

Origenism emphasized in Christology from the “Gnostic belts” of Evagrius of Pontus

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Abstract:

By taking over and emphasizing the dogmatic problems of Origen, Evagrius of Pontus developed an etherodox Christology that inflicts the Gospel and the teaching of the Fathers. At Evagrius, the soul of Christ has all the functions the Aryans have attributed to the minimized Logos. The name of Christ is given to the united with the Logos It is no longer the Word made body, but the nose made body. That is why the Incarnation is no longer constitutive of this name, and the assumption of the body and the death of Christ are irrelevant. Thus Christ's humanity has no meaning for the redeemed world. Origen and Evagrius laid the foundations of a pantheistic concept in which all spirits will be consubstantial with the primary essence.

Keywords: *Christ, the preexisting soul, union, nous, incarnation, science*

In a previous study we have shown the dogmatic problems in Evagrius of Pontus Christology and their consequences in the teaching of the Church. It is closely linked to this study and this is where we continue the analysis of the past. Especially we will stop on Evagrius Christology from the *Gnostic Belts*. Here we can see that Evagrius has no reason to conceal its thinking, as it did in other works, but rather exposes its teaching in precise terms (Refoulé 1961: 251). By discovering the second translations into the Syriac language of the primary text of the Gnostic Centers, a clearer understanding of the Evagrius Christology. A. Grillmeier notes that in the Gnostic Centers are the basic lines of the Church's faith in Christ (Grillmeier 1990: 565). But these lines are seen in Gabriel Bunge's studies of Evagrius as being in the “spirit of Nicene Orthodoxy” (Bunge 1986: 47) in which the whole of Evagrius should be read, as Bunge thinks that “it was read by the Fathers of the Fourth Century”, including all those problems which Gregory of Nazianz called

“open” (Verse XXVII, 10), and on which the Orthodox Fathers of the time circulated and different opinions were issued. “In other words, Evagrius has the right to be interpreted to Nicene Orthodoxy and not to leave it”. (But this principle of Bunge contradicts the normative principle in the Christian Church, because at all the Ecumenical Councils of the Church Nicene parents are always taken as normative. Thus the Ecumenical Councils had as basic principle and starting point the Nicene Orthodoxy and not the other way round).

Such an affirmation is problematic because between the “open probes” signaled by St. Gregory of Nazianz can not be seen Origen's errors. However, these were not understood in the life of the Church as “open,” nor in St. Gregory of Nazianz, we find any clues for such a characterization of these errors. In addition, the question is the following: What are the different views of the Orthodox Fathers of time on such “open issues”? Can they be at the Cappadocian Fathers? Not at all. On the contrary, at the Orthodox Fathers of those times? there is a unitary teaching.

In G. Bunge's study we note that Evagrie's Christology is very briefly analyzed. Even when referring to the Gnostic belts, the dogmatic problems of the Evagrius Christologists in this work are overlooked, and therefore the objectivity of Bunge's analyzes is seriously undermined (That is why we did not have G. Bunge's work as a reference study). If at Evagrius the basic lines of the Church's faith in Christ are present, by which the Arianistic and apollinarian heresies are removed, Christ being the deafness after the flesh with our body, the soul with our soul, the Logos with the Father (Evagrius of Pontus 1958: 251) ut the great dogmatic problems.

In Paladiu's Lausiadian History, an Aryan, Eunomian, and Apollinist tormented Evagrius in the form of three demons (Butler 1898-1904: 9). In 620 John Moshu placed him in his hell in the company of Arie, Nestorie, Eutihie, of (Moshu 2013: 66). Saint John the Scarf gives Evagria the “insipientium insipientissimus” (St. John the Scarrow 1885: 865 A). John tells that an unbearable demon lived in Evagri's cell and was upset. A. Grillmeier rightly states that in Christology there is at Evagria “a development towards an exaggerated and finally heretical origenism” (Grillmeier 1990: 562). In this direction, the soul of Christ is seen as

preexisting and united with the Logos of eternity. That is why Refoulé is right to find that "the text of the new version clearly shows us that the Gnostic belts represent an accentuated origenism, and the Synod of 553 seems to have directly touched this work in several of its canons" (Refoulé 1961: 251).

The place in the *Gnostic Centers* where Evagria affirms the pre-existence of the soul of Christ was strongly altered in the first version of the Syriac text in the sense of the teaching of the Church: "There was a time when Christ had no body, but it was not one in which He was not the Word of God. With his birth, the Word of God dwelt in him" (Evagrius of Pontus 1958: 225). Christ is defined as the "nous" united with the science of the Monad: "Nous is Christ who is united to the science of Monad" (Evagrius of Pontus 1958: 209). This idea is resumed and developed several times, constituting as proof of an essential idea in Evagrie's thinking. The anointing of Christ consists in the pure spiritual knowledge of the divine Monad: "For this reason he alone was told to 'sit on my right hand', a straight which according to the rule of the connoisseurs indicates Monada and Unity" (Evagrius of Pontus 1958: 145). This formula is literally resumed by canon 8 of the 5th Ecumenical Council in its final formula.

Another text reveals a contradictory approach by Evagrie:

Christ is not connatural with the Trinity. Indeed He is not the physical science, but he alone has in himself always inseparable the physical science. . Indeed He is not the physical science, but he alone has in himself always inseparable the physical science. But Christ, I want to say the one who came with the Word of God, and in the Spirit is the Lord, can not be separated from his body, and by union he is connatural with the Father, because it is also the physical science (Evagrius of Pontus 1958: 223).

In this last passage is the definition in Evagrius' Commentary on Psalms. Here Evagrius does not disclose how he usually does Origen's teachings. At the same time he strongly emphasizes the divinity of Christ and strengthens the teaching of the soul of Christ. It "has become a physical and theological measure" (Grillmeier 1990: 562).

From the above texts, Evagrius teaches the pre-existence of Christ that he identifies with the First-Born (Evagrius of Pontus 1958: 143), which he distinguishes from the One, but which he identifies with the "nous" raised to the science of Unity. The "nose" united with the physical

science is therefore the one who has incarnated. Evagrius also states that “Christ alone must be worshiped ... for he alone has the One” (Evagrius of Pontus 1958: 83), because it is absurd to speak of two Christians (Evagrius of Pontus 1958: 223). These statements, however, appear contradictory. While the first formulas can be qualified as nestorian, the latter can be called monophysites. The texts in Origen show the same contradiction.

This is why some theologians saw in Origen an ancestor of Nestorius and others a precursor of Eutyches (Crouzel 1956: 134). After Evagrius, Christ having the physical science, is the only One who stands on the right hand of the Father (Evagrius of Pontus 1958: 96). But these rights do not appear to be of Him but for the present time. They will also be ours after the final and lasting restoration. This is shown in *Centuria, III. 2*, in which Evagrius first assures that “Christ is the One who has the whole unity in him” (Evagrius of Pontus 1958: 98). In *Centuria III. 3* Evangelism brings a significant nuance: “Unity is what is now known only by Christ”. In another place in the same *Centuria*, Evagrie affirms a thesis that becomes general: “The naked nose is the one who, through the contemplation that concerns him, is united with the science of unity” (Evagrius of Pontus 1958: 101). This “naked nose” (Evagrius of Pontus 1958: 103) is identified everywhere with the perfect nose in the unblemished spirit.

F. Refoulé has just observed that at Evagrius, “pure intelligence is by itself-intuitive, capable of God” (Refoulé 1961: 253). Prior to Refoulé, I. Hausherr showed that this statement is essential for Evagrius (Hausherr 1961: 146). In this vision Christ appears as a prototype of the naked mind, being also her precursor. This aspect is met in the Gnostic belts: “When he receives the physical science, the nous will be called God because he will also establish the various worlds” (Evagrius of Pontus 1958: 211). According to Evagrius, between Christ and the other spirits the difference does not appear to be essential (Refoulé 1961: 254). All will be what Christ is and all will be united with God the Word.

What, however, was Christ after the first moment, the other minds will only be after a long process of cleansing. In this process Christ is mediator. The other spirits can not inherit the Word, so that they are together heirs of the Word unless they have become the heirs of Christ.

This statement in the *Commentary on Psalms* is explicitly formulated in the Gnostic belts:

The inheritance of Christ is the science of unity, and they all become heirs together with Christ, all will know of the Holy Unity. But it is not possible to become heirs together unless they have first become her heirs (Evagrius of Pontus 1958: 127).

If another is the heir and the other the inheritance, it is not the Inspirational Word, but Christ inherits the Word, which is the inheritance, for whoever inherits thus unites with the inheritance, and that God the Word is free from union (Evagrius of Pontus 1958: 139),

accompanying the science of reason, the destruction of the world, the disappearance of bodies and the disappearance of names, while the equality of science after equality of nature (Evagrius of Pontus 1958: 67).

At Evagria there are texts that state the creation of spirits by God and others in greater numbers that assert the creation of the material world by Christ (Evagrius of Pontus 1958: 61).

About Christ, Evagrie says in *Gnostic Centers*: "The science of the second nature is the spiritual contemplation of Christ, which created the nature of the body, and the worlds departing from it" (Evagrius of Pontus 1958: 71). Through miracles, Christ showed His creative power in His pre-Passion life: "Christ appeared in the Creator by the multiplication of bread and by the union of wine and by the eyes of the blind man of birth" (Evagrius of Pontus 1958: 161).

At Evagrius, Christ has the role of mediator the Word of Origen held. That is why he attributes the creative function to Christ. Evagrius states that before His Incarnation, Christ appeared to men with a fleshly body: "Before His coming, Christ showed men an angelic body, and the latter did not show the body He now has but revealed the one they must have" (Evagrius of Pontus 1958: 155).

F Refoulé observes that the Ecumenical Council, despite having anathematized the original doctrines taken over by Evagrius, hid in some anathemas "fairly faithful" the doctrine proposed or suggested by Evagrius both in the *Gnostic Centers* and in the *Commentary on the Psalms*. For Evagrius, Christ is the nose in its state of perfection. Thus, Evagrius transposes the laws of spiritual union into Christology (Refoulé 1961: 236). In the spiritual union, Evagria never speaks of ecstasy. The vision he describes can be characterized as enstasis. That is why M. Viller

and K. Rahner observe that “the view of the Trinity and the view of the nature of its own spirit seem to be for Evagrie two parts of the same event” (Viller/Rahner 1939: 106).

In the *Gnostic Centuria*, Evagrie states that “it is not possible to understand what is a nature fit for the Holy Trinity, nor to understand Unity, the physical science” (Evagrius of Pontus 1958: 65). This text might take into account the present state of the spirit, not its final state.

In the *Commentary on Psalms*, Evagria refuses to Christ himself a fully comprehending view: “οὐχ ὁ Χριστὸς κυκλοῖ τὴν γνῶσιν, τὴν τοῦ Πατρὸς ἀλλ’ αὐτὴ κυκλοῖ τὸν Χριστόν” (Evagrius of Pontus 1876: 444). Here Evagrius applies to Christ what Origen was saying about the Son (Origen 1912: 360). The question is to what extent Evagrius Christology prolongs that of Origen. F Refoulé asserts that this question can not be answered definitively (Refoulé 1961: 261). This is because Origen is a complex author. On the one hand, he appears as the spiritual and apostle of the Church and can be thought to be the most true. On the other hand, there is undoubtedly an intellectual, esoteric, and rationalizing Origen.

Jean Daniélou says that

we must give up saving it altogether. There is a Gnostic theology that has the preexistence of souls, apocatastasis, depreciation of the world of bodies, subordination, and which is a remarkable, but little orthodox systemic ensemble (Daniélou 1959: 595-596).

Wishing to interpret the Gospel in the framework of contemporary Platonism, Origen was led to various deformations. “Particularly he could not grasp in a satisfactory way the union of human nature with the divine nature in Christ” (Refoulé 1961: 262).

In *Dialogue with Heraclides*, Origen takes an attitude towards adoptions, calling him an unbelieving teaching (Origen 1960: 60). In several places Origen shows that “the man in Jesus” is not “another” than the Word, that they are distinct only as different notions of the same single being (Origen 1900: 120). Refoulé observes, however, that Origen was unable to understand the “union of the pre-existing soul of Christ with the divine Word” – in fact, we say, this is a dogmatic mistake anathematized by the 5th Ecumenical Synod - “than by the way of the mystical union” (Refoulé 1961: 263).

By the attraction of his love, the soul of Christ unites so inseparably and indivisibly with the Word that it is transformed into himself as iron is permeated by fire. Returning synthesized W. Völker's analysis, H. Peuch correctly reads Origen's thinking:

The soul of Christ is united with the Word as the Gnostic soul, progressively integrated and crowned with the Word, fire united with fire, in the point of being but one fire: this is no longer a "koinonia", but also an "enosis" (Peuch 1933: 525).

"This mystical union reaches in Christ such a degree of intensity that the self is lost and is founded on the Divine Being" (Refoulé 1961: 263) although Origen does not portray this ontic unity.

This direction of thought is taken over by Evagrius, "reinforcing his traces". In addition, while Origen emphasized love and will, Evagria describes the mystical union in purely intellectual terms. However, the continuity between Origen and Evagria can not be questioned. In line with Origen's system, it can be seen that Christians will become equal to Christ. This is because the soul of Christ is essentially like ours.

The mystical union of the soul of Christ with the Word is necessarily shown in Origen as the prototype of our union with God, as seen in his *Commentary to John*:

"I speak what I have seen to my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father" (John 7, 38). As we say from some people that they were witnesses of the Word from the beginning (Luke 1, 2) ... so we can call the Savior the witness of things to the Father. Even this is to say the word "No one could know the Father except the Son" (Matthew 11, 27), for no one is a witness, to whom the Son must reveal something to him. That the Savior, however, is witness to things to the Father, makes known the above. You could now wonder if it would ever be that the angels could see the Father Himself without seeing through intercessor and interpreter. If one, seeing the Son, "sees the Father who sent him," then he sees the Son in the Son. But if he sees the Father and what the Father is like the Son, then he becomes like the Son a witness of the Father and of what the Father is, and he no longer knows in a way what it is. And I believe that this is the goal that he touched "when the Son will surrender the kingdom of the Father, and God will be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15, 24-28) (Origen 1903: 334).

As P. Nemeshegyi rightly observes. for Origen, Christians do not become sons in full than a kind of "communication of attributes", assimilating them and thus fully uniting with the One Begotten Son (Nemeshegyi 1960: 202, note 2). In such an understanding, Evagrius' role

is to “develop in one sense a thought that contains other potentials” (Refoulé 1961: 264). “It's hard to deny Origen the paternity of Evagrius system and of the originists”.

A. Grillmeier rightly states that “Christ ultimately becomes only a specially different case gradually in the general condition of the perfect one for the Word, so profoundly mystical he wished Origen to conceive the word-soul relationship” (Grillmeier 1951: 65). It is certain Origen has shown a gradual absorption of all spirits into divinity. He believed that at the end of time all beings would be one with God, as the Father and the Son are one, and then all the diversity will be canceled (Origen 1912: 286).

That is why W. Völker states that in Origen the union of souls with God maintains their depersonalization. F Refoulé, however, believes that neither Origen nor Evagrius suppressed in the “union” or “anakrasis” the distinction between created and uncreated (Refoulé 1961: 265). At the same time, however, he firmly states that “already Origen, in addition to Evagrius, laid the foundations of a pantheistic vision in which all spirits would be said to be consubstantial with the primary essence”. Lieske thinks Origen understood union as substantial when it was about Christ and as an accidental one for human souls (Lieske 1938: 130).

But the texts do not contain this distinction, and “the logic of Origen's ‘system’ to assimilate without reserve the case of all souls with that of Christ” (Refoulé 1961: 264). Such a “system” betrayed Origen's intentions. Thus “as a system of Christian doctrine those first principles were a failure” (Kerr 1958: 39). From such a “system failure” (Refoulé 1961: 266 note 2), often in a less valid way, a certain number of Origen's apprentices, of whom Evagria, retained and developed a foreign teaching to the Church. This fact can no longer be questioned today. “The continuity between Evagrius and Origen is too obvious”. In such a continuity in the Gnostic Centers of Evagria, the center and the greatest weight point lie in the pre-existing soul of Christ. This soul is predominantly called “nous”. From creation it was raised to the knowledge of the Monade. “The great danger threatening here the Church's Christology was recognized by the Second Synod of Constantinople (V Ecumenical o.n)” (Grillmeier 1990: 565).

The subject of the Incarnation is this nous. He bears the name of Christ, because it was anointed with the knowledge of the Monad: "The intelligent anointing is the spiritual science of the Holy Unity, and Christ is the One who is united with this science. And if so, Christ is not the Word at first, so that the anointed is not God in the beginning, but Christ is because of him, and this is because of him is God" (Evagrius of Pontus 1958: 143).

The name of Christ is given to this nous unit with the Logos. That is why the Incarnation is no longer constitutive for this name. The anointing takes place in the clean nose, as an "intelligent anointing". Starting from this nous, the Logos and the body first contemplate. By this, the subject of the Incarnation changes, as the *Explanations to the Psalms* also show.

It is no longer about "the Word made flesh", but "the nose made body". Only "improper" (in obliquo) calls "Christ", "Logos" and "God", just as the Logos has the name of Christ only because of the connection with the nose based on contemplation (Grillmeier 1990: 566).

Grillmeier states that at Evagrius the image of Christ clearly carries traits that may ordinarily be called "antiochian". However, it is fundamentally different from the image of Christ of the Antiochians "because they give full weight to the Incarnation, while the image of Christ at Evagria is unilaterally spiritual-mystic".

Evagrius sees the work of Christ's salvation by leaving this pre-existing nous, anointed by the contemplation of God. This pre-existing nous creates the material world and inferior beings to save fallen souls (Evagrius of Pontus 1958: 23). This nous is also attributed to the theophants of the Old Testament (Evagrius of Pontus 1958: 155). The created nose of Christ is the mediator of creation. Thus Evagria makes a demiurge from the soul of Christ. In such a view, it is clearly seen the influence of Platonism which led the Aryans to the conception of a minimized Logos. At Evagrius, the soul of Christ has all the functions that the Arians have attributed to this minimized Logos. When God created the spiritual beings was in "nothing". But when he created the bodily nature and the worlds, he already had his demiurge, that is, his Nous-Christ, not the Logos, but the nose united with the Logos (Evagrius of Pontus 1958: 161).

Both the descent to hell and the ascension to heaven are made by this Nous-Christ. “The Death of the Incarnate and the assumption of the body are irrelevant” (Grillmeier 1990: 566) due to the fact that “the flesh is not capable of science” (Evagrius of Pontus 1958: 143).

Because all souls are equal, all who are saved become heirs together with Christ: “Together with Christ is he who arrives in the Unity and delights in contemplation with Christ” (Evagrius of Pontus 1958: 139). “The inheritance of Christ is the science of unity, and all become together-heirs with Christ, all will know the unity of God” (Evagrius of Pontus 1958: 127). In contemplation there is equality of all spirits, and equality with Christ (Evagrius of Pontus 1958: 159), for all are in contemplation equally united with the monad. Revelation eliminates all differences, for differences exist only in the world of bodies and matter.

In Evagrius, the Christology of the two natures centered in Logos received a transposition ... The primary image of his understanding of Christ is the mystical union ... becoming a spiritualist teaching of Nous-Christ. The formula no longer calls: Logos-sarx ... but Nous-Logos (Grillmeier 1990: 567).

What is to be noticed, moreover, is the position of the Word. Everything is seen from the point of view of “unity of knowledge with Monada. Knowledge is the own power of union between Logos and nous ... In addition, Evagrius looks only at the nose of Christ”. The humanity of Christ has no meaning for the redeemed world. Only importance is spirit and spirit only knowledge. Based on it, the unity of Christ is built. There is only one Christ or only a son, because there is the contemplation of God. “He who says two Christs or two sons is like the one who calls the wise and wise two wise or two wisdom” (Evagrius of Pontus 1958: 223). Through union, the nose of Christ becomes “fictive science”.

The *Epistle to Melania* reveals the menacing danger of monism (Grillmeier 1990: 567) at Evagrius by accentuating the becoming in the monad of Christ and of every soul with God. Evagrius looks at the whole creation in the face of the sea, where all the rivers were at first one, so that they then separated, receiving different colors and tastes. But when they pour back into the sea, they become one with the sea:

And do not wonder that I said that by uniting with God the Father rational beings become a thread with the Three Temples without any increase or change ... In His uniqueness of endlessness and distinction, because of their union and intercourse with Him ... so by mixing the minds with the Father, there will be no duality of

natures nor quadrums of persons. But as the sea is one in its nature, its color and its taste both before and after the mixture of rivers in it, so the divine nature is one in the three hypostases of the Father, the Son and the Spirit, both before and after the minds, have mixed with her (Evagrius of Pontus 1986: 312-313).

Although Evagrius seems to keep the boundary between created and uncreated, yet Christ's humanity has no place here anymore. Concerning the person of Christ, Evagrius occupies

a unique place between Arianism, Apollinarity, Nestorianism, and Orthodoxy. In his pronounced origenism, he can not distribute to the material world and the assumption of the body through the nose of Christ any role other than that of an incident and his sad pursuits (Grillmeier 1990: 568).

In view of the mistaken statements of both Origen and Evagrius, the Church sought to save the Gospel and the teaching of the Fathers of the Church being led to condemn their system (Kerr 1958: 41). "Evagrius," says A. Guillaumont,

was condemned for his Origenist views at the same time as Dydimus of Alexandria and Origen himself, by the Fathers of the Ecumenical Council, reunited in Constantinople in 553. Anathema primarily focused on the etherodox Christology that is his own and the theories of the preexistence of the souls and apocatastasis he holds from Origen (Guillaumont 2004: 55).

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