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The Politico-Dogmatic Stage of the Apocatastasis' Condemnation. Post-synodal Perspectives

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Abstract

The Holy Scripture distinguishes clearly the ever-lasting penalty, but there are scriptural texts that can be interpreted in the direction of apocatastasis. Based on what has already been mentioned, Origen created under the regime of orientative theological hypotheses, without expectations of it being a dogma, the theory of apocatastasis with debatable Platonic nuances and with more evident universal accents. Saint Gregory of Nyssa develops unequivocally the thesis of universal damnation, though purifying it of any pantheist or spiritual element. He expresses his hope on the unspoken secret of necessary restoration of each conscious creature's liberty. The Church wholeheartedly condemned the later teachings, which have been exhorted the coming back of everyone in the state of pure spirits. After the fifth Ecumenical Synod, the ideas regarding the ideas that suggest the Apocatastasis surpass into a more esoteric register, and it develops the antinomian and apophatic facade.

Keywords

Apocatastasis, Christian universalism, universal salvation, final judgment, eschatology.

I. Introduction

An important characteristic of the final judgement, aside many others which are present in the dogmatic theology, is that of being definitive and

never-ending. These particularities are expressed by The Saviour Jesus Christ Himself in His gospel: “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into eternal life” (Matt 25, 46). The fact that the devil will be condemned to eternal punishment is mentioned in the Holy Scripture: “Then the devil, who had deceived them, was thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulfur, joining the beast and the false prophet. There they will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (Rev 20, 10). The individual responsibility of everyone before God’s Throne of Judgement is strongly highlighted in the writings of the New Testament, especially in the Epistles of Holy Apostle Paul and in the General Epistles: it is mentioned “the day of anger” (Rom 2, 5; I Thess 1, 10), about “the possible perdition” (I Cor 10, 5), about “the double reward” (II Thess 1, 5-10), about the endless repercussions of earthly deeds (II Cor 5, 10).

Being fundamented on these scriptural testimonies, the Ecumenical Synod, which was held at the Constantinople in 553, decides that anyone who learns that the deliverance of the devils and of sinners is just temporary and will end at some point will be severely punished. However, some theologians and Christian philosophers, vaguely and arguably establishing themselves on the interpretation of some scriptural texts, especially Pauline texts (I Cor 3, 13-15; I Cor 15, 24-28; Rom 11, 32-35; Rom 11, 25-26, Col 1, 19-20), also evangelical (Matt 5, 25-26, Lk 12, 58-59, Matt 18, 34-35; Matt 19, 23-26, Lk 12, 47-48) and on some Holy Fathers who had learned the doctrine of Apocatastasis, offered restrictive interpretations and receptions of the decision of the 5th Ecumenical Synod. Among these interpretations, there was a very large popular spread (especially among the Russian Theologians) of the opinion which attests the fact that the Church at the 5th Synod condemned with certainty the affirmation of the Apocatastasis, but not its possibility, possibility which would have instilled the prayer of many saints for their redemption.

II. The establishment of religious teachings and the condemnation of the Apocatastasis. Possible interpretations of the dogmatic judgments

The condemnation of the Apocatastasis subordinated itself to general condemnation of Origenist errors, which, from being simple hypotheses,

reservedly expresses by Origen¹, have evolved to being dangerous major heresies, supported by different Origenist parties, provoking detrimental turmoil to the Church and threatening the Orthodox purity.

Some of his fanatic admirers borrowed and followed as dogmas some of the new teachings that Origen was advancing as hypothesis and as exercises, but on which he would have maybe given up if he had lived more. The enemies of Origen hurried in labelling his works, contributing, as the theologian Teodor M. Popescu said, to the “distortion of Origen’s history”².

“After his death, his ideas were adventurously turned upside-down and caused the appearance of the ill-defined current known as Origenism, in which modern researchers are diligently looking to discern Origen in the bustle of Origenism”³.

¹ Origen offers the Church the right to accept or decline its point of view, and to itself of coming back and changing the done hypothesis. As a result, many of its affirmations should not be taken into consideration as definite formulas, especially the ones from youth, as there as, like many others, the ones from *Despre Principii*. This aspect is described by Origen in the preface of the treaty *De Principiis*: “Only that truth has to be believed in, which does not deviate in the slightest from the apostolic and ecclesiastical tradition”. (according to ORIGEN, *Despre Principii*, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, vol. 8, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1982, p. 17.) In the introductory chapter of the book *Despre Principii*, the headmaster of the Catechetical school of Alexandria affirms that he does not understand his hypothesis as being dogmatic definitive formulations, but simple points of view with the purpose of filling some blank spaces. That is why he declares as being ready to change or remove them as soon as it would be proven to him that they are not in accordance to the real teachings of the Church. Since, according to Origen’s own words, “I am doing this thesis as it is imposed by the course of academic research and our short exposure depicting even more the content of our faith rather than the expectations of some human arguments, as, ultimately, I present more suppositions than precise information: *suspicionis potius quam affirmationes*” and in another occasion, he admits that: “these were exposed for the reason of being the subject of discussions for readers rather than as a definite and established doctrine (*Non potentur velut dogmata esse prolata, sed tractandi more ac requirendi discussa*)”. Therefore, Origen retracts with anticipation any dogmatic mistake situated in his system.

² Teodor M. POPESCU, “Denaturarea istoriei lui Origen”, in: *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, XLIV (1926) 5, p. 246-254

³ Pr. Prof. Sebastian CHILEA, “Despre ipotezele lui Origen”, in: *Studii Teologice*, XXX (1978) 1-2, p. 63.

The non-dogmatic nature of the speculative treaties of Origen, especially *De Principiis*, is very important. Many of the modernists from Origen's era seem to look at him in the same manner as the then authorities of the church. Searching for the "unorthodox" in the writings of Origen, they looked past the beauty of his speculations which are the products of many influences, especially of Neo-Platonism, as well as of spiritual problems with which the Early-Christian⁴ theologians have been faced with.

Regarding the 5th Ecumenical Synod, Ramelli writes: "The so-called condemnation of Origen by the VIth century church did not actually take place, and if it did, it happened just as a result of a long series of misunderstandings"⁵. Ramelli also notes that the ecumenicity of the fifth council is questionable, because it was not jointed by the bishop, but by Justinian⁶. Additionally, his condemnations did not refer to Origen's substantial propositions: "Origen is not the object of an authentic anathema"⁷. As a result, the controversy around the origins of the council questions its authoritarian place in the Christian tradition.

Regarding the decisions taken in the 5th Ecumenical Synod, Mircea Vulcănescu makes some important clarifications. He differentiates between the decision of the Ecumenical Synod and the decision of the Emperor. The Emperor's decision "slices the thing, quite reprehensibly, with the sword, it is clear, categorical and unreserved, concerning, through Origen, any type of teaching which affirms the end of works"⁸.

The punishment of the Origenism (and of the Apocatastasis) had two phases: the first phase in 543 and the second phase, ten years later, in 553:

a) Emperor Justinian, fond of theological problems, for ending the Origenist turmoil he writes a treaty against Origen, one of "the densest and more passionate that have ever been written"⁹, wreathed with ten

⁴ Celia E. RABINOWITZ, "Personal and Cosmic Salvation in Origen", in: *Vigiliae Christianae*, vol.38, nr. 4 (1984), p. 319.

⁵ Ilaria RAMELLI, *The Christian doctrine of Apokatastasis: A Critical Assessment from the New Testament to Eriugena*, coll. *Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae*, volume 20, Brill, Leiden ; Boston, 2013, p. 724.

⁶ I. RAMELLI, *The Christian doctrine of Apokatastasis*, p. 736.

⁷ I. RAMELLI, *The Christian doctrine of Apokatastasis*, p. 737.

⁸ Mircea VULCĂNESCU, Marin DIACONU, *Bunul Dumnezeu cotidian: studii despre religie*, Humanitas, București, 2004, p. 338.

⁹ Ioan COMAN, "Problemele dogmatice ale Sinodului V Ecumenic (5 mai - 2 iunie

Anathematisms. The first nine condemn the Origenist errors – be it cosmological, anthropological, hristological, eschatological, and the tenth one condemns the person, Origen himself, and the people who embrace and exhort his teachings¹⁰. Justinian sends this treaty to the Patriarch Mina of Constantinople, asking him to summon a Synod for the condemnation of Origen, based on the heresies found in his paper *De Principiis*. The Synod took place in Constantinople in January 543 and condemned Origen alongside his teachings. The condemnation decree was signed by Patriarch Mina, by Pope Vigil and by the bishops who were in Constantinople, followed by the rest of the Empire's bishops¹¹. “In the edict offered by the synodals, the idea of Apocatastasis is discredited, considered as being a heinous idea that Emperor Justinian doesn't find the right words to condemn it by”¹². “The ungodly Origen did not keep his cursed teachings for himself, but through his writings he spread his misguidance among many others”¹³, “sneaking up in the hearts of the ones who were of poor spirit and badly hurting the souls of the simple”¹⁴. A faith like that makes people ignorant in the fulfilment of God's orders, it contradicts the words of the Saviour, imposes the conclusion that if punishments have an end, the eternal life of the righteous also has an end (considering that the Saviour characterises both of them with the same word: *αἰώνιος* = ever-lasting). The Embodiment, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection of Christ seem nonsensical¹⁵. The possible existence of the Apocatastasis is disbanded by the following affirmation:

“What is the benefit of those who fought the good fight and were martyred for Christ, if, as in the case of demons, the ones who lack piety can enter through reestablishment the ranks of saints? This to come back over the heads of those who say such myths,

553)”, in: *Studii Teologice*, V (1953) 5-6, p. 316.

¹⁰ Teodor M. POPESCU, “Câteva date istorice la Tratatul Împăratului Iustinian contra lui Origen”, in: *Studii Teologice*, V(1953) 5, p. 21.

¹¹ I. COMAN, “Problemele dogmatice ale Sinodului V Ecumenic”, p. 317.

¹² I. COMAN, “Problemele dogmatice ale Sinodului V Ecumenic”, p. 326.

¹³ Teodor M. POPESCU, “Tratatul Împăratului Iustinian contra lui Origen. Studiu și traducere”, in: *Studii Teologice*, anul 4/1933, p. 53.

¹⁴ Teodor M. POPESCU, “Tratatul Împăratului Iustinian contra lui Origen. Studiu și traducere”, p. 53.

¹⁵ I. COMAN, “Problemele dogmatice ale Sinodului V Ecumenic”, p. 326.

as the words of Christ stand still in the souls of believers and in the truth of things itself¹⁶.

After that, there are several clear texts invoked regarding the never-ending punishment from Saint Gregory of Nazianz, Saint Basil the Great and Saint John Chrysostom. In I. Coman's perception "the theory of the Apocatastasis, the crowning of origenist errors and one of the most dangerous that have been put in circulation by Christian thought jeopardised beyond repair the name and the reputation of Origen. It touched the basis of the Christian belief itself. That is why the Church has punished it unreservedly"¹⁷. This firm conception finds itself in the 9th anathema of the 543 Synod: "Whoever says or supports the idea that the punishment of demons and humans who lack piety is temporary and that will eventually have an end, namely a reestablishment of demons and non-devout people, to be the anathema"¹⁸.

b) Ten years later, in 353, there is a new discussion about the punishment of Origen, at the 5th Ecumenical Synod, but not in the official and plenary meetings, but in its constitution, in the so-called pro-Synod of the 5th Ecumenical Synod. Fr. Diekamp, the best connoisseur of the Origenist issue of the 6th century, specifies that Justinian had already summoned the 5th Ecumenical Synod for the examination of the three chapters when new origenist turmoil in Palestine determines him to ask for a new condemnation of the Origenists from the Synodals already present, but not yet invested in the Synod. If in 543 the person and errors of Origen were especially anathemised, the Emperor asks through a letter addressed to the Synodals of 553 the trial of the Palestinian Origenists¹⁹, especially the isochrists' who were learning a variant of the Apocatastasis, according to which "at the end, everyone would be one and without distinction equal to Christ, as pure intellects"²⁰. Probably, the referral made by the Emperor and addressed to the Synod was motivated not only by the wish to end the

¹⁶ Teodor M. POPESCU, "Tratatul Împăratului Iustinian contra lui Origen. Studiu și traducere", p. 50.

¹⁷ I. COMAN, "Problemele dogmatice ale Sinodului V Ecumenic", pp. 326–327.

¹⁸ Teodor M. POPESCU, "Tratatul Împăratului Iustinian contra lui Origen. Studiu și traducere", p. 63.

¹⁹ I. COMAN, "Problemele dogmatice ale Sinodului V Ecumenic", p. 317.

²⁰ Vasile SIBIESCU, *Împăratul Iustinian I și ereziile*, Tipografia Carpați, București, 1938, p. 147.

Origenist turmoil (which would have had political consequences), but also the duty of dogmatic importance of the problems caused by Origenism²¹. However, “the 5th Ecumenical Synod does not provide new solutions for the debated problems, but makes exclusively a work of critique addressed to the doctrinarian errors”²². This work was materialized in 15 anathemas, the only acts of the pro-Synod, acts which were kept only in the answer addressed to the Emperor’s Synodals²³. Those 15 anathemas of the 553 pro-Synod differ from Justinian’s 10 anathemas of 543, as they almost forget about Origen; they do not even mention his name and have a regard only for Greek philosophy, the spring of his heresies. Although the 15 anathemas do not touch Origen, but only his alleged heretic disciples, still, the 11th anathema of the plenary Synod enumerates Origen alongside the other heretics from the history of the Church.

According to the first anathema, “whoever honours the image of pre-existence of souls and the Apocatastasis which is related to it to be an anathema”²⁴. Moreover, “whoever says that the life of spirits would be similar to the life from the beginnings, when the spirits were not fallen and lost, so that the end and the beginning would be the same and that the end would be the true measure of the beginning, to be the anathema”²⁵. In addition to this, the restoration of demons is expressively condemned by the 12th anathema²⁶.

The condemnation of Origenism, generally, and of the Apocatastasis especially, highlights at least three difficult problems:

- a. The problem of canonical value of the 15 anathemas;
- b. The possibility of a restrictive interpretation of anathemas which targets the Apocatastasis.
- c. The referral of some certain causes of profundity (of socio-historical nature) of Origen’s condemnation, which offers a new perspective of its interpretation and discusses its actual dogmatic value.

²¹ I. COMAN, “Problemele dogmatice ale Sinodului V Ecumenic”, p. 327.

²² I. COMAN, “Problemele dogmatice ale Sinodului V Ecumenic”, p. 325.

²³ V. SIBIESCU, *Împăratul Iustinian I și ereziile*, p. 147.

²⁴ Teodor M. POPESCU, “Tratatul Împăratului Iustinian contra lui Origen. Studiu și traducere”, p. 63.

²⁵ Teodor M. POPESCU, “Tratatul Împăratului Iustinian contra lui Origen. Studiu și traducere”, p. 63.

²⁶ John MEYENDORFF, *Hristos în gândirea creștină răsăriteană*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1997, pp. 56-57.

Regarding the canonical value of the 15 anathemas, newer researchers, amongst which can be mentioned Henri Crouzel, highlight the lesser historical and canonical value of the 15 anathemas related to the 5th Ecumenical Synod. "These do not appear in the official acts of this Synod: as a result, they are not, canonically, an Ecumenical Synod"²⁷, probably having been discussed in the official opening of the Synod.

Concerning the possibility of a restrictive interpretation of the anathemas which target the Apocatastasis: citing the anathemas in the consistent passages I and XV (cited above), Mircea Vulcănescu, in his article "Condamnarea lui Origen", concludes that the Synodals do not keep the categorical formula requested by Justinian, but condemn the doctrine of Apocatastasis depending on the pre-existence of souls²⁸. The opinion of Bulgakov is invoked, according to which "it is not condemned the hope that one day God will be everything in everyone, but only the doctrine in its Origenist form, that being the isochrists' spiritual Pantheist Apocatastasis"²⁹.

As for the critiques brought by Justinian on Apocatastasis, though serious and profound, they are not decisive and impassable. The Apocatastasis does not necessarily imply, as Justinian was thinking, a total relativization, even a futility of scapegoating acts and of Saint's necessities, much less the sacrifice of Christ. For if the Apocatastasis had been possible, it would have been possible just because of Christ's sacrifice, because of the love of Saints, because of their prayer for the redemption of everyone, and, lastly, because of the fact that sinners from Hell would be convinced, conquered and would eventually receive freely this love. On the other hand, the dreadful sufferings of Hell, whom they will be forced to endure until the restoration, as well as their state with numerous steps lower than the Saints, after the restoration, are easily-conceivable elements which would decrease considerably the relativization of good that was mentioned by Emperor Justinian.

During the 4th century, the Roman Empire and the Church go through a metamorphosis of large proportions, a decisive social and cultural mutation

²⁷ Henri CROUZEL, *Origen: personajul, exegetul, omul duhovnicesc, teologul*, Ediția a 2-a, Deisis, Sibiu, 2014, p. 434.

²⁸ Petre SEMEN, *Părinții capadocieni*, Editura Fundației Academice "Axis", Iași, 2009, p. 93.

²⁹ P. SEMEN, *Părinții capadocieni*, p. 93.

of the Christian history and of Europe for approximately a millennium, mutation which made the problematic thinking and the daring theology of Origen pretty obsolete.

The diverse society is pluralistic, spiritually centred on the “advancement and self-realisation of the people transforms into a barracks, rigorously ranked, militarised and codified, focused on the inflexible values of the collectives”³⁰. In Christianity, the collectivisation of belief will lead to an ideological degradation of dogmas at the level of problematic emblem-formulas and to the solidification of tradition in rigid expressions with conservative-only functions. The endless dogmatic fights among the different created parties, arguments worn usually not on the topic of background, but for the simple emblem-words, will lead to lamentable abuses, to acts of violence hard to describe, which ended in schisms and exclusions; it was a state of total exasperation of binary logic, of Orthodox type – heretic, Bible – culture, Church – society, soul – body, with the correlative loss of sense for nuances and diversity³¹.

The study and the lively rethinking of biblical and patristic tradition will be replaced with the boring apotropaic repetition of some abstract forms; the amputated asceticism of mystical and Gnostic dimensions, which had become monasticism in the traditional and actual sense of the word, will be more and more deviated to a routinely asceticism with a collective end, whose cardinal principle would be total hierarchic obedience and the refusal of any Gnosis and discussion about faith³².

Unfortunately, the persecution and condemnation of Origenism fitted perfectly in this evolution. “The Alexandrian teacher, with his philosophy of freedom and its sincere followers of its theology based not only on devotion and piety, but also on thinking, on investigations, on hypotheses and discussions, painted an anachronistic image in this society and Church, which has become authoritarian, obsessed with its monolithic ideal of unity”³³.

“Today, though, this type of rigid and authoritarian Christianity has fallen since half a millennium, and the Modern Era, which

³⁰ H. CROUZEL, *Origen...*, p. 29.

³¹ H. CROUZEL, *Origen...*, p. 29.

³² H. CROUZEL, *Origen...*, p. 30.

³³ H. CROUZEL, *Origen...*, p. 34.

lives under the fascination of liberty, of willingly-assumed contradictions, of culture's last interrogations, discovers Origen with his modality of theologising both spiritually and culturally, both biblically and philosophically³⁴.

Through this, Origen becomes our great contemporary, and his Apocatastasis one of the most difficult theological problems of the current times.

In relation to how it appears, though, the condemnation of Origen does not need to be searched for in causes of sociological nature, but on the contrary, in conservative reasons of divine providence.

III. Maximus the Confessor and the level of understanding of the Apocatastasis after the 5th Ecumenical Synod

As a consequence of the condemnation of the teachings concerning the Apocatastasis of the 5th Ecumenical Synod, the problem of universal restoration (explained in Origen's and Gregory of Nyssa's terms) was shut down and silenced due to easily-understandable reasons. There remains one question: whether the Apocatastasis remained for ever to be catalogued as a heresy? Or, do not some of its senses emerge into an esoteric register?

Approximately a century after the closure of the 5th Ecumenical Synod, Saint Maxim the Confessor (580 - 662), considered one of the brightest theologians pertaining to the Patristic era³⁵, refines at maximum capacity the theory of Apocatastasis, offering it through this a note of originality to Saint Gregory of Nyssa.

Maxim the Confessor rarely talks about Apocatastasis, and only when he is urgently asked. Thus, in the 13th question, the following question is addressed to Maxim: "Because to those who do not understand the height of thought of Gregory of Nyssa it seems that he often admits the restoration (Apocatastasis), please tell me what do you know about it?"³⁶.

³⁴ H. CROUZEL, *Origen...*, p. 36.

³⁵ P. SEMEN, *Părinții capadocieni*, p. 93.

³⁶ Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Filocalia sau Culegere din scrierile sfinților părinți, care arată cum se poate omul curăți, lumina și desăvârși*, vol. 2, Humanitas, București, 2009, p. 193.

The widely-known text regarding the Apocatastasis for this Holy Father is the following:

“The Church knows three restorations (apocatastases). The first one is of each person in relation to their virtue. The second is that of a complete nature in Revival, it is the restoration in life and incorruption. And the third one, about which Gregory of Nyssa talks a lot more in his treatises, is the restoration of soulful power which was smitten in sin, in the state that they had been created. For as well as all would eventually receive through their revival of the body the incorruption, like so they have to deliver themselves from the perverted powers of the soul, during the prolonging of times, the memories of sin lodged in him, and, passing through the times and not finding rest, to come to God, The One Who has no end. And thus, through the acknowledgement of goods, not through the communion of them, to receive the spiritual powers and to be restored and to show that the Doer is not the cause of evil”³⁷.

In another passage, for question 73, being asked about the Pauline text, situated at 1 Corinthians 3, 13-15, speaks in the same sense:

“Regarding the sinners, their belongings get burnt through the judgement from the consciousness, which burns the conscience; it abolishes the sins and redeems the man, but it deprives him of the virtues which he did not accumulate or train in the previous time. But even in the next century, the things of sin melt into inexistence the nature receiving back its powers through fire and judgement”³⁸.

For question 26, which reminds of the sin against The Holy Spirit, Maxim clarifies:

“because memory is not able to remember the errors of the entire time, for the man to repent for them, the Master of nature, in His

³⁷ D. STĂNILOAE, *Filocalia...*, vol. 2, pp. 193–194.

³⁸ D. STĂNILOAE, *Filocalia...*, vol. 2, p. 221.

love for people, ordained for us as well, the ones who do not repent, two modalities of repentance in the next century. Thus, when one sins with indifference, but afterwards he acts good also with indifference, either moved by pity or sympathy for his neighbour, or by other philanthropic reasons, his deeds will be judged in the time of future at the time of judgment and, seeing his inclination for the latter, will obtain forgiveness. This is one modality. The second modality is the following: when whoever is guilty of sins, but hearing God's word: «Do not judge in order not to be judged», he is afraid and does not judge anyone when he researches what has happened will not be judged, like one who followed the order of God. But the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and unfaithfulness, not being forgiven in any case, if only the sinner will gain faith, fairly the one who ends his life in unfaithfulness will not be forgiven for the sin of unfaithfulness³⁹.

This text, through the affirmation of being sorry in the century that is to come, might be associated with a partial Apocatastasis. There will be rejection only for the ones who sinned against the Holy Spirit: they will not have the possibility of repentance in the future, they will not be able to become faithful, because – as the above text mentions – the future repentance must have a base, a starting point in the present life. And we think it is appropriate to hope that in most cases, if not for all cases of people, God, through His providence, created such a base that he planted something good in their souls.

In another occasion, Maxim making a reference to the first state of angels, he notes that:

“the eternal chains are the complete and continuous lack of movement of their will to do good, because of which they will not benefit from God's forgiveness; or the power that stops them, according to the providence of God. And for our repentance, in their rage against us, it is not allowing them to bring to an end their crafts of evil against us. And the darkness is the total ignorance of the Holy Gift, ignorance which, being fully engulfed in their pleasurable will, they cannot rejoice for the happy and

³⁹ D. STĂNILOAE, *Filocalia...*, vol. 2, pp. 199–200.

luminous reception of the clean light, spending its given power of thought in the preoccupation with nothingness. At last, what will happen to them in the frightening day of Judgement only the Judging Right knows, who will give each and every one the righteous reward according to their worthiness and will share by the measure of evil the way of the punishment, deciding justly the proper fate of everyone for the eternal times”⁴⁰.

A certain ambiguity exists here as well, as it is good to know that according to the evangelical teachings, the devils will be tortured in eternal fire. Therefore, it is not clear what Maxim is referring to in this case when he expresses his lack of knowledge, all the more so the fact that it interests us close to nothing the methods of torture, as the essential and decisive fact if these are not eternal. The question is: did Maxim the Confessor think about this aspect?

“The nature will come back to itself, regaining the lack of sins and incorruption. Since the sinners, meaning the causes of sin will die and all will be without sin and without corruption. And all will know the real Kingdom, some through enlightenment, others through punishment. But not all will rejoice in goods. And those who will, they will not rejoice accordingly”⁴¹.

In the passage: “The entire steep valley will be filled”⁴², Maxim refers to the ones who dutifully prepared the way of God and did right by Him, not everyone’s, meaning the ones who did not prepare the way of God and did not do right by Him⁴³. “There will be humiliation for all the spirits of false knowledge and of sin. Because the Word of God Itself will destroy and usurp and conquer their sly dominion, raised against human nature. There will be no more heights of sin and lack of knowledge”⁴⁴. So, the descent down the cunning, spiritual mountains and hills means the reestablishment

⁴⁰ Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Filocalia sau Culegere din scrierile sfinților părinți, care arată cum se poate omul curăți, lumina și desăvârși*, vol. 3, Humanitas, București, 2008, pp. 59–60.

⁴¹ D. STĂNILOAE, *Filocalia...*, vol. 3, p. 105.

⁴² D. STĂNILOAE, *Filocalia...*, vol. 3, p. 152.

⁴³ D. STĂNILOAE, *Filocalia...*, vol. 3, p. 155.

⁴⁴ D. STĂNILOAE, *Filocalia...*, vol. 3, p. 156.

of the body and of the natural powers of the soul and in their ordinance/
That is why he says:

“«And the entire body will see the redemption given by God». Through the whole body, it is understood that that the body which is faithful. After «And I will spill from My Spirit on the whole body», meaning on the entire body who believed. So, not the whole body, generally, will see the deliverance of God, as the body of the unfaithful will not see it if the word which says the following is true: «The unfaithful must die in order not to see God's glory»⁴⁵.

Beyond the slight ambiguity created by the conditional “if”, Maxim concludes like so:

“And maybe to those who search for the highest of meanings will hear differently, on the basis of this gift, in soul free of ardour, like in a wasteland, the voice of reason and of Godly knowledge which hails soundlessly through virtues. As one and the same Word makes everything for everyone, according to everyone, going through everyone and anticipatedly offering itself and its gift as a forwardly-moving voice, which prepares everyone for His coming. In some, this gift becomes repentance, as an anticipator of future righteousness. And it acomodates to His over-natural and human-loving rationale, through which he transforms into everything for everyone, for repenting everyone with His rich mercy”⁴⁶.

“Above nature there is the understood Godly pleasure, whom God obtains for nature, unifying according to Gift with the deserving. And contrary to nature is the unspoken suffering which is born from a lack of that pleasure, which God obtains for nature, unifying outside of the Gift with the undeserving. For God, uniting with all in accordance with the quality of the disposition in each and every one, He gives them, as He knows,

⁴⁵ D. STĂNILOAE, *Filocalia...*, vol. 3, p. 157.

⁴⁶ D. STĂNILOAE, *Filocalia...*, vol. 3, p. 158.

the relevant feeling, in relation to how each man got ready through himself for the reception of the One who will unite with all at the end of times”⁴⁷.

But how is ontologically possible a unification without the Gift of God with the punished? We believe that it is about unification at the level of old-fashioned human potentials through man’s will, but at a last level, a divine level, are already actual data.

“Their place, of the unfaithful and of the sinner, is unknown to those who enrich more or less the hidden knowledge. As the word «where» indicates, of course, a place which is not without a spatial circumscription. Compared to their place, the righteous place is distinguished through the fact that it is displayed through the word «where», as the right received through the gift, as a place above «where», God Himself, in the way it was promised. And whoever will not follow Him for receiving from their relation to Him happiness, will be a constituent of the body which lacks the work of life offering the soul. Because one who cannot receive God in oneself to work happiness into him, where would he show up once he has fallen from the Godly life, above the eternal time, above time and space? If we remain at the first meaning, at the affirmative, the unfaithful and the sinner who will show up «somewhere», will not be in the least free from the circumscribed life beyond all places. And if we receive the second meaning, the negative one, it is necessary to ask ourselves where would the unfaithful and the sinner show up once they would not have God anymore, Who embraces all happy life and Who will be the place for all righteous ones? [...] And, simply speaking, if the righteous barely repents, with much difficulty, what would be understood of the one who did not want to be faithful in the present, earthly life?”⁴⁸.

Maxim himself searches for an answer to these questions in Scolia 19:

⁴⁷ D. STĂNILOAE, *Filocalia...*, vol. 3, pp. 278–279.

⁴⁸ D. STĂNILOAE, *Filocalia...*, vol. 3, pp. 301–302.

“God through one and the same unlimitedly powerful will of kindness will encompass all angels and people, be it good or bad. But not all these will share themselves with God, Who finds Himself in all willingly (ἄσκεπτος). The ones who did in everything the will which was not in conformity with nature, making it into a factor of scattering of natural reasonings, in opposition with the reason of happiness, will fall from the Godly grace due to the dissipation of their will from God’s will, through the befriending of this will with an evil existence. By doing this, they distance themselves from God, not having the rationale of happiness, seconded by will, through the work of good, in which the Godly life gets used to show itself. Under the relation of existence in accordance to eternal life, God will encompass everyone, being present in all, but under eternal happiness will He comprise exceptionally only the angels and the saintly people, leaving those who are not like that the eternal unhappiness as a fruit of their will”⁴⁹

Unfortunately, this text, though wanting itself to be explicative, says less than the anterior ones. It is a regressive explanation, a return to the simple truth of the dogma. It seems to tell us that the unification without the Gift of God with the punished ones is unification at the level of pure existence and nothing more.

Taking into consideration the fact that these series of texts, more or less contradictory, we can notice that they cannot cover the major contradiction, which is frightening through its lack of meaning, already preset in the first cited text. If the soul returns to God, leaving the memories of sin, if he admits the divine goods, if its powers will be restored, what is preventing it from imparting with them? If the souls of the punished will regain its first beauty and grandeur and all evil will be melted in nonexistence, what is preventing him to share from the eternal happiness? If all the powers of the soul are restored, is it not its will as well? Is their restoration not done through Gift? In what sense was it possible for a giftless unification of God with the punished to be talked about? What difference is there between this unification from the end and the state from present life, in which the sinners are also united under the aspect of a pure existence with God? The soul

⁴⁹ D. STĂNILOAE, *Filocalia...*, vol. 3, p. 304.

which comes back to God, how does it not have any movement towards Him? Was its restoration exterior? Do the virtues which harmed through not working in the earthly life not have their seeds in the the reasons of the restored nature and also here their power of growth? Only a divine exterior righteousness prevents the happiness of these purified beings. If there is nothing evil left in there, what meaning does their eternal suffering have? Is this eternal and pure suffering a Christian one? By conserving the total sense of freedom and of all that was possible (or will have been) in the past?

Priest Gregory Dinu offers an explanation of Hans Urs von Balthasar. Detecting only in an exterior way the contradiction between the cited texts of Saint Maxim the Confessor, von Balthasar thought that the solution of this problem could be found in an esotherical plan through the annullment of one of its terms, and that being the affirmation of eternal punishment, term which would have only one exoteric function, the pedagogical one. In this sense, he highlights a third series of Saint Maxim's texts , regarding the problem of evil, texts which he interprets from the perspective of their affiliation with the Origenist and Cappadocian exegesis.

“For Origen, the tree of the terrestrial paradise, in the meantime a tree of life and a tree of knowledge of good and bad, it secretly expresses the fact that the everything returns to God. He corresponds to the double mystical character of the cross-tree on which the good (Jesus Christ) and the bad (the devil) were crucified simultaneously. Gregory of Nyssa followed Origen in this interpretation of the heaven's tree”⁵⁰.

A very important aspect is uncovered by Maxim when he speaks about the meaning of the tree of life and death. Asked by Thalasia over the meaning of the tree, Maxim offers a moral interpretation, after which he affirms that: “This is the way the tree should be understood, by an interpretation which everyone can understand, as the higher more secret sense is reserved for those with a mystical thinking, we have to glorify it through silence”⁵¹.

⁵⁰ Hans Urs VON BALTHASAR, *Liturgia cosmică: lumea in gândirea sfântului Maxim Mărturisorul*, Doxologia, Iași, 2018, p. 218.

⁵¹ D. STĂNILOAE, *Filocalia...*, vol. 3, p. 32.

Regarding the word of Apostle Paul: “In this way, he disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross” (Col 2, 15) he says:

“There is, of course, a higher and more mystical meaning of this word. But, because, as you know, the hidden meanings of the Godly dogmas must not be given in writing, we should be thankful with what had been said until now, which can slow down the prying thinking. And if God would help me to become more deserving in front of you, we will carefully display the apostolic meaning, as well”⁵².

Challenged with a new question which refers to the tree of paradise, he highlights one more time the fact that: “The great teachers of the Church, being able to tell lots of things on this topic, through the Gift in them, decided that it is better to glorify the place silently, not wanting to tell anything deeper, due to the incapacity of the many to rise to the understanding of the things said”⁵³.

These texts seem conclusive for Balthazar:

“He mostly did not want that the Apocatastasis to be preached so openly, like Gregory of Nyssa and Origen did. The history of Origenism showed sufficiently the disastrous effects of this imprudence. An esotericism like the one Origen had practiced was only half-measured. The veritable esotericism meant «to honour silently». The beginners and the ones who were imperfect need fear, we do not need to imprudently open their eyes to the abyss of mercy. And who is the imperfect who is not in danger of falling himself?”⁵⁴.

Indeed, it is highly probable that Maxim would have taken into consideration the fact that in his esotericism was a lesson about Apocatastasis, but we cannot know for certain if this would have been identical with Origen’s one or Gregory of Nyssa’s. We have reasons to

⁵² D. STĂNILOAE, *Filocalia...*, vol. 3, p. 78.

⁵³ D. STĂNILOAE, *Filocalia...*, vol. 3, p. 145.

⁵⁴ H. U. VON BALTHASAR, *Liturgia cosmică...*, pp. 224–225.

believe, according to the cited texts, which it was distinct compared to theirs, through its profundity and its integrating contrary character and through its super rational and ineffable nuances. These can be noticed in a sort of measure intuitively through the questions which we tried to blame on the contradictions which appear in his texts. Probably deducing this fact, Balthazar looks to remain on a balanced position: “We must, also, admit that based on Christ and the Bible the sinners will be punished with eternal punishment. To council this antinomy is not the business of terrestrial theology”⁵⁵.

The teachings of Maxim the Confessor represent the culmination of Patristic thought regarding the Apocatastasis. It represents the basis and offers the force lines over any eschatological thinking.

IV. Conclusions

In this article, I showed what is the position of the Ecumenical Synod summoned at the Constantinople in 553. With all existent reserves regarding the canonical and dogmatic value of the decisions of the 5th Ecumenical Synod concerning the Apocatastasis (decisions taken before the official constitution of the Synod) and beyond the social nature causes of these decisions, we can conclude that the Church condemned categorically the affirmation of the Apocatastasis, rather than its possibility. After the 5th Ecumenical Synod, the ideas regarding the existence of the Apocatastasis pass in a more esoteric register and it develops its contradictory and apophatic side. Therefore, Saint Maxim the Confessor, who represents the culmination of Patristic thought concerning the Apocatastasis, teaches both the inferno and the universal restoration. Thus, he reinforces to the maximum the mystery of final destinies, as he asks himself what will prevent the repentance of those who are in hell, once the powers of their souls would be entirely restored?

⁵⁵ H. U. VON BALTHASAR, *Liturgia cosmică...*, p. 231.