellect to Unity could only be achieved in cosmological perspectives poses a delicate problem”⁵⁵.

This problem becomes even more difficult when we consider that both Origen and Evagrius laid the groundwork for a pantheistic conception in which all spirits will ultimately be consubstantial with the primary Essence.

In Eastern monasticism, however, things are different. Evagrius’ memory was condemned, his “gnostic” works ceased to be read and retranscribed. His ascetic works, however, will be preserved under the

⁵¹ I. H. DALMAIS, “L’ héritage évagrien dans la synthèse de Saint Maxime le Confesseur”, p. 358.

⁵² Fr. REFOULÉ, “La mystique d’ Évagre et l’ origénisme”, in: *La Vie spirituelle. Supplément*, nr. 66 (1963), p. 457.

⁵³ Fr. REFOULÉ, “La mystique d’ Évagre et l’ origénisme”, pp. 459-460.

⁵⁴ A. GUILLAUMONT, *Les “Kephalaia Gnostika” d’ Évagre le Pontique et l’histoire de l’Origénisme chez les Grecs et les Syriens*, p. 277.

⁵⁵ A. GUILLAUMONT, *Les “Kephalaia Gnostika” d’ Évagre le Pontique et l’histoire de l’Origénisme chez les Grecs et les Syriens*, p. 277.

name of Saint Nil, a Father whose orthodoxy was above suspicion. On the other hand, St. John Climacus and other Hesychast Fathers transmitted the ascetical and mystical teaching of Evagrius, but corrected from any Origenism⁵⁶.

Apart from cosmological perspectives, hesychast mysticism thus preserved the ascetic and mystical teaching of Evagrius corrected by Origenism. However, the principle that was the basis of the reception of some spiritual works of Evagrius in the life of the Church must be seen in the economy of the Church, which according to the model of the early Church received those works not with the value of normative teaching, but with the value of good works to read, so as in the early Church, the *Anaginoskomena* books were received among the canonical books of the Holy Scriptures, but not with normative value, but with the status of “good to read”. This explains the fact that some of Evagrius’s spiritual works were included in the collection “*Philokalia*”, although as observed by I. Hausherr “Evagrian mysticism remains more philosophical than theological, at least in the Trinitarian sense”⁵⁷, understanding by this that Evagrius did not ever integrated Trinitarian theology into his spirituality.

Some modern Western theologians see a profound marking of Hesychastic spirituality and even Western monasticism by Evagrius. His influence appears to them greater than that of St. Gregory of Nazianz and St. Gregory of Nyssa: “By its systematic rigour and simplicity, his teaching was much more easily assimilated than that of the great Teachers”⁵⁸.

In general, in the first half of the last century much was written in the West about the influence of Evagrius’ work on the development and formulation of the ascetic teaching of the Eastern Fathers, as we see in M. Viller⁵⁹. The numerous reprints of Evagrius’ works have done much to clarify this issue. Archbishop Basil Krivocheine says that because of this publishing fame “Evagrius’ importance has been slightly overestimated”⁶⁰:

⁵⁶ Fr. REFOULÉ, “La mystique d’Évagre et l’origénisme”, p. 460.

⁵⁷ I. HAUSHERR, *Les leçons d’un contemplatif. La traité de l’oraison d’Évagre le Pontique*, Paris, 1960, p. 98.

⁵⁸ Fr. REFOULÉ, “La mystique d’Évagre et l’origénisme”, pp. 460, 461.

⁵⁹ M. VILLER, “Aux sources de la spiritualité de saint Maxime: les oeuvres d’Évagre le Pontique”, in: *Revue d’Ascétique et de Mystique*, nr. 11 (1930).

⁶⁰ Archevêque Basil KRIVOCHÉINE, “Évagre le Pontique (346-399)”, in: *Messenger de l’Exarchat du Patriarcat de Moscou en Europe Occidentale*, Nr. 32, Paris, 1959, p. 214.

“The spiritual current represented by the Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius, like the writings of St. Diadoch, has exercised a much greater influence and is more significant in its mystical dimension. Simeon the New Theologian (942-1022), one of the greatest saints of the Byzantine Church, descends from Diadoch in a straight line. Moreover, the mysticism of the «Jesus prayer», which is already found in Nil of Ancyra (430) and which does not appear in Evagrius, left much deeper and more persistent traces than all of Evagrius’ «contemplations» with their many subdivisions. It is no longer possible to consider Saint Maxim Confessor as a mere imitator of Evagrius, as M. Viller tends to do”⁶¹.

These just observations of Archbishop Basil Krivoscheine can be related to the statement that Saint Maximus always remains careful not to let his spiritual teaching flow into Evagrian schemes.

Essentially at Evagrius, his mysticism introduces into the Eastern spiritual tradition a permanent danger: the fatal attraction to pure abstraction⁶². On the other hand, for Saint Maximus his spiritual teaching is ordered in a rectification of the will in such a way that the spiritual life translates a loving identification of the human will with the divine will, in such a way that an exchange is made between them which is called love⁶³.

Fr. Refoulé wonders whether Evagrius’ mysticism is basically Christian or Platonic. According to him this mysticism is Christian in the sense that it involves a soteriology founded on a Christology and that Christ is present here as a necessary mediator: “But this Christology... is utterly heterodox and its soteriology leaves no room for the mystery of the cross and apparently little room for mysteries”⁶⁴.

His turn, I. Hausherr noted that the name of Christ is absent from Evagrius’ *Treatise on Prayer*, and this is a sign of unrest. At the same time not only the external framework of his mystical doctrine is borrowed from

⁶¹ Archevêque Basil KRIVOCHÉINE, *Évagre le Pontique (346-399)*, p. 214.

⁶² Fr. REFOULÉ, “La mystique d’Évagre et l’origénisme”, p. 456.

⁶³ I. H. DALMAIS, “L’ héritage évagrien dans la synthèse de Saint Maxime le Confesseur”, p. 358.

⁶⁴ Fr. REFOULÉ, “La mystique d’Évagre et l’ origénisme”, pp. 461-462.

Middle Platonism, but also his anthropology, which leaves no room for the resurrection of the body and his theory of knowledge⁶⁵.

Recalling Urs von Balthasar's assertion that Evagrius was more Origenist than Origen, Fr. Refoulé wonders whether Origen was himself an Origenist. Hardly, he replies, if we believe H. Crouzel. Refoulé rightly points out that he cannot share Crouzel's entire point of view⁶⁶. The remaining reality is that Origen proposed in *Peri Archon* a system that some of his followers would develop for themselves. But Evagrius could not have written the *Kephalaia Gnostika* without *Peri Archon*: "It remains (valid) that Origenism is not a late invention, still less a «phantom heresy» and the discovery of Evagrius' writings demonstrates this"⁶⁷.

⁶⁵ Fr. REFOULÉ, "La mystique d'Évagre et l'origénisme", p. 462.

⁶⁶ Fr. REFOULÉ, "La mystique d'Évagre et l'origénisme", p. 463.

⁶⁷ Fr. REFOULÉ, "La christologie d'Évagre et l'Origenisme", in: *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, nr. 27, Roma, 1961, p. 266.