



THE HISTORY OF HUMAN FREEDOM AND DIGNITY IN WESTERN CIVILIZATION



NEWSLETTER

MAY 2020

WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN THE NETWORK?

- DISSERTATION RESULTS
 - CONFERENCE REPORTS
 - NEW PUBLICATIONS
-

DISSERTATION RESULTS

Elisa Zocchi's dissertation, "**The Sacramentality of the World and the Mystery of Freedom: Hans Urs von Balthasar, Reader of Origen,**" is the first comprehensive study of the presence of Origen of Alexandria in the thought and works of Hans Urs von Balthasar. She begins with a historical perspective before moving to examine some specific theoretical issues. Balthasar's interest in Origen is usually considered univocal by scholars, who collocate it within the enthusiastic appreciation of the Fathers in the movement of Ressourcement. Elisa has discovered, however, a complex presence of the Alexandrian in the thought of Balthasar, who not only wrote directly on Origen in a very self-reflective manner, but also shaped his own theological thought in dialogue with him. She focuses extensively on the context of Balthasar's 20th century discovery of Origen, who assisted Balthasar in his contribution to discussions about the challenges posed by such movements as Neo-Scholasticism and the Idealistic return of Neoplatonism. Not only does Elisa analyse Balthasar's two specific works on Origen, but she also considers the presence of Origen in Balthasar's own theology building, specifically concerning issues such as the spiritual senses, love, freedom, and universal salvation.



In Johannes Renders' dissertation, "**Freedom through Submission: Muslim-talk on Human Volition, Destiny, and Liberation in Denmark,**" he combines ethnographic fieldwork with discourse theory and critique of ideology. This in order to analyze the binding logic of a disparate selection of statements on freedom by Danish citizens self-identifying as Muslim. This original work has involved everything from foundational texts, interviews, social media posts, images, sermons, interventions in news media, and therefore seeks to focus the ethnographic gaze on statements about freedom, rather than on the individuals who formulate them. A cross-sectarian analysis brings heterogeneity together with commonalities, and structural conditions together with individual agencies, thus breaking through the sameness/difference paradigm endemic to social anthropology. Johannes asks, what 'makes sense' to say (and do) about freedom, for Danish Muslims? His dissertation draws out the sophisticated and reflective discourse articulated by Muslims from disparate communities. He argues that for Danish Muslims, freedom functions as something individuals can/must simultaneously exercise (as birthright), surrender (as ethical practice), and achieve (as moral goal) in a voluntary, cultivated relinquishing of the will to Allāh as ultimate authority. Johannes also focused on the ways in which Islamic discourse, rooted in commitment and submission to Allāh's will challenge the pervasive Danish notions of freedom-as-choice. He observes that, in this way, Muslim-talk is able to bypass liberal associations of freedom with individualism, autonomy, choice, which sets the conditions for the admittance of Islamic truths into the public sphere, allowing them to latch onto established narratives, reconfiguring the public debate on freedom.

The main goal of Morten Koch Møller's project, "**Echoes of Origen: Augustine's reception of the Latin *Commentary on Romans***" has been to trace the influence of Origen's *Commentary on Romans* on Augustine's writings from the period 411-418 AD. Augustine appears to have borrowed several elements of exegesis from Rufinus of Aquileia's Latin translation (about 405-6 AD) of Origen's original Greek *Commentary*. Virtually all of these elements have some kind of relevance to the issues at stake in the theological debate between Augustine and his "archenemy" Pelagius. Augustine cherry-picked ideas and comments from the *Commentary* that could be taken as support of his own understanding of original sin, especially from Origen's exegesis of the passage Rom. 5:12-21. The source of these ideas, however, is never openly acknowledged by Augustine. The same applies to the instances where Augustine appears to censure elements of exegesis from the *Commentary*. In these cases, Augustine criticized interpretations that were at odds with his own clear demarcation between life "under grace" (*sub gratia*) and life "under the Law" (*sub lege*). In conclusion, it can be said that Augustine's reception of Origen's *Commentary on Romans* was very eclectic and largely motivated by the polemical needs of the Pelagian controversy.

In Kristian Bunkenborg's project, titled, "**Kierkegaard and the Tragic: Aesthetic Additions to Modernity, Self, and Freedom,**" he has sought to show the relevance of re-evaluating some of the most fundamental concepts of Western thought, namely, the self and freedom. This he does through analysis of the tragic, both in antiquity and modernity. Kristian uncovers the relationship between these central themes and voices in Kierkegaard's works, which tie together his aesthetical concepts with his existential philosophy.

In Sara Contini's dissertation, titled, "**Origen on Human Dignity: From External Social Attribute to Universal Internal Potential,**" she assessed how the Latin translators of Origen, Rufinus and Jerome, expressed Greek Christian discourse on humanity as God's creation through the use of a highly codified term of Roman statesmanship, *dignitas*. This was possibly the most trad-

itional and sought-after value of contemporary Roman society, i.e. the elevated status connected to a public office. Sara's dissertation clarifies the extent of continuity and innovation in the use of *dignitas* as displayed by the translators of Origen, and it sheds light on the ways in which Rufinus' and Jerome's translations serve as moments of intercultural dialogue. Finally, it provides valuable insight into the history of dignity as a social/divisive and as a universal/uniting concept.

In her dissertation, "**In Defence of Freedom of Choice: Origen's Exegesis of Romans 9 and its Latin Reception (4th-5th centuries),**" Ilaria Scarponi focussed on the exegesis of Romans 9 in the writings of Origen and in the writings of the Latin commentators active in the 4th/5th-century in the Western part of the Roman Empire. She investigated whether and to what extent the biblical interpretations of the Latin commentators drew on Origen's interpretations, particularly those that highlight the concept of human self-determination (αὐτεξούσιον), or freedom of choice (*libertas arbitrii*). Among the writings investigated in relation to Origen's output is the anonymous Pelagian treatise "On the Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart" (*De Induratione* - first half of the 5th century), which has previously been given very little attention in its own right and in respect to its relationship with the prior exegetical tradition. Ilaria demonstrated that Romans 9 is treated similarly by the text, "On the Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart," and by Origen, even sometimes using similar imagery and terminology. This research offers a strong basis for the claim that the author of "On the Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart" was influenced by Origen.

Adolf von Harnack's *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* has not been considered a reliable source for building a fair and objective image of Origen of Alexandria. Valeria Dessy has chosen to attend to Harnack's selective reconstruction of the image of Origen within his interpretation of church history in her dissertation, titled, "**Why this Origen? An analysis of Adolf von Harnack's interpretation of Origen of Alexandria.**" She argues that Harnack's selective presentation of Origen tells us a great deal about the religious perspective of the theologian himself. With this specific angle, Valeria emphasizes three aspects that played a pivotal role in Harnack's interpretation of church history: a latent Hegelian framework in his conception of *Dogmengeschichte* and history, the idea of the ethical community as a headstone for the religious experience, and the notion of unfinished reformation. She concludes that a focus on Harnack's treatment of Origen within his presentation of church history tells us more about his philosophical and theological biases and assumptions than it does the Alexandrian. Despite Harnack's claims to be a church historian, his treatment of Origen reveals the concerns of the systematic theologian.

In what ways can an "outsider" become "normal"? What tools were available in 17th century Europe to present oneself as belonging to the "right" group? These simple questions provide a rough idea about how Andrea Bianchi's intellectual history project, titled, "**Heterodoxy and Rational Theology: Jean Le Clerc and Origen,**" can provide fruitful reflections even today. The aim of Andrea's research has been to better understand the (explosive) relationship between Jean Le Clerc (1657-1736) and Origen. Le Clerc was an "outsider," both within Reformed Protestantism, as a part of the Arminian church, and also in his own church, due to his sometimes-unorthodox theological positions, which were born out of his philosophical and biblical-philological outlook. Andrea thus observed how Le Clerc re-interpreted Origen's argumentative practices, despite the fact that Origen was still generally considered to be the most prominent outsider of the early Church. In some instances, Le Clerc even managed to present Origen as a champion of orthodoxy. Andrea demonstrated that despite Le Clerc's sympathy for Origen's work, his strategy served the purpose of helping his own cause, that is, to show his belonging to the "right" contemporary religious party.

Renze Klamer's PhD project, entitled, "**Reconceptualizing Workplace Dignity,**" focused on 'Dignity and Work' and especially on how this is experienced by people on the job. Based on empirical fieldwork in two different organisations, Renze theorized that dignity is only ever experienced through processes of recognition. Whereas previous scholarship identified hierarchies at work and instrumentality of work as ever-present threats to dignity, Renze found that these same facets also enhance the experience of dignity. That is, having a certain position in a work situation gives you the agency to act, and having goals external to your own gives you a sense of contributing to something greater than yourself. In addition, Renze identified a previously unnoticed aspect of bureaucratic systems at work: whilst being treated like a number, one is also granted dignity-enhancing rights and securities.

Elisa Bellucci, in her dissertation, titled "**Johann Wilhelm and Johanna Eleonora Petersen's Eschatology in Context,**" investigated the eschatology of Johanna Eleonora and Johann Wilhelm Petersen, whose thinking developed in close relationship with so-called German Pietism. The work of the Petersens – one of the first testimonies to the *apokatastasis* doctrine in the German territories between the 17th and the 18th century – shows a strong influence of Origen. In addition to Origen, however, the Petersens also draw on the English theosophist Jane Lead, the Cambridge Platonists, and the Lurianic-Christian Kabbalah. Such traditions, which developed in the 17th century almost contemporary to the thought of the Petersens, presented fertile soil for the Petersens to discover and embrace the *apokatastasis* doctrine. Their interest in the doctrine was first generated as they read Jane Lead's work, which promoted, among other things, universal salvation. However, the Petersens found the main arguments for the necessity and the process of the return of all beings to God in the thought of the Christian Kabbalists of Sulzbach and some Cambridge Platonists, especially Anne Conway. Elisa therefore demonstrates that for the Petersens, Origen is primarily an important witness of this "truth" as a "holy father of the church". Therefore, while it is possible to place the Petersens' work in the Origenian tradition, it is equally important to be aware that such a tradition is mediated by other authors and traditions mentioned above.

In her thesis, entitled, "**A Complex Relation. Reading Anne Conway from a Process Theological Perspective,**" Karen Felter offers a systematic theological reading of the seventeenth-century philosopher Anne Conway's treatise *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*. She uses process theology as a hermeneutical lens in order to argue that Conway's *Principles* in many ways prefigures a process theological weak ontology. Karen has conducted this analysis with regard to the two main themes of Conway's treatise: how God relates to the world and how the spirit relates to body. This analysis is founded on an account of the main process theological terminology that is based on selected material from four key process theologians. Her analysis has yielded the following results. First, the tripartite substance metaphysics that Conway presents in the *Principles* makes inconsistent use of the term "substance", given that Conway uses the term on different levels within her ontology. This inconsistency, she describes as a "sliding" from a strong ontology of being as static and absolute, found in her rationalist and theocentric ideal, to a weak ontology of becoming that is only fully developed in later process theology. Second, she argues that the substance of Jesus Christ is the pivotal point in the gradual movement towards an experience-based ontology. Conway's *Principles* resembles process theology with respect to her understanding of the nature of the created substance and God's revelation in the world, which she holds to be relational, experience-based, and contextual. However, Conway's insistence on maintaining a conception of God in line with strong ontologies, prevents us from describing her straightforwardly as an early process theologian.

Giovanni Tortoriello's dissertation, titled, "**Scala Christus est: Reassessing the Early Reformation Movement in the Context of the Hermetic-Cabbalistic Literature,**" focuses on the ideas of freedom and dignity in the Renaissance and the Reformation. Through a reconstruction of the debates in their intellectual contexts, in his thesis he challenges several historiographical paradigms. For more analytical precision, he has chosen to put aside the categories "humanism," "Renaissance," and "Reformation" and focuses instead on the concrete debates and historical encounters among the prominent figures of the philosophical and theological debates of the early sixteenth century. Thus, he argues that the Augustinianism of Martin Luther has to be understood as a reaction to the opposite tendencies of sixteenth century culture. He points out that Luther's early theology emerged in opposition to Erasmus of Rotterdam, Hieronymous Emser, and John Eck. Erasmus and Emser were highly influenced by Origen of Alexandria and Luther repeatedly attacked them for their use of the "condemned" Origen. Simultaneously, Origen's works were read and quoted by Giovanni Pico della Mirnaodla, founder of the controversial movement known as Christian Kabbalah. A growing interest in neo-platonic, hermetic, and Kabbalistic works can be identified in Eck's thought on the eve of the Leipzig debate. He argues that Luther's theology of the cross emerged as a concrete reaction against the hermetic and Kabbalistic tendencies of sixteenth century culture.

Laurel Lied's project is focused on the works of **Enevold Ewald**, a Danish Pietist pastor, who has hitherto received little academic attention, but whose authorship was focused on bringing Pietist ideas and Pietist Biblical scholarship to a Danish-reading lay audience. The project is based primarily on an analysis of two early catechisms, a large set of printed sermons, and finally his devotional verse and exhortation to Scriptural reading, which occupied his later years. Lied finds Ewald of interest due in part to the fact that he likely held Origenist-inspired views on Apokatastasis.

CONFERENCE REPORTS

XVIII International Conference on Patristics Studies in Oxford - ITN Panel, Aug. 19-24, 2019

Some of the project's members participated in the sessions of the workshop, "Role Models for Human Freedom and Dignity in Origen," which was organized by Karla Pollmann. György Heidl (University of Pécs, Hungary) served as chair, and Peter Martens as respondent. Presenters included: Pollmann, presenting "Human Dignity and Soft Power in Origen"; Ilaria Scarponi, presenting "The *Liber de Induratione* in defence of freedom of choice"; Sara Contini, "Judging the Judges: Exaltation and Humiliation in Origen's *Homilies on Judges*"; and Monnica Klöckener (University of Münster, Germany), presenting "The Samaritan Woman at Jacob's Well (Jn 4) as an Example of Gaining Knowledge."



The Project's Final Conference - *Human Freedom and Dignity: Innovative Humanities*, Oct. 30-Nov. 3, 2019 in Pécs, Hungary

In this final conference, the ESRs presented three years' worth of intensive and passionate research to a broader public. Each gained very useful feedback and received support for further research.

Among the many significant moments of this conference, three in particular are worthy of mention.

The first is the 'Discussion panel,' which was held on the morning of Oct. 31st

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xjYaqj47fyU&t=3945s>)



It was a wonderful opportunity to establish a fruitful dialogue between experts from the academic world, young researchers, public executives, such as Jiri Schneider (Executive Director at "The Aspen Institute Central Europe") and public intellectuals, such as Ben Ryan (Head of Research at "Theos"). This round table highlighted some interesting perspectives on how ancient philosophical and religious tenets can still shape principles of moral and human conduct in our modern society.



The second was the 'Café origéniste', organized by Karla Pollmann on Nov. 2nd. It provided the opportunity to question ourselves about the highlights in our academic investigations regarding the history of human freedom and dignity in Western civilization, and the impact of our interdisciplinary and reception-oriented approach on our understanding of religion. It also provided the context for us to think about how can we build on the project results and can make them fruitful for both further academic work and impact in non-academic contexts.

The third was the opportunity to reflect on the excellent work done during the last three years and to look to the future at the same time. This was facilitated by the closing remarks of the Network coordinator, Anders-Christian Jacobsen, and one of the project's supervisors, Alfons Fürst.



American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting in San Francisco, November 23–26, 2019, Origen and Origen Reception program unit

Some of our members, as well as some members of our network, participated in two sessions of the Origen and Origen Reception Program Unit, which was focused on the theme of biblical exegesis and chaired by Anders-Christian Jacobsen and Ellen Muehlberger (University of Michigan). Alfons Fürst gave a keynote lecture titled, “Philosophical Exegesis as a Way of Life in Early Christianity,”



which set the tone for the two sessions that followed. ESR Sara Contini presented the paper, “A ‘worthy’ Understanding of God: Discovering and Communicating God in Origen’s *Against Celsus*,” and postdoc and network member Miriam DeCock (Aarhus University) presented the paper, “Origen and Theodoret on Psalm 15: An Exercise in Detecting Origen’s Shadow in the Greek Patristic Exegetical Tradition.” Both sessions were extremely well-attended and there was much lively discussion of the ideas presented.

NEW PUBLICATIONS

Elisa Bellucci

“Origenian, English, and Kabbalistic Influences in Johann Wilhelm Petersen's Apokatastasis Doctrine. The case of *Mysterion apokatastaseos panton*,” in Alfons Fürst (ed.), *Origen's Philosophy of Freedom in Early Modern Times. Debates about Free Will and Apokatastasis in 17th Century England and Europe*, Aschendorff, Münster 2019

Andrea Bianchi

“17th century Cambridge Platonists in Continental Europe: critique and erudition in the Bibliothèques of Jean Le Clerc” in: Alfons Fürst (ed.) *Origen's Philosophy of Freedom in Early Modern Times. Debates about Free Will and Apokatastasis in 17th Century England and Europe. Adamantiana 13*. Aschendorff Verlag: Münster, 2019, 149-180.

“The case of the Platonism of Origen of Alexandria in early modern Dutch-Arminian theology” in: John F. Finamore & Eric D. Perl (eds.) *Platonic Interpretations. Selected Papers from the Sixteenth Annual Conference of the International Society for Neoplatonic Studies*. Prometheus Trust Publishers of Great Britain: Lydney, UK, 2019, 169-190.

Karen Felter

“Origen's philosophy of Freedom in Early Modern Times”, Münster, is published in volume 13 of the series *Adamantiana*, November 2019

Alfons Fürst

Ed. *Origen's Philosophy of Freedom in Early Modern Times. Debates about Free Will and Apokatastasis in 17th-Century England and Europe*, Münster: Aschendorff, 2019 (Adamantiana, 13).

Ed. *Freedom as a Key Category in Origen and in Modern Philosophy and Theology*, Münster: Aschendorff, 2019 (Adamantiana, 14).

Beten als Akt der Freiheit. Zu den philosophischen Aspekten der Gebetsschrift des Origenes, in: *Ist Beten sinnvoll? Die 5. Rede des Maximus von Tyros*, ed. by R. Hirsch-Luipold / M. Trapp, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019 (SAPERE, 31), pp. 117–146.

Concepts of Origenism from Late Antiquity to Modern Times. Freedom between Pre-existence and Apokatastasis, in: *Origen's Philosophy of Freedom in Early Modern Times. Debates about Free Will and Apokatastasis in 17th-Century England and Europe*, ed. by A. Fürst, Münster: Aschendorff, 2019 (Adamantiana 13), pp. 11–44.

Origenes über Individualität, Selbstbestimmung und Selbstsorge, in: *Freedom as a Key Category in Origen and in Modern Philosophy and Theology*, ed. by A. Fürst, Münster: Aschendorff, 2019 (Adamantiana, 14), pp. 33–47.

Individuality and Self-Agency: The Self in Origen's Metaphysics of Freedom, in: *Self, Self-Fashioning and Individuality in Late Antiquity. New Perspectives*, ed. by M. R. Niehoff / J. Levinson, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019, pp. 505–522.

Anders-Christian Jacobsen

Ed. with Fabio Dalpra. *Augustine's Theological Anthropology*. ECCA 23. Frankfurt, forthcoming, 2020.

"Augustine's on Human Freedom and Free Will," in ed. Fabio Dalpra, *Augustine's Theological Anthropology*. ECCA 23. Frankfurt, forthcoming, 2020.

"Eschatology in Origen from Alexandria," In: *Eschatology in Antiquity*, eds. Hilary F. Marlow; Helen van Noorden; Karla Pollmann. 2020, (forthcoming, accepted).

"Themenheft: Some body or no body? Studies in Origen's theological anthropology Introduction." In: *Zeitschrift fuer Antikes Christentum*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 05.2019, p. 1-3.

"Luther on Human Freedom and Freedom of the Will," In: (eds. Lorenzo Geri; Nicolás Maldina; Pasquale Terracciano; Christian Houht Vrangvæk), *The debate about free will from Dante to Luther*, (accepted, forthcoming 2019, 12 p.)

Lenka Karfiková

'Christus Gott und Mensch nach Origenes,' in: Th. Hainthaler *et alii* (ed.), *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der einen Kirche: Christologie – Kirchen des Ostens – Ökumenische Dialoge*, Herder, Freiburg i.B. 2019.

Lenka Karfiková,

'Providence, fate, and freedom according to Origen and Boethius,' in: Theresia Hainthaler *et alii* (ed.), *Pronoia: The Providence of God – Die Vorsehung Gottes, Forscher aus dem Osten und Westen Europas an den Quellen des gemeinsamen Glaubens*, Tyrolia Verlag, Innsbruck – Wien 2019.

Aurelius Augustinus, *De quantitate animae, O velikosti duše*, Vyšehrad Praha 2019 (edice Reflexe), 160 pp. (Introduction, Czech translation and Notes Lenka Karfiková).

Morten Kock Møller

"'I can will what is right, but I cannot do it' (Rom. 7:18): The weakness of the will in Origen and Augustine", in: Ján Husár and Václav Ježek (eds.): *Teologie, jazyk a duch doby: Sborník příspěvků z interdisciplinární vědecké konference s mezinárodní účastí konané při příležitosti 1150. výročí uznání slovanského bohoslužebného jazyka, 289-298. Praha: Pravoslavná církev v českých zemích, 2018.*

Morten Kock Møller and Joshua Roe

"Luther demolished the roofs, Calvin the walls, but Socinus destroyed the foundations': The ambivalence of religious tolerance in Hungary according to Mihály Virág", in: *Martin Méreg*,

Dávid Molnár and Éva Schmelczer-Pohánka (eds.): "A hazának hű őre és oszlopa": Szepesy Ignác pécsi püspök emlékezete. TUDOMÁNY ÉS KUTATÁS A KLIMO KÖNYVTÁRBAN. A 2018. október 4-én rendezett tudományos konferencia tanulmányai, 103-116. Pécs, 2019

Lene Kühle

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Johannes Renders

"I want you to be a Muslim: Religious Subjectivity, Proselytization, and Discursive Conversion in an Ethnography of Islam" in *Tidsskrift for Islamforskning. År g. 12 n. 1.*

Giovanni Tortoriello

"Philipp Melanchthon's twofold reception of Platonism," in *Platonic interpretations: Selected Papers from the Sixteenth Annual Conference (2018) of the International Society for Neoplatonic Studies*, edited by John F. Finamore and Eric D. Perl, Prometheus Trust, Lydney (UK), 2019, pp. 147-68. Open access: http://www.prometheustrust.co.uk/Philipp_Melanchthons_Two-fold_Reception_of_Platonism.pdf

Elisa Zocci

"Das dramatische Geheimnis der Freiheit. Hans Urs von Balthasar und Origenes Freiheitslehre," in *Freedom as Key Category in Origen and in Modern Theology*, Adamantiana 14 (Aschendorff, Münster 2019).

"Where the human senses become spiritual, faith becomes sensory," in *Corporeality and spiritual senses in Balthasar's reading of Origen*, in *Origeniana XII* (Peeters Publishers, Leuven 2019).