

From the closure of the schools of Athens to the Second Council of Constantinople: Repudiating a tradition dating back to Antiquity

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Abstract

In 553, the Second Council of Constantinople issued a series of anathemas against various doctrines and certain bishops in order to settle the so-called “Three Chapters Controversy.” It also condemned Origen and several of his theses, including that of the “pre-existence of Souls”: their fall and their return to the Divine through a series of successive existential ordeals. One can consider these theses as underlying those of Reincarnation and Reintegration.

This paper presents the two main characters who are Origen (b. 184 or 185 / d. 253 or 254 CE), the theologian in question, and Emperor Justinian I (also known as Justinian the Great, ca. 482 – 565 CE), who promoted the Council. It examines the works of the former and the political actions of the latter, thereafter the circumstances of the Council itself, before turning to a discussion of the philosophical, historical, and theological themes that nourished the premises, the progress and the consequences of this ecclesiastical event.

De la fermeture des écoles d’Athènes au Concile de Constantinople II: la répudiation d’une tradition antique

par Thierry Guinot, PhD

Résumé

En 553, le deuxième Concile de Constantinople a prononcé une série d’anathèmes contre diverses doctrines et certains évêques afin de régler la « querelle des Trois-Chapitres ». Il a également condamné Origène et plusieurs de ses thèses, dont celle de la préexistence des âmes, de leur chute et de leur retour vers le divin par une série d’épreuves existentielles successives, pouvant être considérées comme sous-jacentes aux théories de la réincarnation et de la réintégration.

L’étude présente les deux personnages principaux que sont Origène, le théologien mis en cause, et l’empereur Justinien, en tant qu’instigateur de ce Concile. Elle examine les œuvres du premier et les faits politiques du second, puis les circonstances de l’assemblée conciliaire elle-même, avant de se pencher sur la discussion des thèmes philosophiques, historiques et théologiques qui ont nourri les prémices, le déroulement et les suites de cet événement ecclésial.

Desde el cierre de las escuelas de Atenas hasta el Segundo Consejo de Constantinopla: Repudiando una tradición que vuelve a la Antigüedad

por Thierry Guinot, PhD

Resumen

En 553, el Segundo Concilio de Constantinopla emitió una serie de anatemas contra varias doctrinas y ciertos obispos para resolver la llamada "Controversia de los Tres Capítulos". También condenó a Orígenes y varias de sus tesis, incluida la de los "preexistencia de las Almas ": su caída y su retorno a lo Divino a través de una serie de pruebas existenciales sucesivas. Uno puede considerar estas tesis como subyacentes a las de la Reencarnación y la Reintegración.

Este artículo presenta a los dos personajes principales que son Orígenes (nacido en 184 o 185 / d 253 o 254 DC), el teólogo en cuestión, y el emperador Justiniano I (también conocido como Justiniano el Grande, aproximadamente 482 - 565 DC). Quien promovió el Consejo. Examina los trabajos de los primeros y las acciones políticas de este último, a partir de entonces las circunstancias del propio Consejo, antes de pasar a una discusión de los temas filosóficos, históricos y teológicos que alimentaron las premisas, el progreso y las consecuencias de este evento eclesiástico.

Do encerramento das escolas de Atenas ao Segundo Conselho de Constantinopla: O repúdio de uma tradição Antiga

por Thierry Guinot, PhD

Sumário

Em 553, o Segundo Conselho de Constantinopla emitiu uma série de anátemas contra diversas doutrinas e certos bispos para resolver a "Controvérsia dos Três Capítulos". Ele também condenou Orígenes e várias de suas teses, inclusive a da pré-existência das almas, a sua queda e seu retorno ao divino por uma série de sucessivas provas existenciais, que poderiam ser consideradas como subjacentes às teorias da reencarnação e reintegração.

O estudo apresenta os dois personagens principais que são Orígenes, o teólogo implicado, e o Imperador Justiniano, como instigador deste Conselho. Este estudo examina os trabalhos do primeiro e os fatos políticos do segundo, depois as circunstâncias da própria assembléia conciliar, antes de analisar a discussão dos temas filosóficos, históricos e teológicos que alimentaram as alegações, o curso e as consequências. deste evento eclesial.

Die schliessung der schulen von Athene und das Zweite Konzil von Konstantinopel: Die ablehnung einer tradition, die bis in die Antike reicht

von Thierry Guinot, PhD

Zusammenfassung

Das zweite Konzil von Konstantinopel sprach in 553 n. Chr. verschiedene Anatheme gegen einige Dogmen und Bischöfe aus. Die „Drei Kapitel Kontroverse“ sollte hiermit geregelt werden. Auch Origenes selbst und verschiedene seiner Thesen, u.a. die These der Vorexistenz der Seele, ihr Fall und ihre Wiederkehr zum Göttlichen mittels aufeinanderfolgenden existentiellen Prüfungen, wurden verurteilt. Es liegt nahe, dass diese Thesen der These der Reinkarnation und der Reintegration zugrunde liegen.

Diese Abhandlung bespricht die beiden wichtigsten Persönlichkeiten: Origenes, der angeklagte Theologe, und Justinian, als Initiator dieses Konzils. Es werden vorerst die Werke des Erstgenannten, die Politik des Kaisers sowie die Umstände des Konzils untersucht. Danach werden die philosophischen, historischen und theologischen Themen, die zu den Anfängen, dem Verlauf und den Folgen dieses kirchlichen Ereignisses beigetragen haben, unter die Lupe genommen.

Introduction

Scholars unanimously and rightfully consider that the doctrine of Origen upon the “return of the souls” was condemned by the Second Council of Constantinople. Some deem that they have exhausted the subject with this proven historical statement, although they are wrong. Not only did the censorship of this doctrine follow a substantially more complex path, but above all - more than the Council itself – it was the influence of Byzantine Emperor Justinian, who was ruling at the time of the Council, that led to such a sanction, which was accompanied by other equally authoritarian measures. One can therefore assert that the ancient thought that had conveyed traditional antique spirituality through the centuries, came to an end under Justinian’s reign.

This paper will attempt to develop this statement by presenting the characters, the doctrines, and the facts that were respectively the subjects, the objects, and the circumstances of this alienation. Posed in this way, however, this trilogy would lack a critical dimension, since equally strong personalities such as Origen and Justinian could not be at odds without any consequences on an ideological level. I therefore thought it appropriate to add a debate upon the values brought into play, thereby separating this study in three parts, respectively focusing upon: **(I)** Origen and his doctrines, **(II)** Emperor Justinian and his “political actions,” and **(III)** the consequences of their confrontation on philosophical, historical and theological levels.

I - Origen and his Doctrines

We will not linger upon a biography of this man since history has accurately recorded his facts and actions. It is indeed useful to recall his exceptional dimension (1) as an innovative intellectual, thereafter to focus upon (2) some of his doctrines, since they are extremely interesting for a contemporary reader attracted by Neo-Platonic culture and mysticism.

1) The Dimension of the Human Person, according to Origen

Origen (184-253), also called “Adamantius”¹ was a Christian theologian, born in Egypt,² pupil and successor of Clement of Alexandria as head of the Alexandrine theological school. He led an ascetic life and since he was teaching both men and women, he went so far as to voluntarily castrate himself in order to escape temptation. History has it that his oral teachings were extremely popular; nonetheless, it is his writings that have perpetuated themselves in History. They took place in a pivotal time of Christianity’s formation, between the primitive period and the first proper dogmatic developments - to which they largely contributed.

Origen’s works had considerable repercussion. He contributed to the building-up of a proper Christian theological doctrine through exegetic works, such as the *Hexapla* (a transcript of the Old Testament with the Hebrew text and six different Greek translations),³ the *Scholia* (comments and discourses upon the Old Testament); as well as apologetic and fundamental theological works such as *Contra Celsus* (*Against Celsus*, in response to Celsus, an opponent of Christianity), and especially the *Peri Archôn* (*De Principiis* in Latin, i.e. *On [First] Principles*), a theological treatise in which he presented his metaphysics. In this latter work, dating from ca. 231 CE, he developed a vision of God, of Creation and of the Human Person, which constitutes the first theological synthesis of Christianity. This earned him as much praise as condemnation.

Origen asserted that the Scriptures should be read on a double level,⁴ i.e. a subtle “spiritual meaning”) in addition to their current (“physical meaning”)⁵ and sometimes even on a third (the “psychic meaning”), which addresses the soul. He availed himself of the “allegorical reading” method used by the Greeks of the 6th Century BCE to interpret Homer, which was thereafter employed by Philo of Alexandria to decrypt the Bible, and ultimately by Origen’s own teacher, Clement of Alexandria. Origen uses hermeneutics as the foundation of his commentaries as well of his theological assumptions. He considers the “Scriptural allegory” as an implicit teaching, a presentation at the second or third degree.

His doctrine, controversial as has been said, availed itself of Platonic thought in order to establish a Christian concept. This approach, a product of enculturation, was innovative at the time, for the great Athenian philosopher was a man deeply rooted in an ancient

vision of the world - just like Socrates whom he interpreted enthusiastically - so that the adaptation of such a thought to the revolution introduced by Christianity was not self-evident. Many successive theologians would adopt the same method, including St. Augustine (354-430), himself a connoisseur of Neoplatonism and of Plotinus, who would also endeavor to achieve a synthesis of Platonism and Christianity. We may say that Origen, over a century in advance, affirms the Augustinian requirement of Faith that wishes to understand what it believes.⁶

Origen affirms the pre-existence of the soul, its free will, thereafter its fall and its purification through a series of successive ordeals leading towards salvation, in a universal reintegration that reinstates Creation in its original state within God. This ultimate State, similar to the original State, is called “apocatástasis” (Anc. Greek: recovery, restitution).

Origen’s theses, as expounded in his master works, were intended to be theological proposals, axes for reflection, not a dogma, however his merely apologetic thought was quickly taken over by many theologians, radicalized and shrouded Evagrius Ponticus (345-399). The latter converted *theoria* into *Gnosis* - considered heretical – in his *Kephalaia Gnostica* (“Gnostic Chapters”). In the teachings of Evagrius, spiritual beings become angels, demons or souls incarnated in human bodies, all bound to rediscover the desire of the contemplation of God. We are explicitly dealing here with *metempsychosis*.⁷

Origen himself was not a Gnostic; on the contrary, he refuted at length the Gnostic theses in the *De Principiis*, demonstrating the identity of the God of the Law and of the God of the Gospels,⁸ that is, connecting the writings of the Old Testament with those of the New Testament – a matter that the Gnostics specifically refused to accept.

In the Gnostic movement, the Human Persons save themselves by understanding the divine knowledge that they acquire, while in Christian theology the redemptory element is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Between salvation by knowledge and salvation through the death and resurrection of Christ, the contradiction becomes insoluble, and the Church’s condemnation inevitable. However, this controversy, on a theological level, should not have concerned Origen, since his theory of the fall of souls excluded Christ consistently with Christian dogma: he regarded Jesus as the only soul who has remained united to the Divine Word, becoming therefore - by personal merit - fit to receive the *substantial* fullness of the Word. The notion of *substance* must here be understood in the Platonic sense of “true reality” as opposed to “changing reality.”⁹

Not Origen himself but successive Origenist theories, similar to a distorting mirror, drew criticism from the Church, particularly the teachings of Evagrius who radicalized Origen’s thought on Christology, turning Christ (not God) as the Creator of perceivable worlds, and the incarnation of Christ United to the Word (not the Word itself) as the promoter of the Salvation of souls. Antoine Guillaumont¹⁰ claims that the condemnation of Origen by the second Council of Constantinople was actually a condemnation of

Evagrius of Pontius. Moreover, several Origenist theories, censored in that Council, are not even present in Origen's works, so that they are not, strictly speaking, Origenian.

2) Some of Origen's doctrines

We have isolated three among the authentic theses, with a bias that is the inevitable counterpart to choice. We wish to highlight the ideas of the Alexandrine Teacher that lay outside the scope of theological discussions too imprinted by Late Antiquity¹¹ so that, because of their general metaphysical value, they may become part of a more timeless consideration. We now wish to expose the specific concepts that Origen developed upon: (a) the apocatástasis, (b) mysticism and (c) reincarnation.

a) The "apocatástasis"

The concept of apocatástasis is included in the acts of the Apostles 3:20-21: "And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the Heaven must receive until the times of *apokatástasis pantôn*, which God hath spoken by the mouth of His Holy Prophets since the world began." The interpretation meets with an ambiguity: *pantôn*, a word meaning "of all things" may alter the meaning of the word *apokatástasis*, therefore the sentence can be understood either as: "the restoration of the Whole, which God hath spoken by the mouth of His Holy Prophets," or as: "the establishment of everything that God hath spoken by the mouth of His Holy Prophets." The difference, from a theological point of view, is sizeable. In the first case, the Creation is a circular cycle, in the second it is a linear evolution. The first option appears corroborated by the same text in 3:18, where Peter speaks of "the accomplishment of that which God had spoken through the mouth of all the Prophets," however, the Jerusalem Bible translators¹² chose the latter, thereby validating the idea of a universal restoration.

The apocatástasis, as Origen views it, is so complete that it extends to the very demons, also called to return to God. This concept would be a subject of deep criticism, for it is based upon the Platonic theory of the absolute Good, but it also connotes - in a rough analysis - the concepts of Pantheism¹³ which identifies the Universe and the Creation within God: borne out of God, Creation ultimately returns to God. Originally, all spirits were united in the contemplation of the Divine; then they became wary and drifted away, causing their "fall" (*katástasis*). God then created the perceivable world in order to allow them, by means of their free will, to be purified through the ordeals of matter, until their final reintegration (apocatástasis meaning literally "the reversal of catastasis").

This way, souls would be submitted to a downward then upward movement, similar to "Jacob's ladder," which Origen clearly recalls in *Against Celsus*:

"Moses, the oldest of our Prophets, while describing the vision of Jacob the Patriarch, told that he experienced a divine dream of 'a ladder that reached heaven, by which the angels of God ascended and descended, whose upper extremity bore our Lord.'¹⁴ Perhaps the Prophet intended to mean that souls descend from Heaven to Earth and then ascend

from Earth to Heaven, or maybe he intended to represent something much greater through such a symbol as the Ladder. The treatise that Philo wrote on this topic deserves to be read with care and attention by those who love the truth.”¹⁵

To envision freedom as a factual principle of the process of Creation was in those times a very original theory. The Divine Reason had chosen to enable creatures, who have thus become able to employ “free reasoning,” with this faculty. They would now be able to reclaim what was originally just a pure liberality of God. Human nature now appears as a temporary phenomenon, the human self only being there to exceed its own human status by the use of reason, in order to reintegrate its original divine nature.

In this scheme, Christ’s incarnation fulfills the purpose to educate those spirits that have fallen; however, other principles such as the equality of the Origin and the End, the primordial equality of all spirits, or the reunification of the multiple, bear nothing that is specifically Christian. Yet the fundamental importance of the freedom of spirits, embedded in this doctrine, turns it into an innovative element of Christian dogma.

The rational basis of the individualization of responsibility for faults is already contained in the Old Testament, but it is a plainly compensatory system and does not bear a global vision of Creation. Origen proves that he is aware of this when he discusses it in “*Against Celsus*”:¹⁶

“How much better are those words of Scripture: ‘The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, nor the children for the fathers. Every man shall be put to death for his own sin.’¹⁷ And again, ‘Every man that eats the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge.’¹⁸ And, ‘The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.’¹⁹ If any shall say that the response, ‘To children’s children, and to those who come after them,’ corresponds with that passage, ‘Who visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me,’²⁰ let him learn from Ezekiel that this language is not to be taken literally; for he reproves those who say, ‘Our fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge,’ and then he adds, ‘As I live, said the Lord, every one shall die for his own sin.’”²¹

According to Origen, the degree of fall and the path of regeneration of each soul become individualized, as in the examples above, but the groundwork of this individualization is much broader. Since the souls are expected to preexist the formation of the body, the cause of the original sin disappears behind an individual cause, unique to each soul and determining each destiny. This multiplicity of paths is only resolved at the end, occurring with the Reintegration in the Whole that leads the Creation back to the One. The concept of substituting the dogma of original sin with the hypothesis of a unique individual preexistence obviously sparked a major opposition, within the Church, to Origen’s hypotheses. However, it provided an explanation for the acknowledgement of the diversity of human destinies upon Earth, and established freedom and free will as

determining the conditions of existence, each Human Person owing only to themselves the quality of their own destiny.

In this model, no one can envy the other, since initially everyone was endowed with the same legacy, though some freely chose to squander it. On the other hand, everyone may freely find this legacy anew. Divine justice appears in a new light, no more vengeful but individually contributory, fundamentally good since every sin carries along its reparation. Origen quotes Isaiah, for whom the fire of punishment is a property of the guilty party: “Walk in the light of your fire, in the flame that you have lit.”²² We notice here another discrepancy with the Church models: Hell is not a specific place; it lies within the earthly life of the one who has voluntarily abandoned the contemplation of the Divine and must thus ascend “step by step up to the highest realities”²³ to find it anew.

Even the devil, this great foil of medieval Christendom, is called - according to Origen - to final beatitude. This shows a great boldness of spirit, since it promises rehabilitation even to the archetype of wickedness. Radical Evil is somehow defeated by the principle of radical Good, the latter shaping the end of History.

b) Origen’s mysticism

Along the same overall explanatory path of the world as that of *apocatastasis*, Origen’s mysticism attempts to perceive and understand the creative process. We have to be careful not to measure 3rd Century thought with concepts and modern practices of what we call today “mysticism.” Origen based himself upon the writings of St. Paul - for whom mystery had an initiatic meaning related to the revelation of God to Humanity through Christ - as well as upon Greek philosophers.

In line with Neo-Platonists (here we naturally think of Plotinus’ teachings),²⁴ the theme of the ultimate [re]union with God constitutes a fundamental part of Origen’s intellectual constructions, the centerpiece of his mystical conception. We will include as well the problematic of the One that Plato theorized in the dialog *Parmenides*, since we know of Plato’s influence upon Origen’s thought. Yet his testamentary writings shape the basis and structure of all his demonstrations.

In this respect, there appears to be a correspondence between the words of Christ: “I and the Father are One”;²⁵ “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am”;²⁶ and again: “that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in me, and I am in You. May they also be One in us (...)”²⁷

Nonetheless, there also is a gradation, starting from the unity of the Father and the Son, then onto the Son and creatures, and finally to the overall unity of the creatures with the divine hypostases, such as will be developed below. If we place ourselves in the context of the post-Chalcedonian theology, these hypostases are consubstantial. Is that to say that the return of the souls in God – according to Origen’s theory – could also constitute the unity of substances? Or rather that, since the Human Person of Genesis created in the image of God, we are heading to an end point where the “achieved human” will be one

with God, in a sort of existential co-implication, itself embedded into the Being? Origen seems to consider this second hypothesis when he writes “it appears that the likeness itself will make headway, so to speak, and that from similar we will become one, because there is no doubt that at the consummation, or end, God is all and in all.”²⁸

This notion of the Whole is another mystical topic for Origen. “I think that this expression attributed to God, ‘be all in all,’ also means that He will reside as a Whole in every being. I mean by this that a reasoning intelligence, purified of all the rubbish of the vices and completely cleansed of all clouds of malice, can feel, understand and believe, all this will be God; and it will not do anything else than feel God, think God, see God and maintain God. God will be in every one of its movements: and this is how God will be all.”²⁹

We must explain at this point the notion of *hypostasis* at the time of Origen. The Trinitarian doctrine, in dogmatic theology, is extremely complex and subtle, something that cannot be addressed in the framework of this paper. Initially, the Trinitarian division is suggested by Greek philosophy, which distinguishes, in every being, three transcendentals: the essence, the existence and the *hypostasis*, corresponding respectively to the nature of the being, to the fact of being there in actuality, and to the being as a subject. One cannot be conceived without the other two, this is why we speak of “transcendentals.” The Trinity of Being appears irreducible.

The *hypostasis* is the subject, not the substance, nor the essence. The essence is a principle of the being while the existence is the fact of being; the *hypostasis* is both essence and existence, thus power and action: it is the subject of both essence and existence. When we talk about a being as a person, we actually mean the *hypostasis*. The *hypostasis* is the means of the passage from essence to existence.

Until now, these definitions are plain. The problem becomes significantly more complex when applying this tripartite structure to God himself, that is, to theology. To consider that the three persons of God are just different modalities of a single God leads to an aberration: the Father and the Holy Spirit would thus have been crucified along with the Son. This is the error of Modalism, for which the three persons of the Trinity share the same nature and substance. However, as we have just said, the component “existence” invalidates this theory since it is “absent” in the Father and the Holy Spirit.

The word “hypostasis” first took, in the Christian view, an anti-modalistic meaning, expressing the reality of God within the otherness of its triple nature, thus the hypostasis manifests the One³⁰ while God is Three, that is, three hypostases, three *distinct* but not *independent* Persons. We should define the meaning that Origen gives to this word in this very dogmatic state.³¹

We now understand that if we consider respectively the non-consubstantiality of the Son and the Father, the distinction of natures (divine and human), or the single divine nature of Christ: Arianism, Nestorianism and Monophysitism could in no way agree with

Origenism. One must admit – let us be clear on this point – that the Origenist theses could not offend the Chalcedonians nor deserve the penalty inflicted on their author at the Second Council of Constantinople. Another fate, however, awaited the thesis that we will discuss next.

(c) Reincarnation, as expressed in Origen’s works

The concept of “reincarnation,” such as we view it today, is not paired easily with Origen’s philosophy, especially since the original Greek text of the *Peri Archon* has not been preserved in full. There exist two Latin translations (*De Principiis*), that of Rufinus of Aquileia³² (345 - ca 411), favorable to Origen, and that of St. Jerome (347-420), an opponent. Rufinus interprets the original text as excluding reincarnation, while St. Jerome instead quotes the same text as defending it.

Unfortunately, both these translations appear biased. Rufinus concedes that he omitted some concepts voluntarily,³³ while St. Jerome presents the thought of Origen in such a way as to transform hypotheses into statements.³⁴ These two exegetes, longtime friends, quarreled about this translation, Jerome even ending up writing a treaty, *Against Rufinus*, following a controversy that saw them accusing each other of heresy - a very strong word in those times.

Due to the aforementioned, we cannot ascribe, in Origen’s cosmological construction, a “theory of reincarnation” such as we know it today through Eastern philosophies, but rather a principle of “return of the souls” in a succession of perceivable worlds. Nonetheless, the notion of “subsequent ordeals” of the soul in these several worlds clearly identifies incarnation in a succession of multiple existential episodes.³⁵ Pythagoras had already provided one such theory, and so had, later, Plato in his dialogues,³⁶ Plotinus in the *Enneads*,³⁷ as well as Porphyry of Tyre³⁸ and Iamblichus.³⁹ We would rather term it *metempsychosis*, accepting *evolution*, as well as *regression*, into an animal body or even into a demon.

However Origen does not endorse the *metempsychosis* assumption: “We certainly believe, that one should in no way accept the questions or the assertions of some [thinkers], who believe that souls can achieve such a degree of forfeiture that, [becoming] oblivious of their reasonable nature and dignity, they go as far as to rush into a class of unreasonable sentient beings, such as animals and livestock.”⁴⁰

A somewhat circuitous, however explicit, way to present reincarnation, consists in considering it from the perspective of series of bodies, not as a pilgrimage of the soul itself. This was the choice of Origen when he wrote, “*Nulli dubium est corpora non principaliter subsistere, sed per intervalla*” (there is no doubt that bodies do not exist mainly, but in intervals).⁴¹ The notion of *existence* implies that the multiplicity denies the final resurrection, or that we are dealing with multiple resurrections, which amounts to reincarnation.

One of the arguments in favor of reincarnation is that it explains in a simple way the cause of the diversity of human destiny. Origen clearly takes position in favor of this view, regardless of any notion of multiplicity of incarnations. This is a decisive reason: “Heed what the Apostle [Paul] speaking of the birth of Esau and Jacob, said: could there be injustice on behalf of God? It cannot be so! I deem it fair to apply this same statement to all creatures, since, as we said above, the Justice of the Creator must appear in all. This would be shown more clearly, in my view, if every celestial, terrestrial, or even hellish being carried, within them, before their physical birth, the causes of such differences.”⁴²

We find the same pattern a little further, in Book II, Chapter 9: “(...) this diversity is not the initial state of the creature, but, as a result of pre-existing causes, the Creator prepares for each a different function and service according to the dignity of their merit.”⁴³

Another interesting topic is the individualization of fate, already present in previous examples but more specifically illustrated in this one, that we find a little further in Chapter 9: “One can therefore understand that these reasoning vessels were previously either cleansed or not cleansed; in other words, they either purified or not purified themselves; and that for this reason each of these vessels obtained, to the extent of their purity or impurity, such place, such region, such condition to be born or to accomplish some deed in this world.”⁴⁴

Reincarnation of course assumes the freedom of the entity that constitutes its subject. The state of “subject” also postulates freedom as an existential condition. This is one of the innovative aspects of Origen’s work: this freedom of the creature within a world desired by God, governed by the laws of God. The Human Person is not omnipotent but free to exercise their choice, thus stressing the importance of free will: “It appears to me logical to seek why the human soul is sometimes driven by good spirits, sometimes by bad ones. I suspect that the causes are antecedent to our physical birth (...)”

The next paragraph continues as follows: “It must be said that there were some anterior causes that, before souls were born in bodies, made them guilty in their thoughts and in their movements, to the point of deserving to endure such guilt, in accordance with the judgement of Divine Providence. Because the soul, whether it resides inside or outside the body, always possesses free will, which is ever drawn either towards good, or towards evil, so that the sense of reason, i.e. the intelligence of the soul, can never remain without movement, whether good or bad. It is plausible that these movements, even before they act in this world, be a cause of merits. Thus, according to these causes and these merits, from birth, or better even, before birth, the Divine Providence has set that Humans would experience some good or some evil.”⁴⁵

In the five previous quotes, it is the very notion of “antecedent cause” that entails that of “consequent incarnation,” depending upon the will of the subject, directly derived from the philosophy of Epictetus (50 - ca. 125 CE)⁴⁶ and the Stoics.

On a philosophical level, reincarnation was not particularly problematic, especially when you consider the influence of the Platonic (but also, let us not forget, Pythagorean) theories at the time of Origen. Theologically, it does not appear as an insurmountable hindrance. Nevertheless, politically, and more precisely in terms of political exploitation of ideas, would not the Church, as well as the Emperor, benefit from eliminating such a cultural element?

Undeniably, it is easy to understand that the concept of an individual locked within the temporal limits of birth and death, responsible before God for the acts he committed during this time-lapse, is infinitely weaker – and therefore more subject to influence – than a Human Person having at hand a long series of earthly lives to achieve perfection. The latter knows that he will escape, at one time or another, those who currently may exercise a hold on him. This influence is so great that it appears determined and irreversible. At a time when political and religious powers were one, the power holder had a tendency to enforce a mono-existential scheme, which overvalued duties and dramatized – in some way - the consequences of a fault or of an error.

Similarly, such a scheme, which entailed representations as frightening as that of hell, described the conditions of punishment and pointed to the one and very enemy: the devil, to whom the offender was likened to. This is how persecutions, convictions, and anathemas gained validity. It is also due to such means that some believers yearned for martyrdom, the promise of a successful outcome after the end of earthly existence; that others self-inflicted tortures⁴⁷ or deprivations with the ultimate goal of obedience. *Obedience*: the very word that conditions all consciences subjected to such a vision of life.

In a “reincarnationist” scheme instead, catching up becomes possible, “moral balance” stems from multiple exercises (allow me to borrow from accounting vocabulary), therefore fear and obedience make room for reflection. Free will changes direction: imagine the free will of someone who must act under duress of the laws and threat of punishment, without hope of a return to better conditions, and on the very short life span that prevailed in those times. A multi-existential thesis turns obedience not into an end but a means; we will thus go as far as to call it an adaptable, negotiable, way, depending upon several successive existential supports, as many as it takes in order to achieve the goal.

Did Origen really profess this doctrine by means of the arguments that we have just mentioned? Allow me to doubt it; in any case, he has not expressed it in this way. Although he was molded by Platonic concepts, he was above all deeply Christian, and although he undoubtedly recognized the evidence of antecedent causes to an incarnation, he did not write about future lives. Yet this tension towards God, caused by the initial fall, cannot - in Origen’s own line of thought - take place in one existence, since it would fall back into the risk of “divine injustice” which he categorically refutes.⁴⁸ Indeed it can only be achieved gradually; this is why he mentions various worlds, and should we need

a further demonstration, let us recall that he envisions the salvation of demons, a redemption that certainly cannot be expected in a single span of existence.

Lastly, when he explains his vision of the end and of consummation,⁴⁹ the multiplicity of experiences becomes hardly questionable: “Therefore, alike some in the former times and others in the latter, some even in the latest ones, having suffered great and burdensome torments, and even supportable and endured, so to speak, for many centuries, are reformed and restored by more painful corrections, being instructed first by the angels, then even by the powers of the higher orders, to be led step by step up to the highest realities, being thus able to reach those who are invisible and eternal, since they have exercised this way, one by one, the functions of the heavenly powers, akin to a form of teaching.”⁵⁰

Origen was clearly referring to the reincarnation of the soul in numerous, successive bodies. In the 18th Century, Jesuit Louis Doucin will perceive this clearly when, writing about his doctrine, he declares: “But he had to say, that the body is with respect to the spirit, only a temporary abode, so uncomfortable that the spirit is trapped there only due to its guilt: this being new evidence that it existed before settling in this body; but also that said body shall not participate in its happiness, as it did not participate in its sin. I mean by this the original sin; therefore, there is no resurrection of the flesh, since the flesh was made to be the prison of the spirit. And, the same way a criminal sometimes changes prison, from an unbearable cell being transferred to a less inconvenient jail, it was not only necessary, but even very natural in Origen’s system, that one same spirit could pass from a body onto another, and that after having languished long enough in these houses of flesh it would be allowed to dwell in the stars which are less unpleasant places.”⁵¹

We could explore the thought of Origen much further on this topic, but that is not the purpose of this paper. We should nevertheless remember the originality of his thesis that blends – albeit with the precautions that he was subdued to – Platonic theory and Christian perspective, in a vision of the restoration of Human Person in God through earthly experiences not limited in time.

Such a personality and such theories could not fail to feed discussions and controversies within the Christian Empire. It was foreseeable that similar debates would end with reactions on the part of religious or political institutions. Emperor Justinian would join both together.

II –Justinian’s “government actions”

Emperor Justinian, who reigned from 527 to 565 CE, was a resolute conqueror and a great legislator.⁵² He wanted to maintain, and even increase, his influence upon the Church,⁵³ by presenting himself as the guarantor of its unity. He expanded his legislative work to the religious sphere and defended Christianity by violently suppressing the

Samaritan revolt in Palestine (530), also by legislating against Jews, Pagans, heretic Arians and Donatists, by confiscating their belongings,⁵⁴ banning their civilian, military or teaching functions, then forcing them, by means of harsh punishments, to convert to Christianity.⁵⁵

He was also involved in theology,⁵⁶ stemming from his distinctive status as head of Christianity, which had become the State religion after the edict of Theodosius I in 392 CE. The Emperor enforced respect of the Laws of the Church, preserved the Dogma, appointed the Patriarchs and summoned the Councils. In the Byzantine vision, the Empire was the earthly image of the Kingdom of Heaven, and the Emperor, of a celestial sovereign.⁵⁷ Since Constantine - who had founded the town bearing his name, Constantinople - the Emperor was: “Equal to the Apostles” (*isapostolos*), “A friend of Christ” (*philochristos*), “The Living Law” (*nomos empsychos*), and reigned over a Roman empire now wholly Christian. In fact, before Justinian, Emperor Basiliscus (who died in 477) had published an Encyclical. In 482 CE his successor Zeno issued the Act of Union (*Henotikón*), a document related to the Council of Nicaea and the anathemas of St Cyril. These undertakings prove their involvement in religious matters.

In its early centuries Christianity was characterized by many theological dissensions, multiple debates between communities, where the rational principles of Greek philosophy were used to clarify a not-yet-clearly-established dogma. Two authors emerge from that time: Irenaeus of Lyon (ca. 120-202 CE), who proposed the principle of unity of the Old and the New Testament and pointed out heresies in his work *Against Heresies*, and Origen, who founded Christian hermeneutics and exegesis, as we saw earlier in this paper.

Attempting to end these philosophical-theological disputes and dogmatic doubts, Justinian ordered (1) the closure of the Athens Schools of Philosophy and (2) convened the Second Council of Constantinople.

1) The Closure of the Schools of Athens

We have just exposed rational principles. These have always been treated with reserve by theology, which emphasizes divine revelation with respect to human explanation. Thus, the Schools of philosophy constituted a risk, in the eyes both of the Church and the Emperor, of perpetuating reprobated beliefs or of introducing dogmatic deviances - even heresies.

In Athens, around 387 BCE, Plato founded the very prestigious “Academy,” where he taught, among others, his pupil Aristotle [see fig. 1]. Its organizing principle was already that of a modern university campus, with a community life, and its religious dimension was well presented through a form of learned paganism, while the training seems to have been multidisciplinary. Having gone through several phases after its foundation, the Academy was forced to cease operations in 86 BC, when Athens was seized by the Romans, and the philosophical schools of Athens were shut down.⁵⁸

In the year 176 CE, Emperor Marcus Aurelius however restored four philosophical Schools respectively dedicated to Platonism, Aristotelianism, Stoicism and Epicureanism. Around the year 400 CE a fifth, “Neoplatonic,” school developed, founded by Plutarch (350-430), more or less taking up the tradition of the ancient Academy, under the direction of the *diadochoi*, i.e. the “successors” of Plato. These were, in chronological order: Plutarch, Syrianus, Proclus, Marinus, Isidore of Gaza, Zenodotus, Damascius and Simplicius.

The Neoplatonic School of Athens taught Plato and Aristotle in a very thorough manner, as well as the theological traditions of Pythagoreanism, Orphism and of the Chaldean Oracles.⁵⁹ It also practiced traditional rites - probably dedicated to the gods - and built, little by little, a pagan theology of significant magnitude. Proclus developed metaphysics and logic through the establishment of a systematic theology, while Damascius regarded the First Principle as Unknowable: the *Unspeakable*, thus founding the first of the theologies of the non-objective knowledge of God.

Damascius’ intense activity, in particular, had endowed this school with an increasing prestige, attracting - as historian Agathias relates - the best philosophers of the Hellenic world.⁶⁰ However it ended up, as a result, becoming a platform of resistance to Christian doctrines, a fact which could not fail to upset Justinian, who viewed himself as a protector of the religion. This is possibly why he decided to crush this intellectual and spiritual opposition.

In 529, he published and had affixed in Athens an edict prohibiting “teaching philosophy, explaining the laws and playing dice.”⁶¹ He ordered the closure of the Schools, accused of perpetuating pagan philosophy, magic, and astrology, and the confiscation of their property⁶² which had been provided through the generosity of the local aristocracy.⁶³ The teachers sought refuge at the court of Chosroes I, of the Sasanian dynasty, King of Persia and a philosopher, an hereditary enemy of the Byzantine Empire. Thus Damascius, Simplicius, Eulamius of Phrygia, Priscianus of Lydia, Hermias of Phoenicia, Diogenes of Phoenicia and Isidore of Gaza, went into exile.

Following a peace treaty in 532 CE between the Persian and Byzantine empires, these philosophers were able to settle within the borders, perhaps in the city of Harran in Syria. Although we are unsure about this location, we notice that a community claiming Neoplatonism and Hermetism - the “Sabeans of Harran” - continued to exist in this city until the 10th century.⁶⁴

Although he managed to close the Schools of Athens down, Justinian nonetheless had to face several theological controversies stemming from various parts of his Empire; their resolve required doctrinal clarifications. This is the topic of our next inquiry.

2) The Second Council of Constantinople

The history of the Second Council of Constantinople will be very summarized, since it abounded with adventures of all kinds: typically Byzantine court intrigues, secret interviews, apocryphal letters, falsehoods, conflicting stories, texts disowned by their authors, even excommunications - besides some substantially more violent episodes.

The aims of the Council are easily identifiable: (a) settle the Monophysite controversy and (b) silence the Origenist controversy. As to (c) the Council's proceedings, they will remain as a model of mockery and political interventionism in an ecclesial assembly.

a) The “Monophysite Dispute”

The role of an Emperor such as Justinian was crucial in the context of the mid-6th Century, especially since he had managed to retake Italy from the Ostrogoths, implying that the Pope was now sited within his Empire. Ambitious and authoritarian, maintaining a cult of personality, Justinian sought to extend his Empire to the West, since the relations with the Eastern regions were marked by the rivalry with the Persian Empire of the Sassanid dynasty, as we previously saw. His wife Empress Theodora, cunningly intelligent and very influential upon him, was certainly aware that it was important to secure the loyalty of the Eastern provinces of the Empire (Syria, Mesopotamia),⁶⁵ and for this purpose act with a gesture in favor of the Monophysites, since they lived in great numbers in those regions, as well as in Egypt - the country that supplied the Byzantine capital with goods.

Let us recall that *Monophysitism* was a doctrine stating the union of the divine and the human nature, within Christ, in only one nature in which the divine had absorbed the human. It was the opposite of *Arianism* (which denied the divinity of Christ) and of *Nestorianism* (that separated both natures of Christ, the divine and the human). These different Christologies illustrate the main doctrinal dispute that marked the first centuries of the history of the Church: the nature of Jesus, the other being the doctrine of the Trinity, the material or spiritual meaning of the Incarnation, the doctrine of salvation (Soteriology), and the role of the Virgin Mary.

Supporting the Monophysites, however, created a dangerous situation, insofar as they called for the conviction of three bishops whom they considered to be heretics: Theodore of Gaza, Theodore of Cyrus (known as “Theodoret”), and Ibas of Edessa. Some selected writings by those three bishops had been collected under the title of the “Three Chapters”. These bishops were suspected of Nestorianism and were allegedly hostile to Saint Cyril of Alexandria, revered by the Monophysites and a well-known opponent to Nestorianism. All three had been convicted during the “Robber Council of Ephesus”⁶⁶ in 449, but subsequently rehabilitated by the Council of Chalcedon in 451, which had notably declared Monophysitism to be a heresy.

Supporting the Monophysites was therefore tantamount as contradicting the Council of Chalcedon, recognized as “Ecumenical”, that is, accepted by the whole Church. In addition, moving forward conviction on the basis of the “Three Chapters” - an artificial

compendium assembled from carefully chosen excerpts aiming to highlight a doctrine opposing Monophysitism - presented the risk of appearing as the exploitation of a grossly conceived argument.

In 533, after having summoned six Chalcedonian and six Monophysite theologians, Justinian published a profession of faith, neutral enough to satisfy both parties, and managed to secure its acceptance by Pope John II in 534. In 535, a new Patriarch of Constantinople, Anthimus I, favorable to the Monophysites, was elected⁶⁷ and in 537 Vigilius became Pope. In February 544, Justinian took the initiative of publishing an edict condemning the “Three Chapters”. This text was met with the approval of the Eastern bishops subsequent to the approval of the Pope, but was widely rejected by the Western bishops who saw it – as did the Pope – as a denial of the Council of Chalcedon, but also as an interference by the Emperor in the theological debates of the Church. (The Emperor did indeed have the power to summon a Council, but not to set its theological guidelines.) This papal opposition constituted a disavowal for Justinian, who had Pope Vigilius kidnapped on November 25, 545, while he was celebrating mass in the Church of Saint Cecily of Trastevere, in Rome, and held him captive, first in Sicily, then in Constantinople, for almost nine years...

Vigilius had to cede under coercion, and condemned the “Three Chapters” in April 548 by publishing a *Judicatum*, provoking the anger of the Western bishops. On June 28, 548, upon learning of the death of Empress Theodora, he however retracted himself and took refuge in the Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul. It is said that armed men tried to wrest him away from the columns of the altar to which he had chained himself, pulling him by the beard and the feet; the altar ultimately collapsed, but the Pope was protected by the populace,⁶⁸ until the soldiers had to withdraw. On December 23, 551, Pope Vigilius succeeded in evading house arrest by escaping from a window, and after having crossed the Bosphorus, sought refuge in Chalcedon⁶⁹ in the Church of St. Euphemia, the very place where the Council of Chalcedon had been held a century earlier. There, on February 5, 552, he published an encyclical, opposing a second Edict that Justinian had issued the previous year (*Confessio recta fidei adversus tria capitula*) confirming the Imperial Edict of 544. Following these events, the Eastern Bishops made some concessions, and the Pope returned to Constantinople.⁷⁰

Pope Vigilius’ role as a victim has often been highlighted, it should however be tempered somewhat: he was a Roman aristocrat close to Byzantine power, ambitioning very early to accede to Saint Peter’s throne. He reached the pontificate following an astonishing mix of intrigues and betrayals, deposed his predecessor Silverius, whom he let die of hunger by exiling him to the desolate Pontine island of Palmaría [today Palmarola] - thus becoming the first criminal Pope in history.

b) The “Origenist Controversies”

Although the doctrine of Origen met at once with great success, it also became the subject of controversy and condemnation because of the novelty of some of its theses.

Already in the year 399, or 400 CE, the “pre-existence of souls” and the “*apocatastasis*” had been censored at a Council convened by Theophilus, Bishop of Alexandria, a sentence referred to Pope Anastasius I who confirmed it. His theory that the “stars” (Earth, Sun, Moon, etc...) are akin to animated beings⁷¹ also attracted much criticism.

On another level, the Origenist theses had prospered greatly since the death of their Master, in 253 or 254, particularly in Palestine. In fact, after his exile from Alexandria⁷² Origen had settled in Caesarea in the year 232, where he founded a school. He had as a pupil Gregory the Thaumaturge, who dedicated his famous “farewell speech” to his Master. His disciples also included Saint Firmilian of Caesarea, Saint Alexander of Jerusalem, Theoctistus of Caesarea, Berylius of Bostra, Saint Anatolius of Laodicea, Julius the African (*Julius Africanus*), Saint Hippolytus and Saint Dionysius of Alexandria. So the Palestinian monks had naturally perpetuated Origen’s philosophy, particularly in the monastery of the “New Lavra”,⁷³ founded near Jerusalem in the year 507.

However, prior to that year, Origenism had already been the subject of controversies that had particularly shaken Palestine. The first, dating from the second half of the fourth century, had opposed the monks of Nitria (defenders of the Origenist allegorism) to those of Sceta (who, for fear of this allegorism, had fallen into anthropomorphism.) Amidst this feud, a dispute arose between Saint Jerome and Rufinus of Aquileia concerning the translation of the *De Principiis*, as we saw earlier. It ended around the year 400 with the condemnation of St. John Chrysostom.

In 531, St. Sabas (439-532), the founder and father of the monastery of the Great Lavra (*Mar-Saba*, see Fig. 2), while undertaking a trip to Constantinople, distanced himself from his companion Leontius of Byzantium of the New Lavra Monastery, considering him too involved in Origenism. The New Lavra monks revolted, and there ensued a *de facto* war between the two monasteries (536 to 546), punctuated by looting and killing. After the New Lavra Origenists won over, and seized, the monastery of the Great Lavra, the quarrel went on by means of intrigues fomented by the hostile monasteries within the Imperial Palace of Constantinople: the belligerents engaged in a conflict of influence with Theodore Askidas, one of Justinian’s principal advisers, himself an Origenist favorable to the New Lavra - all this amidst the raging of the “Three Chapters” controversy.

Another opponent of Monophysitism and of Origenism was Patriarch Ephrem of Amid († 545), a former prefect of the city of Constantinople who became prelate and head of the Church of Antioch. A strong supporter of neo-Chalcedonian orthodoxy, he resorted to violent methods during the persecution launched against the Monophysites in Syria, as from 536. In 542, he convened a Synod in Antioch, which condemned Origen because of the trouble his theories had caused in the Church.

In 543, witnessing the stir existing among the Palestine monks due to the Origenist controversy, Justinian addressed to Menas, Patriarch of Constantinople, an Edict anathematizing nine proposals drawn from the *De Principiis*.⁷⁴ Pope Vigilius ratified

these convictions, then Menas forwarded them to another Synod summoned the same year in Constantinople, which led to the condemnation of Origen for his theses concerning the pre-existence of souls and the *apocatastasis*, but also to that of his disciples Evagrius Ponticus and Didymus the Blind.

c) The Council's Progress

The rivalry between the Pope and the Emperor had raised a great stir in the Christian world; Justinian decided to put an end to the challenge by convening an Ecumenical Council, i.e. whose decisions would be binding on all the faithful. This also presented an ideal opportunity to condemn both Origenism and Monophysitism. Pope Vigilius requested that the Council be held in Italy or Sicily, and - so that it would be truly ecumenical - that all bishops be summoned. However, notwithstanding the Pope's requests and without even waiting for the deadline he had given to Vigilius, Justinian convened the Council in Constantinople, inviting only the bishops who were notoriously adverse to the "Three Chapters"... or notoriously corrupt! Therefore, of only 151 bishops attending - there were 603 at the Council of Chalcedon – a mere five or six represented the West, including one representing a Bishop improperly ordained in the previous year, and another who had been convicted of adultery six years earlier.⁷⁵

The Council began on May 4, 553, without the presence of the Pope, who refused to preside under these conditions [see Figs. 3 and 4]. A solemn deputation, composed of the three Patriarchs of Constantinople, Alexandria and Antioch, accompanied by sixteen Metropolitan Bishops, had been sent to the Pontiff to invite him to the Council, so that the "Three Chapters" controversy could be debated. Vigilius replied to them that he would not go, since the council's composition largely privileged Eastern representatives at the expense of the Western bishops,⁷⁶ and declared that he would deliver his opinion in writing.

On May 12, the Council examined and condemned the writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia, the same happened the next day to those of Theodoret of Cyrus, and on May 19 the letter of Ibas of Edessa to Maris⁷⁷ was declared heretical. On May 25, a very long letter by Pope Vigilius, under the title *Constitutum*,⁷⁸ was brought. It anathematized sixty texts by Theodore but not the author himself, also refused to condemn Ibas of Edessa and Theodoret of Cyrus, and prohibited any judgment contrary to the provisions of the Council of Chalcedon.⁷⁹ Justinian, aware that the answer of the Pope was in opposition to his will, refused to take delivery of it. He then provided a document to the Council certifying that Vigilius had sworn a few years before a secret and very solemn oath - upon the nails of the Holy Cross of Christ and the Gospel - that he would not oppose the condemnation of the "Three Chapters."

On May 26, at the request of the Emissary of the Emperor, the Council deposed the Pope and erased his name from the *diptychs*⁸⁰ albeit without excommunicating him, while claiming the will to maintain the union with the See of Rome.

On June 2 a verdict, in the form of fourteen anathemas, was read to the assembled bishops. It was approved, unanimously as it seems, signed by all (Euty chius, Patriarch of Constantinople, signed first), and published at once [see text in Appendix 1]. The eleventh anathema concerned Arius, Eunomius, Macedonius, Apollinarius, Nestorius, Euty ches and Origen; the twelfth condemned Theodore of Mopsuestia, the thirteenth the writings of Theodoret of Cyrus (but not the man) and the fourteenth, the letter of Ibas of Edessa to Maris (also sparing the author).

We may be surprised, when reading the above, that no particular attention has been devoted by the Council to Origen himself. The fact is that - another feature of this peculiar Council - the original Greek acts were apparently lost, probably in 1453 upon the Fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans. In 1264 – 1265, St. Thomas Aquinas mentioned explicitly canons 4, 5, 8 and 9 in the fourth book of the “*Summa* against the Gentiles”, and in 1448 - during the Council of Florence - these acts were utilized.⁸¹ There remains nowadays, in complete form, only a Latin version, probably the one that was forwarded to Pope Vigilius [see Fig. 5].

On the other hand, there remain fifteen Canons in Greek, as reported by Baluzius, who obtained them from Peter Lambeck, according to a Greek manuscript kept at the Imperial Library of Vienna. These Canons are also cited in the *Dictionaries of the Councils* that confirm the explicit condemnation of Origen, Didymus the Blind and Evagrius Ponticus⁸² Although Gregory of Nyssa was not mentioned among the anathemas, he was however implicitly condemned through the censorship of *apocatastasis* in Canons 11, 14 and 15. Gregory, as we saw earlier, was a strong supporter of the Origenist theory, which he had even raised to the level of dogma, while for Origen it was a mere *apologia*.

These Canons in Greek contain fifteen convictions of Origen’s theses, proving that the Council did indeed deal with this matter, as attested by the clear title in its Latin translation: “*Canones Concilii Constantinopolitani II, adversus Origenem*”⁸³, in the form of judicial anathemas⁸⁴ reproduced at the end of this article [see Appendix 2]. The first, which concerns us particularly here, reads “If anyone believes in the fabulous preexistence of souls, which leads to the monstrous idea that they return (with the passing of time to their primitive state), let him be anathema.”

Cardinal Noris,⁸⁵ a very authoritative source, defended the opinion whereby the sessions dedicated by the Council to the “Three Chapters” had been preceded - or perhaps followed - by one or several further sessions where Origen’s writings had been reviewed and censored, while at the same time condemning Didymus the Blind and Evagrius Ponticus. It must be mentioned that the Latin transcriptions are blatantly incomplete at

the end - there are no final acclamations - which makes plausible the existence of additional sessions missing in the Latin version.

The eleventh of the General Canons is not surprising insofar as it condemns the principal authors of the Trinitarian heresies, particularly of the Christological heresies. Origen's being censured, which apparently occurred without debate - in any case without dogmatic motivation - is much more astonishing, so much that one could think, for several reasons, that this was a later interpolation.⁸⁶ (1) Askidas, one of the most influential members of the Council and himself a convinced Origenist, would certainly not have accepted such a sentence; (2) the list of the eleventh General Canon only quotes those names of heretics already condemned by previous Councils, which was not the case with Origen, who incidentally had nothing to do with these authors; (3) the eleventh General Canon only replicates the tenth Canon of the *Confessio recta Fidei* promulgated by Justinian in 551,⁸⁷ which did not mention Origen.

On the other hand, it must be noted that the turnaround of Justinian against Origen occurred earlier than the publication of the *Confessio Recta Fidei*. We have seen that the emotion generated by the Origenist controversy had motivated the Emperor, as early as 543, to condemn several Origenist theses.⁸⁸

It is likely that Askidas, in spite of his personal beliefs, would not contradict the Emperor on this point. Further evidence includes the fact that the New Lavra monks broke off with the Bishops of Palestine as soon as they learned of their approval of the Council's acts, while a simple condemnation of the "Three Chapters" would not have affected them. In order to cause such an immediate and radical rupture, Origen had to be directly mentioned.

Furthermore, Cyril of Scythopolis, a contemporary of the Second Council of Constantinople and a member of the monastery of the Great Lavra, wrote in his *Life of Saint Sabas*: "When the Holy Fifth Ecumenical Council met at Constantinople, Origen and Theodore of Mopsuestia were condemned by a joint, universal anathema, that also condemned what Evagrius and Didymus had taught about the pre-existence and *apocatastasis*."⁸⁹ Several subsequent Councils, which had knowledge of the acts of 553, confirm the authenticity of these condemnations in their minutes: the Lateran Council of 649 (eighteenth canon), the Sixth Ecumenical Council (Constantinople III) of 680 (seventeenth and eighteenth sessions), the Seventh Ecumenical Council (Nicaea II) of 787 (seventh session). We thus see that there is a high degree of verisimilitude.

Six months later, while his entourage was exiled or imprisoned, Pope Vigilius, aged and sick with gout, resignedly decided to endorse the decisions of the Council, which had partially taken account of his opinion, in a letter to Patriarch Eutychius⁹⁰ dated December 8, 553, then by a second *Constitutum* dated February 23, 554, in which he pointed out the errors of the "Three Chapters." The Pope pronounced an anathema against Theodore of Mopsuestia and his writings, but merely sentenced the writings of Theodoret of Cyrus against Cyril and the letter to Maris by Ibas of Edessa, without condemning their authors,

thus rejoining the Council's twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth anathemas. Vigilius was subsequently restored in the *diptychs* of the Byzantine Church, his relationship with Justinian renewed⁹¹ While he was allowed to return to Rome, he died in Syracuse, in 555, on his journey back.

This Pontifical "approval" had the effect of quieting the "Three Chapters" controversy. Some Western bishops protested, refusing for several years to recognize the decisions of the Council, and then the quarrel fell gradually into oblivion. The second Council of Constantinople was recognized as the fifth Ecumenical Council, and the sixth - the third Council of Constantinople (680-681) - would even welcome the happy ending of the previous Council – albeit a hundred and thirty years later – praising both Pope Vigilius and Emperor Justinian.

The theological disputes concerning Origen did not cease there, since in the 15th and 16th Centuries Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494) would defend him in his *Nine Hundred Philosophical, Cabalistic and Theological Conclusions* (1486), then in his *Apologia* (1487). Both these texts were censored by Pope Innocent VIII but then rehabilitated by Pope Alexander VI. Erasmus (1466-1536) also drew inspiration from Origen, and Jacques Merlin wrote an *Apology of Origen* in 1511, causing a sharp quarrel with Noël Bédard, the then Dean of the University of Sorbonne in Paris and a great hunter of heretics. In the 17th Century, Origen was condemned by the Protestants (as had Luther), but also by St. Francis of Sales and Jansen, while the Jesuit father Etienne Binet took up his defense (*About the salvation of Origen*, 1629); so did Pierre Halloix - also a Jesuit - in his text *Origenes defensus* (1648), and Daniel Huet in his *Origeniana* (1668). In the 18th Century, Jacques Joseph Duguet rejected any suspicion of apostasy by Origen in the first volume of his *Ecclesiastical Conferences* (1742).

III - Issues and developments

The controversies and the events that we have outlined in the previous two parts must arouse some theoretical considerations. We will review here three parallel areas, by successively addressing (1) the philosophical, (2) the historical and (3) the conciliar plans, in order to draw - if possible – some conclusions, if not definitive, at least, so we hope, relevant.

1) On a Philosophical Level

If one focuses on the philosophical level, this portion of the history of Christianity appears visibly crossed by three contradictions, sometimes real, sometimes apparent, between: (a) Faith and Reason, (b) Anthropomorphism and Universalism, (c) Hellenism and Christianity.

a) Faith and Reason

The edict of 529 against the Schools of Athens, as well as the Second Council of Constantinople marked a rupture with the Ancient Greek World, along with the rationality of Classical Greek Philosophy. In doing this, they laid the foundations for an opposition between faith and reason, for the benefit of the first and – judging by the subsequent course of history – in favor of papal authority, a fact which will not fail to regularly raise the inadmissibility of any philosophical argument that deviates from established dogmatism.

This is illustrated by the 11th anathema of the General Canons of the Council of 553: in condemning the Fathers in question, it did not try to oppose reason to their theses, but only considered the argument of faith, notwithstanding that the Fathers had based themselves upon faith and reason.

It was certainly out of question in 553, to reinforce the authority of the Pontiff, rather than that of the Emperor,⁹² however, one could say, this superiority of the irrational, this rejection of the Greek dialectic by the Decree of 529, ended up limiting any critical position against the Church in general, in full accordance with the Sixth Canon of the First Council of Constantinople (381) that repressed the charges against the bishops responsible of the Government of the Church, and other clerics,⁹³ while the Third Canon gave precedence to the Bishop of Rome - that is the Pope - the Bishop of Constantinople coming second.⁹⁴ The subsequent Pontiffs benefited from this dominant position, which guaranteed them a very important protection against any malicious hints of threats proceeding from any branch of Christianity.

The history of the papacy reveals a sinusoidal path of Pontifical authority, therefore we cannot state that the Canons of Constantinople I, then of Constantinople II, shrouded the future popes with an inviolable armor. However, the prior abeyance of the Schools of Athens was without a doubt a defense against possible conflicting rhetoric: this will be the case until the twentieth century. Following Origen, the Church, which had already annexed the Greek thought with St. Augustine (354-430), continued in this perspective, particularly through the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274)⁹⁵ who utilized, in the 13th Century, Aristotle's philosophy in order to validate Christian faith.

The word “utilized” is justified by the purpose of Thomas Aquinas himself, who regarded philosophy as the maidservant of theology (*philosophia ancilla theologiae*),⁹⁶ as an apology of Christianity, and successfully exploited Aristotelianism. This criticism does not however prevent us from doing justice to the intellectual dimension of St. Thomas Aquinas, who viewed intelligence as a power of the soul,⁹⁷ linking it to the Universal Being. In Aquinas' eyes, the reconciliation between faith and reason is set in a vertical axis where the first dominates the second, the latter merely being there as a support.

The end of the Middle Ages marked a separation between theology and rationalistic knowledge, due to the development of the Universities, a phenomenon that would

escalate in the Renaissance with the birth of Atheist Humanism and the return of Neo-Platonism. It would later expand with the rise of science, successively with the philosophers of the Age of Enlightenment in the 17th and 18th Centuries, and finally through the materialistic thoughts of the 19th Century: Evolutionism and the theories of Marx and Engels. The separation between faith and philosophical reason had brought the Church to a position of withdrawal into itself, even of negation of rationality that excluded it from its own field of investigation.

This confrontation probably reached its culminating point with the *Syllabus* of Pope Pius IX *Complēctens praecipuos nostrae aetatis errores*⁹⁸ dated December 8, 1864, an encyclical condemning all answers external to faith and inspired by science. Despite the accusations of obscurantism and reactionary thinking that this text caused, the Church will maintain its position of principle of the rule of faith and revelation. We know how laborious the efforts of some laymen – even of some members of the clergy – were in order to reconcile these points of view: e.g. Father Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), did not see his works published in his lifetime.

Despite the gesture of Pope Leo XIII in 1879, through his Encyclical *Aeterni Patris*⁹⁹ that recognized the value of philosophical thought, the Church kept on standing at distance from rationalism, particularly from that of science. To cite only a minor, but significant, example, the theologian Aurelio Palmieri (1870-1926) in 1911 declared in a chapter of his *Theologia dogmatica orthodoxa* that “scholasticism should be purged from rationalist slander.”¹⁰⁰

Then, in the middle of the 20th century, we witnessed a wave of reconciliation between the act of believing and that of understanding, particularly with the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) whose Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (Joy and Hope) emphasized the transcendent ability of reason.¹⁰¹ One could also feel that we were nearing the rehabilitation of Origen’s work, since his thinking and his method were highlighted by Henri de Lubac, Hugo Rahner¹⁰² and Hans Urs von Balthasar: three great erudite theologians and philosophers, enlightened by that rationality which was now inevitably ascending within the Church.

It rested upon John-Paul II’s Encyclical *Fides et Ratio*¹⁰³ (Faith and Rationality) to complete this reversal, with an amazing introduction bringing up the “Know Thyself” carved on the architrave of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, acknowledging the speculative capacity peculiar to human intelligence, stating that “the Church, for its part, cannot but appreciate the efforts of reason”¹⁰⁴ and that “with the skill derived from the fact that it is the custodian of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, the Church wishes to reaffirm the necessity of reflection upon truth.”¹⁰⁵ We then witnessed a re-appropriation of Reason by the Church, as in the time of the first Fathers who had to make theirs the philosophical thought of the Greeks, thus - perhaps - the reference to the Delphi temple inscription.

This Encyclical also linked knowledge with truth, then truth with faith,¹⁰⁶ in a classical theological scheme: the method of the *auditus fidei* and the *intellectus fidei*. Admitting that “the encounter of Christianity with philosophy was neither immediate nor easy,”¹⁰⁷ John-Paul II critiqued Celsus (as had Origen in “Against Celsus”), explicitly quoted Clement of Alexandria (Origen’s teacher),¹⁰⁸ and lastly approved the works of Origen himself, in their *dimension of Christian philosophy*,¹⁰⁹ a subtle way to erase the controversies of the Second Council of Constantinople.

In his famous Regensburg speech, September 12, 2006, Pope Benedict XVI confirmed this analysis by stating that “not to act according to reason is contrary to God’s nature,”¹¹⁰ thus consolidating the encounter between Faith and Reason, as he had already stated in his earlier theological work¹¹¹ as well as during his remarkable Munich debate of 19 January 2004 – while he was Cardinal Ratzinger – with the philosopher Jürgen Habermas, a self-defined “methodological atheist”.¹¹² This confrontation remains until today a source of knowledge upon the deep thought of Pope Benedict, since Greek thought - at the initiative of Habermas – was also involved, a topic that could not be eluded in such a debate.

Far from dodging the difficulties, Benedict XVI declared that, “with the statement of the Gospel of St. John ‘In the beginning was the *Logos*,’ the Evangelist has given us the final word upon the biblical concept of God, in which all roads reach their aim and realize their synthesis, and that the encounter between the biblical message of Faith and Greek thought was not a mere coincidence but an ‘intrinsic necessity.’”¹¹³

Then, on April 25 2007, Benedict XVI distanced himself from the anathemas of Constantinople II by rehabilitating Origen as his predecessor had previously done, in a little-known but significant speech,¹¹⁴ where he described Origen as “a master”, and even, in its conclusion, as a “great master.” This being said, such praise does not suggest that the Pontiff “validated,” somehow, the theory of the pre-existence or the return of the souls, because his speech, in the context of Patristics, dealt with Origen as an exegete of the Scriptures. However, one should not forget that the Church is moving only slowly towards new paths, that it gives only very gradually up the elements of its dogmatism. Nevertheless, John-Paul II’s, and Benedict XVI’s approaches already represent a very important step, since they struck against the eleventh Anathema of Constantinople II against Origen.

b) Anthropocentrism and Universalism

In another field, we can consider that the opinion of the Church (including its excesses such as the *Syllabus* of Pius IX), rejoins the ancient tradition stemming from the philosophers through their common contradiction with the theses of positivist scientism. They also share a Cosmocentric and Universalist vision. They both resolutely act against Anthropocentrism and metaphysics-deprived materialistic ideas. This was initially an element of convergence, although (unfortunately) the Council of 553 chose to ignore it. Nevertheless nowadays, very far from the presumptions of said Council, modern

philosophy has absorbed the Greek philosophical legacy. It has, at the same time, radically rejected the Judeo-Christian conception of Salvation through the Revelation and the Church. History, on this point, did not prove the Council right.

We have just mentioned Anthropocentrism insofar as it opposes the Theocentrism of the Church and, overall, metaphysics, however this can lead to a misconception regarding Origen's thought. He develops a vision where the Human Person is placed in the center of the Reintegration process, where human freedom is decisive, but this does not mean that Origenism opposes the concept of God: quite the contrary, God and the various elements of Creation join together so closely in this theological view, that the author has sometimes been accused of Pantheism. Still, Pantheism presupposes a consubstantiality of God and Creation - therefore a monistic system - that Origen never states. On the contrary, in "Against Celsus," he denounces the Pantheism of the Stoics.¹¹⁵

We should also emphasize that the issues related to the notion of Anthropocentrism – that we will not detail here - connect with two very interesting topics: On one hand, Humanism itself is Anthropocentric, since the Human Person stands at the center of its philosophical reflection, it enhances knowledge and the development of human qualities; however, it is not "scientist" in the modern sense of the word, although it is not at all theist. On the other hand, the Church has made an effort to advance towards Anthropocentrism, through the pen of John John-Paul II, when he declared in his Encyclical *Dives in Misericordia*¹¹⁶ that the perspective of Christianity was simultaneously and inseparably Anthropocentric and Theocentric.

c) Hellenism and Christianity

Moreover, the relationship between Hellenism and Christianity is often raised in relation to the two events that are the subject of this study. We must first observe that before crossing Christianity's path, Hellenism met with Judaism, and that some Jewish communities - the Alexandrine for example - requested that their sacred literature be in Greek, because they had lost the knowledge of reading Hebrew. This is why the Seventy¹¹⁷ translated the Torah under Ptolemy II Philadelphos (308-246 BCE). In doing so, they represented a nomadic desert people, organized in tribes, in the image of a Greek city-state, among further transpositions that prove that Hellenization of Judaism was underway. Concerning non-translatable topographical names, transliterations were incorporated to the Greek noun system and little by little became subject to declension. Hellenization thus triggered an interpenetration,¹¹⁸ and at the same time a definite forfeiture of the Hebraic culture.

The Greek texts of the Scriptures - this time, deriving from the Hebrew version of the Masorettes¹¹⁹ - became the Old Testament of the Christians. They served as a reference for the Fathers of the Church after Origen. These had access to the Hebrew text transcribed into Greek by Origen. They themselves wrote in Greek, so that Hellenism came to be a determining factor in primitive Christianity, Greek becoming very soon the

language of the Church. The conceptual framework of the new religion was borrowed from Greek philosophy, chiefly from Platonic thought, since the early Christian theologians had been shaped by Platonism and subsequently by Neo-Platonism. This process, which took place over several centuries, brought these two cultures together to learn from each other, the Christians adopting the Greek philosophical categories, and the Neo-Platonists - with Porphyry (234 – ca. 310), then Iamblichus (ca. 250-330) and Proclus (412-485) - integrating a dimension of Salvation into their doctrine.

However, Christianity had a different *visio mundi* from that of the Greeks: the vision of the Divine and of that of the Human Person, in Christianity, appeared irrational to the Pagans. Where Plato and Aristotle demonstrated their theories, Christians believed in a revelation denying - through its enlightened character - any need for a demonstration. From this stemmed the Pre-Chalcedonian Christological quarrels that opposed Platonists and Christians against one another. The latter had to adapt to the philosophical method, thus the technical language and arguments were already very developed in some Cappadocian Christian fathers such as Gregory of Nazianzus (329-382), Basil of Caesarea (329-379) and Gregory of Nyssa (335-384).¹²⁰

These controversies may appear surprising today, yet the Eastern urban populations of that time loved theological debates. The new religion addressed itself not only to scholars but to the populace. It was no longer debated in philosophical circles but preached in public squares, it became a topic of daily conversation. It spread a form of culture and education in all social classes, whence its popularity, further enhanced by the strength of community life in these Eastern cities. Gregory of Nyssa described humorously the life in Constantinople in the fourth century: “If you ask someone to give you change, he philosophizes about the Begotten and the Unbegotten; if you inquire about the price of a loaf, you are told by way of reply that the Father is greater and the Son inferior; if you ask ‘Is my bath ready?’ the attendant answers that the Son was begotten out of nothingness...”¹²¹

By imposing Christianity, Constantine gave a “political” advantage to Revelation, albeit without being able to silence criticism from the Greek philosophers who invoked the irrationality of Christian faith. It must be pointed out that, in Greek culture, irrationality was the worst of weaknesses, enough to invalidate any theory. The thesis of God incarnate in Man, in particular, was at the center of discrepancies and fundamental misunderstandings: there was no longer an issue of intermediation between two worlds, but of transmutation of the Divine into a Man - tortured, humiliated, then put to death. This represented a real ontological break, an abrupt rupture with the concept of continuity, a key principle of the hierarchy of beings among the Greeks.

How, therefore, can Christology reconcile with Greek thought? How to admit - and to make admitted - this reversal of traditional social distinctions, that turns the uneducated or the sinner as an equal of the educated and virtuous, such as Greeks saw them? How can one affirm that the Human Person is created in God's image, while being radically different from Him? How – and this is very important – can one explain that Eternity no

longer implies an immutable world, that the stars, whose regular movement represented a model for the Greeks, are no longer gods? In a word, that the universe is no longer Nature but History?

This is precisely what Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Augustine, and others, will endeavor to accomplish. They will arm themselves, for this purpose, with the rational weapons of their opponents. They will use Platonic thought to rebut criticisms, the *corpus* of the Old Testament to support their arguments, thus achieving a “Hebraic-Greek-Christian” triangulation. Origen’s *Against Celsus* is a good example. We do find, in this approach, a process of Hellenization, although Origen still considers the stars as Beings, defends a cyclical system with a return of the souls and successive ordeals in a plurality of existential experiences (we purposely do not use here the word “reincarnation!”.)

Christian theological argumentation needed therefore, as we said, to draw upon Greek philosophy in order to be better understood and accepted. This was a method used by St. Paul himself:¹²² “Though I am no man’s slave, yet I have made myself everyone’s slave, that I might win more men to Christ. To the Jews I was a Jew so that I might win the Jews. To those who were under the Law I put myself under the Law (...), that I might win those who are under the Law. To those who had no Law I myself became a man without the Law (even though I am bound by the law of Christ), so that I might win the men who have no Law. To the weak I became a weak man, that I might win the weak.”¹²³ Similarly, confronting those Greeks who accused them of irrationality, Christians became somewhat rational. Thus did they deepen their own doctrine, and became able to fight their opponents, to win educated Pagans to their faith. In the *De Principiis*, Origen shows this deepening, when he tackles philosophical issues under the perspective of Christian faith, such as the mechanisms of the universe, and, by doing so, justifies them rationally.

The Alexandrine school contributed substantially to this reflection, and the ousting of Origen, who was its leading light, in fact did it a great favor, since the founding of another school in Caesarea led to the dissemination of Alexandrine thought through the whole Christian East. It even led to the resolution of the Arian controversy in the 4th century.

Since Judaism, Hellenism and Christianity were thus entangled, leading to a “Hellenism transfigured by biblical tradition,” as Alain Durel¹²⁴ wrote in a text about Gregory of Nyssa. However, the Greek model suffered violent political attack from Dogma, imposed since Emperor Constantine. The closure of the Schools in Athens by Justinian provided the definitive advantage. The combat ceased for lack of combatants, a delayed reprisal for St. Paul who was – it is said – knocked down (intellectually) at the Areopagus on one of his journeys to the Greek capital city.¹²⁵

Justinian’s political motivation is understandable: the “Catholic” (a word that means “universal”) dimension of Christianity was in line with his extensive conception of the Empire. There exists now a State religion, priests have replaced the ancient philosophers, the period of Antiquity makes way for the Middle Ages. The rupture with the past is the

transition of the concept of the City towards that of the State. Social organization becomes one of a multitude of individuals guided by a sovereign, who is responsible for order and security, while the salvation of souls is being taken care of by the clergy. Being rid of Athenian rhetoricians and dialecticians, Justinian was now able to dominate those two axes.

2) On an Historical Level

Beginning with Constantine, Byzantine emperors found themselves facing the irreducible growth of a religion that could possibly threaten the social order, hitherto based on a relationship between the gods and the city. Once deprived of the religious cement that conflated the worship of the gods with that of the Emperor, the latter being the link between the world above and that below, the unity of Roman society was in danger of collapsing. Constantine's gesture envisioned to purely and simply transpose an ancient scheme to a new situation, as well as to maintain the authority of the Emperor, appointing him as supreme protector of the Church. There was therefore a unifying and federative scope to his decision.

However, the Byzantine Empire was composed of diverse religious factions (Pagans, Jews, Christians, many philosophical and theological schools, etc.), that the new State Religion could not tolerate. Until the 4th century, the Paganism of the Roman city made-do (to some extent) with this plurality. The new religion was persecuted in the first centuries¹²⁶ - in fact until the conversion of Constantine - precisely because it refused any other dogma than its own, thus representing a challenge to public authority whose laws it criticized. Once imposed by the Emperor, Christianity sustained this requirement of exclusivity with renewed insistence, which implied that the other religious forms, now regarded as heretic, had to disappear.

Both Church and Empire drew benefit from such exclusivism. Indeed, the Emperor availed himself of the pretext of conversion to justify his territorial conquests, and the fact that he behaved as guarantor of Christian dogma allowed him to find anew - *mutatis mutandis* - the privileged "transcendental relationship" that his predecessors maintained in the Ancient Roman Empire. The Emperor's temporal power stemmed from God, and the Christian faith was the best justification for Imperial monarchy.

However, this scheme could only operate by recognizing the spiritual authority of the Roman Apostolic See, that is of the Pope, in a sort of "twin-headed autocracy."¹²⁷ These two institutions, one more demanding than the other, constituted a permanent risk of confrontation between the Papal *auctoritas* and the Imperial *potestas*, as was often the case, sometimes to the benefit of the first, sometimes of the second. During Justinian's reign, we saw that the "dominant head" was the Emperor, who imposed his will to the Pope at the political level and, in terms of religious law, even on a theological level. This sovereign had indeed a totalitarian conception of his role, which will take the name of "Caesaropapism."

Justinian had obviously understood the enormous rift that Christianity represented in the culture of late Antiquity,¹²⁸ and the civilizational rupture that this new way of thinking was in the process of achieving. In any case, Constantine's conversion and the edict of Milan (313) were the determining elements of these upheavals. History shows that every great change is triggered by the action of an individual who - more often - is not himself aware of the true dimension of his action in the future. The action of Constantine was political but its impact extended far beyond, although he did not wish to eradicate the existing ancient foundation.¹²⁹ As to Justinian, his task was to consolidate the Empire by means of the universalist claim of its Christian dimension, thus taking up the two poles of supreme authority. Such supremacy would not last, since the slow decline of the Byzantine Empire began after Justinian's death. It will nevertheless survive – in spite of numerous vicissitudes – until the capture of Constantinople by the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II (the Conqueror) in 1453.

The Second Council of Constantinople also constituted a further element of divergence between the Churches of the East and of the West, divergences due to the composition of the Byzantine Empire and in fact dating back to Constantine. On one side the Eastern provinces of the Empire, of Greek culture, were infatuated with philosophy. On the other side, the Western provinces, of Roman culture, which were much less individualistic and more juridically-oriented. This difference will never be extinguished, and will lead - through complex historical factors, far exceeding the Second Council of Constantinople - to the Great Eastern Schism of 1054, then to the establishment of the Latin Eastern Church. This “divorce” between Catholic and Orthodox churches will be definitely consummated during the sack of Constantinople by the Crusaders in 1204 (Fourth Crusade). Relics preserved at Constantinople were then taken to the West by the Crusaders, a very significant move in the context of medieval Christianity, and although the Byzantines regained the city in 1261, the two churches remained separate, up to this day.

In the West, Pope Vigilius' state of resignation and his concessions towards Justinian exposed the Papacy to criticism and put him, even in Italy, in a position of weakness. The Bishops of Aquileia, Milan and Illyria¹³⁰ (since Northern Italy laid outside the borders of the Byzantine Empire) opposed the decisions of the Council and the sanctions against the “Three Chapters.” This led to the “Schism of Aquileia,” led by Bishop Paulinus, this dissension extending until the end of the 7th Century.

The second Council of Constantinople was also a failure as far as reconciling with the Monophysites, a settlement, as we have seen, desired by Emperor Justinian in order to unify the components of the Empire, since these felt dissatisfied with its decisions. Justinian went further in 564 by enacting a decree accepting Julian of Halicarnassus' moderate Monophysitism, but then again, fearing to be absorbed by the Orthodox, the Monophysites rejected any compromise. Eutychius, Patriarch of Constantinople, had to

resign, and Justinian did not have time to persevere in his efforts since he died the following year, on November 15, 565.

A Monophysite Church structured itself in 564 at the initiative of the Bishop of Edessa James I Baradeus († 578), thence the name of Jacobite Church (Syriac Orthodox Church), that comprises Bishops, Metropolitans and Patriarchs. It later met with the competition of the – also Monophysite – “Tritheism” of the Antiochian Church, this last church itself sparking a quarrel with that of Alexandria (Egyptian) concerning the Patriarch Paul the Black († abt. 581). The feud led to a schism between these two Patriarchates, so that today the (still Monophysite) Church of Syria bears the name of the Jacobite Church, while that of Egypt is called the Coptic Church.

These many vicissitudes lingered on, ultimately leading to the Third Council of Constantinople in 680-681 CE. As we see, the very causes that led to the Second Council were ultimately not extinguished by it, so that we can speak of a - at least partial - failure of Justinian’s maneuvers in this respect.

3) On a Conciliar Level

The Second Council of Constantinople, as every act of the Ecclesial Magisterium, can be looked at in terms of (a) law, and of (b) theology, whether one considers its form, or its contents. In these two areas, we will attempt to respect the strict limits of a Conciliar vision, and confine our remarks to the assessment of the 553 Assembly.

a) The Legal Point of View

From a legal point of view, this Assembly was marked by important irregularities. Although there was no actual Canon law - in any case not an autonomous law - in the Church of the year 553, practices in force imposed a strict division of powers between the Pope and the Emperor: the first determining - or at least accepting - the themes of the debate, the second undertaking the convening and the formal organization of the Conciliar Assembly. In addition, in order to stigmatize it as Ecumenical, a Council had to gather together the Bishops of the whole of Christendom. Otherwise, we may speak of regional Councils or diocesan Synods. It is clear that these conditions of validity were never met here.

Summoned by the Emperor in a place chosen by him against the Pope's request, the Council took place *in absentia* of the latter - who furthermore ended up even being sequestered - as well as in the absence of most representatives of the Western Church, who - in the overwhelming majority - had not been summoned. The Assembly could only debate upon a project presented by the Emperor, who rejected the Papal *Constitutum* by refusing its production for the debates. In addition, the Council condemned the Pope, erasing his name from the *diptychs*. Finally, the dogmatic definition adopted at the end of the Assembly, was only accepted by the Holy See through a retraction, itself obviously obtained through coercion. From a legal point of view, this Assembly should then be

considered irregular and its decisions inadmissible. It should not bear the title of “Ecumenical,” but considered as “regional.”

Despite these breaches, it was validated and regarded as Ecumenical. The Emperor’s persuasive skills were certainly not extraneous to this reception, and a touch of diplomacy – or of cunning – was added by insisting upon the compliance of the Canons of 553 to the Council of Chalcedon’s dogmatic definition. That was partly true, yet two realities were concealed: the Council of Chalcedon had not referred to the Origenist controversy, and two of the fathers anathematized by Constantinople II, Theodore of Cyrus and Ibas of Edessa, had on the contrary been rehabilitated at Chalcedon. The argument of compliance appears thus as shoddy.

Let us add to this that the Council Fathers recognized the Assembly as Ecumenical, and that the following Popes accepted it as such. Subsequent crises, dealt with by the following Councils, did not leave any room for debate upon an Assembly about which no one clearly cared anymore, so that as of today the Second Council of Constantinople is officially recognized as the Fifth Ecumenical Council of the Church - a fact that appears highly questionable on a legal level.

b) The Theological Point of View

From a theological point of view, we will now separate (α) the dogmatic content of the Canons from (β) the theological value of the Council itself.

(α) The General Canons of the second Council of Constantinople [see text in Appendix 1] can be rearranged in the following order, in order to determine their dogmatic content. Firstly, they reasserted the divine consubstantiality of the Three Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Canon I). They were broadly trying to reconcile the theology of St. Cyril of Alexandria (which Justinian wanted to privilege) with that of Chalcedon, since it was essential to safeguard the authority of the Councils: in other words, “Cyrilian formulas” had to be maintained, making them acceptable to “Chalcedonian orthodoxy”. This is why Apollinarius and Eutyches were condemned along with Nestorius and Theodore of Mopsuestia (Canons 11 and 12).

The text preserved the unity of the Incarnate Word, “One of the Trinity” (Canon 10),¹³¹ while remaining faithful to St. Cyril and the Greek doctrine, as well as to Christian tradition: the “Christ-God-Word that was begotten by a woman, performed the miracles and suffered” (Canon 3). We obtain here a unity, without confusion nor separation of the two natures, the divine and the human (Canons 7, 8 and 9). We encounter again the negative formulas of the Council of Chalcedon’s theology, in order to preserve an appearance of compliance.

Such a difference of *natures* does not imply a distinction of *persons*, since such natures do not exist independently. Indeed, the human nature does not possess its own *hypostasis* and survives only in the *hypostasis* of the Word (Canon 4), so that the two natures

constitute only one Christ in one substance (Canon 5). It is therefore in the *hypostasis* that the Union takes place (theory of the “hypostatic union”). Here the formula of St. Cyril is set in context of Chalcedonian theory, a balancing act, somewhat hypocritical (the unique nature taught by St Cyril being thus distorted)¹³² although ultimately this contextualizing gained consent.

Secondly, the Canons affirm that the human nature of Christ was born from the Virgin Mary, who is therefore actually the “Mother of God” (Canons 2, 3 and 6).

The extremely subtle use of the words “person”, “nature” and “*hypostasis*” allowed to finalize the dogma and closed the door to any attempt for Nestorian resurgence (i.e. the separation of the two natures). However the thread of this balancing act remained very thin, since fourteen centuries later, on December 7, 1965, the joint declaration of Pope Paul VI and Patriarch of Constantinople Athenagoras I, reclaimed the doctrine of Chalcedon... carefully avoiding to use the word “nature.”

With respect to Origen, according to the Lambecius manuscript [see text in Appendix 2], the Second Council of Constantinople anathematized fifteen theories: 1 - the doctrine of the pre-existence of souls and their return. 2 - the doctrine of human beings originally considered as being angelic, but later descending to a lower condition; 3 - the doctrine of the stars considered as beings; 4 - the doctrine of the descent of beings in bodies of Human Persons or of demons; 5 - the doctrine of descending or ascending directions in the incarnation of human beings; 6 - the doctrine of fallen spirits with the exception of Christ, who is thus self-begotten; 7 - the doctrine of the incarnation of Christ without humanity; 8 - the doctrine of the plain union of Christ to the Word; 9 - the doctrine of the descent into hell of the intelligence of Christ, not of God the Word Himself; 10 and 11 - the doctrine of the destruction of the bodies at the resurrection of the dead and the last judgment; 12 - the doctrine of the final union with the God-the-Word thus ending the reign of Christ; 13 - the doctrine of the final absorption, in God, of Christ and of the other reasoning creatures; 14 - the doctrine of the future unity of human beings, identical to that of their pre-existence; 15 - the doctrine of the identity of the beginning and the end of Creation, the end being the measure of the beginning.

As far as we are concerned, we must retain the condemnation of the pre-existence of souls, of their fall in the material world, and their reintegration in the Divinity through a series of ordeals or tests. However, as we said in the first part,¹³³ Origen’s heterodoxy, as emphasized by the Council, was partially due to the radicalism of Evagrius’s interpretations, particularly in his “Gnostic Chapters” (*Kephalaia Gnostica*). He went astray, notably in his Christology, away from his model, when he considered Christ as separate from the Son, simply the first of all spiritual beings.

Now, it is precisely Origen’s Christology that motivated the Conciliar anathemas. As for reincarnation, it is not explicitly mentioned, but the anathema that strikes Origen in the General Canons (Canon 11) suffices to condemn all of his writings. Even if Origen himself had not *supported*, but just *evoked*, reincarnation, it was a logical consequence of

his theory of pre-existence, since it represents the thesis of *previous causes*. The Council's sanctioning of this approach – whether it be subjective or objective – was tantamount as condemning any demonstration, affirmation or evocation of such a doctrine. It therefore dismissed any concept of reincarnation of the soul, whatever its modality.

(β) Finally, we need to make a few remarks in order to evoke the theology of the institution itself and the value of the Second Council of Constantinople. As we have previously seen, the Church was inspired by Greek philosophical principles adapted to Christian Dogmas, but it also shaped its own organization in contact with the Greek political principles, as stated by Aristotle, of “representation” and of “popular sovereignty”. True, the revelation was always placed above the contingencies; however, the source of spiritual power was located, from the beginning, in the universality of the faithful who invoke the name of Christ: a democratic *ethos* constituent of the ecclesial institution.

The Councils have emerged very early on, in this context, as *consensus (ecclesiae catholicae universitatis et antiquitatis consensio)*¹³⁴ between representatives of the faithful, upholding a both horizontal (*universitas*) and vertical (*antiquitas*) significance leading to normative constructions possessing an organizational, dogmatic, or political character, even to jurisdictional acts. This was the case during the Assembly that we are dealing with here. The Councils reveal the consciousness of a normative identity, from the standpoint of contents to be transmitted (*traditum*), as well as in the relationships among those who handle this transmission (*tradentes*). These latter being - at least theoretically - in communion with the people of God, within the theory of representation. This prompted theologian Hans Küng to evoke a double dimension: that of the Church as an Ecumenical Council convened by God, and of the actual Ecumenical Council convened by men as a representation of the former.¹³⁵ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (the future Pope Benedict XVI) did not share this opinion, he considered that “the Council is not called *ekklesia*, it is called *synedrion*; it does not represent the Church, it is not the Church as opposed to a Eucharistic celebration. It is only convened by the Church for a determined service.”¹³⁶

Whether it be the Church itself or a church service, this distinction - as important as it may be in terms of the nature of the Council - does not affect the relationship between the Assembly and the historical and cultural causes that define the purpose of a Council. The identity of the Church expresses itself in it, but the truth must also be spoken. The Revelation of the Word of God is thus determined by this Act of transmission of truth to the faithful and to the world. The message conveyed is thus indissolubly tied to the attitude of the Conciliar Fathers themselves, as well as to their questioning of their own faith. *Traditum* and *tradentes* are structurally and mutually interdependent.

The sincerity of the approach of faith involved in this process, is of course an essential condition of the validity of the *traditum*, and ultimately of the truth that is to be

proclaimed. What happened at the Second Council of Constantinople? What can the allegiance to faith be of the *tradentes*, when they were coerced by an external authority? Certainly, given the composition of this Assembly, there must have been a consensus between that very authority and the Council. We can assess this with some degree of certainty. Nonetheless, the Council saw fit, maybe under the very peculiar circumstances of its preparation and convening, to justify its legitimacy by stating, in a marginal note written after the last Canon: “Such then are the assertions that we confess. We have received them from Holy Scripture, from the teachings of the Holy Fathers, and from the definitions about the one and same Faith, made by the aforesaid Four Holy Councils (...).”¹³⁷

These three conditions: faithfulness to the Scriptures, to the Fathers and the previous Councils, will successively be undertaken and turned into a method, until the *Ordines de celebrando concilio*, in the 7th Century, will assess a more accurate control of the scheduling of debates. Paradoxically, the Second Council of Constantinople was involved in the strengthening of Conciliar authority, at least from a formal point of view. Therefore, can its Canons accede to the status of “truth” in theological terms? Many centuries after, Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464) will answer the issue of Conciliar decisions’ infallibility, assuming that it is subordinate to the real consensus between all participants, including the Pope.¹³⁸ This has been since confirmed by the general doctrine, laying down as a condition “the agreement between the episcopal body, when it exercises the Supreme Magisterium jointly with the successor of Peter.”¹³⁹ According to this definition, the decisions of the 553 Council could not theologially claim to possess an authentic infallibility, since there was no consensus between the two bodies (the Council and the Pope), their discrepancy having even been officially proclaimed. This Assembly cannot be therefore regarded as a place where the Revelation would be historically upheld. One must conclude that - even on the level of conciliar theology - the reception of the Canons of the Second Council of Constantinople appears questionable.

We will conclude this study with these considerations, not without keeping in mind the intuition of a lost opportunity for Christianity. Certainly, in later times, many more were lost. Nonetheless, this remains a major example of the defeat of the spiritual when it bows before the temporal. Is the flight of the philosophy teachers, driven out of the City, the vision of an empty papal throne, that of the Council Fathers escorted by soldiers, not sufficient to prove that the real motive, the real purpose of the Emperor’s meddling in Church affairs, was his quest for absolute power? Even Pope Vigilius ultimately had to bow before it.

When approving the condemnations of the Second Council of Constantinople, by fear of opposing himself to the Kingdom of Human Beings, Vigilius can be labeled a traitor. Perhaps he thought of Peter’s - the first of his predecessors – attitude towards the One whom he had just defended by sword in the Gethsemane gardens, but that he would immediately after disown three times,¹⁴⁰ He who was - and remains - the center of all these confrontations, He who had voiced against them the most pertinent judgment, in a premonitory response to Pilate: “My Kingdom is not of this world.”¹⁴¹

Appendices

Illustrations and texts - See the original French Paper above.

1

“The school of Athens” by Raphael (1483-1520) - Fresco (1509-1510), Sistine Chapel, Vatican.

2

Monastery of the Great Lavra (Mar-Saba), nowadays located in Israel
The Council of Constantinople II seen by artists

3

Fresco by Giovanni Guerra (1544-1618) - Apostolic Library, Sistine room, the Vatican

4

Illumination in a Byzantine manuscript of the 9th Century CE
In these two works, we can see the empty papal throne on which the Holy Scriptures were placed. The bishops took oath before them since they could not do it before the Pope.

5

The Latin version of the acts of the second Council of Constantinople, copied by the monk

Notker the Stammerer of St. Gallen; dating is estimated between 887 and 893 AD. ¹⁴²
Manuscript preserved in the *Stiftsbibliothek* of St. Gallen, Switzerland.

Appendix 1

General Canons of the Second Council of Constantinople

Canon 1

If anyone will not confess that the nature or divine substance is one and consubstantial in three persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost; let him be **anathema**.

Canon 2

If anyone will not confess in the Word of God two nativities, one incorporeal by which he was born from the Father before all ages, the other when he was begotten from the Virgin Mary, mother of God, in latter days; let him be **anathema**.

Canon 3

If anyone declares that it is not the same Christ-God-Word, [the one] begotten from the woman, who has accomplished miracles and has suffered; let him be **anathema**.

Canon 4

If anyone will not confess that the flesh has been substantially united to God the Word and that it was animated by a reasoning and intellectual soul; let him be **anathema**.

Canon 5

If anyone says that there are two substances or two persons within our Lord Jesus Christ, and that only one must be worshipped, as have written out of folly Theodore and Nestorius; let him be **anathema**.

Canon 6

If anyone does confess that the Holy Virgin is veritably and truly Mother of God; let him be **anathema**.

Canon 7

If anyone does not want to recognize that both natures were united within Jesus Christ, without diminution, without confusion, but that by means of these two natures he means two persons; let him be **anathema**.

Canon 8

If anyone does not confess that both natures were united within Jesus-Christ in one only person; let him be **anathema**.

Canon 9

If anyone says that Jesus Christ is to be worshipped in two natures, which is tantamount as introducing two adorations, a separate one for God the Word and another for the man; and so does not worship by a single adoration the Word of God incarnated along with his human flesh, as has been traditionally taught by the Church from the beginning; let him be **anathema**.

Canon 10

If anyone denies that our Lord Jesus Christ, who was crucified in his flesh, is truly God, Lord of Glory, the One of the Trinity; let him be **anathema**.

Canon 11

If anyone does not anathematize **Arius, Eunomius, Macedonius, Apollinarius, Nestorius, Eutyches** and **Origen**, as well as all their impious writings; let him be **anathema**.

Canon 12

If anyone defends the impious **Theodore of Mopsuestia**; let him be **anathema**.

Canon 13

If anyone defends the impious writings of **Theodoret**; let him be **anathema**.

Canon 14

If anyone defends the letter which **Ibas** is said to have written to Mari; let him be **anathema**.

Appendix 2

Canons of the Council of Constantinople II against Origen *(Canones Concilii Constantinopolitani II, adversus Origenem)*¹⁴³

1st Anathema.¹⁴⁴ If anyone asserts the fabulous preexistence of souls, which leads to the monstrous idea that they return (with the passing of the time to their primitive state), let him be anathema.

2nd Anathema. If anyone shall say that the creation of beings endowed with reason includes the generation of beings intangible and immaterial, without definite mode of existence, in such a way that all of these beings be united through the identity of their substance, power and virtue; also by their union with God-the-Word; and also by the knowledge they have of him; however that, fulfilled with divine contemplation, they descended to a lower condition; also that they have taken, each in accordance with their inclination, some a subtle body, others a gross and all of them a name. That the difference between the bodies results from that which exists between the superior virtues, some having become and being called Cherubim, others Seraphim, certain Principalities, others Powers, others Dominations, or Thrones, or Angels, and as many other levels of the heavenly army; then let him be anathema.

3rd Anathema. If anyone pretends that the Sun, the Moon and the Stars are themselves similar to the human beings endowed with reason, and that because of their fall towards evil did they become what they are, let him be anathema.

4th Anathema. If anyone declares that the human beings, being endowed with reason, since the time when they were deprived of an ardent love of God, have been chained to a gross body similar to ours and have been called men, while others, having reached the uppermost degree of malice, were chained to cold and obscure bodies and thus became demons or spirits of iniquity; then let him be anathema.

5th Anathema. If anyone declares that from an angelic and archangelic state we may descend to the condition of animal, or in that of demon, or of man; that from human condition we can become angels or demons, and then become part of each order of the heavenly Virtues; and that all those who belong to the lower orders can be issued from the superior ones, and those who belong to the superior orders may also stem from the lower ones; then let him be anathema.

6th Anathema. If anyone accepts as true that there is a twofold race of demons: one made up of the souls of men and the other, of fallen superior spirits; that only one of all beings endowed with reason has remained immutable in love and contemplation of God and that this being is our Lord the Christ, the King of all beings endowed with reason; that this being has created all the material nature, the Heaven and the Earth, including everything that exists between the two; that this world possesses within itself the elements of existence prior to its own existence, that is: dryness, damp, heat, and cold, and the idea for which it has been created; this implying that the very Holy and consubstantial Trinity would not have created it, but that it was created by a working intelligence which is more ancient than the world, and which communicates to it its being; let him be anathema.

7th Anathema. If anyone shall say that, in recent times, Christ, who is said to exist in the form of God and united with God-the-Word before all ages, humbled himself towards humanity, touched with compassion since, it is said, he imitated the various falls of the beings who were within its unity; and that, wishing to restore them all in their primitive State, he has existed for them all, has undertaken several bodies, has taken various names, has become all to all: an Angel within the Angels, a virtue within the virtues; that he transformed himself into the other orders or species of beings endowed with reason and became akin with each of them; that subsequently he participated in the same way as we do, to the flesh and the blood, and thus existed as a man for men; if anyone does profess that the God-the-Word humbled himself in order to become man; let him anathema.

8th Anathema. If anyone does not uphold that God-the-Word, being consubstantial with both God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, who was made flesh and became man, one of the Holy Trinity, (is) properly (and actually) the Christ; but (that he is instead called so only) by an abuse of words, because, so do say these heretics, he abased His own intelligence, (which was) United to God-the-Word Himself and (is not) properly called Christ (because of this union); however (God-the-Word, called) Christ because of (His Union with) it, (this intelligence), and Himself (called) God because of (the union with) him (the Christ); let him be anathema.

9th Anathema. If anyone says that God-the-Word, incarnated in a lively flesh, by means of his gifted and reasonable soul, did not descend to hell and then again ascend in heaven; but that this was achieved by that intelligence that they claim to be properly become Christ through the knowledge of the unity; let him be anathema.

10th Anathema. If anyone upholds that the body of the Lord, once resurrected, became ethereal and of spherical shape, so that upon the resurrection of the dead, all bodies will

take a similar existence and shape; and that, once the Lord himself will leave His own body, subsequently all the others will do the same, in a way that the material nature of the bodies will fall into nothingness; then let him be anathema.

11th Anathema. If anyone says that the Last Judgment is tantamount to the full destruction of the bodies; that the end of this tale (of the world) is the beginning of the immaterial nature, and that nothing material will be extant in the future, except the universal spirit, let him be anathema.

12th Anathema. If anyone speaks that all celestial virtues and all men, as well as the devil and the spirits of malice, will be united to God-the-Word without any divinity, so that the soul itself, to which these ungodly anathematics gave the name of Christ, whom, they pretend, exists in the form of God and, so they say, has annihilated itself, will put an end to the reign of Christ; let him be anathema.

13th Anathema. If anyone says that there will be no difference between Christ and the other reasoning creatures, neither in their essence, their knowledge, nor in their potency or power, but all will be on the right side of God as their own Christ, such as they were - according to them - in their fabulous (imaginary) pre-existence; let him be anathema.

14th Anathema. If anyone states that the only future unity of all beings endowed with reason, the hypostases and the numbers, will be destroyed along with the bodies, as well as the knowledge of said beings, as a consequence of the destruction of the world, of the abandonment of the bodies and the abolition of all names, thus bringing forward the identity of knowledge and of persons; and that in their unreal recovery (of human beings to their primitive State) they will be naked (i.e., stripped of the material), and will be in the same form as they existed in their (alleged) pre-existence; let him be anathema.

15th Anathema. If anyone declares that the life of the spirits shall be the same than the one they enjoyed before their fall, so that the beginning and the end shall be alike, and the end the true measure of the beginning, then let him be anathema.

¹ This allows to distinguish him from another Origen, a lesser-known philosopher of the 3rd Century CE.

² Born in a Christian family, yet his name "Origen" means "Begotten of Horus."

³ We may say that Origen, basing himself upon the data of Rabbinic exegesis, actually founded the model of Christian exegesis. His *Hexapla* resume the Hebrew text transcribed in Greek and the Greek translations of the Seventy, of Aquila, of Symmachus, of Theodotion, as well as two anonymous translators.

⁴ Origen, *De Principiis*, book IV, § 8 to 27, in: *Patrologiae cursus completus*, tome 11, Ed. J.P.. Migne, 1857, p. 355-401.

⁵ This notion will successively be reworked by most illustrious theologians such as Saint Augustine or Saint Thomas Aquinas, up to our times. Pope John-Paul II, referring to the Encyclical of Pius XII *Divino afflante Spiritu* (September 30, 1943), claims that a double reading of "literal sense" and "spiritual sense" of the biblical texts is mandatory (cfr. John Paul II' speech, dated 23 April 1993, on the centenary of the Encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* and the 50th anniversary of the encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu*).

⁶ "I desired to see through intelligence what I believed" (St. Augustine, *De Trinitate* XV, 28, 51); "If it is not pondered, faith is nothing" (Id., *De praedestinatione sanctorum*, II, 5), quote also picked up by John Jean-Paul II in the Encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, September 14, 1998, § 79.

⁷ We should recall here that metempsychosis admits transmigration of the soul in the body of an inferior species, e.g. an animal.

⁸ *De Principiis*, Liber II, Chapter 4: "The God of the Law and the Prophets is one, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ", op. cit. p. 198 and succ.

⁹ Aristotle successively introduced in the meaning of the word "substance" the notion of category, thereby modifying the concept itself. See: Suzanne Mansion, "The first doctrine of substance: the substance according to Aristotle", philosophical journal of Leuven, 1946, vol. 44, nr. 3, pp. 349-369. The Aristotelian notion of substance is expressed in his works *Metaphysics*, *Categories*, also in the *Second Analytics*.

¹⁰ Antoine Guillaumont, "Evagrius Ponticus, a philosopher in the desert," J. Vrin, "Texts and traditions," 8, Paris, 2004.

¹¹ We refer here to the status of angels, of demons, of the Virgin Mary, of hell, also to the spherical or non-spherical shape of ethereal bodies, etc...

¹² Translation of the Bible written by the French Biblical and Archaeological School of Jerusalem (EBAF).

¹³ We'll see at the end of this article that this amounts to nothing.

¹⁴ Gen., XXVIII: 12-13.

¹⁵ Origen, *Contra Celsius*, Book VI, § 21, in: *Patrologiae cursus completus*, tome 11, Ed. J.P.. Migne, 1857, pp. 1322 - 1323.

¹⁶ *Contra Celsius*, Book VIII, § 40, op. cit., pp. 1575 - 1578.

¹⁷ Deut., XXIV: 16.

¹⁸ Je., XXXI: 30.

¹⁹ Ez., XVIII: 20.

²⁰ Ex., XX: 5.

²¹ Ez., XVIII: 2, 3, 4.

²² Is., 50: 11, quoted by Origen in *De Principiis*, book II, Chapter 10 "Of the resurrection and judgment, the fire of hell and punishment", § 4, op. cit., p. 236.

²³ *De Principiis*, book I, Chapter 6: "Of the consummation of the world", § 3, op. cit., p. 169.

²⁴ Plotinus (204-270) and Origen (185-253) were contemporaries, both strongly influenced by Platonic philosophy.

²⁵ John, 10:30.

²⁶ John, 17:24.

²⁷ John, 17:21.

²⁸ De Principiis, Book III, Chapter 6: "Of the consummation of the world", § 1, op. cit., p. 334.

²⁹ De Principiis, Book III, Chapter 6: "Of the consummation of the world", § 3, op. cit., pp. 335-336.

³⁰ The words "the One" in this context introduce a dilemma: can one say of "the One" that it is a hypostasis, since the reality is the being, and since "the One" is beyond the being hence beyond the reality, would it thus appear difficult to turn it into an order of reality?

³¹ We will not mention, in order not to weigh down our text, an issue, albeit important: that of the subordination of the Son (the incarnate Word) to the Father in Origen's doctrine, thus the subordination of one hypostasis to another, which distorts the relationship within the Trinitarian system.

³² Rufinus had been a student of Didymus the Blind, a convinced origenist.

³³ Rufinus writes, in the preface of Book III of De Principiis: "I must warn [the reader] that we have observed here the same rule of conduct than in previous books, by not translating that which seemed contrary to other opinions of the author and our faith, omitting it as if inserted by other [authors] and altered," De Principiis, op. cit. p. 248.

³⁴ It is this very translation, an actual betrayal of the author, who will serve as the basis for criticism of Origen's works, as expressed by the Second Council of Constantinople.

³⁵ St. Thomas Aquinas also believes that those who admitted the creation of the soul separate of the body, admitted the transmigration of souls (Quaestiones disputatae de potentia, q. III, a. 10).

³⁶ We may cite Gorgias, 525 c; Menexenus, 81a; Phaedo, 70 c, 81b, 107d; Phaedra, 248 d; The Republic, X, 614 and succ., among others.

³⁷ Enneads, III.4.2.

³⁸ See Porphyry, De Regressu animae (Upon the return of the soul).

³⁹ See Iamblichus's treaty De Anima (Concerning the soul); De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum (About the Egyptian mysteries).

⁴⁰ De Principiis, book I, Chapter 8: "about Angels", § 4, op. cit., p. 180.

⁴¹ De Principiis, book IV: "that the Scriptures are inspired by God", § 35, op. cit., p. 411.

⁴² De Principiis, book II, Chapter 9: "about the World, the movement of reasoning creatures, whether good or bad, and their causes", § 7, op. cit., p. 232.

⁴³ De Principiis, book II, Chapter 9: "(ibid)", § 7, op. cit., p. 231-232.

⁴⁴ De Principiis, book II, Chapter 9: "(ibid)", § 8, op. cit., p. 233.

⁴⁵ De Principiis, Book III, Chapter 3: "of the three forms of wisdom", § 5, op. cit., p. 318-319.

⁴⁶ Epictetus, as reported by Arrian, XXIX-1.

⁴⁷ One could object that Origen practiced them, but he did for other reasons. While it is true that he mutilated himself and preached asceticism, we must note that his life was marked by dramatic episodes: he attended, in the year 202 CE, to the martyrdom of his father, beheaded during the persecution of Septimus Severus in Alexandria; he was himself persecuted, jailed, and tortured under the reign of Decius, in 250.

⁴⁸ De Principiis, book II, Chapter 9: "About the world, the movement of reasoning creatures, good or bad, and their causes" op. cit., pp. 225 and foll.

⁴⁹ *De Principiis*, book I, Chapter 6: "About the consummation of the world", op. cit., pp. 165 and foll.

⁵⁰ *De Principiis*, book I, Chapter 6: "About the consummation of the world", § 3, op. cit., p. 169.

⁵¹ L. Doucin, "History of movements having occurred in the church about Origen and his doctrine, dedicated to Monseigneur the Cardinal d'Estrées," Nicolas le Clerc, Paris, 1700, pp. 337-338.

⁵² He was, if not the author at least the attentive sponsor, of one of the largest monuments of law: the *Corpus Juris Civilis*, containing the *Codex Justiniani*, the *Digesta*, the *Institutiones* and the *Novellae*.

⁵³ Like the other Byzantine Roman emperors since Constantine (272-337), who converted to Christianity and proclaimed freedom of worship through the edict of Milan, in the year 313.

⁵⁴ "It is fair to deprive of their earthly possessions those who do not worship the true God", Cod. Just., 1, 5, 12 (*De haereticis et manichaeis et samaritis*), Corp. Iur. Civ., vol. 2, Ed. Krueger and Mommsen, *Editio stereotypa*, Berlin, 1842, p. 53.

⁵⁵ "If they disobey, they should know that they will be excluded from the State and will not be allowed to own any property, whether movable or immovable; stripped of everything, they will be left destitute, without prejudice to the appropriate punishments which we will strike them with" Cod. Just., 1, 11, 10 (*De paganis sacrificiis et templis*), Corp. Iur. Civ., op. cit., p. 63.

⁵⁶ He had learned this discipline with Leontius (485-543 CE), one of the greatest Byzantine theologians.

⁵⁷ The earthly power was regarded as being of divine origin, a concept developed by Eusebius of Caesarea in the 4th century, during the reign of Constantine; the Emperor therefore had authority in the religious field.

⁵⁸ There were five successive Academies between the primary Foundation and 86 BCE, each of a different philosophical inspiration (Pythagorean, with Plato, then skeptical, probabilistic, fallibilistic, and syncretic). See H.F. Cherniss, "The riddle of the Ancient Academy, transl. by L. Boulakia, Paris, Vrin, 1993.

⁵⁹ The so-called "Chaldean oracles" were theurgical courses in Greek language, published around the year 170 CE by Julian the Theurgist, inspired by Platonic Dualism and describing mediumistic contacts with Plato's soul.

⁶⁰ Agathias, History, II, 12, 4.

⁶¹ Let us recall here the passage from Deuteronomy: "Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritualist or who consults the dead." (Deut., XVIII: 10-11).

⁶² Cf. A. Cameron, "The end of the Academy", in: *Neoplatonism*, Editions CNRS, 1971, pp. 281-290.

⁶³ In the 5th century, the capital of the Schools was worth more than 1,000 *nomismata* per year.

⁶⁴ Thabit ibn Qurra (Thebit) (826-901), a mathematician and astronomer, came from this community.

⁶⁵ The importance of a good relationship with the Eastern provinces had an even greater scope: in order to secure his Western conquests around the Mediterranean, Justinian often had to strip his Eastern border troops.

⁶⁶ A name given by Pope Leo I to a disputed Council, held in Ephesus in 449 (that should not be confused with the officially recognized "Council of Ephesus" of 431). During this pseudo-council of 449, some partisans of Monophysitism – a doctrine already regarded at that time as a heresy - silenced all opposition by deposing Flavian, the old Bishop of Constantinople, and prevented the Papal legates to read a letter, written by the Pope, that denied the doctrine of Eutyches, the chief propagator of Monophysitism. Flavian (who was rehabilitated by the Council of Chalcedon in 451) had excommunicated Eutyches during the Synod of the Church of Constantinople in 448. There existed, therefore, a clash between these two personalities.

⁶⁷ Anthimus, although among the Chalcedonian theologians in the 533 meetings, ended up being Monophysite. Accused of heresy, he was deposed and replaced by Menas in 536. We recognize here a typically byzantine situation.

⁶⁸ Cf. C. Sotinel, "Papal authority and imperial power under the reign of Justinian: Pope Vigilius," *Mixing of the French school of Rome. Antiquity*, vol. 104, no. 1, 1992, pp. 439-463.

⁶⁹ See previous note. Chalcedon was on the eastern shore of the Bosphorus, within easy sailing reach from Constantinople. The city is now called *Kadıköy*.

⁷⁰ We know that Vigilius returned before August 24, 552, the day when Menas, Patriarch of Constantinople, died.

⁷¹ *De Principiis*, book I, Chapter 7 (Upon the intangible and the tangible"), § 2 to 5, op. cit., pp. 171 to 174.

⁷² Following the castration that Origen performed upon himself, Demetrius, Bishop of Alexandria, declared that he had been ordained a priest irregularly; he relieved Origen of his functions, excommunicated him and forced him out of Alexandria.

⁷³ A "Lavra" is a monastery where the monks live in a joint semi-anchorite, semi-cenobitic fashion: during the week, they lead an eremitical life in isolated cells, but meet on Sundays and holidays for joint observances.

⁷⁴ Reproduced in: H.J.D. Denzinger (Latin), *Enchiridion symbolorum*, nr. 403 - 411.

⁷⁵ See: "Memory of the clergy of Italy to the ambassadors of Theodebald of Austrasia." Mentioned by Adolphe-Charles Peltier, "Universal and complete dictionary of the General and Specific Councils, of the main diocesan Synods and of other most remarkable Ecclesiastical Assemblies," Ed. Migne, 1846-1847, volume 1, p. 721.

⁷⁶ It should be noted that very few Western bishops had already attended the first four Councils (only 6 Western bishops were present at the Council of Nicaea, convened by Emperor Constantine in 325), however they had been regularly summoned to all the Councils, contrarily to that convened by Justinian in 553.

⁷⁷ This is a letter written at the beginning of the year 433 by Ibas of Edessa to his friend Maris, Bishop of Beth-Hardashir, in which he evokes the events that occurred in the Church of the East after a scandal caused by Nestorius. See R. Devreesse (*scriptor* of the Vatican Library): "The beginning of the quarrel of the "Three Chapters": the letter of Ibas and the Tome of Proclus" in *Journal of Religious Studies*, 1931, vol. 11, nr. 4, pp. 543-565 (accessible through the portal of Persee, www.persee.fr).

⁷⁸ *Constitutum (I) Vigilii Papae "Inter innumeras sollicitudines" de tribus Capitulis ad Justinianum Imperatorem*, reproduced in H.J.D. Denzinger (Latin), *Enchiridion symbolorum*, nr. 416 - 420.

⁷⁹ Indeed, Theodoret of Cyrus and Ibas of Edessa, considered as "dead in the peace of the Church," had been declared Orthodox by the Council of Chalcedon, and the Pope wished to preserve authority of the previous conciliar decrees.

⁸⁰ The "diptychs" were tablets containing the names of Church benefactors: popes, bishops, Patriarchs, Emperors and Kings, which the Deacon used to read during the Office in order to provide for the Prayers of the Faithful. The practice of erasing popes from the diptychs was used several times by the Church of Constantinople during schismatic episodes.

⁸¹ Cf. J. Gill S.J., *Quae supersunt actorum graecorum Concilii Florentini*, Rome, 1953.

⁸² Cfr. Adolphe-Charles Peltier, op. cit., pp. 729-730.

⁸³ Cfr. A.C. Peltier, op. cit. p. 720.

⁸⁴ There are judicial anathemas and abjuration anathemas. The first is an ecclesiastical sentence by a Council, the Pope or a Bishop, or by any person having jurisdiction for this purpose. The latter are spoken by the very person at fault when they abjure their error in their confession of heresy.

⁸⁵ Cfr. Noris, *Dissertatio de synodo quinta: Henrici Norisii Veronensis opera omnia*, Ed. Ballerini, Verona, 1729-1733, chapter VI, volume 1, no. 638.

⁸⁶ Cfr. Pierre Halloix, Garnier, Jacques Basnage, Walch, Vincenzi, among others.

⁸⁷ See previous section b) The Origenist controversies.

⁸⁸ See previous note.

⁸⁹ Cyrilli, Vita Sabae, Chapter XC, in Cotelier, *Ecclesiae Graecae monumenta*, volume 3, p. 374.

⁹⁰ Eutychius had succeeded Menas as Patriarch of Constantinople in 552.

⁹¹ Vigilius even managed in 554 to obtain from Justinian an Imperial Constitution reinstating Italy into the Empire (*Pragmatica Sanctio*).

⁹² In the area of faith, the authority of the Emperor was reinforced after the Second Council of Constantinople, while that of the Pope was diminished.

⁹³ Council of Constantinople I, Sixth Canon: "Of those that may be admitted to accusations against bishops and priests."

⁹⁴ The third Canon justified this rank by the fact that Constantinople was the new Rome.

⁹⁵ St. Augustine, one of the fathers and doctors of the Church, had already appropriated Greek philosophy (Neo-Platonism to be exact) into Christian culture, but his life and his works are prior to the Second Council of Constantinople.

⁹⁶ Roger Bacon will make, out of this formula, the title of one of his books, published 1621 in Edinburgh.

⁹⁷ We find this concept in Aristotle ("About the Soul").

⁹⁸ The translated title is: "A recollection containing the main mistakes of our time [as reported in consistory speeches, encyclicals and Apostolic letters of our Holy Father Pope Pius IX]."

⁹⁹ Published August 4, 1879, a text available on the site www.vatican.va (path: the Holy Father / Leo XIII / Encyclicals).

¹⁰⁰ Aurelio Palmieri, *Theologia dogmatica orthodoxa*, Florence, 1911.

¹⁰¹ Published on 7 December 1965, § 15-1, text available on the site www.vatican.va (path: basic texts / Archive / Second Vatican Council / Documents of the Second Vatican Council / Constitutions / *Gaudium et spes*).

¹⁰² He was the elder brother of Karl Rahner, another great theologian.

¹⁰³ Published September 14, 1998, available on the website www.vatican.va text (path: the Holy Father / John-Paul II / encyclicals).

¹⁰⁴ John-Paul II, *Fides and Ratio*, Introduction, § 5.

¹⁰⁵ *Id.*, § 6.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, chapter III ("Intellego ut credam")

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, Chapter 4 ("the relationships between faith and reason"), § 38.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, in the same paragraph 38.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, § 39.

¹¹⁰ Pope Benedict XVI drew this phrase from the remarks made by the Byzantine emperor Manuel II Palaiologos in 1391 to a Persian scholar, as reported by theologian Theodore Khoury.

¹¹¹ See, for example, his inaugural lecture at the University of Bonn in 1959, on "the God of faith and the God of the philosophers", among many other interventions.

¹¹² Jürgen Habermas (b. 1929) belongs to the Frankfurt School.

¹¹³ Cfr. The conference by Card. Ruini, president of the Italian Episcopal conference, "Dialogue on faith and reason, between Benedict XVI and Jürgen Habermas", Vatican City, March 7, 2007, in the mark of the meeting titled "Reason, sciences and the future of civilization."

¹¹⁴ Benedict XVI, general audience of April 25th, 2007, original Italian text: *L'Osservatore Romano* newspaper on April 26, 2007; Catholic Documents, no. 2382, June 17, 2007, p. 559.

¹¹⁵ *Contra Celsius*, VI, 71, where the allegory of fire refers to God: "Let the Stoics condemn everything to pass through the fire: since we do not believe that an immaterial substance can be affected [by it]; we cannot persuade ourselves that the human soul, the angels, thrones, dominations, principalities, powers, are of such a nature as to dissolve into fire" *op. cit.*, pp. 1406 - 1407; *id.* VIII, 72, where freedom is opposed to the principle of Pantheism: "The Stoics say that, upon the victory of the element that they deem as the strongest (i.e., the fire of God) upon the others, a blaze will take place and engulf everything into fire. While we ourselves affirm, that one day the Logos will dominate all the reasoning nature and transform every soul in its own perfection, that this will occur when each individual, by use of his mere freedom, will choose that what the Logos wants, and reach the state that he has himself chosen" *op. cit.*, p. 1623).

¹¹⁶ Published November 30th, 1980, text available on the site www.vatican.va (path: the Holy Father / John-Paul II / encyclicals).

¹¹⁷ The Seventy were Doctors of the Jewish law, numbering seventy-two (each tribe of Israel having provided six), which had been endowed with the task of translating the Torah into Greek. This translation came to be called the *Septuagint*, or in a more esoteric way "LXX".

¹¹⁸ Philo claims both Jewish faith and Greek rationality.

¹¹⁹ The Masorettes (*ba'alei hamassora*, literally “masters of the tradition” in Hebrew) perpetuated a precise transmission of the Hebrew Scriptures, including the nuances of punctuation, but also the phonetic signs of pronunciation and vocalization. The Masoretic texts were the subject of draconian checks, including a word, and even letter, count. In the 8th Century CE, the Karaites continued using this method.

¹²⁰ Gregory of Nyssa being the brother of Basil of Caesarea.

¹²¹ Gregory of Nyssa, "Upon the divinity of the Son and of the Spirit, and upon Abraham", *Gregorii Nysseni opera*, X.2, *Sermones* III, Ed. E. Rhein, Leiden, 1996, pp. 117-144.

¹²² St. Paul himself possessed a diversity of cultures, since he was of Jewish origin, a Roman citizen, speaking Aramaic and Greek, and a Christian!

¹²³ 1 Cor., 9: 19-22.

¹²⁴ Alain Durel “Transfigured Eros, variations upon Gregory of Nyssa”, Ed. du Cerf, Paris, 2007.

¹²⁵ cfr. Act., 17.

¹²⁶ These persecutions lasted three centuries, under the successive reigns of Nero, Domitian, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius, Septimius Severus, Maximinus Thrax, Decius, Valerian, Aurelian, Diocletian and Maximian. Even after Constantine, renewed persecutions will be ordained by Julian [the apostate] in 361-363, after he renounced Christianity.

¹²⁷ Justinian had taken over the “theory of the two powers,” that Pope Gelasius had formulated for Emperor Anastasius, since it is found at the beginning of the preface of the *Novella VI (Quomodo oporteat episcopos et reliquos clericos ad ordinationem deduci, et de expensis ecclesiarum)* "the greatest gifts of God bequeathed to men by the supreme Philanthropy are the priesthood and the empire. The first is at the service of divine matters, the second deals with the direction and care of human affairs" *Novellae*, Ed. Schöll and Kroll, Berlin, 1895-1959. The text highlights the need for unity of these two polarities.

¹²⁸ Historians agree that late Antiquity begins with the reign of Diocletian in the year 284.

¹²⁹ The cults were not upset by Constantine’s conversion: the cult of the Emperor, the private family cults and the calendar of festivities, among others, endured. The transformation was gradual, from the conversion of the Emperor in 312 until the recognition of Christianity as a State religion by Theodosius I in 392, the first laws banning the worship of idols in 408 and the Theodosian Code in 438, across the reigns of Constantine himself, then Constantius II, Julian, Jovian, Valens, Theodosius I, Arcadius and Theodosius II: Justinian will be the seventh Emperor after Theodosius II. We may measure, through this succession, the progressivity of this evolution: 217 years elapsed between the conversion of Constantine and the closing of the schools of Athens. It was 241 years between Constantine’s conversion and the Second Council of Constantinople. Meanwhile the Byzantine Empire had been divided between Western Empire and Eastern Empire in 395.

¹³⁰ The Kingdom of Illyria, located at the site of modern Albania, was a province of the Roman Empire, conquered in the 3rd Century BCE.

¹³¹ The tenth Canon takes up the formula of the Scythian monks: "Unus ex trinitate crucifixus" that Justinian had endorsed since the year 519 and upheld since then.

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- ¹³² It could not be put otherwise without openly agreeing with the Monophysites.
- ¹³³ I - 1: the human dimension.
- ¹³⁴ The formula belongs to Vincent of Lérins († before 450), *Commonitorium*, Ed. J.P. Migne, p. 26, available on the website www.migne.fr
- ¹³⁵ H. Küng, *Das theologische Verständnis des ökumenischen Konzils* (inaugural lecture at the University of Tübingen, November 24, 1960), in: *Theologische Quartalschrift* 141, 1961, pp. 56 and 60. Structures of the Church, Trad. De Rochais and Evrard, D. Brouwer, 1963, p. 27 & 35.
- ¹³⁶ J. Ratzinger, *The new people of God*, Aubier Montaigne, Paris, 1971, p.88.
- ¹³⁷ Reproduced in: H.J.D. Denzinger (Latin), *Enchiridion symbolorum*, no. 438. The sentence refers to the first four Ecumenical Councils of Nicaea I, Constantinople I, Ephesus and Chalcedon.
- ¹³⁸ This essential support of the Apostolic See will only grow stronger in history, up to the dogma of Papal infallibility in 1870.
- ¹³⁹ J.-Y. Lacoste (under the direction of -), *critical theology dictionary*, PUF, Paris, 2002, p. 573.
- ¹⁴⁰ John, 18: 17-27.
- ¹⁴¹ John 18:36.
- ¹⁴² St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 672 *Canones Concilii Constantinopolitani II. ; Expositiuncula in libros regum Pseudo-Hieronymi.*
- ¹⁴³ Transcription from the collection of Adolphe-Charles Peltier, op. cit., pp. 729-730.
- ¹⁴⁴ The word 'Anathematism' is used in dictionaries of the Councils, but it is unusual, that of "anathema" being by far the most common.