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Origen's Theology in Modern Western Scholarship and the Maximian Criterion of Discernment: Reappraisal, Selective Reception, and Christological Reconfiguration

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Abstract
This article examines the modern Western reappraisal of Origen's theology in relation to the theological synthesis of Saint Maximus the Confessor. It argues that contemporary scholarship, while distinguishing Origen from later radical Origenism, retrieves the Christological, hermeneutical, and anagogical dimensions of his thought. The study analyses contributions by Hans Urs von Balthasar, Jennifer Newsome Martin, Mark McInroy, Paul M. Blowers, Adam G. Cooper, Pascal Mueller-Jourdan, Torstein Tollefsen, Vladimir Cvetović, István Perczel, and Georges Florovsky. It shows that Saint Maximus receives certain Alexandrian insights concerning Scripture, movement, freedom, and deification, while reordering them within a Christocentric ontology of creatio ex nihilo, historical fall, and eschatological transfiguration. The article concludes that the Maximian reception offers a balanced criterion of discernment: selective retrieval, doctrinal purification, and Christological reconfiguration of the Origenian legacy.

Keywords
Origen, Saint Maximus the Confessor, Origenism, Christology, creatio ex nihilo, apocatastasis, deification, patristic theology

Premises: Origen, Origenism, and the Stakes of Reappraisal

The modern reappraisal of Origen begins from an essential methodological distinction: that between the Alexandrian theologian and the *Origenism* systematized at a later stage. In contemporary scholarship, Origen is often interpreted as an exploratory author, whose reflection operates through hypotheses and theological models rather than through dogmatic definitions in the later sense of the term. This interpretive framework allows for the reassessment of controversial themes, such as pre-existence, apocatastasis, and the relationship between God's eternity and creation, without reducing them to polemical caricatures. At the same time, it requires an honest engagement with patristic criticism and with the conciliar rupture of the sixth century, in order to avoid an uncritical rehabilitation.

Western Reappraisal: Scripture, Logos, and Christocentric Hermeneutics

In twentieth-century Western theology, Origen is significantly retrieved as a theologian of the Logos and of Scripture. Balthasar, in particular, emphasizes the inner coherence of Origenian theology and its role as a key to the later Greek tradition, insisting that exegesis and spirituality are not peripheral domains in Origen, but the very place where theology is tested and verified. In this perspective, Scripture is understood as the medium of the Logos' presence: the Word is not merely the theme of Scripture, but the way in which God gives Himself through the sensible forms of the text and of interpretation. This reading supports a reappraisal in which Origen appears less as a structural dualist and more as a theologian who understands pedagogically the relation between letter and spirit, as well as the relation between ecclesial experience and knowledge[1].

[1] Jennifer Newsome Martin, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Critical Appropriation of Russian Religious Thought*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana 46556, 2015, p. 24. Jennifer Newsome Martin emphasizes that Origen was an interpreter and lover of the Word of God, whose theology was deeply rooted in the Logos. Hans Urs von Balthasar stated in a 1976 interview that he felt most at home with Origen. Likewise, in his posthumous work *My Work: In Retrospect*, Balthasar identifies Origen as the most sovereign mind of the early centuries and describes his

Body and Spirit: The Spiritual Senses without Disdain for Corporeality

An important result of the Western reappraisal is the correction of the intellectualist cliché often attributed to Origen. In Balthasar's reading, as presented by Mark McInroy, the episode of Simeon, "my eyes have seen your salvation" (Luke 2, 30), becomes an example of the fact that bodily sight may be interpreted as the fulfilment of an already existing, yet incomplete, faith. Corporeal vision is not an obstacle, but a mode of encounter with Christ, and union with Him does not entail the evacuation of the Incarnation, but its deepening. In this key, the theology of the spiritual senses does not function through the abolition of the sensible, but through its transfiguration: the spiritual does not replace the bodily, but assumes it as a pedagogical medium of revelation[2].

collection of Origen's writings, *Geist und Feuer*, as, even today, the most important book he had ever published. Balthasar goes further, stating that Origen possesses the most logical and coherent theology of the patristic age, purified of gnostic additions, and represents an almost inexhaustible source of spiritual and theological stimulus for all later Christian thought, especially for Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor. For Balthasar, Origen, rather than Irenaeus, offered the key to the whole of Greek patristics, to the early Middle Ages, and indeed even to Hegel and Karl Barth.

[2] Mark McInroy, *Balthasar on the Spiritual Senses Perceiving Splendour, Published to Oxford Scholarship* Online, August, 2014, p. 32. Mark McInroy shows that, for Origen, Simeon's seeing of Christ with bodily eyes is, in fact, superior to his previous faith grounded in reason. In a tone that anticipates his own constructive use of the spiritual senses within theological aesthetics, Balthasar describes Origen's understanding of the vision of God as follows: This path [toward the vision of God] does not entail abandoning the incarnate Christ; on the contrary, union with Christ is brought to fulfilment precisely through His flesh (*sein Fleisch*). Through this interpretation, Hans Urs von Balthasar offers an anti-dualist reading of Origen, recovering the positive dimension of corporeality within the economy of revelation and contemplation. Instead of opposing spiritual sight to physical perception, Origen, as Balthasar presents him, revalorizes the eyes of the body as instruments of the saving encounter with Christ. Simeon's vision thus becomes an example of the fulfilment of faith through sight, in a way that anticipates the sacramental meaning of Christ's body in later patristic theology. For Balthasar, this emphasis on the body (*das Fleisch, sein Fleisch*) is not accidental, but fundamental: the vision of God does not imply the overcoming or abandonment of incarnate reality, but an ever deeper penetration into its mystery. In this sense, he places the theology of the spiritual senses within an aesthetics of the Incarnation, a vision in which beauty, revelation, and salvation pass through transfigured matter, rather than in spite of it. This approach reconciles the

Creation *ex nihilo*, the Eternity of Sovereignty, and the Risk of a Co-eternal Reading

Another major point concerns the tension between *creatio ex nihilo* and Origen's statements about God's eternal omnipotence. Adam G. Cooper shows that Origen consistently upholds creation out of nothing and rejects the eternity of matter, even though he employs relational language, such as God as Father, Master, and Almighty, which may suggest the necessity of a term upon which divine sovereignty is exercised[3]. Paul Blowers offers a more nuanced interpretation: the atemporal affirmation of divine sovereignty does not refer to the co-eternity of the material world, but rather indicates the framework within which Origen conceives a dependent, contingent, and mutable spiritual order, ontologically distinct from God[4]. Thus, the

sensible and the spiritual, Scripture and the body, within a hermeneutic of the real presence of the Word in the world.

[3] Adam G. Cooper, *The Body in St. Maximus the Confessor*, Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 81. Adam G. Cooper emphasizes a fundamental position in Origen's thought: *creatio ex nihilo*. He also insists that there was no time when God was not almighty and sovereign over His creation, although this claim was later misinterpreted as implying the co-eternity of the world with God. For Origen, especially when viewed within the context of Middle Platonism, it was sufficient to affirm the absolute ontological priority and superiority of the Creator over His spiritual and material creation. Yet, in *On First Principles* 2.1.4 (SC 252, 240-244) and 4.4.6-7 (SC 268, 414-418), he also makes the well-known statement that there was no moment (*χρόνος*) in which God was not almighty and sovereign over His creation. Cooper shows that this passage brings to light a fundamental tension in Origen's thought, situated at the intersection between Greek metaphysics and biblical revelation. On the one hand, Origen affirms a relational principle: God's omnipotence necessarily implies the existence of an other over which it is exercised, an idea that recalls the ontological structures of ancient philosophy, in which being is defined through relation and act. On the other hand, Origen remains faithful to the Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, repeatedly stressing that the material world is not eternal, but was brought into existence by the free will of God. Thus, he avoids a circular metaphysics of ontological necessity while affirming an economy of relation: God does not need the world in order to be God, yet the decision to create manifests His sovereignty in its fullness. In this sense, omnipotence does not become a logical constraint, but an expression of divine love and freedom.

[4] Paul M. Blowers, *Drama of the Divine Economy – Creator and Creation in Early Christian Theology and Piety*, Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 143. Paul M. Blowers, referring to the fact that Methodius, or at least the anti-Origenist interlocutor in his dialogue *Xeno: On Created Things*, later accused Origen of openly maintaining the co-

tension does not necessarily lead to co-eternity, yet it explains why later reception could generate suspicious readings: pre-Nicene language and the metaphysics of the period render certain formulations vulnerable to reductive interpretations.

Apocatastasis: Nuanced Restoration and the Dramatic Parable of Finality

In Paul M. Blowers' reading, apocatastasis cannot be reduced to an eschatological monism. Although the model may initially appear as a return to *stasis*, Origen explicitly rejects the Stoic determinism of cosmic cycles and allows for the possibility of successive aeons only as hypothetical scenarios in which freedom continues to operate. At its deepest level, the *telos* surpasses the beginning: the divine economy is not limited to the correction

eternity of the world with God, emphasizes that: "Nevertheless, the fragments of this dialogue, transmitted by the Byzantine encyclopedist Photius, do not offer an accurate account of Origen's teaching and may rather represent the conclusions that Methodius and others drew from his theological vision. In fact, Origen's statement, when viewed in the context of other relevant passages from *On First Principles*, refers only to the spiritual or intelligible creation, which, although it participates in the eternity of the Creator, is in no way equal to Him, being ontologically subordinate, contingent, and morally changeable. This creation remains after the Creator, after the Word, even if this posteriority is not defined in strictly temporal terms. By contrast, material creation certainly has a beginning in time and space". The theological interpretation of this passage highlights the tension between the affirmation of God's absolute sovereignty and the risk, perceived by Origen's critics, of a cosmology that appears to suggest the co-eternity of creation with the Creator. Origen insists that God has always been almighty and sovereign, which implies the eternal existence of a reality over which He reigns. This claim, however, does not concern material creation, which clearly has a temporal beginning, but refers to the spiritual order, to the intelligible creation, which participates in divine eternity without being ontologically equal to it. Although this vision may be superficially interpreted as a form of co-eternity of the world with God, Origen clearly distinguishes between the absolute eternity of God and the derived, dependent, and mutable character of rational creatures. Thus, he never confuses the divine order with the created order, even though he employs a language that transcends ordinary temporal categories in order to express the relation between God and His spiritual creation. See also Pascal Mueller-Jourdan, *Typologie spatio-temporelle de l'Ecclesia byzantine. La Mystagogie de Maxime le Confesseur dans la culture philosophique de l'Antiquité tardive*, Brill Leiden, Boston, 2005, p. 67.

of a cosmic failure, but aims at fulfilment[5]. Moreover, the emphasis on *allagē* change in relation to the resurrection allows the final state to be interpreted as transfiguration rather than as the abolition of corporeality, while the final *stasis* becomes the stabilization of freedom in an eternal communion of love and knowledge, rather than an ontological fusion into God[6].

[5] Paul M. Blowers, *Drama of the Divine Economy – Creator and Creation in Early Christian Theology and Piety*, p. 92. Paul Blowers shows that, although Origenism promoted a restoration to an undifferentiated unity, Origen himself conceived the theory of *apokatastasis* as a dramatic parabola of eternity, in which the end transcends the beginning through the permanent unity between God and rational natures, rather than as a total ontological fusion: "The portrait Origen draws of the origin and destiny of the world seems, at first sight, quite different from that of Irenaeus, since the dynamic of history appears to be one of resolving essential spiritual creatures into a primordial beatitude, in other words, a literal apokatastasis, as a swift return to *stasis*, rather than a patient growth toward an unprecedented perfection. Yet Origen, who firmly rejected the Stoic doctrine of deterministic world cycles and who admitted the possibility of successive worlds, called in Scripture aeons or ages (cf. Wis. 13, 9), only as hypothetical scenarios in which free will would continue to operate, shares in substance Irenaeus' conviction that the *telos*, or final purpose, of creation's restoration must surpass its beginning, so that the Creator's providential economy is not reduced to a mere correction of cosmic failures". Origen's interpretation of salvation history, although apparently different from the Irenaean view through its emphasis on a rapid restoration of creatures to a state of primordial stability (*stasis*), cannot be reduced to a cyclical reabsorption into the Absolute, whether of a Stoic or gnostic type. On the contrary, Origen explicitly rejects cosmic determinism and introduces, through the idea of successive aeons, a dynamic and pedagogical framework in which the freedom of creatures is preserved and educated. Although he uses the term *apokatastasis*, he does not conceive it as a simple return to the point of departure, but as an eschatological transfiguration of the whole creation, in which the end is not equal to the beginning, but transcends it.

[6] Paul M. Blowers, *Drama of the Divine Economy – Creator and Creation in Early Christian Theology and Piety*, p. 92. Paul Blowers shows that Origen brings divine providence close to a logic of fulfilment, in which history is not a corrected accident, but a pedagogical space of love and freedom, through which God leads rational creatures toward a stabilized, yet free, union with Him. In this vision, the eschaton becomes the supreme expression of the divine economy, through the restoration of order and through the realization of a perfect and unconfused communion between Creator and creature: "In fact, Origen's constant devotion to the divine incarnation in Jesus Christ and his restraint in defining the resurrection as a final annihilation of corporeality, the operative term being change (*allagē*, cf. 1 Cor 15, 51-52), rather than spiritualization, testify to his valuation of embodied existence as a vehicle for the education of creaturely freedom and for the assimilation of creatures to God. Origen certainly affirms this end as a return to *stasis*, the stability in the bosom of the

In this formulation, apocatastasis takes the form of a dramatic parable: the end does not reproduce the beginning, but transcends it.

The Conciliar Rupture and the Maximian Solution: Constructive Critique and Selective Rehabilitation

In later patristic tradition, radicalized Origenism was received as a defective metaphysics, especially through the doctrines of pre-existence, the punitive interpretation of matter, and the eschaton as the annulment of differences. Adam G. Cooper captures the central issue: such a scheme weakens the positive meaning of creation and risks transforming the creative act into a reaction to a primordial crisis[7]. In the same direction, the anti-Origenist

Father of creatures that have finally been subjected to Christ and in whom God has become all in all (1 Cor 15, 25-28). Yet this return or restoration is not an ontological fusion into the being of God; it is, rather, an eternal relation, an unbounded horizon of perfected love and knowledge, a sublime stabilization of creaturely freedom at the end of its formation in the face of evil. Viewed retrospectively, what Origen imagines is a dramatic parabola of eternity rather than a monistic circle of being, in which the end transcends the beginning by becoming a permanent unity between God and rational natures". Origen's conception of creation and restoration proves, as a whole, more nuanced than a hasty reading of apocatastasis as a simple return to the origin of being would suggest. Far from proposing a monistic circularity or an annulment of the difference between Creator and creature, Origen affirms a divine economy in which the beginning is surpassed by the end: creation is called to a new stability, acquired through formation, free choice, and communion. In this sense, incarnation, corporeality, and freedom are not obstacles to be overcome; they are essential pedagogical means within the spiritual itinerary. Final restoration does not consist in the ontological absorption of creatures into God, but in an eternal relation of love and knowledge, in which personal difference is preserved and transfigured in unity. Thus, the Origenian *telos* is not the mere repair of the world; it is its perfection in communion.Top of FormBottom of Form

[7] Adam G. Cooper, *The Body in St. Maximus the Confessor*, p. 56. Adam Cooper shows that, in later patristic tradition, radicalized Origenism was characterized as a form of defective metaphysics, since its assumptions concerning the pre-existence of souls and the punitive character of creation undermine the positive meaning of the creative act. Its foundations, namely the pre-existence of souls, their fall from an original contemplative state, and the creation of the material world as punishment, weaken the free and positive character of divine creation. From this perspective, creation appears less as an expression of God's goodness and wisdom and more as a corrective response to a primordial failure, while matter is viewed as a prison for fallen souls.

literature, especially Pseudo-Caesarius, as István Perczel shows, explicitly rejects pre-existence and the interpretation of the garments of skin as a symbol of punitive corporeality, reaffirming the unity of body and soul and the eschatological value of the body[8]. Within this climate, the anathemas

Such a conception stands in deep tension with the Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, according to which God creates out of nothing, not from necessity, but out of love and freedom, granting the world an intrinsically good and teleological meaning. Precisely this consistent application of *creatio ex nihilo* enables Saint Maximus the Confessor to reject Origenist metaphysics and to recover the vision of creation as a providential act, in which plurality, movement, and matter are not signs of a fall, but conditions of the fulfilment and transfiguration of creation in Christ.

[8] István Perczel, "Pre-existence and the Creation of the Wold in Pseudo-Caesarius", in *Questioning the World – Greek Patristic and Byzantine Question-and-Answer Literature*, edited by Bram Demulder, Peter Van Deun, Brepols Publishers, Turnhout, Belgium, 2021, p. 319. Critics such as Pseudo-Caesarius explicitly rejected these theses, denouncing both the doctrine of pre-existence and the tendency to dematerialize the body and the cosmos, which they considered incompatible with the reality of the Incarnation and with the eschatological destiny of creation, as István Perczel shows. Pseudo-Caesarius distinguishes between the creation of the soul (Gen 1, 26) and the formation of the body (Gen. 2, 7). Avoiding an anthropomorphic approach to the idea of image and likeness, he focuses on the physiology of human conception and rejects three theories: the coexistence of soul and body (*synhyparxis*), the priority of the body (*methyparxis*), and the pre-existence of the soul (*prohyparxis*). He maintains that only the body-soul composite constitutes the human being, thus formulating the paradox according to which the soul is neither contemporary with, nor prior to, nor posterior to the body. After establishing the distinction between creation and formation, Pseudo-Caesarius addresses the theme of the body's fashioning and the nature of Paradise, explicitly rejecting the allegorical interpretation attributed to the "most impious Origen". Perczel shows that his implicit sources are drawn from Epiphanius' *Ancoratus*, whose anti-Origenist discourse he follows closely. He refutes the idea that the garments of skin in Genesis symbolize the bodies received by fallen souls and rejects the Origenist conception according to which embodiment is a punishment for a pre-existent sin. By reaffirming that soul and body are created together, although through distinct acts, Pseudo-Caesarius excludes both pre-existence and the posteriority of the soul in relation to the body. His anti-Origenist critique thus reaches a decisive point, offering a unified theological vision of the human being. In his interpretation of the image and likeness of God, he maintains that the divine image is found neither in the body, nor in the soul, nor in the intellect, but in the immortality of the soul and in the vocation to exercise dominion over creation, an ambivalent formulation that may indicate the presence of a divine, immortal, and governing principle in the human being. This vision culminates in a description of the deified saints, who participate in this principle and remain united with it. Finally, after rejecting any bodily resemblance between the human being and God, Pseudo-Caesarius interprets the divine image not as a natural likeness, but as a prefiguration of the Incarnation, through which the human being becomes the living image of God, as Perczel emphasizes.

of the Fifth Ecumenical Council of 553 function as a normative threshold, even though historical analysis requires caution when directly attributing all forms of later Origenism to Origen himself[9].

At this point, the decisive importance of Saint Maximus becomes clear. Florovsky summarizes the shift of centre: in Saint Maximus, revelation is intelligible Christologically, and the entire economy is explained in the Person of Christ, the God-Man[10]. Consequently, Saint Maximus can take

[9] István Perczel, "Pre-existence and the Creation of the Wold in Pseudo-Caesarius", p. 339. István Perczel shows that the conciliar documents of Constantinople in 553 explicitly targeted certain passages from Origen's treatise *On First Principles*, insofar as these were interpreted as providing a basis for the thesis of the pre-existence of souls, for the reduction of material creation to the status of punishment, and for the prospect of a final restoration that annuls differences and corporeality. The condemnation of these fragments established the Church's rupture with the Origenist reading of history and the cosmos, reaffirming the positive character of creation and the eschatological value of the body. The doctrine of the pre-existence of souls, officially rejected by the Church on several occasions, constitutes the central issue in the comparison between Origen's fragment and the paraphrase offered by Pseudo-Caesarius, as Perczel shows. Although the differences in expression and clarity are notable, the conceptual structure of the two texts remains convergent. Writing in a post-condemnatory context, Pseudo-Caesarius could not openly support a theory associated with Origenism without risking suspicion of heresy; he therefore resorts to a more opaque form of expression, avoiding the direct exposition of controversial positions. Nevertheless, elements of vocabulary and theological logic reveal a certain continuity with Origenist thought, suggesting that the author's intention is not merely polemical, but may also be conservative with regard to certain ideas transmitted through tradition. Moreover, the fact that the text aligns more closely with other anti-Origenist writings preparatory to the Council of 553 indicates a subtle positioning: Pseudo-Caesarius places himself within a discourse that appears faithful to orthodoxy, while reinterpreting, and perhaps even retrieving, certain Origenist concepts in a form acceptable to the dogmatic climate of the period, as Perczel emphasizes.

[10] Georges Florovsky, *Byzantine Fathers of the Sixth to Eighth Century*, Editor Richard S. Haugh, transl. Raymond Miller, Notable & Academic, New York, 1987, p. 216. Father Florovsky shows that: "... it is the idea of Revelation that defines the whole plan of Saint Maximus' reflections, as it did also for the Apologists and for the Alexandrians of the third century. Yet the originality and strength of Saint Maximus' new doctrine of the Logos consist in the fact that his conception of Revelation is developed from a Christological perspective. Saint Maximus begins, in a certain sense, from Origen, yet he surpasses both Origen and Origenism. Christology is not simply included within the doctrine of Revelation; rather, the mystery of Revelation becomes visible in Christology. It is not the person of Christ that requires explanation; everything is explained in the person of Christ, the person of the God-Man". The theology

up tools and insights from the Alexandrian tradition, while reconfiguring them dogmatically. A structural example is the inversion of the triad: instead of the logic of rest → movement → creation, associated with the myth of a pre-cosmic fall, Saint Maximus affirms creation → movement → rest, where creation is a positive beginning, movement is teleological dynamism, and rest is eschatological fulfilment[11]. Against this background,

of Saint Maximus the Confessor emerges as a mature synthesis that assimilates and transcends the Origenian legacy through a Christological reconfiguration of the concept of Revelation. Whereas in Origen the Logos was conceived rather in functional or ontological terms, as the mediating principle between God and creation, in Saint Maximus the Logos is the Person of the incarnate Word, the ontological and epistemological centre of the entire theological edifice, as Father Florovsky shows. The originality of Saint Maximus consists precisely in his reversal of perspective: the mystery of Revelation becomes fully intelligible only in the light of Christ, the God-Man. Revelation is thus more than the communication of divine truth; it is real participation in divine life through union with Christ. This vision reorients the whole of Christian cosmology, anthropology, and hermeneutics, overcoming the metaphysical ambiguities of Origenism and integrating the entire divine economy into a Trinitarian and Christocentric paradigm, in which the person of Christ becomes the ultimate key for understanding creation and salvation.

[11] Vladimir Cvetović, "Re-interpreting Tradition: Maximus the Confessor on creation *Ambigua ad Ioannem*", in: *Questioning the World – Greek Patristic and Byzantine Question-and-Answer Literature*, edited by Bram Demulder, Peter Van Deun, Brepols Publishers, Turnhout, Belgium, 2021, p. 151. Vladimir Cvetovic shows that: "Anyone even vaguely familiar with the work of Saint Maximus the Confessor knows his famous triad: *genesis* creation, *kinesis* movement, and *stasis* rest. Although this recalls Philoponus' arguments, according to which God not only gives the impulse of movement to creatures through the act of creation, but also directs it and constitutes its final goal, the triad, according to Sherwood's interpretation, actually represents Saint Maximus' rearrangement of the Origenist triad: *monē* state, *kinesis* movement, and *genesis* birth or becoming, thus forming the backbone of the rejection of Origenism. Saint Maximus' reconfiguration of this triad has as its main purpose the rejection of the Origenist myth according to which the original fall of creatures resulted from satiety, *koros*, in the contemplation of God". Cvetovic also shows that there are certain differences in contemporary scholarship regarding Origen's perspective. Thus, unlike Sherwood, Andrew Louth mentions another triad present in Origen: *genesis – stasis – kinesis*. The reason for this apparent discrepancy lies in the fact that, within Origenist thought, two creations can be conceived. The first is an eternal creation, in which God creates from eternity beings who contemplate His essence. The second represents the divine response to the movement, *kinesis*, of created beings and to their attachment to angelic, human, or demonic bodies, a divine punishment for the violation of original unity. The Origenist triad can therefore be interpreted in two ways: if the eternal

pre-existence and the henad are rejected, while *Ambigua* 7 becomes a place of exegetical and ontological clarification: the patristic formulas invoked by the Origenists are reinterpreted within the register of the *logoi* and of the historical fall, rather than within that of a pre-cosmic drama[12]. Finally, recent research, especially that of Vladimir Cvetović, shows that Saint Maximus is at once an anti-Origenist theologian and a critic of an extremist anti-Origenism that would biologize the life to come and fail to grasp the meaning of transfiguration[13].

creation is taken into account, the triad is *genesis – stasis – kinesis*; if the second creation is considered, in which the human being is enclosed in a material body, creation must be understood as a consequence of movement, and the triad takes the form *stasis – kinesis – genesis*.

[12] Torstein Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St. Maximus the Confessor*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2008, p. 71. Torstein Tollefsen shows that: "According to Sherwood, *Ambigua* 7 forms part of Saint Maximus the Confessor's critique of Origenism. In this text, Saint Maximus comments on a difficult passage from one of Saint Gregory of Nazianzus' theological orations, which contains the expression: 'we, being a portion of God and flowing down from above.' These words seem to have been taken up by the Origenists in support of their doctrine of an original henad of intellectual beings around God and of their pre-cosmic fall. In this context, the essential question is: how should the words of the Theologian be correctly understood? In what sense can intelligent beings be considered portions of God? For Saint Maximus, it was inconceivable that a venerable Father of the Church could have erred theologically. Therefore, he could not accept the Origenist interpretation according to which intellects had existed as individual beings in two phases: first, in an original unity around God, and then as fallen beings within a cosmos created in order to educate them toward a virtuous life". Starting from the interpretation of the Gregorian text, "we, being a portion of God and flowing down from above", Saint Maximus the Confessor reacts against the way in which the Origenists instrumentalized this formulation in order to support the doctrine of an original henad of intellects around God and of a pre-cosmic fall. He considers it unacceptable that a venerable Father such as Gregory of Nazianzus should be interpreted in a heretical sense. From this conviction emerges an apologetic hermeneutic in which Saint Maximus refuses to accept the idea that rational beings first existed as distinct persons in a pre-existent phase of unity and then, as a result of a fall, entered into corporeal existence. Instead, he develops a theology of creation and fall anchored in historical temporality and in an economy of salvation centred on Christ, rather than in the cyclical rehabilitation of a lost unity. Thus, he dismantles the ontological presuppositions of Origenism and affirms a theological anthropology grounded in freedom, incarnation, and eschatological destiny, as Tollefsen shows.

[13] Vladimir Cvetović, "Re-interpreting Tradition: Maximus the Confessor on creation *Ambigua ad Ioannem*", p. 153. Cvetović emphasizes: "I do not intend to continue

Thus, Saint Maximus functions as an Orthodox filter: he delineates the cosmology of the pre-cosmic fall and the reductive eschaton, while retrieving the anagogical dynamism and the seriousness of the spiritual itinerary, integrating them into an anthropology of deification that includes the transfigured body. Here the most balanced form of reappraisal becomes visible: neither total rehabilitation nor simplistic condemnation, but Christological selection and reordering.

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following Sherwood's line of research in order to demonstrate that Saint Maximus held an anti-Origenist position throughout his entire work. Rather, I wish to shift the emphasis away from his anti-Origenism, since I consider it counterproductive to insist on Origenist issues in Saint Maximus' work or to view his entire corpus as an extensive critique of Origenism. Saint Maximus lived almost a hundred years after the peak of the Origenist crisis, at a time when its consequences had largely been overcome. The terminology in *Ambigua* 7, which Saint Maximus uses as a weapon against those who expressed their positions in such terms, should not be regarded as Origenist. As recent studies by Benevich and Lévy have shown, the purpose of Saint Maximus' re-examination of the Origenist problem is not the restoration of polemics with the Origenists, but a precise definition of the Orthodox attitude toward an extremist anti-Origenism, which called into question the form of salvation and the future deification of the human body. Therefore, the second part of *Ambigua* 7 is devoted exclusively to questions concerning the metaphysical structure of the human being, his concrete and historical condition, and his final destiny. It seeks to reject anti-Origenist claims according to which, in the life to come, human beings will continue to breathe air and to retain veins through which blood flows, arguing instead that the human being will be completely permeated by the fullness of God". Cvetović thus emphasizes a mature reappraisal of Saint Maximus the Confessor's position toward Origenism, inviting a nuanced reading of his work. Rather than presenting Saint Maximus exclusively as an anti-Origenist polemicist, this interpretation presents him as a theologian who, while fully aware of the excesses of Origenism and of its problematic implications, seeks a balanced Orthodox position between the condemnation of heretical doctrines and the risks of a radical anti-Origenism. The central concern of his reflection becomes the formulation of a coherent Christian anthropology and eschatology, in which human deification also includes the transfiguration of the body. Through this approach, Saint Maximus affirms corporeality in eternal life while rejecting a crudely biological understanding of it. He thus reaffirms the spiritual destiny of the human being as an integral person, open to the fullness of God. In this way, *Ambigua* 7 appears as a profound theological intervention in the determination of the Orthodox meaning of salvation in the body.

Conclusions

In contemporary Western scholarship, Origen's theology is being re-appraised within a broader reflection on the patristic tradition. The studies of Jennifer Newsome Martin, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Mark McInroy highlight the Christological and hermeneutical dimensions of Origenian thought. From this perspective, Scripture is understood as the locus of the Word's incarnation, while anagogical interpretation becomes a path of spiritual participation in the Logos. This line of interpretation emphasizes Origen's profound influence on the Greek tradition, especially on the theology of Saint Maximus the Confessor.

Another level of modern research is represented by studies devoted to Origenian cosmology and anthropology. The works of Paul M. Blowers, Adam G. Cooper, Pascal Mueller-Jourdan, Torstein Tollefsen, and Melchisedec Törönen analyse the way in which Origen's theology influenced the development of Maximian thought. These studies show that many Origenian statements must be interpreted within the theological speculations of the period, rather than as definitive dogmatic assertions. At the same time, they highlight the way in which Saint Maximus the Confessor reformulates Christian cosmology through his emphasis on *creatio ex nihilo*, on the dynamism of movement toward God, and on the eschatological finality of creation.

Recent studies, such as those of István Perczel, Vladimir Cvetović, and Georges Florovsky, analyse the historical context of anti-Origenist polemics. They show that many controversies related to Origenism must be understood in relation to the doctrinal and institutional development of the Church. Within this framework, the theology of Saint Maximus the Confessor appears as a balanced formulation, rejecting the excesses of radical Origenism as well as the tendencies of an extreme anti-Origenism.

The studies of Hans Urs von Balthasar and the analysis presented by Jennifer Newsome Martin show that Origen's Trinitarian reflection must be understood within the context of pre-Nicene theology, when the concepts of consubstantiality had not yet been definitively formulated. From this perspective, the language of subordination expresses primarily

a theological order of relations, rather than an ontological difference of nature.

Paul M. Blowers shows that Origen's statements concerning the eternal sovereignty of God do not imply the co-eternity of the material world. Rather, they indicate the way in which Origen conceives the existence of a spiritual order dependent on God, marked by contingency and mutability. In the same sense, Pascal Mueller-Jourdan and Adam G. Cooper emphasize that Origenian reflection on creation must be interpreted within the theological speculations of the period, when cosmology was still undergoing conceptual articulation.

A fundamental aspect of Origen's theology is the emphasis placed on the freedom of rational creatures. This interpretation is also indirectly supported by modern studies devoted to Maximian cosmology. Torstein Tollefsen and Vladimir Cvetović show that the theology of Saint Maximus the Confessor develops and corrects this vision, affirming the positive character of creation's movement toward God and integrating creaturely freedom into a teleological ontology.

The doctrine of universal restoration remains perhaps the most controversial dimension of Origenian theology. Contemporary research, especially that of Paul M. Blowers, proposes a more nuanced interpretation. Final restoration should not be understood as the ontological absorption of creatures into God, but as the stabilization of creaturely freedom in perfected communion with the Creator.

One field in which Origen's contribution is almost unanimously recognized is biblical hermeneutics. Hans Urs von Balthasar, together with the interpretations presented by Mark McInroy, emphasizes the deeply Christocentric dimension of Origenian exegesis. Scripture is conceived as a textual form of the Logos' incarnation, while anagogical interpretation becomes a path of spiritual participation in the mystery of the Word. This perspective explains the major influence exerted by Origen on the Greek patristic tradition, especially on the theology of Saint Maximus the Confessor.