Greek Philosophy and the Problem of Evil in Clement of Alexandria and Origen

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ABSTRACT

In spite of the acrimonious criticism issued against it, Greek philosophy always exerted an irresistible attraction to Christian writers of the first centuries. Not only did their censure of divine anthropomorphism, mythology, and polytheism rely on Greek philosophical precedents. Surprisingly, also their attacks against Greek philosophy itself often resorted to philosophical interschool polemics. This paper, however, focuses on the positive and creative side of this appropriation: during the second and third centuries Clement of Alexandria and Origen raised the cultural level of Christian theology by their large use of the Greek philosophical discourse. The present study focuses on how they dealt with the problem of the existence of evil in the context of God's creation and traces their approach back to Greek philosophical precedents.

Keywords: Theodicy, Greek philosophy, Christianity, Judaism, Apocalypticism

RESUMEN

A pesar de su ataque contra la filosofía griega, los autores cristianos de los primeros siglos siempre se vieron atraídos por la filosofía griega. No sólo su censura del antropomorfismo divino, la mitología y el politeísmo partía de los precedentes sentados por los filósofos griegos, sino que incluso los ataques contra la propia filosofía se basaban, a menudo, en la polémica entre escuelas filosóficas. El presente estudio se centra en el lado positivo y creativo de dicha apropiación: durante los siglos segundo y tercero Clemente de Alejandría y Orígenes elevaron el nivel de la teología cristiana gracias a una amplia integración en la misma del discurso filosófico griego. El análisis del tratamiento de estos autores del problema del mal en el contexto de la creación divina proporciona un ejemplo excelente para acercarnos a dicha integración.

Palabras clave: Teodicea, filosofía griega, judaísmo, cristianismo, apocalíptica

It is well known that in spite of a not always profound criticism of Greek philosophy and culture, the Christian attitude towards Hellenism was in general one of appropriation rather than one of rejection[1]. It is true that, in their attempts to define

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[1] This is documented in numerous studies. See L. Shortt, *The Influence of Greek Philosophy on the Mind of Tertullian* (London, s.a.) 10 and R.E. Witt, "The Hellenism of Clement of Alexandria", *CQ* 25 (1931) 195-204; see, in general, H.A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers* (Cambridge, MA,

their own identity, early Christians needed to adopt a critical position against Hellenism in order to delineate, even if negatively, clear borders between pagan religion and philosophy on the one hand and Christianity on the other. The Apologists of the second century offer a good example of the latter. Even if their acrimonious criticism of Hellenism is, with a couple of exceptions, in general not very substantial[2], they nevertheless succeeded in presenting Christianity as a fresh alternative to an old and outdated worldview[3].

But alongside this negative approach there was a much more prolific attitude towards Hellenism. Clement of Alexandria, at the end of the second century, and Origen, at the beginning of the third, are good examples of the positive and creative appropriation of Greek philosophy[4]. Their philosophical training and the intellectually cross-fertilizing cultural environment of Alexandria raised the quality and consistency of Christian theology to levels unknown in previous periods.

This is not the place to deal with the numerous aspects in the thought of these two Christian theologians that reveal the influence of Greek philosophy. The subject is vast and has been dealt with in depth on numerous occasions[5]. Our purpose is more modest. It is to reflect upon a single though seminal aspect in the thought of these two Christian philosophers that clearly reveals a background of Greek thought. I am referring to the

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1956); also J.H. Waszink, *Tertullianus, Quintus Septimius Florens de Anima* (Amsterdam, 1947) 81-85; H.B. Timothy, *The Early Christian Apologists and Greek Philosophy. Exemplified by Irenaeus, Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria* (Assen, 1973) 81-85; for Philo of Alexandria, see J. Mansfeld, 'Philosophy in the Service of Scripture', *Studies in Later Greek Philosophy and Gnosticism*, X (London, 1989). See also below note 3.

  [2] See L. Roig Lanzillotta, 'Christian Apologists and Greek Gods', J. Bremmer and A. Erskine (eds), *The Gods of Ancient Greece* (Edinburgh, 2010) 442-464. According to H. Crouzel, *Origène et la philosophie* (Paris, 1962) 167-77, at 170, there were two opposing attitudes, negative and positive, in early Christianity towards Greek philosophy. On the one hand, we have the position of Tatian, Hermias, Irenaeus and Tertullian, who, at least at first sight, reject Greek Philosophy altogether; on the other, we have the contrary tendency in Justin and Clement of Alexandria. As far as Origen is concerned he represents, always according to the same scholar, the synthesis of both tendencies.

  [3] P. Athanassiadi and M. Frede, (eds.), *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford—New York, 2001) 6-7. In general, E.R. Dodds, *The Ancient Concept of Progress and Other Essays on Greek Literature and Belief* (Oxford, 1973) 1-25.

  [4] As far as Clement is concerned, even if earlier studies tended to minimize his debt to Greek philosophy and underestimate his positive attitude towards Hellenism (see, for example, A.C. Outler, 'The Platonism of Clement of Alexandria', *JR* 20 [1940] 217-40; W. Völker, *Der wahre Gnostiker nach Clemens Alexandrinus* [Berlin, 1952]; E. von Ivanka, *Plato Christianus. Übernahme und Umgestaltung des Platonismus durch die Väter* [Einsiedeln, 1964]), this view is no more tenable after S. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria. A Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism* (Oxford, 1971).

  [5] For Clement, see previous note. For Origen, see E. de Faye, *Origène: sa vie, son oeuvre, sa pensée*, 3 vols (Paris, 1923-1928) and H. Koch, *Pronoia und Paideusis: Studien über Origenes und sein Verhältnis zum Platonismus* (Berlin, 1932) who saw in the Middle Platonists of the second century his main philosophical source; J. Daniélou, *Origène* (Paris, 1948) 85-108; R. Gögler, *Zur Theologie des biblischen Wortes bei Origenes* (Düsseldorf, 1963) 120-64, and 134-35 about the influence of the Stoa, and 135-47 about the influence of Middle Platonism; see also U. Berner, *Origenes* (Darmstadt, 1981) 19-43; and, more recently, H., Crouzel, *Origène* (Paris, 1985) 207-15; Id., *Origène et Plotin: comparaisons doctrinales* (Paris, 1992); and, especially, Id., *Origène et la philosophie*.

ways Clement of Alexandria and Origen dealt with the problem of the existence of evil in the context of God's creation[6].

It goes without saying that the issue is a cardinal one in every religion and/or philosophy around the world, both nowadays and in the past. In spite of general similarities that concern the problem and its consequences, the ways diverse cultures tackle the issue sensibly differ according to their environments[7]. Given the fact that Greek and Judaeo-Christian approaches to the question also reveal marked differences, the analysis of the treatment by the Alexandrian theologians will show both the extent to which their positions were influenced by Greek philosophy[8] and how they differ —with several exceptions[9]— from the attitudes of mainstream Christian theology from the second century onwards[10].

Within this purpose my article is divided into three sections. The first deals with general issues concerning the explanation of evil in both the Greek and Judaeo-Christian worlds. The second focuses on the solutions proposed by Clement of Alexandria and Origen. The third, finally, contextualizes their positions with a view to contending that, in spite of "official" opposition, Clement and Origen were not as isolated as one might think. The approach to the textual transmission of the *Apocalypse of Peter* (*ApPet*) will show not only that the problem they faced had been (and still was) latent in Jewish and Christian thought, but also that the antagonistic ways of dealing with it throughout history reflect the existence of two clearly differentiated groups within Christianity.

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[6] See W.E.G. Floyd, *Clement of Alexandria's Treatment of the Problem of Evil* (Oxford, 1971); more recently, P. Karavites, *Evil, Freedom and the Road to Perfection in Clement of Alexandria* (Leiden-Boston, 1999).

[7] D. Parkin, *The Anthropology of Evil* (New York, 1985).

[8] See A. Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* I (Tübingen, 1990 [⁴1909]) 680-97, at 693-97.

[9] So, for example, for Gregory of Nazianzus, who considers that the main suffering of the condemned is spiritual as a result of the alienation from God. For the echoes of the apokatastasis in Gregory, see H. Althaus, *Die Heilslehre des heiligen Gregor von Nazianz* (Münster, 1972). In line with the Neoplatonic view on evil as deprivation of Good, Dionysius Areopagites' conception of the non existence of evil (*De div. nom.* IV 19) gives ground to his view of the Good as transforming evil in order for it to be productive. Also for Scotus Erigena (c. 815-877), as was the case with Gregory of Nazianzus, the punishment of the impious is spiritual (*De div. nat.* V 30, *spiritualiter enim futura impiorum tormenta intelligenda* sit), since, if God is 'all in all', punishment cannot be physical (*De div. nat.* V 28). It is therefore impossible that punishment should take place forever (*De div. nat.* V 27, *si verbum Dei humanitatem accepit ... nihil humanitatis, perpetuis poenis insolubilibusque malitiae, quam tormentorum calamitas sequitur, nexibus obnoxium reliquit*). On Erigena's view on the apokatastasis, see Th. Christlieb, *Leben und Lehre Joh. Scotus Erigena* (Gotha, 1860) 417-30; H.Bett, *Johannes Scotus Erigena. A Study in Medieval Philosophy* (New York, 1964 [1925]) 78, 146-47; more recently, V.E. Kooy, *God and Nature in John Scotus Erigena. An Examination of the Neoplatonic Elements and Their Patristic Sources in the Ontological System of John Scotus Erigena* (Diss. Claremont, 1971) 189-200.

[10] See this view in Tertullian, *De spectac.* 10; Cyprian, *Ad Demetr.* 30.2; John Chrysost., *In 2 Cor* (*PG* 61. 471.49ff.); Jerome, *Hom in Luc.* 16,26; Augustine, *Civ Dei* 22,22; *Enchr.* 94.24; Gregory the Great, *Hom.* 40.291-301 (*CCSL* 161.405); Petrus Lombardus, *Sent.* IV 50.7 (*PL* 192.962); Aquinas, *Summa Theologica,* Suppl. 94.1 and, similarly *Sent.* IV 50.2.4; see also Bellarmine, *De eterna felicitate Sanctorum* IV 2; Francis de Sales, *De l'amour de Dieu* IX 8; Pascal, *Provinciales* IX; on the issue, see L. Roig Lanzillotta 'Does Punishment Reward the Righteous? The Justice Pattern Underlying the Apocalypse of Peter', in J.N. Bremmer and I. Czachesz (eds), *The Apocalypse of Peter* (Leuven, 2003) 127-57, at 130.

1. EVIL AND ITS EXPLANATION IN THE GREEK AND JUDAEO-CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEWS

It is pertinent to begin this section with a quotation:

> Epicurus' old questions are yet unanswered:
> Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then, he is impotent.
> Is he able, but unwilling? Then, he is malevolent.
> Is he both able and willing? Whence, the evil?[11]

These words by David Hume, in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, succinctly summarize centuries of thought regarding the problem of evil in the context of God's creation and the theistic explanation of its existence[12]. In point of fact, Hume's words are particularly apt because as soon as we move towards the theistic explanation of evil we encounter two problems rather than one: on the one hand, there is the problem of evil as such; on the other, the nature and qualities of the divinity who in one way or another is held responsible for its being[13]. Clement of Alexandria and Origen were certainly not the first to notice the issue, but in a Christian context they were the first to offer a satisfactory solution to the problem[14].

Both in Greek and Judaeo-Christian contexts evil has from time immemorial been a prerogative of the divinity[15]. The growing rationalistic approach to the divine, however, began to delimit divine action, as a result of which evil also demanded a more rationalistic justification. Although Greek and Judaeo-Christian explanations are to a certain extent different, the underlying problem is exactly the same. How can we explain the existence of evil in the world if our universe is the product of a divinity who cares about human existence?

In ancient Greece, the unpredictability of the divine as the only explanation for the existence of evil[16] very quickly created room for a view in which human responsibility

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[11] David Hume, in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, book X.

[12] On Hume's approach to the problem of evil, see S. Tweyman, 'Hume's Dialogues on Evil', in Id. (ed.), *David Hume. Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion in Focus* (London – New York, 1991) 187-95.

[13] On the issue, see also J. Hick, 'The Problem of Evil', in P. Edwards (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 3 (London, 1967) 136-41, at 136.

[14] A similar position to that of Hume was already stated by Sextus Empiricus, *Pyr*. III 12, 'those who positively affirm that God's existence are probably compelled to be guilty of impiety; for if they say that he foresees everything, they will be declaring that God is the cause of what is evil, while if they say that he foresees some things or nothing, they will be forced to say that God is either malignant or weak, and obviously this is use impious language'.

[15] P. Ricoeur, 'Evil', in M. Eliade (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion* 5 (London, 1987) 199-208, at 200-04 distinguishes up to four paradigms among the various "myths on evil" in the Ancient Near East and Archaic Greece: The myths of chaos in which both chaos and evil precede man; the myth of the grudging divinity that draws a line between divine and human spheres and punishes the *hybris* of those who attempt to transcend it; the myth of the exiled soul, in which soul is punished with a life in the body; and the myth of paradise lost, in which man receives the main responsibility in the appearance of evil.

[16] This unpredictability is also evident in the fact that originally Greek religion does not posit a single origin for evil but several. On the one hand, a variety of Olympic gods might be responsible for the

played a growing role. Consequently, already at an early stage, the idea of an original *fatum* that determined human suffering[17] appeared hand in hand with human guilt as the origin of evil[18]. As soon as human responsibility began to gain ground, however, the suffering innocent made an appearance in order to claim a proper answer to a problem in which he shares no guilt[19].

The solution, the ancient concept of inherited guilt that we find in Aeschylus, could only temporarily ease Pre-Socratic intellects, however[20]. Democritus and Socrates already placed the realm of evil in human ignorance[21]. Whereas, according to the former, ignorance was the origin of what people call Tyche or evil, the latter attributed both moral evil and the so-called physical evil to lack of knowledge. On the one hand, no-one errs voluntarily[22]; on the other, ignorance regarding the divine ways permits us to conceive as evil that which *sub specie aeternitatis* might not be so[23].

Another solution is the one proposed by Pythagoras, namely a dualistic explanation in which evil is related to the unlimited and good to the limited. ''The limitless is confronted by the limitation which creates cosmic order''[24]. In a way we find here the necessity of evil as the opposite of good, a dialectical necessity which also appeared in Heraclitus (fr. 111 D-K) and in Empedocles' pair Love and Strife, although the latter seems also to have attributed the creation of the universe to an evil Demiurge[25]. But in ancient Orphism and Pythagoreanism we also find the notion of inherited guilt that we

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appearance of disgrace, such as Zeus, Athena, Ares and Hephaestus. On the other hand, we find different divine instances that can produce human suffering, such as the Moira, Themis, Dike, and Nemesis. In general, see F.M. Cornford, *From Religion to Philosophy* (New York, 1957) 21 and W.C. Greene, *Moira, Fate, Good and Evil in Greek Thought* (New York, 1963) 10-46.

[17] See Homer, *Il.* 1,5; *Od.* 1,17.60; For the importance of theistic determinism in Homer and the role played by the gods in shaping human destiny, see P. Chantraine, 'Le divin et les dieux in Homère', in H.J. Rose (ed.), *La notion du divin depuis Homère jusqu'a Platon. Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique 1* (Berne, 1955) 47-77, at 47 and A.W.H. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility. A Study in Greek Values* (Chicago and London, 1960) 10-29.

[18] Adkins, *Merit*, 25, already noted, however, that the belief in non-human causation of human action had no influence on the issue of human responsibility.

[19] In ancient Greece the problem became excruciating in the 5th century and already appears in Aeschylus (*Agamemnon* 764-73) and Euripides (*Heracl.* 655-72). In Jewish context, the problem of the suffering innocent was tackled in the Book of Job. However, it appears to have been dealt with already in Babylonian stories, see D.W. Thomas, *Documents from the Old Testament Times* (New York, 1958) 97-104; B. Landsberger, 'Die babylonische Theodizee', *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* (1936) 32-76.

[20] As worded, for example, in Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 764-73.

[21] See for Democritus 68 B 175 DK.

[22] On this view, defended by Socrates, see Plato, *Protagoras* 345d-e.

[23] See, for the view that evil results from our ignorance regarding divine ways, Plato, *Apology* 41 *passim.*

[24] Aristotle, *Eth. Nich.* II 6, 1106b 29-30.

[25] Aristoteles, *Metaph.* 985a 5ff, see Mansfeld, 'Bad World and Demiurge: A "Gnostic" Motif from Parmenides and Empedocles to Lucretius and Philo', *Studies in Later Greek Philosophy and Gnosticism* XIV (London, 1989) 261-314, at 283. The role of Strife, or Hate, is essential, since it is the creator of the physical world. The implications, however, of this "Gnostic" element are not as dramatic as one might expect, since there was in Empedocles' *On Nature* a clear balance between Love and Hate, see fragments 31 B 2, cf. B 15 and B 62 D-K.

saw in Aeschylus, since they conceived incarnation as a punishment[26], whether human life be interpreted as a prison or as a tomb.

Plato inherited both the Pre-Socratic and the Socratic views on the problem of evil and, especially in his later period, combined the more sombre Pythagorean and Orphic conceptions[27] with the more optimistic Socratic attitude[28]. The Pythagorean view of the body as a tomb or the Orphic one which conceived of it as a prison properly exemplified a rather pessimistic view of human beings and of the world as evil *an sich*[29]. The same provenance should be searched for the idea of a post mortem punishment of wrongdoers. However, thanks to a philosophically developed conception of divinity, exclusively good and loving on the one hand and the notion of evil as a result of ignorance on the other, the Orphic idea of post mortem punishment acquired a coercive and/or corrective goal[30].

As far as the Judaeo-Christian world is concerned, leaving aside for the moment the dimension of evil as defilement or impurity, the traditional Hebrew view of evil, as reflected by the Pentateuch, was basically one in which humans break their relationship with God[31]. The Pentateuch posits evil in the realm of human action insofar as it

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[26] Plato, *Crat.* 400C; 1 B3 D-K.

[27] As Mansfeld, 'Bad World', at 292-93 has pointed out, however, both Orphic and Pythagoreans are not as pessimistic, for example, as Parmenides and Empedocles, because even if holding a pessimistic anthropology, their cosmology is still optimistic, as can be seen in the Pythagorean view that harmony holds the world together (44 B 1). On the issue, W. Burkert, *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1972) 251-52, 268.

[28] Besides these views, four other sources of evil are pondered by Plato: according to Aristotle, there is, to begin with, the Infinite Dyad (*Metaphys.* 988A 14-15, 1075A 32-36); then comes the evil soul of the *Laws* (896C; 898C; 904A); the disorderly character of the receptacle (*Timaeus* 28C-30D); and the alternation of periods of order and chaos of the *Politician* (269C-270A). On the issue Ph. Merlan, 'Greek Philosophy from Plato to Plotinus', in A.H. Armstrong (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1970) 25-29.

[29] The idea that the body is a prison for the soul is attributed by Plato, however, also to the Pythagorean Philolaos (*Phaed.* 62b = 44 B 15). See J.N. Bremmer, *Rise and Fall of the Afterlife* (London and New York, 2002) 11-26. In spite of a pronounced anthropological pessimism, clearly formulated both in the *Phaedo* (109b-c) and in the *Republic* (514a-517), Plato always maintains that the world has been formed in the best possible way (*Phaedo* 99b-c) and that god can only be good, as the *Timaeus* (29a) affirms, even if pondering on the possibility of the opposite view.

[30] Developed according to Plato's view in the *Protagoras* 324A-B, *Gorgias* 526B-C and *Phaedo* 112E-114B. Plato's views certainly experienced some evolution during his life. In the myth of *Gorgias* (523A-527B), for example, the emphasis lies on the curative goal of punishment, because this allows a better choice in reincarnations; this is also the case in the *Phaedo* 81Aff, 107D-108C and 113D-114C, where a distinction is made among sinners according to the character of the crimes committed: those who have committed tolerable sins and paid for them are absolved; those who have committed horrible crimes such as murder are incurable and will never be forgiven; and those who even if also responsible for horrible crimes did that out of anger and have repented. The absolution of the latter depends on their capacity to convince their victims, and will remain in the Tartarus until they persuade them. As far as the *Phaedrus* (248A-E) is concerned, it simply states the reward or punishment according to the life chosen, without conceiving it as a cure. This tendency can also be seen in the *Republic* (614A-616A, 617D-end) the *Timaeus* (42B-D, 91D-92C), and *Laws* (903B 1-905C 7), in which the corrective goal of post-mortem punishment fades away.

[31] See D. Taylor, 'Theological Thoughts about Evil', in Parkin, *Anthropology of Evil*, 26-41 at 28-29.

results from human sin[32], mainly that of apostasy from God[33], and that receives proper punishment from the divinity[34].

As time went by, however, unmerited evil required a more proper answer and apocalyptic literature, under the influence of Zoroastrism, developed a more radical explanation. The world is irredeemably evil, controlled by evil forces, and this would remain so until God's intervention; He will destroy evil and begin a new creation. This view was going to influence early Christianity and the figure of Satan owes much to the apocalyptic worldview.

In addition to these traditional views on evil, John J. Collins distinguishes, in second century BC Judaea, up to three other different ways of coping with the existence of evil. To begin with, there is the interesting "Myth of the Watchers" in the Book of Enoch (1-36) that attributes the origin of evil to a heavenly revolt[35], locating in this way its origin in the divine sphere. In this mythic account fallen angelic figures have intercourse with women, and this illicit union and the violence of the giants they beget account for the origin of evil[36].

The sapiential tradition, however, very quickly reacted against this view[37] and attempted to posit the origin of evil in human beings. Ben Sira (Sirach), with his conception of a certain "human inclination" was, according to Collins, the first to grasp and develop the implications of the story told in Genesis 2-3. In spite of Sirach, however, one might wonder whether ultimate responsibility for this inclination does not still lie with God. Like clay in the hands of the potter, God moulds man as he pleases, and consequently his inclination seems to depend upon the will of the Creator[38].

The third view on the origin of evil we will briefly discuss appears in the "Instruction of the two Spirits" of the Community Rule of Qumran (1QS 3:13-4:26). According to this, God appointed two different spirits to determine a man's life, namely the spirits of truth and wickedness. Even if the beginning seems to imply a sort of human dualism that determines humans belonging to either one or the other spirit, it later affirms that the two spirits fight their battle within the heart of human beings (1QS 4:23). An anthropological dualism can nevertheless be seen in the affiliation of the two spirits to

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[32] Deut. 31:17f. On the absence of an abstract question regarding the origin of evil in the Old Testament, see E. Noort, 'JHWH und das Böse. Bemerkungen zu einer Verhältnisbestimmung', in A.S. van der Woude (ed.), *Prophets, Worship and Theodicy* (Leiden, 1984) 120-36.

[33] Wis 14:27.

[34] See W. Grundmann, 'Κακός', in Kittel, *ThWNT*, s.v.

[35] P. Hanson, *apud* J.J. Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (London, 1997) 30, describes it as a "Rebellion in Heaven".

[36] 1 Enoch 15:8-10: "Evil spirits came out of their flesh, because from above they were created; from the holy Watchers was their origin and first foundation". See on the origin and development of this myth, Loren T. Stuckenbruck, 'The Origin of Evil in Jewish Apocalyptic Tradition: The Interpretation of Genesis 6:1-4 in the Second and Third Centuries B.C.E.', in C. Auffarth and L. R. Stuckenbruck, *The Fall of Angels* (Leiden, 2004) 87-118.

[37] Sirach 15:11-20: "Do not say, 'It was the Lord's doing that I fell away', for he does not what he hates".

[38] J.J. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age* (Louisville, KY, 1997) 80-84. For the Stoic influence on Sira, see D. Winston, 'Theodicy in Ben Sira and Stoic Philosophy', in R. Link-Salinger (ed.), *Scholars, Savants, and their Texts* (New York, 1989) 239-49 at 242.

either the Prince of Light or the Angel of Darkness (3:20-21) and is simultaneously a psychological, moral and cosmic dualism[39]. According to its clear apocalyptic background, this text affirms that the battle between good and evil will only last until God's visitation, when He will destroy evil altogether.

We see here several attempts to adapt the dualistic Zoroastrian explanation of evil to a monistic context. To a certain extent, the situation is similar in the New Testament because it also inherited the apocalyptic dualism, which is at odds with the monistic belief in a loving and omnipotent creator. The solution was sought for in a sort of "secondary dualism"[40]: the powers of good and evil, namely Jesus and Satan, yield to the higher authority of God. Satan, as the representative of all that is opposed to God incarnates evil and is responsible for the misfortune and sickness that fall upon man. But in this he is opposed by Jesus, who counteracts the Prince of demons and is stronger than he is[41].

Another Christian explanation for the existence of evil, finally, places its origin in man. The story of Adam and Eve strikingly did not receive particular attention in earlier times outside Genesis. But in Christian interpretation, the Adamic myth in Genesis 1-3 provided grounds for a view in which Adam's original sin, inherited by all mankind, was held responsible for the origin of evil. In a way, this view presents similarities with that of "human inclination" in Sirach's conception of the origin of evil, since it also places the origin of evil in human beings and in both conceptions there seems to be a previous cause for evil: in Sirach the human being is moulded by God, and in the Adamic explanation the serpent is, in the last analysis, the origin of temptation.

In a typical combination of Greek and Judeo-Christian thought, the Gnostic explanation of Evil expands and develops the latent dualism in both worldviews. To begin with, Gnostics accentuated and made explicit the implicit Platonic pessimism, which, nevertheless, never resulted in an open and clear degradation of matter and the physical body. Then they developed apocalyptic dualism by introducing a duality of gods, a theological dualism which, under the influence of the Platonic-Peripatetic idea of God, now opposed a good and all-loving deity to the malignant and frequently inept demiurge, creator of the visible world and consequently responsible for Evil.[42]

2. EVIL AND APOKATASTASIS IN CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA AND ORIGEN

Clement's and Origen's views on the problem of evil in the context of God's creation can clearly be seen in their theory on apokatastasis.[43] The idea of universal salvation

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[39] Collins, *Apocalypticism*, 36-41.

[40] Taylor, 'Theological Thoughts' 35.

[41] Lk 11:14-23.

[42] However interesting, the Gnostic answers to the question *unde malum* have been left aside for the lack of space. For those interested in the issue, I refer to G.A.G. Stroumsa, *Another Seed: Studies in Gnostic Mythology* (Leiden, 1984) 17-34.

[43] See A. Oepke, 'ἀποκαθίστημι, ἀποκατάστασις', in G. Kittel, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* 1 (Stuttgart, 1933) 388-92; C. Lenz, 'Apokatastasis', in *Reallexikon für Antike und*

—the idea that not a single rational being will be lost to the darkness of ignorance and sin— ponders both the existence of evil and God's role and/or responsibility in its perpetuation in the form of punishment. After two centuries of Christian struggle with the inherited problem of evil, authors like Clement of Alexandria and Origen attempted, for the first time in a Christian context, to solve the issue by applying the solutions sought for in Greek philosophy.

The necessity for the punishment of the wicked was an important element in apocalypticism, a theodicy typically born in contexts of suffering and persecution that, however, extended its dominion far beyond its original environment. This is not to justify a rather resentful kind of justice in which the suffering of the other tends to mitigate our own suffering. As I have pointed out elsewhere, if the idea of justice is based on "a compensatory inversion of the present situation of injustice and despair, it is dangerously apt to take the form of a triumphant elevation over the suffering of others".[44] But not only that: it also seems to jeopardize God's equanimity and, more importantly, the goodness and sinfulness of the totality of His creation.

As Richard Bauckham has pointed out, the issue first appears in apocalyptic literature.[45] The problem of the duration and sinfulness of hell appears recurrently in numerous texts. Alongside the timid protest represented by the intercession of the viewers of the punishment who plead for mercy for the damned[46] we have more radical positions that even question the meaning of the creation of the damned if destined for eternal punishment.[47] The problem is more serious in the context of Christianity where the necessity and eternity of punishment, and the vindictive kind of justice behind this, clearly conflicts with the principle of neighbourly love endorsed by the New Testament (Mt 5.38ff).[48] The list included in Bauckham's article on Augustine's attack

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Christentum, I (Stuttgart, 1950) 510-16; A. Méhat, ' "Apocatastase". Origene, Clément d'Alexandrie, *Act.* 3,21', *Vigiliae Christianae* 10 (1956) 196-214; G. Müller, 'Origenes und die Apokatastasis', *ThZ* 14 (1958) 174-90; F.-H. Kettler, 'Neue Beobachtungen zur Apokatastasislehre des Origenes', in H. Crouzel and A. Quacquarelli (eds), *Origeniana secunda* (Rome, 1980) 339-48; Crouzel, *Origène*, 331-41; Id., 'L'apocatastase chez Origène', in L. Lies (ed.), *Origeniana quarta. Die Referate des 4. Internationale Origeneskongresses (Innsbruck, 2.-6. September 1985)* (Innsbruck, 1987) 284-89; J.R. Sachs, 'Apocatastasis in Patristic Theology', *Theological Studies* 54 (1993) 617-40; W. van Laak, *Allversöhnung* (Sinzig, 1990); R. Parry and C. Partridge (eds), *Universal Salvation?* (Carlisle, 2003); see now P. Tzamalikos, *Origen: Philosophy of History and Eschatology* (Leiden, 2007).

[44] Roig Lanzillotta 'Does Punishment', at 128. See now I. Ramelli, *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis. A Critical Assessment from the New Testament to Eriugena* (Leiden, 2013).

[45] R. Bauckham, 'The Conflict of Justice and Mercy: Attitudes to the Damned in Apocalyptic Literature', in Id. *The Fate of the Dead. Studies on the Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (Leiden-Boston-Köln, 1998) 132-48, at 134.

[46] See, for example, the list included in Bauckham, 'The Conflict', 137, Zephaniah in the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*; Ezra in the *Greek Apocalypse of Ezra* (passim) and the (Latin) *Vision of Ezra* (8.ª, 11, 18, 22, 33, 42, 47, 55, 57c, 61); Baruch in the Slavonic version of *3 Baruch* (16:7-8); Peter in the *Apocalypse of Peter* (3:4); Paul in the *Apocalypse of Paul* (33, 40, 42, 43); the apostles in the *Didascalia of our Lord Jesus Christ* (Nau §30); the virgin Mary in the Greek *Apocalypse of the Virgin* (James, §25-28), the Ethiopic *Apocalypse of the Virgin* (Chaine, p. 68) and the Syriac *Transitus Mariae* (Lewis, p. 67).

[47] See for example *ApPetE* 3.4, on which Roig Lanzillotta, 'Does punishment', 138-39.

[48] See, in general, Roig Lanzillotta, 'Does punishment', 127-32.

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on the "compassionate" Christians shows that, in this context, the critical attitude towards the notion of eternal punishment was far from being an exception.[49]

It is in this context that we have to place Clement's and Origen's views. In addition to the numerous arguments in favour of redemption that we find in previous apocalyptic texts, both Christian theologians resorted to Greek philosophy in order to argue the *necessity* of salvation. The first to do this was Clement of Alexandria. His philosophical definition of God and the central place of the Logos in his theology make universal salvation a logical necessity. With regard to the former, evil is not only totally alien to his idea of God; essential in His goodness is His plan for human being's salvation, and this always and without any change whatsoever[50]. As to the latter, the Logos is described as φιλάνθρωπον τὸ ὄργανον τοῦ θεοῦ, as the implement by means of which God fulfils this salvation[51]. The Logos, consequently, not only plays a central role in helping the soul to regain the internal harmony it lost due to the influence of the passions of the irrational part[52]. Giving its ubiquitousness in the universe, the Logos instructs, corrects, leads and amends in order to reach the overarching goal, namely the salvation of the human race[53].

The Greek philosophical influence is not only evident both in his conception of God and of Logos[54], but especially in the fact that the whole process of salvation is conceived as a divine pedagogy, whose ultimate goal is the acquisition of virtue and knowledge[55]. Of course, Clement endorsed the penalty of "punishment by fire" for those who fall short of mercy and generosity towards the needy, but divine punishment is intended as a corrective leading to the amendment of an attitude governed by ignorance[56]. As the *Paedagogus* affirms, God's main goal is to reach man's repentance and his threats and punishments are intended for the good of the sinner[57]. The fire, consequently, is neither eternal nor consuming; it is a purifying rational flame that intends

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[49] Augustine, *Civitas Dei* 17-24. See R. Bauckham, 'Augustine, the "Compassionate Christians", and the Apocalypse of Peter', in *The Fate of the Dead*, 150-51, lists up to seven different groups of "compassionate" Christians, attacked by Augustine, who hold a variant of a doctrine of universal salvation or have laxer views than Augustine regarding salvation.

[50] Clement of Alexandria, *Protr.* 6.104.3: ποιῶν δὲ ἰδίως ἀγαθά, θεὸς ὄντως καὶ πατὴρ ἀγαθὸς ὤν τε καὶ γινόμενος ἐν ἀδιαλείπτοις εὐποιίαις, ἐν ταὐτότητι τῆς ἀγαθωσύνης ἀπαραβάτως μένει.

[51] See below note 53.

[52] On the Logos moderating the passions see Clement, *Paed.* 1.1.2; 1.3.1; 1.3.3; 1.6.1; on its role as charioteer or pilot, see *Protr.* 121.1; *Paed.* 3.53.2; *Strom.* 2.516, on which Lilla, *Clement,* 96-97.

[53] Clement of Alexandria, *Protr.* 1.6.2, Φιλάνθρωπον τὸ ὄργανον τοῦ θεοῦ· ὁ κύριος ἐλεεῖ, παιδεύει, προτρέπει, νουθετεῖ, σῴζει, φυλάττει καὶ μισθὸν ἡμῖν τῆς μαθήσεως ἐκ περιουσίας βασιλείαν οὐρανῶν ἐπαγγέλλεται, τοῦτο μόνον ἀπολαύων ἡμῶν, ὃ σῳζόμεθα. Κακία μὲν γὰρ τὴν ἀνθρώπων ἐπιβόσκεται φθοράν, ἡ δὲ ἀλήθεια, ὥσπερ ἡ μέλιττα λυμαινομένη τῶν ὄντων οὐδέν, ἐπὶ μόνης τῆς ἀνθρώπων ἀγάλλεται σωτηρίας.

[54] Not only the notion is of Platonic origin, but also the image of the Logos as a charioteer has the same provenance (see *Phaedrus* 246B), although Clement, according to Lilla, *Clement* 98-99, note 7, might have borrowed it from Philo, in whose work it appears regularly as well, see for example, *Leg. Alleg.* 1.72; 1, 73; 2.104, etc.

[55] For the corrective character of punishment in Plato, see above note 30.

[56] Clement of Alexandria, *Quis dives* 33.3.

[57] Clement of Alexandria, *Paed.* 1.70.1-3.

to sanctify the souls of the sinners[58]. As we shall see later, the idea of ignorance as the origin of sin, the function of punishment —either corrective or instructive— together with the idea of God's concern for the personal and communal good of humankind reveals a Greek philosophical background as well.

The Hellenism of Origen's position regarding the problem of evil is even clearer. To begin with, there is what has been called Origen's "metaphysical doctrine of the non-substantiality of evil from the ontological point of view".[59] Taking his starting point from God's intrinsic goodness and from the fact that the Good and that which is are one and the same, it follows that evil has no real existence.[60] In the context of God's creation there is no room for evil in the real sense of the word. The totality of creation flows from God and returns to him;[61] and given that He is the Good, there is no evil whatsoever in His nature.[62] God's creative activity results from His goodness, it is an impulse to create that, consequently, can only produce that which is good: *Hic cum 'in principio' crearet ea, quae creare voluit, id est rationabilis naturas, nullam habuit aliam creandi causam, nisi se ipsum, id est bonitatem suam*".[63]

God's goodness not only redounds on a good creation, however. His concern with human fate is inalterable in spite of the fall. Evil appeared in the world due to an act of dispersion, due to the departure of the spirits from God; those who fell closer have an easier return to Him; those who fell somewhat farther from God must work harder.

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[58] Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 7.6.34.4, κἂν πειραταὶ κἂν λῃσταὶ κἂν τύραννοι τύχωσιν; φαμὲν δ' ἡμεῖς ἁγιάζειν τὸ πῦρ οὐ τὰ κρέα, ἀλλὰ τὰς ἁμαρτωλοὺς ψυχάς, πῦρ οὐ τὸ παμφάγον καὶ βάναυσον, ἀλλὰ τὸ φρόνιμον λέγοντες, τὸ διικνούμενον διὰ ψυχῆς τῆς διερχομένης τὸ πῦρ.

[59] Origen, *De principiis* 3.6, 3: "I am of opinion that the expression, by which God is said to be 'all in All', means that He is 'all' in each individual person. Now He will be 'all' in each individual in this way: when all which any rational understanding, cleansed from the dregs of every sort of vice, and with every cloud of wickedness completely swept away, can either feel, or understand, or think, will be wholly God; and when it will no longer behold or retain anything else than God, but when God will be the measure and standard of all its movements; and thus God will be 'all', for there will no longer be any distinction of good and evil, seeing evil nowhere exists; for God is all things, and to Him no evil is near: nor will there be any longer a desire to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, on the part of him who is always in the possession of good, and to whom God is all. So then, when the end has been restored to the beginning, and the termination of things compared with their commencement, that condition of things will be re-established in which rational nature was placed, when it had no need to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; so that when all feeling of wickedness has been removed, and the individual has been purified and cleansed, He who alone is the one good God becomes to him 'all', and that not in the case of a few individuals, or of a considerable number, but He Himself is 'all in all'. And when death shall no longer anywhere exist, nor the sting of death, nor any evil at all, then verily God will be 'all in all' ". Translation by F. Crombie, in P. Schaff (ed.), *Fathers of the Third Century: Tertullian, Part Fourth; Minucius Felix; Commodian; Origen, Parts First and Second* (Edinburgh, 1885).

[60] Origen, *Comm. in ev. Johan.* 2.13.

[61] Origen, *Comm. in epist. ad Rom.* 8.13, *Unus Deus Pater ex quo omnia (...) et finis in ipso (scil Christo) erit tunc cum erit Deus in omnibus.*

[62] Origen, *De principiis* 1.4.3, *Hanc ergo beatam et archiken, id est principatum omnium gerentem dicimus trinitatem. Hic est bonus deus et benignus omnium pater (...) id est beni faciendi virtus et creandi ac providendi (...) Et ideo nullum prorsus momentum sentiri potest, quo non virtus illa benefica bene fecerit.*

[63] Origen, *De principiis* 2.9.6.

Nevertheless, His grace is so powerful that He attracts everything back to Him[64]. He enacts this by means of His Son, God's Logos, namely Jesus, who fulfils the salvation of the cosmos and regains even those who have departed from him[65]. This is the ultimate sense of apokatastasis. Salvation is all-embracing, and this on the basis of an allegorical interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15,26-28 and Romans 5,17. In addition, by means of equating *multos homines* with *omnes homines*, with the support of Philippians 2, Origen argued the salvation of *every creature*[66].

God created this world as a place of amendment, that is, a place of education or *paideia* by means of which rational beings have to apply their free choice to depart from evil and return to God. Thanks to the healing power of the Logos or Christ, which cures every evil in human soul, God purifies it by a "consuming fire"[67].

It is in this context that we approach the theme we are dealing with here, namely that of the punishment of the sinners and the meaning and duration thereof. As in Clement, we find in Origen the notion of a pedagogical function of punishment, which is at the same time medical, healing and soteriological[68]. In his allegorical approach to Scripture, Origen ventured that the punishments described in it are intended for the simpleminded, to frighten ordinary Christians who could not otherwise refrain from vice and sin[69]. Those who reach their hidden meaning know, however, that God cannot intend the destruction of man but of evil. The final goal of God's mercy is to free people from evil in order to prepare them for eternal happiness[70].

In dealing with the notion of the apokatastasis in Clement of Alexandria and in Origen, scholars and exegetes of recent years have attempted, for obvious reasons, to stress the "Christianity" of their points of view[71], as though Christianity can be un-

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[64] Origen, *Comm. in epist. ad Rom* 5.10.

[65] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 4.12, Καταβαίνει γὰρ ὁ θεὸς ἀπὸ τοῦ ἰδίου μεγέθους καὶ ὕψους, ὅτε τὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ μάλιστα τῶν φαύλων οἰκονομεῖ.

[66] Origen, *Comm. in epist. ad Rom* 9.41.

[67] Origen *Contra Celsum* 4.13, "Therefore our God is a 'consuming fire' in the sense in which we have taken the word; and thus He enters in as a 'refiner's fire', to refine the rational nature, which has been filled with the lead of wickedness, and to free it from the other impure materials, which adulterate the natural gold or silver, so to speak, of the soul. And, in like manner, 'rivers of fire' are said to be before God, who will thoroughly cleanse away the evil which is intermingled throughout the whole soul". Translation by F. Crombie.

[68] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 5.13; 15, "it is a purificatory fire which is brought upon the world, and probably also on each one of those who stand in need of chastisement by the fire and healing at the same time, seeing it *burns* indeed, but does not *consume*...". See further, H. Crouzel, 'L'Hadès et la Géhenne selon Origène', *Gregorianum* 59 (1978) 291-329, at 325-26. Translation by F. Crombie .

[69] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 5.15, "Now the Scripture is appropriately adapted to the multitudes of those who are to peruse it, because it speaks obscurely of things that are sad and gloomy, in order to terrify those who cannot by any other means be saved from the flood of their sins, although even then the attentive reader will clearly discover the end that is to be accomplished by these sad and painful punishments upon those who endure them". Translation by F. Crombie.

[70] For this idea, see Origen's commentary on 1Cor 3,11-15, on which H. Crouzel, *Origen*, 263.

[71] See, for example, Müller, 'Apocatastasis', 180 and 187; Sachs, 'Apocatastasis in Patristic Theology', 617-40, at 621 (below, note 74); I.L.E. Ramelli, 'Christian Soteriology and Christian Platonism: Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Biblical and Philosophical Basis of the Doctrine of Apokatastasis', *VigChrist* 61 (2007) 313-56, at 313-14, although the author insists on the Greek influence on the notion.

derstood without the Hellenistic component[72]. In the case of Origen this position is to a certain extent understandable. By focusing on his interpretation and use of Biblical texts to support his views, scholars are in fact trying to exonerate Origen of the injustice done to him ever since his views were classed (in 553 CE) as heretical[73].

It may well be that the process of salvation in Origen is a "direct result of God's loving, saving action in the cross and resurrection of Christ"[74]; his theology might be rooted in Scripture and be, like Clement's, focused upon the creative and saving power of divine Logos, yet the Greek character of the notion can be clearly seen both in the conceptual premises and in the development thereof.

As far as the premises are concerned, we have the notion of God's complete sovereignty and the goodness of His creation. The idea of God as the first Good and His creative impulse resulting from His goodness is essential in the apokatastasis because it is the cornerstone of the whole building, namely the fact that God has created the best of all possible worlds. This idea had already appeared in the *Timaeus*, in the rhetorical question, which is only mentioned to be categorically denied, regarding the possibility that the Demiurge could have not used the eternal model as inspiration for his creation[75]. The same applies to the notion that there is no real room for evil in the context of God's creation and that He is concerned with the destiny of his creatures. They also have a clear Platonic provenance, witness the *Republic* and the *Timaeus*[76].

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[72] See, for example, Sach's view ('Apocatastasis', 621) that "Origen may have been sympathetic to and influenced by Neoplatonic and Stoic cosmologies, [but] his theology is rooted in the Scripture". On the general issue of the Hellenization of Christianity, see, however, A. Piñero, 'On the Hellenization of Christianity. One Example: the Salvation of Gentiles in Paul', *Flores Florentino. Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Early Jewish Studies in Honour of Florentino García Martínez* (Leiden and Boston, 2007) 667-83 at 683, who thinks that, in any case, from the very beginnings Christianity had experienced a heavy influence from Hellenism: "In its own birth, Christian theology was deeply Jewish and deeply Hellenic. It was Hellenic or it was not: Christianity was born already Hellenized".

[73] The edict by Justinian (543 CE) found expression in the fifteen anathemas pronounced by the Fifth Ecumenical Council in 553, see 'The Anathemas Against Origen', in P. Schaff (ed.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*: Series II, Volume XIV (*The Seven Ecumenical Councils*) (Peabody, MA, 1994) 318-19.

[74] Sachs, 'Apocatastasis', 621.

[75] See Plato, *Timaeus* 28C-29A, "However, let us return and inquire further concerning the Cosmos,—after which of the Models did its Architect construct it? Was it after that which is self-identical and uniform, or after that which has come into existence; Now if so be that this Cosmos is beautiful and its Constructor good, it is plain that he fixed his gaze on the Eternal; but if otherwise (which is an impious supposition), his gaze was on that which has come into existence. But it is clear to everyone that his gaze was on the Eternal; for the Cosmos is the fairest of all that has come into existence, and He the best of all the Causes. So having in this wise come into existence, it has been constructed after the pattern of that which is apprehensible by reason and thought and is self-identical". Translation by R.G. Bury, *Plato in Twelve Volumes. Timaeus, Critias, Cleitophon, Menexenus, Epistles* (Cambridge, MA, 1981).

[76] Plato, *Republic* 508B; 509B and *Timaeus* 29D-30A, "Let us now state the Cause wherefore He that constructed it constructed Becoming and the All. He was good, and in him that is good no envy ariseth ever concerning anything; and being devoid of envy He desired that all should be, so far as possible, like unto Himself. This principle, then, we shall be wholly right in accepting from men of wisdom as being above all the supreme originating principle of Becoming and the Cosmos. For God desired that, so far as possible, all things should be good and nothing evil; wherefore, when He took over all that was visible,

Origen's metaphysical doctrine of the non-substantiality of evil, consequently, also has its starting point in Plato, who as a Greek conceived evil as στέρησις or privation of good. Also, Origen's attribution of the origin of evil to a fall, a departure of the spirits from God through satiety or *koros*[77]*,* is typically Greek, witness, for example, the important role it plays in mythological cases such as that of Tantalus (in Pindar) or the importance of *koros* in the Greek archaic explanation of *hybris*[78]. Further, his view of a growing quantity of evil in the spirits according to how far they fall from God (angels, souls, and powers of evil, respectively)[79] reveals its Greek origin. The notion is central to Aristotle's cosmology, which attributed a diminishing degree of divinity (=goodness) to the successive layers of the cosmos as we are removed from the area of the Unmoved Mover and approach the sublunar region[80].

Greek as it is, Origen's view of evil could not lack optimistic undertones: human beings are created in the image of God and, as such, he must be essentially good. Even if temporarily obscured by sin, our true nature can never be totally annulled by it. The concept underlying this notion of an intrinsic identity between beginning and end (*archē kai telos*)[81] —that is, an identity between God and people— not only played a central role in numerous religious and philosophical movements of Late Antiquity, but especially also in Middle and Neo-Platonism[82]. In addition, the way through which man recovers his pristine condition reveals Platonic influence insofar as it consists of the well-known *homoiosis theo* (ὁμοίωσις θεῷ) or 'likeness to God', so important an issue in Middle Platonism[83].

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seeing that it was not in a state of rest but in a state of discordant and disorderly motion, He brought it into order out of disorder, deeming that the former state is in all ways better than the latter. For Him who is most good it neither was nor is permissible to perform any action save what is most fair". Translation by R.G. Bury.

[77] Origen, *De principiis* 1.3.8, "But if satiety should ever take hold of any one of those who stand on the highest and perfect summit of attainment, I do not think that such an one would suddenly be deposed from his position and fall away, but that he must decline gradually and little by little, so that it may sometimes happen that if a brief lapsus take place, and the individual quickly repent and return to himself, he may not utterly fall away, but may retrace his steps, and return to his former place, and again make good that which had been lost by his negligence". Translation by F. Crombie. See M. Harl, 'Recherches sur l'origenisme d'Origène: la satiété (*koros*) de la contemplation comme motif de la chute des âmes', *Studia Patristica* VIII (1966) 374-405.

[78] See, for example, Solon 6.3-4 West, Theognis 153-54 West; Pindar, *O.* 13.10; Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 750-62. On which L. Roig Lanzillotta, 'The So-Called Envy of the Gods: Revisiting a Dogma of Ancient Greek Religion', in 'The So-called Envy of the Gods: Revisiting a Dogma of Ancient Greek Religion', in J. Dijkstra, J.Kroesen & Y.Kuiper (eds), *Myths, Martyrs, and Modernity: Studies in the History of Religions in Honour of Jan N. Bremmer* (Leiden, 2010) 75-93.

[79] On which see Crouzel, *Origène*, 273-84.

[80] Aristotle, *de Caelo* 269b 13-17; *Meteo*. 340b 6.

[81] Origen, *De principiis* 1.6.1.

[82] See the idea clearly formulated in Aristotle, *Metaphysics* IX, VIII 9 1050a 8-12. In Middle and Neoplatonism the idea explained both man's origin and the objective of his efforts in life, namely the reunion with the divinity.

[83] For the Middle Platonic background of the *homoiosis theo* in early Christianity, see now L. Roig Lanzillotta, 'A Way of Salvation: Becoming like God in Nag Hammadi', in A. Klostergaard Petersen and K. von Stuckrad (eds), *The Gods as Role Models in Western Traditions* (Numen special issue 60.1 [2013]) 71-102.

The ethical character of the process by means of which human beings purify everything alien to them and begin their return to God also bears witness to its distinct Platonic-peripatetic provenance. Origen's conception of the Logos' healing capacity and its factual cleansing of the human soul from evil[84] has the same therapeutic function as the word-charm in Middle-Platonism. In Plutarch, for example, we find the Old Platonic and Aristotelian concept according to which the Charm, or rational discourse, helps the rational part of the soul to regain its internal harmony and balance in order that it may subdue the irrational part, namely the source of evil in Platonism[85].

When we look at the details, the Greek provenance and inspiration becomes even clearer, witness the term itself that defines the notion. It is well known that the term apokatastasis appears as a New Testament *hapax legomenon* in the Acts of the Apostles 3,21, but its meaning is far from the interpretation by Clement and Origen as it refers to the fulfilment of the promises of the Old Testament[86]. As a technical term it appears for the first time in the fragments of Chrysippus and describes the return of the planets to their original celestial signs, which initiates the conflagration or *ekpurōsis*[87]. In spite of attempts to bring the latter in line with Zoroastrism[88], the fact is that the notion, even if not the term, had already appeared in Greek context in Plato, both in the *Timaeus* and in the *Republic*, where "the great year" describes the period after which all the planets return to their original positions, beginning in this way a new astronomical period[89].

3. THE CONTEXT OF CLEMENT'S AND ORIGEN'S VIEWS

In spite of the scholarly attempts to stress the exclusively Christian character of Clement's and Origen's views, therefore, both theologians side with those Christians who saw a contradiction between the idea of eternal punishment of evil and the essence of Christian thought. It is also true, however, that there were more radical endeavours to supersede this contradiction. Whereas Marcion rejected the Old Testament and its punishing God altogether[90], Clement and Origen applied allegorical interpretation and

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[84] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 8.72, "... the Word shall prevail over the entire rational creation, and change every soul into His own perfection; in which state every one, by the mere exercise of his power, will choose what he desires, and obtain what he chooses. For although, in the diseases and wounds of the body, there are some which no medical skill can cure, yet we hold that in the mind there is no evil so strong that it may not be overcome by the Supreme Word and God. For stronger than all the evils in the soul is the Word, and the healing power that dwells in Him; and this healing He applies, according to the will of God, to every man". Translation by F. Crombie.

[85] Plutarch, *De genio Socr.* 588E.

[86] See J. Parker III, 'The Concept of Apokatastasis in Acts. A Study in Primitive Christian Theology (Diss. Basel; Abilene, Texas, 1978).

[87] Chrysippus, SVF 625.1-15.

[88] Müller, 'Origenes und die Apocatastasis', 175-76.

[89] Plato, *Timaeus* 39CD; *Republic* 546Bff. See also Plato's *Politician* (269C-270A) with Merlan, 'Greek Philosophy', 26 and note 2.

[90] On the Gnostic approach, see above note 42.

Greek philosophy in order to bridge the gulf between a retributive (actually vindictive) kind of justice and the forgiveness of sins.

The difference between their position and the orthodox Christian one becomes even clearer when one realizes that their views continue the line of thought already present in Christian apocalypses such as the *Apocalypse of Peter*, in which an alternative conception of punishment and its duration begin to emerge. Against the view that claims the eternity of punishment, the older version of this well-known apocalyptic text grants to those in punishment salvation from their sufferings. Depending on the scholar, this salvation might be seen either as universal salvation or as a more restrictive kind of deliverance that requires forgiveness by the victims[91]. For textual reasons which I have analyzed elsewhere, I prefer the first reading[92], but be that as it may, the fact is that *Apocalypse of Peter*'s original view was altered during its textual transmission in order to bring it into line with more official thought regarding the issue.

The section in question reads as follows:

> I will give to my called and chosen whomsoever they will ask me for, out of punishment, and I will give them a fine baptism in the salvation of what is called the Acherusian Lake, in the Elysian field, a part of the justice with my holy ones[93].

The reference to the Acherusian Lake bear witness to the Greek (or, more precisely, Platonic) influence behind the text. And even if the geographical description might be wrong, the Greek provenance of the Elysian field is clear as well[94]. In point of fact, Richard Bauckham has already proposed the influence of the Platonic *Phaedo* (114b) and the purification of curable sinners on the *Apocalypse of Peter*'s view[95]. The Ethiopic version of the apocalypse perverted this concept by altering the original text and eliminating every reference to an eventual salvation.

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[91] See for the former view, D.D. Bucholz, *Your Eyes Will Be Opened. A Study of the Greek (Ethiopic) Apocalypse of Peter* (Atlanta, 1988) and for the later, R. Bauckham, 'The Apocalypse of Peter: A Jewish Christian Apocalypse from the Time of Bar Kochba', in *The Fate of the Dead,* 160-258.

[92] Roig Lanzillotta, 'Does Punishment', 151.

[93] See M.R. James, *The Apocryphal New testament* (Oxford, 1955) 521; T.J. Kraus and T. Nicklas, *Das Petrusevangelium und die Petrusapokalypse: die griechischen Fragmente mit deutscher und englischer Übersetzung* (Berlin, 2004) 121-30, at 128; on the text, see already M.R. James, 'The Rainer Fragment of the Apocalypse of Peter', *JTS* 32 (1931) 270-79; more recently, P. van Minnen, 'The Greek Apocalypse of Peter', in Bremmer and Czachesz, *The Apocalypse of Peter*, 15-39, at 37-39.

[94] T.J. Kraus, 'Acherousia und Elysion: Anmerkungen im Hinblick auf deren Verwendung auch im christlichen Kontext', *Mnemosyne* 56 (2003) 145-63.

[95] Bauckham, 'The Conflict', 145-47 and Roig Lanzillotta, 'Does Punishment', 153-54. See on Plato's view in the *Phaedo*, J. Annas, 'Plato's Myths of Judgement', *Phronesis* 27 (1982) 119-43, at 125-29; J. Saunders, *Plato's Penal Code. Tradition, Controversy, and Reform in Greek Penology* (Oxford, 1991) 198-99. For the geographical imprecision regarding the Acherusian Lake and Elysian field in the *ApPet* see Roig Lanzillotta, 'Does Punishment', 154, note 62; see also the thorough article by Kraus, 'Acherousia und Elysion', 151-63; and now J.L. Lightfoot, *The Sibylline Oracles: with Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on the First and Second Books* (Oxford, 2007) 530-32.

The point is that in a text bearing the influence of Greek thought such as *Apocalypse of Peter*, we find a concept of evil and of its punishment consistent with a view of God and of His creation as completely free of any evil whatsoever. At the same time, we see the first attempts to apply Greek philosophical ideas to the notion of evil and that of punishment: exactly the same approach we find in Clement of Alexandria and Origen. By allegorically interpreting Scripture with the aid of Greek conceptual implements, both theologians creatively succeeded both in presenting a consistent view of God and His creation and in providing a satisfactory explanation for the existence of evil.

This approach to the problem of evil, which we may call the "Greek approach", was rejected by the orthodox Christian position: ever since Tertullian this group insisted on the necessity and on the eternity of punishment, even at the risk of compromising their belief in an omnipotent and loving God[96]. The tension between these two lines of thought in the history of Christianity —the one defending the need for eternal punishment and the other appealing to the unlimited goodness of God— is plastically reflected by the transmission of *Oracula Sibyllina*, a text influenced by the *Apocalypse of Peter* that includes the theory of the sinner's salvation. In verse 2.330-338 we read:

> Almighty God shall grant another boon:
> To the pious he'll consent when they entreat
> Immortal God, to save men from the fire
> And endless torments: this, too, he will do.
> For, plucking them once more from tireless fire,
> He will remove and send them to his folk,
> To new life in the Elysian fields,
> Immortal for immortals, by the waves
> Of the ever-flowing, deep Acherousian Lake[97].

The idea, however, was repulsive to one of its readers at least, since a scholion to the verse retorts[98]: "False manifestly; for the penal fire shall never cease from those who are condemned. (…) But let Origen of his presumptuous babble be ashamed, saying there shall be end of punishments"[99].

This tradition can be seen not only in Origen's later assessment as a heretic, but also in the textual transmission of the *Apocalypse of Peter*. Whereas the Greek original as preserved by the Rainer fragment defends the first line of thought, the Ethiopic version transforms the text in order to claim the eternal suffering of the damned.

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[96] See above note 10.
[97] Lightfoot, *The Sibylline Oracles*, 321.
[98] J.H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* 1 (London, 1983) 353, note c3.
[99] I would like to express my warm thanks to J. Bremmer, J. van Ruiten and I. Muñoz Gallarte who read this article and enriched it with numerous improvements and suggestions.