

Early Christianity about the notions of time and the redemption of the soul

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Provided that no one asks me, I know. If I want to explain it to an inquirer, I do not know. But I confidently affirm myself to know that if nothing passes away, there is no past time, and if nothing arrives, there is no future time, and if nothing existed there would be no present time. Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 11.¹

Early Christians and the authors representing them fathomed that the human soul, despite being created, transcends historical time; from a limited existence (peculiar to it as a created entity) it is apt to progress to the time of God, and thus to be redeemed. The argument of this paper is that they held such a conviction because of a genuine belief in the manifestation of the Holy Spirit within, and not because of a need to console themselves for disappointments in connection with eschatological promises, as some researchers suggested.

When comparing the writings of the Patristic authors who lived before the eighth century – because the work of those will be analysed here – from the perspective of how they treat the nexus time-salvation, one might at first be misled into believing that they proposed two clearly distinct ways of approaching it: one metaphysical and one historical (i.e. more explicitly concerned with the notion from the perspective of human history).² But such a

¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 11. 14 (17), trans. H. Chadwick, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998, vol. 1, p. 230.

² This is the content of the talk I gave on the 12th of August, 2015 in Oxford at the Seventeenth International Conference on Patristic Studies (10 August - 14 August). I thank many colleagues who offered suggestions concerning this particular point and the content of the paper in general, especially Mark Edwards and Metrop. Kallistos Ware (I discussed the matter with His Grace about three years ago, when I began my labour on this issue). The topic of time is vast and in the long period that I have been working on it, I gathered substantial material from which I made a selection for the presentation to the conference. Therefore, while fully aware of the impact Henri-Charles Puech's study "La gnose et le temps" (*Eranos* -Jahrbuch, Bd. XX, Zürich, 1951) made on the way this issue has been analysed, I shall refer to it more broadly while developing a research project about the notion of time. It is entitled 'Dislocated Chronologies: An Investigation in the Early Eastern Christian Conception(s) of Temporality'; the AHRC grant proposal is now with the University of Oxford for approval. The same academic enterprise will pay due attention to books like Richard Sorabji's *Matter, Space and Motion. Theories in Antiquity and Their Sequel*, London: Duckworth, 1988 (about circular time and circular space), and *Time, Creation and the Continuum. Theories in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983; and especially to new publications and academic work in progress that focus on this concept.

distinction does not do justice to the complexity of Patristic positions with regard to this connection. Nevertheless, for strictly practical purposes I shall group Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (fifth-sixth centuries) and Maximus the Confessor (c. 580-662) together as sharing more communalities between themselves than they do with the rest of the authors analysed here.

1. Time as eternity- Redemption. 'The time of God'

The conception of time in Dionysius the Areopagite's work is expressed not only through that of participation in God, who is concomitantly eternal and "of Time", but also through eschatology, which the Syrian conceives in the framework of deification. The terms he uses, "procession", "union with God", "uplifting", and "return" have implications of significance for a view concerning the redemption of the soul. For the Syrian, paradoxically, God is concomitantly "Ancient" and "Young"; Eternity, Days, and Time in general derive from Him even though he is anterior to them.³

The Areopagite or rather the Pseudo-Areopagite, as some theologians rightly name him,⁴ believed that the Creator constitutes "the Eternity of all things", but to the same extent He is "their Time"⁵ and "the Ancient of Days."⁶ Since, according to this theologian, God is

³ Dionysius the Areopagite, "Περὶ θεῶν ὀνομάτων/De divinis nomibus", PG 3, Chap. 10. 937B; "The Divine Names", in *Pseudo Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibhéid, New York: Paulist Press, 1987, pp. 119-121; see also *The Divine Names & Mystical Theology*, trans. Clarence E. Rolt, London: SPSK, 1983, for instance p. 179.

⁴ Vladimir Lossky, 'La notion des 'analogies' chez Denys le Pseudo-Aréopagite', *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen-âge* 5 (1931), pp. 279-309; Gheorghe Drăgulin, *Identitatea lui Dionisie Pseudo-Areopagitul cu Ieromonahul Dionisie Smeritul (Exiguul)* [*The identification of Dionysios the Areopagite with Hieromonk Dionysios Exiguul*], The publishing house of Oltenia Diocese, Craiova, 1991. Also The Right Rev. Dr. Kallistos Ware calls him thus.

⁵ Dionysius the Areopagite, "The Divine Names", PG 3, Chap. 10. 937B; *The Divine Names & Mystical Theology*, trans. Rolt, pp. 169-170; *The Complete Works*, trans. Luibhéid, p. 120.

⁶ Dionysius the Areopagite, "The Divine Names", PG 3, Chap. 10. 936D, 937B, 940A; *The Complete Works*, trans. Luibhéid, pp. 119-121; see also *The Divine Names & Mystical Theology*, trans. Rolt, pp. 169-173.

the “Super-Essence”⁷ in which everything – including time – participates, each reality has its ultimate and everlasting being within it. In the same sense, the terms “Time”, “Day”, “Season”, and “Eternity” are applied to Him as meaning the “One Who is utterly incapable of all change and movement and, in his eternal motion, remains at rest; and Who is the Cause whence Eternity, Time, and Days are derived. [...] Wherefore, in the Sacred Theophanies revealed in mystic Visions He is described as Ancient and yet as Young; the former title signifies that He is the Primal Being, existent from the beginning, and the latter that He grows not old.”⁸

Dionysius refers to various actions in connexion to Divinity: he speaks about “uplifting” (ἀγάγω) and “return” (ἐπιστροφή) to God (and also union with Him), and sometimes about “procession and return” in his treatise *Celestial Hierarchy*.⁹ The concept of ‘return’ is Neoplatonic and has a “wide range of equivalents”.¹⁰ For the Syrian there is no distinction between ‘uplifting’ and ‘return’. Because Proclus sees them as contrasting notions¹¹ it is important to emphasize, with Paul Rorem that, in a divergent manner, the writings of Dionysius conceive both processes designated by these terms as aspects of the same movement towards the one God.¹² The researcher also flags out that the Areopagite employs the notion of ‘uplifting’ and its cognates to explain the soul’s move in time from

⁷ The idea is implied, for instance, in Dionysius the Areopagite’s “The Divine Names”, PG 3, Chap. 10. 936D, 937A. In *The Divine Names & Mystical Theology*, Rolt comments on the ‘Super-Essence’ and how time relates to it in footnotes on pp. 169, 170, and 190 respectively (all of them ‘footnote 1’). On p. 170 the translator explains that “In the Super-Essence each thing has the limits of its duration predetermined. Or else D. means that in Super-Essence the movement of time has the impulse which generates it.”

⁸ Dionysius the Areopagite, “The Divine Names”, PG 3, Chapter x, 937B-937C; *The Complete Works*, trans. Luibhéid, p. 119-120; *The Divine Names & Mystical Theology*, trans. Rolt, p. 170

⁹ For instance, one place in *Celestial Hierarchy* (henceforth CH) where Pseudo-Dionysius mentions these notions is CH 9, PG 3. 260B.

¹⁰ Stephen Gersh, *From Iambicus to Eurigena. An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition*, Brill Leiden, 1978, p. 46, and also *A Study of Spiritual Motion in the Philosophy of Proclus*, Leiden: Brill, 1973.

¹¹ Proclus, in Eric Robinson Dodds (ed.), *Proclus: The Elements of Theology. A Revised Text with Translation, Introduction, and Commentary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, no. 158, p. 138.

¹² Paul Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols*, p. 100; especially chapter 7 of this book elaborate on “the uplifting and return to God”.

simplicity to trinity, and from creation to its Originator and Steward.¹³ By doing so the ancient theologian describes in fact the act of salvation.

The above-mentioned notion of participation (μετοχής) in God's Being is also central to Dionysius.¹⁴ As Istvan Perczel underlined during our current academic event (the Seventh International Conference on Patristic Studies), specific to the Syrian's theology is the vertical axis on which he sees this process as happening.¹⁵ Pseudo-Dionysius holds that ensouled earthly realities "come into existence through participation in the Divine name" and in "the Essential Principle of all things [...] for the 'to be' of all things is the Divinity above Being Itself, the true life. Living things participate in Its life-giving Power above all life; rational things participate in Its perfection and in Its great Wisdom above all reason and intellect."¹⁶ For the Areopagite the degree of participation depends on the capacity/readiness of the soul – of the person – to experience, change, and receive illumination.¹⁷ He also says that "We are conducted, hierarchically according to our measure, to the deification, i.e. to God and the Divine virtue."¹⁸ Participation happens at God's initiative because "it is the very nature of God, which is the Supreme Cause of all, to invite all things to participate in Him".¹⁹ He calls people to uplift themselves through symbols²⁰ and they respond to this. Stephen Gersh refers

¹³ Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols*, p. 99.

¹⁴ Dionysius, Θεῶν ὀνομάτων/*De Divinis Nominibus/The Divine Names* (henceforth DN) 2, PG 3. 644 A-B. See also CH4, PG 3. 187 AD, and "Epistola ii", To the monk Caius the Therapeutē [Θεραπευτή], in Nicétas Stéthatos (ed.), *Opuscles et letters*, PG 3. 1067-1070.

¹⁵ Istvan Perczel, "Theodoret of Cyrrhus: the main source of Pseudo-Dionysius' Christology", paper at the Seventh International Conference on Patristic Studies, August 2015.

¹⁶ Dionysius, CH 4, PG 3. 187 A-D. See also DN 2, PG 3. 644A-B; my trans.

¹⁷ Dionysius, CH 1, PG 3. 135 A-C; see also CH 1, PG 3 119B-121B, and also *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* (henceforth EH) 1, PG 3. 381 A.

¹⁸ Dionysius, EH 1, PG3. 381B-C; my trans. See also Alexander Golitzin, *Et introibo ad altare dei: The Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagita*, Thessaloniki: Patriarchal Institute/Patriarchikon Idryma Paterikon Meleton-George Dedousis, 1994.

¹⁹ Dionysius, CH 4; PG 3. 187 C; my trans.

²⁰ Dionysius, CH e.g. 1. PG 3. 121A; EH 3, PG 3. 424B. See also Paul Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols within the Pseudo-Dionysian Synthesis*, Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984, pp. 99, 105; and Paul Rorem, John C. Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus: Annotating the Areopagite* (Oxford Early Christian Studies), Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998.

to the co-operation described here as a “downward and upward process”,²¹ which is consistent with Perczel’s insight into this state of affairs. Gersh does so when referring to an analogous dynamic in the works of the Neoplatonists, but the expression represents equally well what is happening in Dionysius’s work. Paul Rorem considers that, in spite of the physical/sensible language the Syrian deploys, “neither spatial nor even temporal movements” are his main focus, but actually time in relation to God is central to the Areopagite.²² All the notions he developed seems to merge into that of union with God which denotes the redemption of the human soul.

The other Church Father who approaches salvation through the concept of time is Maximus the Confessor (c. 580-662). He summarises the previous views on this notion, which we will further introduce, by stating that “all things move in either a linear, circular, or spiral manner”.²³ The monk refers here to “all the things that come into being from God, whether intelligible or sensible”, and sees this fact, as is the case with other representatives of primeval Christianity about whom I speak somewhere else,²⁴ in connection with movement: “their coming into being (genesis) is conceived before their motion (*kinesis*), for motion cannot precede coming into being.” He details further: “the motion of intelligible beings is an intelligible motion, whereas that of sensible beings is a sense-perceptible motion.”²⁵

²¹ Stephen Gersh, *From Iambicus to Eurigena. An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition*, Leiden: Brill, 1978; also *A Study of Spiritual Motion in the Philosophy of Proclus*, Leiden: Brill, 1973, pp. 50 f.

²² P. Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols within the Pseudo-Dionysian Synthesis*, Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984, p. 59.

²³ Maximus the Confessor, *Ambiguum* 7, PG 91. 1077C; *Ambiguum* 7, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers. The Ambigua*, ed. and trans. Nicholas Constatas, (Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 29), vol. 1, p. 81.

²⁴ The paper “Is there progress in the Sacred World? Patristics texts on the notion of advancement in the divine and human realms”, Oxford-Bonn Seminar, September 2015; it constitutes a chapter in the volume *A Journey along the Christian way. Festschrift for Metropolitan Kallistos 85th birthday* that I have edited, and hopefully it will come out with Bloomsbury/T&T Clark.

²⁵ Maximus the Confessor, *Ambiguum* 7, PG 91. 1072 B; *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers*, ed. and trans. N. Constatas, vol. 1 p. 81.

According to C. von Orelli's study *Die hebraischen Synonima der Zeit und Ewigkeit genetisch und sprachvergleichend dargestellt*,²⁶ in Indo-European languages many words referring to temporality are derived from those denoting movement; their root is the verb *i* = go. The most reputable works to testify to this origin are those by Aristotle²⁷, in which Maximus seems to have found inspiration.²⁸ The situation is the same in Semitic lexes; those have a wide variety of expressions that refer to motion in its array of modes: fast and slow, sudden and abrupt, agitated, circular, etc. Each of these types brings to surface different particular nuances of the notion of time. Von Orelli wrote that alongside this group of terms, which represent time as a phenomenon confronting or affecting man, there is another group in which time is characterised as that which is fixed, determined or ordained. He indicates the Hebrew words that differentiate between, on one hand *et* – time as a measured duration, and on the other '*olam*' and '*nešah*', denoting time as eternity.²⁹ Also James Barr affirms that in both Indo-European and Semitic languages the root of the word time is common to that of movement.³⁰

Going back to Maximus, he gradually brings the discussion on temporality to a higher level of abstraction; in the words of Andreas Andreopoulos, he “reframes the questions that concern it, examines it in a different framework, and also explores this notion in a mystagogical way.”³¹ This effort leads him to ideas with regard to the link salvation - time. Maximus envisions the final ‘destination’ of human souls in their union with God in

²⁶ C. von Orelli, *Die hebraischen Synonima der Zeit und Ewigkeit genetisch und sprachvergleichend dargestellt* [Hebrew Synonyms of time and eternity genetically and linguistically compared], Leipzig, 1871.

²⁷ Aristotle, φυσικά/Physics, book VIII, ch. 5 and Μετά τὰ φυσικά/Metaphysics, 1073a 23-28, 32-34. See also Ursula Coe, *Time for Aristotle*, Physics IV. 10-14, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

²⁸ This is what, among others, Sotiris Mitralaxis affirms in his doctoral dissertation *Ever-Moving Repose. The notion of time in Maximus the Confessor's Philosophy through the Perspective of a relational ontology*, Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin, 2014. See also B.J. Daley, “Apokatastasis and ‘Honorable Silence’ in the Eschatology of Maximus the Confessor”, in C. von Schonborn and F. Heinzer (eds.), *Maximus the Confessor. Actes du Symposium sur Maxime le Confesseur*, Fribourg, Switzerland, 1982, pp. 309-339.

²⁹ Von Orelli, *Die hebraischen Synonima der Zeit*, p. 45.

³⁰ James Barr, *Biblical Words for Time*, SCM Press, London, 1962, p. 84.

³¹ Andreas Andreopoulos, “Eschatology of Maximus the Confessor”, in Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2015, [pp. 322-340], p. 324.; See also Hans Schwarz, *Eschatology*, Wn. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Mich., 2000.

eschaton, at the end of time. Therefore, he conceives eschatology in terms of deification, and speaks about it as being both a personal and a collective redemptive event. His book *Ambigua* reflect best his standpoint on time and its ‘end’ (as realized eschatology);³² but intimations about this concept can be found scattered throughout his other writings. Instrumental in the Confessor’s view on salvation are three distinct modes of temporality: time as *χρόνος*, the aeon, *αἰών*, and the ‘ever-moving repose’, *στάσις ἀεικίνητος* (a ‘radical transformation of the spatio-temporal dimension and motion’³³). For Maximus eternity becomes time in eons, when major events like Christ’s incarnation take place and saints are ‘created’, i.e. recognised as such; for the holy persons things do not move anymore because they reach maximum of divine life which was given to them. The entire ‘process’ is supposed to be seen in relation to the immovable eternity of God; the temporality specific to “those beings that are intelligent and rational”³⁴ might allow them to near it.

2. Time understood in reference to human history. Redemption

As mentioned in the beginning of the paper, some of the early Christian authors like Tertullian, Origen, Clement, and partially Augustine, and Nyssen treated the concept of time in terms more directly related to human history than Dionysius the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor did. To do so the former cluster of writers employed a terminology usually found in texts that focus on historical issues.

³² Maximus the Confessor, *Ambiguum* 7, PG 91. 1072 B; *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers. The Ambigua*, ed. and trans. N. Constas (Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 28&29), vols. 1-2 Realised eschatology, as also developed by Charles Harold Dodd (1884-1973) holds that the eschatological passages in the New Testament do not refer to the future, but instead refer to the ministry of Jesus and his lasting legacy. Dodd expressed his views on this topic in *The Parables of the Kingdom*, Nisbet & Company Limited, London, 1935; *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments*, Willett and Clark, London, 1936, and *History of the Gospel*, Charles Scribners' Sons, New York, 1938. George Eldon Ladd and Donald Alfred Hagner comment on Dodd’s ‘realised eschatology’ in *A Theology of the New Testament*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1993, p. 56.

³³ Sotiris Mitralaxis, *Ever-Moving Repose. The notion of time in Maximus the Confessor’s Philosophy through the Perspective of a relational ontology*, doctoral dissertation, Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin, 2014.

³⁴ Maximus the Confessor, *Ambiguum* 7, PG 91. 1177 AB.

Among them Tertullian (c. 155- c. 240 AD) assumed salvation to take place in a transcendental spatio-temporal reality;³⁵ however, I will not focus here on his writings,³⁶ but on those of Origen (c. 184-c. 254 AD). Adamantius held the conviction **that a** distinct moment marked the beginning of the world. For him the existence of this primary instant was consistent with the narrative of Creation; his worldview has sometimes been misinterpreted, but it seems that it has indeed harmonised the two realities. Origen also believed that the Cosmos has an end and that its two ‘temporal brackets’ are similar. In his words from *On First Principles* “the end is always as the beginning; as therefore there is one end of all things, so we must understand that there is one beginning of all things...”³⁷ In the same treatise, Origen gives expression to the idea of a temporary divine punishment undergone by the sinners for their own benefit [salvation],³⁸ and their purification effected through being subjected to a fire coming from within; cf. Matt. 25. 41, 46 – i.e. through self-awareness.³⁹ Probably the notion of Purgatory in the Catholic Church has its roots in these ideas.⁴⁰ The

³⁵ Tertullianus/Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*, ed. and trans. Ernest Evans, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972, vol. 1, Book 3, 24, pp. 245-253. Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, Book 3, 24 (“Christ’s “millennial” and “heavenly” glory in company with His saints”), Ante-Nicene Christian Library: translations of the writings of the Fathers down to AD 325 edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, trans. P. Holmes, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1868, vol. VII, pp. 169-174.

³⁶ Tertullianus/Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*, ed. and trans. E. Evans, vol. 1, Book 3, 24, pp. 245-253. Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, Book 3, 24 (“Christ’s “millennial” and “heavenly” glory in company with His saints”), Ante-Nicene Christian Library: translations of the writings of the Fathers down to AD 325 edited by A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, trans. P. Holmes, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, vol. VII, pp. 169-174.

³⁷ Origen, *De Principiis/Origen on the First Principle*, Henry de Lubac (ed. and Introd.), G. W. Butterworth, trans., Gloucester Mass., Peter Smith (publisher), 1973; Book 1. The final unity, chapter VI, “The end or consummation”, p. 54.

³⁸ For instance, in Origen’s *On the First Principle*, de Lubac, Book ii, chapter x (“Resurrection and punishment”), pp. 143-146.

³⁹ Origen, *On the First Principle*, p. 141.

⁴⁰ The faith of the Church concerning purgatory is expressed in the Decree of Union drawn up by the Council of Florence (J. D. Mansi, *Sacrorum concilium nova et amplissima collection*, A. Z. Veneti, Florence, 1764, v. XXXI, col. 1031), and in the decree of the Council of Trent, Sess. XXV of which asserts: “Whereas the Catholic Church, instructed by the Holy Ghost, has from the Sacred Scriptures and the ancient tradition of the Fathers taught in Councils and very recently in this Ecumenical synod (Sess. VI, cap. XXX; Sess. XXII cap. ii, iii) that there is a purgatory, and that the souls therein are helped by the suffrages of the faithful, but principally by the acceptable Sacrifice of the Altar; the Holy Synod enjoins on the Bishops that they diligently endeavour to have the sound doctrine of the Fathers in Councils regarding purgatory everywhere taught and preached, held and believed by the faithful”; Heinrich Joseph Dominicus Denzinger, “Enchiridion symbolorum et definitionum quae in rebus fidei et morum a Conciliis oecumenicis et summis pontificibus emanarunt”, 983; Napoli: Dura, 1856; first ed. Wirceburgi [Würzburg]: Stahel, 1854; H. J. D. Denzinger, *Symboles et definitions de la foi catholique*, Paris: Cerf, 1996. See also A. D’Ales, “La question du Purgatoire au concile de Florence en 1438”, *Gregorianum* 3, 1922, pp. 9-50.

Alexandrian, as Maximus the Confessor⁴¹ and Gregory of Nyssa.⁴² as we shall further see, theorizes that the progress of the souls consists in an ‘ever moving repose’ (ἐπέκτασις-*epektasis*). Origen states that people can reach the resurrection unprepared, but after further perfection of their souls, the dead will be raised in “power”, “glory”, and “incorruption” (cf. 1 Cor. 25 cited by Origen); their bodies will be “refashioned”⁴³ and become “spiritual”.⁴⁴ This for the purpose of *Restoration*, which implies the regaining of the authenticity of human existence as well as the attainment of the transcendence ‘in-dwelted’ by God.

Methodius (d. c. 311)⁴⁵ and St. Jerome (c. 347-420),⁴⁶ among others, erroneously saw Origen’s doctrine of the eternity of the world (and that of the resurrection of the body) as being contrary to the Christian doctrine. For instance, Jerome reads the Alexandrian’s ideas as meaning that at the Restoration, when the souls will be redeemed, the bodies, spiritualised and of a ‘clear’ nature, will be ‘dissolved’ into the divine nature. Mark Edwards comments on this debate in “Origen no gnostic; or, on the corporeality of Man”.⁴⁷

Some researchers, as Andreas Andreopoulos in his entry on the eschatology of Maximus the Confessor from the recently published *Oxford Handbook of Maximus the*

⁴¹ Maximus the Confessor, “Ambiguum” 10: 7; PG 91, 1081 A, C and 1084 B. See Paul M. Blowers, “Maximus the Confessor, Gregory of Nyssa, and the concept of Perpetual Progress”, *Vigiliae Christianae*, vol. 46, 1992, pp. 151-171; Paul M. Blowers, “Realised Eschatology in Maximus the Confessor: *Ad Thalassium* 22”, in *Studia Patristica* 32, 1997, pp. 258-263.

⁴² Gregory of Nyssa, “De perfectione”, in W. Jaeger, J. P. Cavadon, and V. W. Callahan (eds.), *Opera ascetica: De perfectione*, Leiden: Brill, GN08, 1986, p. 214; Gregory of Nyssa, *In Canticum canticorum* 6, in H. Langerbeck (ed.), *In Canticum canticorum*, Leiden: Brill, GN06, 1960, pp. 174-175; 245-246; Gregory of Nyssa, *De Vita Moysis* 2 in H. Musurillo (ed.), *Opera exegetica: De Vita Moysis*, GN07, 1991, pp. 110-120.

⁴³ Origen, *On the First Principle*, p. 141.

⁴⁴ Origen, *On the First Principle*, p. 140.

⁴⁵ Methodius, *De resurrectione/From the Discourse of Resurrection*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. William R. Clark, Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1886, vol. 6, pp. 364-377. Particularly for the critique of the Origen’s teaching regarding the eternity of the world see Methodius’s “Xeno: De creatis”, in Lloyd G. Patterson, *Methodius of Olympus, Divine Sovereignty, Human Freedom, and Life in Christ*, Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1997. See also Pamphilus and Eusebius, “Apologia pro Origene”, ed. by Georg Röwekamp, Turnhout: Brepols, (Fontes Christiani, vol. 80), 2005, pp. 208-209, and Vladimir Cvetkovic, “From Adamantius to Centaur. St. Methodius of Olympus’s critique of Origen”, in *Origeniana Decima. Origen as Writer*, ed. by Sylwia Kaczmarek and Henry Pietras in collaboration with Andrzej Dziadowiec, Leuven: Peeters, 2011.

⁴⁶ St. Jerome, *Epistolae ad Avitum* 10/“To Avitus” (Letter 124), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., transl. W. H. Fremantle, G. Lewis and W.G. Martley, 1893, vol. 6, pp. 410-419.

⁴⁷ Mark J. Edwards, “Origen no gnostic; or, on the corporeality of Man”, *Journal of Theological Studies*, vol. 43/1, April, 1992, pp. 23-37.

Confessor,⁴⁸ in which he also refers to Adamantius, ascertains that in the Origenist work just quoted here there are notions which could be interpreted as meaning that the theologian from Alexandria allowed for cycles in the development of the world. He said that Origen: “left the end of historical linearity open, not fixed into an irreversible finality, and therefore possibly leading to a cycle of new beginnings and ends.”⁴⁹ I do not read the Alexandrian’s treatise in this key; as stated, to me he seems to have believed in ‘*The Apokatastasis*’ (ἀποκατάστασις), i.e. in a universal and final process of redemption. But as Edwards indicates,⁵⁰ both the idea of its universality, as well as the suggestion that this moment of spiritual climax will be followed by a new fall, have been reproached to Origen.⁵¹ The issue of the state in which the bodies resurrect – if they do so in Origen’s texts (and I think this is the case) – further complicates the discussion; the latter researcher goes into details of it in the source mentioned earlier.⁵² If the Alexandrian indeed conceived the human course in terms of cycles in parallel with his view on *apokatastasis* we are faced with a conundrum because, as we have observed, the theologian not only advocated for the latter, but also considered that all things have a beginning. A solution for this would be to assume that the Alexandrian was thinking about a certain number of stages of purification (where the bodies again become incorporeal, as he thought they initially are?) followed by the universal Restoration taking place once for all souls; in this case, probably for each one of them a different number of such phases of development would be necessary, in accordance with the multitude of the sins a person had committed.

⁴⁸ A. Andreopoulos, “Eschatology of Maximus the Confessor”, p. 324.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ M. J. Edwards, “Origen no gnostic”, pp. 23-37.

⁵¹ Edwards, “Origen no gnostic”, p. 26.

⁵² Edwards, “Origen no gnostic”, pp. 23-37.

The existence of the notion of temporal cycles in Adamantius's *oeuvre* should not constitute a surprise because such a concept was also held before by Hesiod (c. 700 BC),⁵³ Heraclitus (c. 535 - c. 475 BC),⁵⁴ the Stoics (in the 300's BC),⁵⁵ and Plato.⁵⁶ Hesiod's well-known *Five Ages of Man* has a section, "Works and Days", in which he describes the successive ages of humans, the ages of gold, silver, and bronze.⁵⁷ Despite the fact that he does not mention the word 'cycle', the poet seems to suggest that human history is characterized by temporal repetitions that might imply it.⁵⁸ (He also deplores the condition of humankind in the iron age, and writes that he wishes he had died before it, or that he had been born after it.) The expectation of a better age after the present one is, as above mentioned, often present in Greek culture – coming via the pagan tradition – and so is the cyclical idea of time, by contrast to that of linear temporality, more specific to Christian thought.⁵⁹ Some ideas in Origen's writings come from those of Plato (c. 428-c. 348 BC), especially from his dialogues *Republic* and *Timaeus*, where he sees time as cyclical. He contrasts time and eternity⁶⁰ and implies a decline, but sees it as followed, through a self-movement, by a new cycle of evolution for both the cosmos and the people. In the former

⁵³ Hesiod, "Five Ages of Man", lines 109-201, in *Theogony, Works and Days, Testimonia*, edited and trans. Glenn W. Most, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1988, pp. 96-105.

⁵⁴ Heraclitus, *Fragments*, ed. by Charles H. Kahn, Toronto, London: University of Toronto Press, 1987. See also Stobaeus/Ioannis Stobaei, *Eclogarum physicarum et ethicarum/Ecl. Phys. i* [Extracts about Physics and Ethics], edited by A. Meineke, vol. 1; Heraclitus of Ephesus, *Fragments: the collected wisdom of Heraclitus*, ed. by Brooks Haxton, New York: Viking, 2001, and also Charles H. Kahn (ed.), *The art and thought of Heraclitus. An edition of the fragments with translation and commentary*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979; on line 2010.

⁵⁵ As, for instance, Chrysippus who believed in "periodic conflagrations", when the world is absorbed in Zeus, cf. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives and opinions of eminent philosophers*, Loeb Classic Library, Book vii, 180. See also R. W. Sharples, *Stoics, Epicureans and Sceptics: An Introduction to Hellenistic Philosophy*, London and New York: Routledge, 2014, p. 67.

⁵⁶ John M. Cooper (ed.), *Complete Works*, Hacket Publishing Company, Indianapolis, Cambridge, 1997, pp. 971-1224. Here the dialogues where Plato deals with these aspects of time are included. They are "*Timaeus/Timaeos*", "*Republic*", and "*Symposium*".

⁵⁷ Hesiod, "Five Ages of Man", lines 109-201, pp. 96-105.

⁵⁸ Hesiod, "Five Ages of Man", line 174, in *Theogony, Works and Days, Testimonia*, edited and trans. G. W. Most, Loeb Classical Library, pp. 100-101.

⁵⁹ Henri-Charles Puech's study "La gnose et le temps", *Eranos -Jahrbuch*, Bd. XX, Zürich, 1951 is one of the first publications to have debated this issue.

⁶⁰ Plato "Timaeus" 37D, in John M. Cooper (ed.), *Complete Works*, Hacket Publishing Company, Indianapolis, Cambridge, 1997. p. 1241. [1225-1291].

dialogue, Plato speaks about the “journey from here to there [the world of the gods] and back again”.⁶¹ He also sees smaller cycles within the universal one. In *Timaeos* the Greek philosopher affirms that ‘Was and will be’, as ‘motions’, are “forms of time that have come to be – time that imitates eternity and circles according to number”.⁶² But it seems that despite the fact that Plato aligns himself to the ideological fashion of his day – the belief in a cyclical progression – that concept is not essential for him.

What he regards as crucially important is the effort of the soul to apprehend the *Nous* (expressed in various forms – beauty, and also love, goodness, and the virtues in general – that is similar to the idea of nearing God in Christianity). I have elaborated on this issue somewhere else;⁶³ for now I shall emphasize Benjamin Jowett’s comment on this aspect of the philosophy of the famous ancient Greek: “...no one prior to Plato had advanced the conception of a God whose very nature leads him to work for the perfection of other beings beneath him.”⁶⁴ I.e. in Platonic thought Divinity cares for the human soul. With that Origen would have been in total agreement.

I am aware of the position expressed by Mark Edwards⁶⁵ and John David Dawson⁶⁶ maintaining that Origen was not a Platonist to the extent usually assumed and sometimes openly expressed. I am also familiar with the contrary opinion as voiced, for instance, by scholars like Daniel Boyarin from the University of Berkley.⁶⁷ The space does not allow

⁶¹ Plato “Republic”, Book x, 619 e, edited and trans. Jeffrey Henderson, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd., vol. 2, 2012, pp. 482-483; see also Plato “Republic”, in John M. Cooper (ed.), *Complete Works*, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis, Cambridge, 1997, p. 1222. [971-1224]

⁶² Platon, “Timaeus”, in Cooper (ed.), *Complete Works*, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis, Cambridge, 1997, p. 1241. [1225-1291]

⁶³ “‘Love never fails, not even in death’. Gregory of Nyssa on *Theôsis*”, in Elena Ene D-Vasilescu and Mark Edwards (eds.), *Visions of God and ideas on deification in Patristic thought*, Routledge, Abingdon-on-Thames, London, 2016.

⁶⁴ Benjamin Jowett (trans. and ed.), in “Introduction”, *The Works of Plato*, Plato’s Random House, New York, 1928, XVII.

⁶⁵ Mark J. Edwards, *Origen against Plato*, Ashgate, Farnham, 2002.

⁶⁶ John David Dawson, *Christian Figural Reading and the Fashioning of Identity*, University of California, Press, Berkeley, 2002.

⁶⁷ Daniel Boyarin, “By way of apology: Dawson, Edwards, Origen”, *The Studia Philonica Annual*, XVI, 2004, pp. 188-217.

delving into this controversy more than to say that while assenting with Edwards that indeed Origen was more ‘biblical’ than ‘Platonist’, for the purpose of this paper I also agree with Plato’s most known editor, Jowett, on the ‘Christianity’ of the Greek philosopher.

Some echoes of Origen’s thought on the issue of time and redemption can be found in Cyprian of Carthage’s writings.⁶⁸ Cyprian (c. 200 - 258), in his *Liber ad Demetrianum* (Book to Demetrian), imagined a linear, progressive evolution of the universe of which end (“the old age of the world”/“*senectus mundi*”⁶⁹) will be marked by cataclysms.⁷⁰ He maintains that cosmos and society naturally regress before renewal and a return to the first state happens; however, he posits that the final goal of history is Christ’s second coming⁷¹ and, we understand, the redemption of human souls.

In order to understand how Gregory of Nyssa (c. 332 - after 385) conceived the notion of time, we shall specify that he cites Moses’s ‘indication’ that heaven and earth were made by God “in the beginning”,⁷² and affirms that, “for he who does admit a beginning of motion

⁶⁸ Cyprian of Carthage, “Liber ad Demetrianum”, J-P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina* 4, cols. 561-583, Paris: Imprimerie Catholique, Paris, 1865; “Ad Demetrianum”, in Manlio Simonetti (ed.), *Sancti Cypriani Episcopi Opera*, Brepols, Turnholt, 1976 part II, pp. 33-51; and St. Cyprian of Carthage, “To Demetrian”, in Allen Brent (ed., trans., introduction, and commentary), *On the Church: selected treatises*, St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 2006. See also Cyprian of Carthage, “De mortalitate”, *Patrologia Latina* 4, 603-625, and Cyprian of Carthage, “About Death”, in Brent, *On the Church: selected treatises*, St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 2006; Graeme Wilber Clarke (ed.), “Cyprianus. The Letters of St. Cyprian of Carthage”, in *Ancient Christian Writers*, vol. 3, Paulist Press, Mahwah, NJ, 1986, especially “Letter 56. To Fortunatus, Ahymmus, Optatus, Privatius, Donatulus, and Felix”, pp. 53-55, Michael M. Sage, *Cyprian*, Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, Cambridge, M.A., 1975. See also St Cyprian of Carthage, *Selected Treatises*, edited and translated by Allen Brent, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 2007, and St Cyprian of Carthage: *Selected Letters*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 2007.

⁶⁹ Cyprian of Carthage, “Ad Demetrianum”, in M. Simonetti (ed.), *Sancti Cypriani Episcopi Opera*, p. 34. His expression was: “senectutem mundi, qui iam uergebatur ad finem.”

⁷⁰ Cyprian of Carthage, “Ad Demetrianum” 3, in *Patrologia Latina* 4; St. Cyprian of Carthage, “To Demetrian”, *On the Church: selected treatises*, p. 70.

⁷¹ Cyprian of Carthage, “Ad Demetrianum”, in *Patrologia Latina* 4 [cols. 545-564]; St. Cyprian of Carthage, “To Demetrian”, *On the Church: selected treatises*, n. 2 on p. 67.

⁷² Cyprian of Carthage, “Ad Donatum”, in CCL3A; St. Cyprian of Carthage, Brent, “To Donatus”, *On the Church: selected treatises*, p. 50. On the Stoic determinism and its implications for nature and society see J. M. Rist, *Stoic Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1969, pp. 175-85 and A. A. Long, *Stoic Studies*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, pp. 40-44.

⁷² Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, p. 389. See also Gregory of Nyssa, *De Vita Moysis*, PG 44; Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, trans. Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson, The Classics of Western Spirituality, Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1991, pp. 113-114.

surely does not doubt as to it also having an end.”⁷³ As Origen did, Nyssen tried to express the journey from our fallen state of sinfulness to the transcendence of God through *epektasis*; the paradoxical notion of an ever-moving repose⁷⁴ culminating in *apokatastasis*⁷⁵ – the “summer” of “the gathering of the crops”.⁷⁶ Gregory believed that since from the temporal perspective humanity is a thought of God which is not yet completed, additions to the number of souls continue to a certain upper bound. This rather surprising limitation in the number of human souls in Nyssen’s texts has been emphasized by Morwenna Ludlow in her book *Universal salvation: eschatology in the thought of Gregory of Nyssa and Karl Rahner*.⁷⁷ She also underlies the view of the bishop that the “ideal relationship of the soul with God consists in the full participation of the soul in God through the attraction of love”, and that “Gregory also appears to imply that perfection and resurrection can (and perhaps will) apply to all humans created by God.”⁷⁸ When describing the future life, Nyssen mentions beauty, advancement of the soul, and unity to God; the idea of universality is implied in these (certainly ‘beauty’ is one of the universals in Theology and Philosophy).

Gregory is credited with the understanding of the eternal process of perfection as a linear pursuit begun in the human historical reality and which is advancing to the Eschaton. However, because in the *Making of Man*, he speaks about *apokatastasis* as consisting in a return to the initial state, implications regarding the notion of cycles could also be found in the work of the bishop. He, as did other early fathers of the Church, maintained this idea on

⁷³ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, p. 413.

⁷⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, “De perfectione”, in W. Jaeger, J. P. Cavadinos and V. W. Callahan (eds.), *Opera ascetica: De perfectione*, Leiden: Brill, GN08, 1986, p. 214; Gregory of Nyssa, *In Cant.* 6; H. Langerbeck (ed.), *In Canticum canticorum*, Leiden: Brill, GN06, 1960, pp. 174-5; H. Langerbeck 1960: 245-6; Gregory of Nyssa, *De Vita Moysis* 2, H. Musurillo (ed.), *Opera exegetica: De Vita Moysis*, GN07, 1991, pp. 110-120; P. M. Blowers, “Realised Eschatology in Maximus the Confessor: Ad Thalassium 22”, 1997.

⁷⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, *De hominis opificio*, 21.5, PG 44. 205 C; *On the Making of Man*, in H. Wace and P. Schaff (eds.), *A Selected Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (NPNF)*, vol. V, 1893, p. 413.

⁷⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *De hominis opificio*, 21.5, PG 44. 205 C, *On the Making of Man*, p. 413.

⁷⁷ Morwenna Ludlow, *Universal salvation: eschatology in the thought of Gregory of Nyssa and Karl Rahner*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 47.

⁷⁸ M. Ludlow, *Universal salvation*, p. 76.

the ground of variations in the intensity with which the divine “energies”, “powers”⁷⁹ or activities⁸⁰ manifest themselves. But the unfolding of *epektasis*, either in a linear or cyclical manner, does not contradict the fact that the kingdom of God, which the transfigured souls will eventually reach, is transcendent. One of the modes in which Gregory details the final state of humankind is through the story of the woman who was married consecutively to seven brothers.

As one can see, Gregory’s interpretation – having the story of the fall and return of the human soul as fundamental – is Platonic, and Gregory’s familiarity with Plato’s words – especially with those from the dialogue *Timaeus* – is evident. Also in relation to another of his writings, Anthony Meredith stresses that, “Underlying and enabling the upward movement in Plato’s *Symposium* is the unsatisfied desire to behold unlimited beauty.”⁸¹ Since the content of this statement is true, it is not surprising that the Middle Platonists read Plato in a ‘metaphysical’ and ‘religious,’⁸² even a ‘theistic’ note.⁸³ In a similar fashion as that manifested in Plato’s writings, Nyssen conceives the human soul as being continually engaged in an upwards movement leading, paradoxically, to a state similar – or according to Andreoupoulos, a better one⁸⁴ – to that from the beginning of its creation.

⁷⁹ All three Cappadocians speak about God’s energies and powers. Among others, Maximus the Confessor, for instance, mentions energies in “Ambigorum liber 7”, in J-P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, Paris: Imprimerie Catholique, 1865, vol. 91, 1076A-1077B ; 1256D-1257C (in the latter, about both energies and *logoi*). See also Maximus the Confessor, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers. The Ambigua*, ed. and trans. Nicholas Constas, vol. 1, “Ambiguum 7”, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library, Cambridge, Mass. & London: Harvard University Press, 2014. Pseudo-Dionysius has a chapter (XI) entitled “Why all the Celestial Hierarchies are commonly called Celestial Powers” in his *Celestial Hierarchy*.

⁸⁰ For instance, Gregory of Nyssa, *De hominis opificio*, PG 44; Gregory of Nyssa, “On the Making of Man”, in H. Wace and P. Schaff (eds.), *A Selected Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (NPNF), vol. 5, 1893; Maximus the Confessor, for instance, in “Ambiguum 41”; Gregory Palamas, *Capita CL, physica, theologica, moralia, et practica*, 29, ed., trans. Robert Edward Sinkewicz, *Studies and texts* 83, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval studies, Toronto, 1988, and Evagrius of Pontus, *The Greek ascetic corpus*, ed., trans., and commentary R. E. Sinkewicz, Oxford: Oxford University Press, University Press, 2003.

⁸¹ Anthony Meredith, *The Cappadocians*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1995, 55.

⁸² Cornelia J. de Vogel, “What was God for Plato”, *Philosophia. I. Studies in Greek Philosophy*, Assen, 1970, pp. 210-242.

⁸³ John Peter Kenney, *Mystical Monotheism: A Study in Ancient Platonic Theology*, 54-56; Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981, pp. 18-19.

⁸⁴ A. Andreopoulos, “Eschatology of Maximus the Confessor”, p. 324.

Somehow between Tertullian and Gregory of Nyssa's standpoints, or rather combining the two, is Augustine's position. He speaks about three temporal modes of existence (past, present, future), and believes that only the present actually exist: "In the soul there are these three aspects of time, and I do not see them anywhere else. The present considering the past is memory [*memoria*], the present considering the future is expectation [*expectatio*]."⁸⁵ The difference between God's 'today' and the historical 'today' consists in the fact that the former is not followed by a tomorrow, nor did it come after a yesterday, but it is eternal; this is how actually the bishop defines eternity. While for him eternity is peculiar to Godhead, for Plotinus, whose vein Augustine (354 - 430) follows on this issue, eternity is a characteristic of the second hypostasis, which he equals with 'the Intellect'; for the Greek eternity is derivative because it occurs in the process of emanation from the One, the One itself is no more eternal than it is temporal.⁸⁶

In Augustine's *Confessions*, by contrast to the eternity of God, creation resides in time; but since its temporality is always in motion (arrives, remains for a moment, and passes away) one can say that it tends toward non-existence. Augustine asks himself how people can deal with this state of affairs. He finds a solution that is psychologically oriented, and which refers to elements of subjectivity as memory, attention, and expectation;⁸⁷ that because time can be cognised from the changes that happen in creation. The ancient author seems to think that the only characteristic one can confer with certitude to time is that of transience. In the Book 11 (41) cited above, Augustine said that time itself is a creation of God; God, being eternal, is outside time. In his interpretation of Genesis, the bishop of Hippo avers that God did not create at a given time because for God there *is* no time. His act of creation is both instantaneous and eternal. Since time is a feature only of the created world, there could not

⁸⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 11. 14 (17), trans. H. Chadwick, vol. 1, p. 235.

⁸⁶ Plotinus, *Enneads* 3.7, trans. Stephen MacKenna, introd. P. Henry, London: Faber and Faber, 1969, pp. 222-238.

⁸⁷ Timothy Harvie, *Jürgen Moltmann's Ethics of Hope: Eschatological Possibilities for Moral Action*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2009, p. 149.

have been any time before God created the universe, and with this Augustine offers an answer to the Manicheists. He presents this issue in a number of ways: “There was no ‘then’ when there was no time,” or, “It is not in time that you [God] precede all times. Otherwise you would not precede all times.”⁸⁸ Again, God is ‘first’ only in the sense of being the eternal cause of all creation. He was not ‘doing’ anything before he created the world because there was no ‘before.’

Concerning the redemption of souls, Augustine implies that, since the mystical City of God exists to ‘host’ them and would ultimately triumph, Christians should be optimistic; he, like his fellow Roman denizens, calls this ‘place’ the New Jerusalem. The theologian believed that those inhabiting it have forgotten earthly pleasures to dedicate themselves to the eternal truths of God revealed fully in the Christian faith. The bishop states that the “joys” of those living within it, i.e. “of the saints”, in “that Sabbath”, “shall be spiritual, and consequent on the presence of God.”⁸⁹ The bishop of Hippo has expressed himself in these terms under very difficult circumstances for the earthly Roman Empire; its very existence was at risk under the attacks of the Visigoths, who conquered its capital in 410. For many the event constituted the beginning of the Empire’s disintegration in the West. Some understood it as a punishment for the fact that a number of its residents abandoned the worship of traditional Roman gods moving their allegiance to Christ. Despite this situation, Augustine wanted his book *The City of God* to convey a spiritual message rather than a political one, and to affirm the triumph of Christianity and of God’s kingdom. With respect to salvation and the afterlife of the human soul he believed in two resurrections or ‘regenerations’, thus: “one after the faith, which even now comes about through baptism; the other after the flesh, which is to come about in its exemption from decay and death through the great and last judgement, so there are two resurrections: one, the first, of the soul, which now is, and which prevents us

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 230.

⁸⁹ St. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 20. 7; col. 667.

from coming into the second death; the other, the second, which is not now, but is to be at the end of the world, and is not of the soul but of the body, and which by the last judgement will send some into the second death and others into that life which has no death.”⁹⁰ As noticed, the bishop thought that the first resurrection already took place in the conversion of sinners to Christianity; the other one is supposed to happen in the Eschaton. He was not only discussing these things with the people in his congregation, but also with the Millenarians (or the Chiliasts, in their Greek designation), who believed that the kingdom was to be the reign of Christ in the world. This faction conceived it as a future reality, but Augustine told its representatives that the current dominion of the Church already constitutes the City of God, at least for some. In his defence of Christianity Augustine argued for its truth over that of other religions and philosophies. He also stated that it was not to be blamed for the downfall of the Romans, but that on the contrary, it was to be commended for its heavenly success because, as mentioned, the City of God was the Kingdom. As has also been observed, for the Doctor of the Church from Hippo the transience of time does not contradict the souls’ chance for salvation. This eschatological orientation of God’s activity in human history was an idea common to many of the early Christian authors.

One of the conclusions of our work can be formulated thus: while the kingdom of God may be beyond time, it can still be characterised by linearity and progression; also the human effort towards it is usually conceived as being linear and increasingly efficacious. Also, in a theological context, one can say with Norman Perrin that “time is something in the proclamation of Jesus which fills and *fulfils*, and is something which man experiences, rather than something which moves from past to future”.⁹¹ People begin their journey of redemption from a certain ontological state characterised by the limitations of time and space, and

⁹⁰ Ibid. 20. 6 col. 666.

⁹¹ Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus*, London: SCM, 1967, p. 206; italics in the original.

through the action of the Holy Spirit and their participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, hope to escape these confines.

The main conclusion, which ties up with our introduction, can be summarised through an opinion expressed by Brian E. Daley. The author of the *Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* does not believe in Martin Werner's conviction that "the development of Christian doctrine in the first several centuries [was] essentially the by-product of a failed eschatological hope, a way of coping intellectually with the non-fulfilment of first-century apocalyptic fantasies".⁹² Daley explains that those who believe the latter reverse "the order of religious priorities suggested by early Christian literature, and confirmed in our own reflective faith."⁹³ The truth is that, while certain people who lived before the eighth century waited for the Second Coming of Christ during their lives, many saw this event as happening in 'the time of God' (as was and still is the case with most later Christians); some can have access to the kind of temporality this reality represents while still subject to their earthly existence.

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⁹² Martin Werner, *The Formation of Christian Dogma. An Historical Study of its Problems*, trans. and Introd. S. G. F. Brandon, Harper, New York, 1957, p. 125.

⁹³ Brian E. Daley, *The hope of the early church: a handbook of Patristic eschatology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 3; see also Wolfram Kinzig, *Novitas Christiana: Die Idee des Fortschritts in der Alten Kirche bis Eusebius*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck 8, Ruprecht, 1994/ *Novitas Christiana: The idea of progress in the early church to Eusebius*.

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