Ilaria Ramelli

The Christian Doctrine of *Apokatastasis* A Critical Assessment from the New Testament To Eriugena. Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae. Euros 249.00.

In the course of this stunning work, nearly 900 pages including indices, Ilaria Ramelli explores with wonderful learning and precision the doctrine of universal salvation. Although the title suggests a critical assessment, it became very clear to the present reviewer that the author was on the side of Origen, and was herself a universalist. The main authors she discusses are the disciples of Origen, above all Eusebius of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa.

There are two basic New Testament texts, 1] Acts 3. 21—the only one to use the actual word that occurs in the title ‘universal restoration,’ and 2] 1 Corinthians 15, 24-28, which ends with the words ‘God shall be all in all.’ The texts, used by Augustine in his criticism of Origen in his *City of God* 21. 17 ff., derive from the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25. 46, which speaks of κόλασις αἰώνιος = everlasting punishment. So too the worm that does not die in Mark 9, 44-48 is used by Augustine in the same passage from the *City of God*.

Ramelli makes an important distinction between two Greek words αἰδιος, which does mean everlasting and αἰώνιος, which means rather of a different era or age. Unfortunately for Augustine, who in book 1 of his *Confessions* [xiv, 23.] admits his hatred of Greek, both the words are translated in the Vulgate as *aeternus*, the root of our word eternal.

It is instructive to note that, although they never knew each other, Augustine was born in 354 AD exactly a century after the death of Origen. There is a mixture of concord and discord in their attitudes, especially towards the relationship of divine grace and human freedom. The optimism of Origen, in his dogmatic treatise *De Principiis* 3.5.8 and elsewhere, for whom all punishment in this world and in the next is therapeutic, whereas for Augustine eternal punishment is insisted on, as noted above.

Nevertheless, they are at one on several issues, such as the idea of Christ as a doctor of souls, so Origen at *Contra Celsum* 3.54 and 8.72 and *De Principiis* 2.10.6-7 an idea which was influential on both Gregory of Nyssa *Oratio Catechetica* 16 and 26. Ambrose also who baptizes Augustine in Easter 387 defines Christ as a physician [*In Lucam* vii, 75] and Augustine, *City of God* iv. 16, though here and elsewhere the treatment for disposing of the swelling [tumor] of pride is above all humility. Pride is for Augustine THE cardinal sin that can torpedo even our virtues. Far less insistence is placed on it in either Origen or his most important ‘disciple’, Gregory of Nyssa.

Origen is less insistent on the idea of divine election. For him, unlike Augustine, God foresees how we shall behave and gives grace accordingly,

whereas for Augustine grace always comes first. 'Give what you command and command what you will.' [*Confessions* 10, xxix, 40], a text, repeated several times that sums Augustine's basic attitude to the relationship between divine grace and foreknowledge and human freedom, which did not please Pelagius and his followers. In his *Enchiridion* 1x. 32, he stresses the prevenient character of the divine election with the use of Romans 9.16 'Salvation depends not on man's will but on God's mercy.' It must be admitted that in chapter xxvii, 103 of the same treatise he is challenged by another Pauline saying 'God wishes all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth [1 Timothy 2,4]. Ramelli is keen to absolve Origen of the charge of being a Pelagian before his time. The challenge of the relationship between grace and freedom does not go away in a hurry.

As mentioned in the beginning of this review the impressive feature of this volume is the amount of scholarship brought to bear on the central issue, though it must be admitted that the most distinguished opponents of Universalism, Jerome and Augustine are both said to have undergone a volte face. Incidentally it is worth noting that one of the most interesting of later latin writers, Primasius of Hadrumetum, is not mentioned, despite his *Commentary on the Apocalypse*. Interestingly, the crucial verses from the rest of the New Testament are never cited.

It is hard to do justice to the various strengths of this book, above all to the amazing combination of breadth and accuracy, many texts being cited in their original languages. We may all of us be destined for the cleansing fuel of purgatory, but no one, not even he devil, will be consigned to hell as salvation is for all, including anonymous Christians. If we follow the teaching of Plotinus, cf. *Enneads* 1.8. that evil is unreal, rarely mentioned in this volume, but cited in *Confessions*, 3, vii, 12. what is the point of salvation? The New Testament apart, 5 principal sources are cited in favour of the doctrine of *apokatastasis*, Bardaisan, from Syria 154-222, Origen himself 185-254, Gregory of Nyssa c. 330-395, Evagrius Ponticus, 346-390 who greatly influenced Cassian, and finally, John Scotus Eriugena c. 810 c. 877, a great translator.

It is worth noting that much of our knowledge of Origen depends on Latin translations, above all by Rufinus. Origen's teachings were semi condemned at the Second Council of Constantinople in 553. It is worth noting that Gregory of Nyssa was by and large a universalist, he rarely, if ever, applies the idea of deification to our return home, mainly because his anti Eunomian insistence on the divine infinity, above all in his *Contra Eunomium* led him to insist on the unbridgeable gap between creator and creation. How could a finite creature ever become divine?

Ramelli is rather unsympathetic to two very important Latin Fathers, Jerome in his rift from Rufinus and Augustine for what she terms in both cases a volte face, the two being Origenists after a fashion to changing their minds on the issue. Above all, she is silent about two vital and important elements in Augustine's anthropology. Above all no mention that I could spot is made of original sin, as distinct from Origen's idea of the fall of souls, through satiety [κόρος]. When the soul became cold through tedium. Origen at *De Principiis* 2.8.3 derives the word ψυχή [soul] from ψυχρός cold. Souls fall because they lose their spiritual comfort in the presence of God, something which could never have happened in Gregory of Nyssa with his insistence on the divine infinity. For Origen, therefore, souls never use their ability to choose. Even so the two Latin Fathers shared much with Origen, above all their addiction to scripture. Doubtless Augustine's conversion brought him face to face with his own moral frailty and need of God's grace.

Augustine, by contrast, makes an important distinction between *liberum arbitrium*, which enables us to choose for or against God in this life and true freedom—*libertas*—in the life to come. In heaven we shall be truly free, because we shall not want to be, as he writes 'In the beginning we had the power to will either good or evil. . . . In the after life our will be much more free, because it will be impossible for him to be slave if sin.'

As for original sin, which for him lies at the root of all of our difficulties, it arose at the beginning as a result of pride, the origin and root of all sin [see Sirach 10, 6 ff.] and can only be dealt with by the humility of Christ [*Enchiridion* 28, 108]. My impression is that this tension does not occur in Origen or Gregory of Nyssa.

Finally on this issue the doctrine of original sin rests largely on the translation in Ambrosiaster of Romans 5.12 which renders the Greek ἐφ' ᾧ by in *quo* in whom all sinned. This is all very clear at *Enchiridion* 8.26. It would doubtless be possible to argue that as with eternal damnation, so too with the doctrine of original sin Augustine had been misled because of his imperfect knowledge of Greek. Yet at 1, Corinthians 15, 22 Saint Paul writes 'As in Adam all die so in Christ shall all be made alive'.

The amazing learning and complexity of this work makes it difficult to do justice to its contents. The Subject Index pages 882-890 enables the reader to find his way through the text. My suspicion is that Martin Luther, like a good Augustinian, would not have been an Origenist though many Jesuits are. In the words of Sir Roger de Coverley 'there is much to be said on both sides'.

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