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**LIVING FROM TRUE HOPE: THE DOCTRINE OF APOKATASTASIS IN
ORIGEN'S THOUGHT.**

NEW APPROACHES AND RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

Dissertatio ad Doctoratum

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Statement of the Topic

In modern theological historiography, it is often asserted that Origen was the first Christian theologian to deny the existence of eternal damnation. In this dissertation, I aim to demonstrate on scholarly grounds that this is a markedly reductionist interpretation of the doctrine of *ἀποκατάστασις* (final restoration). The idea of ultimate restoration can be derived both from Scripture and from ecclesial tradition, and within the theology of the early Eastern centuries Origen was not the only figure who extended this hope to all created reality.

The dissertation advances two principal theses:

1. The central claim of the study is that in Origen the doctrine of apokatastasis is not an eschatological hypothesis but the structural key of his entire theological system.
2. I argue that Origen's primary focus was not the salvation of the devil but the extension of hope for humanity within a cosmic horizon.

The true meaning of Origen's theology can only be grasped if the rhetorical nature of accusations and defenses is distinguished from the actual content of his teaching. Accordingly, this study seeks to reconstruct Origen's thought by disentangling polemical distortions and reading the texts within their proper contexts.

The investigation draws upon a wide range of source layers: ancient philosophical traditions, Hellenistic cosmological models, apocryphal writings, theological controversies, conciliar decisions, anti-Origenist polemical literature, and the entire history of modern theological and religious-historical reception. This process made clear that the dissertation is not merely a reconstruction of a single doctrine, but a mapping of the interpretative field that developed around apokatastasis across several centuries. Accordingly, the research is guided by a set of interrelated questions.

Research Questions

1. In what forms and with what shifts of emphasis does the idea of final restoration appear in modern theology, particularly in the work of Balthasar, Bulgakov, and twentieth- and twenty-first-century patristic reception?
2. What role do Scripture and apocryphal writings play in the formation and interpretation of the concept of apokatastasis?
3. Which philosophical, linguistic, and history-of-religions antecedents shaped the early Christian use of the concept?
4. What constitutes Origen's distinctive theological innovation, and how does the idea of restoration integrate into the anthropological, cosmological, and hermeneutical dimensions of his system?
5. What relationship exists between apokatastasis, the doctrine of resurrection, and the question of the pre-existence of souls? Can restoration be regarded as a structural nexus linking the anthropological, cosmological, and eschatological dimensions of Origen's thought?
6. How does apokatastasis appear intertextually across Origen's works, and to what extent is it misleading to confine the doctrine to a few passages of *De principiis*?
7. How was Origen's teaching interpreted, modified, or contested by later Church Fathers, and how did polemical debates shape its reception during the Origenist controversies?
8. What theological relationship exists between demonology and the doctrine of restoration?
9. How does apokatastasis confront the astrological worldview of antiquity, one of the most coherent systems of determinism, and how did Christian theology — especially Origen — seek to reassert the primacy of freedom and grace?

The results of the investigation show that the answers to these questions do not emerge as isolated theses, but rather as a theological synthesis unfolding from the overall argument of the work.

Structure and Argument of the Dissertation

The dissertation examines the problem of apokatastasis in three major parts: from its intellectual antecedents, through Origen's theological synthesis, to the boundary question of demonology.

The chapters are organized around the questions outlined above and aim to understand the doctrine of restoration not as an isolated proposition but within the anthropological, cosmological, and eschatological framework of Origen's thought. The study therefore investigates not only the origins and internal logic of the doctrine, but also its patristic and modern reception and its theological implications for contemporary reflection.

The first major section explores the antecedents and counterpoints of apokatastasis, presenting its biblical, rabbinic, and apocryphal background, as well as early patristic motifs of restoration and the opposing tradition emphasizing judgment and damnation. This is supplemented by philological and methodological analysis of terminology, key passages, and the scientific and hermeneutical foundations of Origen's theology.

The second section examines the reception of Origen, including questions of textual authenticity, anti-Origenist polemics, disputed dimensions of the doctrine, and the testimonies of Methodius, Eustathius, and other ecclesial authors. It also addresses the specifically Origenian dimensions of restoration and analyzes the concepts of *ekpyrosis* and *palingenesis* in relation to time, cyclicity, and salvation history. The chapter concludes with a short excursus on Augustine's understanding of salvation as a defining Western alternative.

The third section investigates the anthropological and angelological depth-structures of the question whether Satan and the demons can be restored. It combines patristic analysis with systematic theological reflection on freedom, the nature of the soul, and the limits of restoration. The study of trichotomous anthropology, the disruption of pneumatic relation, and the somatological dimension of demonic activity provides a nuanced background for interpreting the anathemas of 553 and for drawing independent theological conclusions.

Conclusions of Chapter One

The first chapter made clear that apokatastasis can be treated neither as a marginal speculation nor as a self-evident doctrine of Christian eschatology. According to the witness of early tradition, the idea of final restoration appears as an open interpretative possibility shaped alike by the various layers of Scripture, the apocryphal traditions, and the differing emphases of patristic reflection.

The counterpoints presented in the chapter – especially the tradition emphasizing the reality of judgment and damnation – do not refute the hope of restoration, but generate a structural tension that belongs to the inner dynamism of Christian thought. This tension is not resolved by simple doctrinal assertions but requires hermeneutical sensitivity. It calls for the recognition that divine justice, mercy, and human freedom are not mutually exclusive but mutually implicative realities.

The clarification of philological and methodological starting points also showed that the interpretation of apokatastasis cannot be reduced to a few isolated passages, but can only be understood within a broader framework of interconnections. In this way, the chapter lays the foundation for the investigation that follows, which focuses explicitly on Origen's thought: on how final restoration becomes in his theology a complex doctrinal nexus linking anthropological, cosmological, and eschatological dimensions. The first chapter, therefore, does not close the question of apokatastasis but opens it: it delineates the problem-field within which Origen's teaching can be understood not as an eccentric deviation, but as an attempt to respond to one of the deepest and most demanding questions of Christian thought.

Conclusions of Chapter Two

Chapter Two shows that Origen's doctrine of apokatastasis was never an isolated speculation but part of broader early Christian debates on creation, resurrection, the state of the soul after death, the meaning of freedom, and the intelligibility of time. The testimony of Methodius proves particularly significant, revealing that Origen's doctrine cannot be reduced to cosmological schemes but is organically connected to the pedagogy of salvation, the theology of the body, and the gradual transformation of humanity.

His critique does not deny Origen's fundamental intuitions; rather, it seeks to reconfigure their anthropological and salvation-historical emphases.

The examination of conceptions concerning the state after death – through the differing approaches of Origen, Eustathius, and Augustine – is not merely of historical interest, but is crucial for understanding the theological possibility of apokatastasis. The comparison of these authors makes it clear that the idea of final restoration is not primarily the product of individual speculation, but is closely bound up with how eschatological time and the post-mortem “intermediate state” are understood. Whereas in the early Eastern tradition the journey of the soul and the cosmic fulfillment of creation appeared within a unified perspective, in Western thought the finality of individual decision and an eschatological closure tied to death gradually came to the fore. This shift in outlook fundamentally reshaped the framework of thinking about salvation and decisively contributed to the fact that Origen's teaching on universal restoration later came to be regarded as theologically problematic.

Origen's understanding of time and cosmology is not structured by cyclical necessities, but unfolds within a historically dynamic process shaped by Christological meaning. Although he adopts certain Stoic conceptual elements – such as the motifs of *ekpyrosis* and *palingenesis* – these lose their deterministic force and their association with an eternal cosmic cycle in his thought. The successive order of the aeons is not a motion that returns into itself, but a process whose ultimate orientation derives from the Paschal mystery of Christ. Apokatastasis is the inner telos of the entire historical-cosmic order: the fulfillment that brings the succession of the aeons to its close and leads creation into that unique and irrevocable state in which “God will be all in all.” For Origen, therefore, time is not a neutral framework but a salvific-historical space in which the spiritual presence of Christ continually shapes the world, and whose ultimate meaning lies in the full integration of created beings into the divine life.

Conclusions of Chapter Three

The aim of the chapter was to clarify in what sense the possibility of the final restoration of Satan and the demons can be raised within Origen's thought, proceeding methodologically in two steps: first through patristic reconstruction, and subsequently through systematic theological assessment.

The source-critical survey of reception history showed that the accusation of the “salvation of Satan” very early hardened into a polemical formula, often nourished by textual distortions and statements detached from their context. Within Origen’s system, however, the restoration of demons does not appear as a dogma, but as a boundary implication of the ontological logic of apokatastasis: the universality of divine goodness, the principle of the persistence of created substance, and the non-substantial understanding of evil together open – though do not determine – the possibility of healing for fallen rational beings. Consequently, final restoration in Origen does not mean the rehabilitation of evil, but the abolition of an evil state – that is, the cessation of hostile will and the re-establishment of order according to the Logos.

The second focal point of the chapter therefore concerned the limit-question of freedom: in Origen the pedagogy of grace is real but not deterministic, and the hardening of freedom – as the endpoint of persistent rejection – remains a genuine theological possibility. The examination of trichotomous anthropology further sharpened the issue, insofar as the disintegration of the order of “spirit–soul–body” may represent not merely a moral deficit, but also the rupture of a pneumatic relation oriented toward salvation.

In the systematic theological balance, the angelological teaching of the Catechism of the Catholic Church and Maritain’s Thomistic intuition shed light on the problem of the irrevocability of spiritual decision, while the temporal-theological distinctions of Rahner and Ratzinger helped to differentiate created time from the dimension of eternity. At this point the notion of pneumatic blindness became central: demonic existence can be described as the refusal of relation to the divine Light, a fixation of the spiritual being in “pure possibility” that distorts personhood toward anti-personhood. Finally, the somatological reading of demonic activity highlighted that the demonic “mode of action” represents the desacralization of the sacramental order of the body – the inversion of the logic of the Incarnation and Eucharistic self-gift – manifested in the corruption of symbolic and sacramental mediation.

Final Conclusions

The principal scholarly results of the dissertation can be summarized as follows:

1. I have demonstrated that in Origen apokatastasis is not a peripheral eschatological speculation, but the structural key of his theological system, integrating its anthropological, cosmological, and salvation-historical dimensions into a coherent whole.
2. Through philological and reception-historical analysis, I have shown that later misunderstandings of the doctrine are to a significant extent rooted in polemical distortions and in constricted readings of the texts.
3. I have argued that without Origen's theology of time and his doctrine of freedom, apokatastasis cannot be properly understood; thus, final restoration in his thought is not a necessary universalism, but an eschatological possibility bound to the pedagogy of grace.
4. I have shown that the question of demonology is not the center of the doctrine, but its boundary issue, one that makes the internal logic of Origen's system visible and at the same time reveals the theological fault lines – concerning freedom, grace, and eschatological hope – that also structure modern debates.

My work did not undertake to deliver a definitive dogmatic judgment – nor to pronounce on Origen's orthodoxy – but rather to render the Alexandrian teacher's doctrine of apokatastasis intelligible within his own theological system and within its philological and patristic contexts. The methodological starting point of the investigation was the conviction that final restoration is not an isolated speculation, but a theological nexus in which scriptural exegesis, cosmology, anthropology, and the theory of freedom are closely intertwined. Accordingly, the research did not aim to “prove” or “disprove” the doctrine, but to uncover the internal logical conditions under which it becomes interpretable at all.

The analysis of the first chapter showed that the idea of final restoration is not alien to the biblical tradition. Scriptural testimony, however, does not present a unified doctrine, but rather an eschatological horizon marked by tension, in which the promise of universal salvation and the reality of judgment appear as mutually implicative poles. Rabbinic and apocryphal traditions further nuance this picture, especially through the motifs of the intermediate state, purification, and divine pedagogy. Philological investigations – above all the analysis of the terminology *αἰών/αἰώνιος* – made clear that many modern dogmatic misunderstandings arise not from theology itself, but from linguistic and hermeneutical presuppositions.

The second chapter focused on Origen's reception-historical position. The investigation made clear that apokatastasis, already in the patristic period, appeared not as a unified doctrine but as an interpretative nexus burdened by controversy. The critiques of Methodius, Eustathius, and other authors are not to be read as simple rejections, but rather as signs that Origen's fundamental intuitions were reconfigured according to differing anthropological and eschatological emphases. The chapter gathered together the full range of Origen's teachings concerning final restoration. Particularly instructive was the demonstration that in the Western tradition the structure of eschatological time gradually shifted: cosmic and pedagogical horizons were increasingly replaced by the finality of individual decision and a more pessimistic perspective – a development that in the long run decisively shaped the later assessment of apokatastasis.

One of the central results of the dissertation has been to demonstrate that in Origen's thought apokatastasis cannot be separated either from the doctrine of the resurrection or from the theology of time. The successive order of the aeons does not constitute a mechanical cyclicity, but a pedagogical structure that receives its meaning and fulfillment in Christ. Final restoration is not a new world-age, but the state beyond the aeons in which God is "all in all." Creation has a goal, and our hope has a foundation: the world that has fallen away from God may, through Christ, find its way back to the Father's house, and we may come to share in the divine life.

At this point the question of freedom becomes especially decisive. The third part of the dissertation showed that in Origen's system the possibility of restoration never becomes a mechanical necessity. Creaturely freedom is real and carries within itself the possibility of self-destruction. The notion of the "hardening of freedom" appears as a boundary question – not as a dogmatically closed claim, but as the recognition that divine pedagogy does not abolish personal responsibility. God's grace is primary and offered to every created intellect, yet it does not override the creature's self-determination. By imitating Christ we may at once cling to a love beyond all imagination and do so freely, without coercion.

The investigation also gave particular emphasis to Origen's anthropological starting point. For Origen, the human being is not a static entity but a continually forming, rational, and personal being whose existential condition follows from his own decisions. In this way the Alexandrian theologian not only rejects gnostic fatalism, but also moves beyond the irreconcilable conclusions of the philosophical schools of his time:

every component of existence – body, soul, spirit, time, and history – is interpreted within a unified theological horizon in the light of Scripture. Origen’s system is therefore not a speculative metaphysics but a coherent vision in which freedom, pedagogical judgment, and final restoration are ordered within a single internal logic.

The analysis of modern theological reception – especially the thought of Balthasar and Bulgakov – has shown that the question of apokatastasis is not merely a historical problem even today. Balthasar’s theology of extended hope, framed Christologically and Trinitarianly, preserves the possibility of ultimate rejection, whereas Bulgakov’s ontological universalism becomes problematic precisely at this point. The debate thus reveals that behind the question of final restoration ultimately lies a difference in the interpretation of the divine image and the concept of freedom.

It has also become clear that modern scholarship often exhibits a reductionism that interprets the Alexandrian teacher either merely as a system-builder or merely as an exegete and mystic. I have sought to show that Origen’s thought does not define itself as a “self-contained system,” but as a believing inquiry unfolding through logical argument grounded in the scriptural texts. This inquiry is not an abstract speculation but an existentially committed theological path that integrates human freedom, the historical dynamism of creation, and God’s healing pedagogy within a single coherent vision. For Origen, the perspective of final restoration is not merely a future event, but already an existential task: an invitation to a path of seeking that does not end in ready-made answers, but strives for ever clearer insight through deepening participation in the mystery.

The preparation of the demonological question constitutes one of the sharpest tests of the internal implications of apokatastasis. The non-substantial understanding of evil in principle opens the possibility of the return of fallen beings to God, yet the serious affirmation of freedom excludes its automatic realization. I align with those scholars who hold that in Origen’s anti-gnostic theodicy Satan may be restored at most with regard to his substance, while his accidental determinations – above all his rebellion against God – may in principle cease. The decisive question therefore proves ultimately not metaphysical but Christological: whether the fallen intellect, contemplating the wounds of Christ, can utter the confession, “My Lord and my God.” Or, put differently, whether hatred is stronger than the love that has preserved the being through the aeons from total annihilation.

In summary, it can be concluded that in Origen apokatastasis is not a doctrinal endpoint but a theological vision. It is not the denial of damnation, but the hope of the healing of creation; not the abolition of freedom, but its ultimate seriousness. The results of the dissertation show that Origen's open questions are not signs of theological inconsistency, but spaces of thought that can remain fruitful for contemporary theological reflection.