

ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON PRAYER: EVAGRIUS PONTICUS AND ORIGEN

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Abstract This article examines the theology and anthropology of prayer in two foundational figures of early Christian mysticism: Origen of Alexandria and Evagrius Ponticus. Drawing on a close reading of primary sources – chiefly Origen’s *On Prayer* (*Peri euchēs*) and Evagrius’s *Chapters on Prayer* (*De oratione*) – the study traces the conceptual development of contemplative prayer from Origen’s pneumatological framework to Evagrius’s systematic theory of “pure prayer” (καθαρά προσευχή). The article first analyses the Evagian understanding of prayer as a “state of the intellect” (κατάστασις νοῦ) that transcends all mental “representations,” situating it within his broader ascetic and contemplative system. It then traces the philosophical antecedents of Christian prayer, comparing the approaches of Clement of Alexandria and Origen with those of pagan philosophical schools, particularly Platonism. The central section of the study investigates the anthropological distinction between *nous* and *pneuma* in both Origen and Evagrius, examining how each thinker assigns distinct roles to these faculties in the act of prayer, with particular attention to their differing interpretations of 1 Corinthians 14:15 and Romans 8:26. The article argues that Evagrius’s decisive contribution lies in his transformation of the Origenian concept of the “praying intellect” into a rigorous experiential and tactical discipline, anchored in the “antirrhetic method” and oriented toward “imageless” communion with God. This shift had a lasting normative impact on Greek, Latin, and Syriac contemplative traditions in Late Antiquity and beyond.

Keywords Evagrius Ponticus, Origen, Contemplative prayer, Patristic anthropology, *nous* (intellect), *pneuma* (spirit).

Introduction

The present study addresses a question that stands at the intersection of Patristic theology, philosophical anthropology, and the history of Christian spirituality: how did early Christian

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thinkers conceptualise the relationship between the human intellect and the act of prayer? The article sets out to analyse, compare, and contextualise the theories of contemplative prayer developed by two of the most influential figures of early Christian thought – Origen of Alexandria (ca. 185–254 AD) and Evagrius Ponticus (345–399 AD) – with the aim of identifying both the continuities and the decisive innovations that distinguish their respective approaches.

The study pursues three principal objectives. First, it seeks to elucidate the Evagrian conception of “pure prayer” as a state of the intellect (*nous*) freed from all mental “representations,” placing this teaching within his broader ascetic and mystical system. Second, it aims to trace the philosophical and theological background of Christian prayer, examining how thinkers such as Maximus of Tyre and Clement of Alexandria mediated between Greek philosophical traditions and emerging Christian spirituality. Third, the article investigates the anthropological relationship between *nous* and *pneuma* in both Origen and Evagrius – two terms whose precise meaning and mutual relationship remain subjects of scholarly debate – and explores how this relationship shapes each author’s understanding of authentic, “spiritual prayer.”

Methodologically, the article employs a comparative close reading of primary sources, including Origen’s *On Prayer*, Evagrius’s *Chapters on Prayer*, *Reflections*, *Gnostic Chapters*, and *On Evil Thoughts*. These texts are read alongside relevant secondary scholarship, particularly the contributions of Gabriel Bunge, Henri Crouzel, Henri de Lubac, Dominique Bertrand, Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, and Lorenzo Perrone.

Through this analysis, the author seeks to demonstrate that, while Evagrius builds on Origen’s pneumatological and epistemological foundations, he introduces a qualitatively new approach to prayer – one that shifts the emphasis from intellectual knowledge to lived contemplative experience, from theoretical reflection to a tactical, ascetically grounded discipline of the “praying intellect.” This transformation, the article contends, represents a pivotal moment in the development of Eastern Christian mysticism and left a normative legacy that shaped contemplative traditions across multiple linguistic and cultural contexts in Late Antiquity.

Spiritual Prayer in Evagrius Ponticus

Evagrius emphasises that the intellect (*voûs*) must avoid any mode of contemplation that could “imprint” a form upon it because, even after surpassing the “contemplation of corporeal nature” (ἡ θεωρία τῆς σωματικῆς φύσεως), it can remain captive within the multiplicity of intelligible objects (τὰ νοητά): “Even if the intellect has gone beyond (ὑπέρ) the contemplation of corporeal nature, it has not yet fully beheld/ contemplated (θεάομαι) the place of God (τόπος τοῦ θεοῦ); for it can [still] abide in the knowledge of the intelligibles (γνώσις τῶν νοητῶν) and become manifold (ποικίλλεσθαι) in relation to it.”¹

¹ See *De oratione* 58 (Évagre le Pontique, *Chapitres sur la prière*, ed. Paul Géhin, Sources chrétiennes 589 (Les

During the time of prayer, the νοῦς is called to detach itself radically from the senses – a state of insensibility (ἀναισθησία)² – because it cannot perceive the “place of God” within itself until after it has surpassed all mental representations³ related to created things: “The intellect would not see (ὁράω) the ‘place of God’ (ὁ τόπος τοῦ Θεοῦ) in itself (ἐν ἑαυτῷ), if it had not risen above all representations (νοήματα) of things/objects (πράγματα).”⁴

In this horizon, prayer (προσευχή) should be understood as “a state (κατάστασις) of the intellect (νοῦς) that abolishes every earthly representation (νόημα),”⁵ meaning any image of a sensible object. It is not simply a form of introspection but an “inner technique,”⁶ through

Éditions du Cerf, 2017), 270); Augustine Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus* (Routledge, 2006), 192]. As Evagrius specifies in *KG* 4.77 (S2, *Évagre le Pontique, Les six centuries des ‘Kephalaia gnostica’: Édition critique de la version syriaque commune et édition d’une nouvelle version syriaque, intégrale, avec une double traduction française*; *Kephalaia gnostica*, ed. Antoine Guillaumont, *Patrologia Orientalis* 28 (Firmin-Didot, 1958), 171): “Objects are outside the intellect, while their contemplation (*theōria*) is established within it. But it is not so regarding the Holy Trinity, for it alone is essential knowledge” (Evagrius of Pontus, *The Gnostic Trilogy*, trans. Robin Darling Young et al. (Oxford University Press, 2024), 349).

² See *De oratione* 120 (Évagre le Pontique, *Chapitres sur la prière*, 338): “Blessed (Μακάριός) is the intellect (νοῦς) which, at the time of prayer (κατὰ τὸν καιρὸν τῆς προσευχῆς), has acquired perfect insensibility (τελείαν ἀναισθησίαν) [to all things]” (see Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 198) See *De oratione* 118 (Évagre le Pontique, *Chapitres sur la prière*, 336): “Blessed (Μακάριός) is the intellect (νοῦς) which prays without distraction (ἀπερισπάστως προσευχόμενος), continually acquiring (προσλαμβάνει) a greater longing (πόθον) for God.” (Evagrie Ponticul, “Despre rugăciune,” 543)

³ See *De oratione* 70 (Évagre le Pontique, *Chapitres sur la prière*, 284): “Stand at your post, guarding your intellect (*noûs*) against mental representations (*noēmata*) during the time of prayer” (Evagrie Ponticul, “Despre rugăciune,” 534)

⁴ See *Skemmata* 23 (Joseph Muyldermans, “Note Additionnelle à: *Euagriana*,” *Le Muséon. Revue d’Études Orientales* 44 (1931): 369–83, 376; William Harmless and Raymond R. Fitzgerald, “The *Skemmata*: A Translation,” *Theological Studies* 62, no. 3 (2001): 3, 525, modified). See Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, “The Limit of the Mind (Noûs): Pure Prayer According to Evagrius Ponticus and Isaac of Nineveh,” *Zeitschrift Für Antikes Christentum / Journal of Ancient Christianity* 15, no. 2 (2011): 2, 302.

⁵ See *Skemmata* 26 (Muyldermans, “Note Additionnelle à: *Euagriana*,” 377; Harmless and Fitzgerald, “The *Skemmata*,” 526). Evagrius emphasises that one will not be able to “pray purely” (προσεύξασθαι καθαρῶς), if one is entangled with material things and troubled by incessant worries, because “prayer is the laying aside of representations” – προσευχή γάρ ἐστιν ἀπόθεσις νοημάτων (see *De oratione* 71; Évagre le Pontique, *Chapitres sur la prière*, 284; Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 193). “Those who desire pure prayer (καθαρᾶς προσευχῆς),” he urged, “must watch over their anger (θυμὸν), to master their belly, limit their water consumption, keep vigil in prayer, [...] and knock at the gate of Scripture with the hands of virtues. Then impassibility of the heart (καρδίας ἀπάθεια) will dawn for you and you will see, in prayer, the intellect shining like a star (νοῦν ἀστεροειδῆ ὄψει ἐν προσευχῇ).” (*De malignis cogitationibus* 43.7; Évagre le Pontique, *Sur les pensées*, ed. Paul Géhin et al., *Sources chrétiennes* 438 (Cerf, 1998), 298, 299)

⁶ William Harmless and Raymond R. Fitzgerald, “The Sapphire Light of the Mind: The *Skemmata* of Evagrius Ponticus,” *Theological Studies* 62, no. 3 (2001): 3, 518.

which the intellect frees itself from mental representations that leave imprints (τυπόω) in it, allowing it to approach “in an immaterial way, the Immaterial One” (ἄυλος τῷ ἄυλῳ).⁷

This state of prayer demands that the intellect be free from any representation, from any “form” – not only of sensible objects or any created reality, but even of God Himself. Any depiction of God, of Christ, or of angels appearing during prayer can only be a deception wrought by the demons, especially the demon of vainglory.⁸

Accessing this state of “imageless prayer” requires ascetic practices, the struggle with passions, the overcoming of evil thoughts, and total renunciation. The goal of these efforts is the mastery of the irascible (θυμός) and concupiscent (ἐπιθυμία) parts of the soul,⁹ as well as liberation from “passionate mental representations” (νοήματα ἐμπαθῆ), but also from those originating from the “senses” (ἐκ αἰσθήσεως), from “memory” (μνήμη), or related to “temperament” (κράσις).¹⁰

⁷ See *De oratione* 67 (Évagre le Pontique, *Chapitres sur la prière*, 280): “Do not configure (σχηματίζω) the Divine within yourself when you pray, nor allow your intellect (νοῦς) to be imprinted (τυπόω) by any form (μορφή); but, approaching the Immaterial in an immaterial way (ἄυλος τῷ ἄυλῳ), you will understand” (Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 193, modified).

⁸ See *De oratione* 116 (Évagre le Pontique, *Chapitres sur la prière*, 334): “The beginning of error in the intellect (νοῦς) is empty glory (κενοδοξία), by which the intellect, being set in motion, attempts to circumscribe (περιγράφειν) the Divine through figures (σχήμασι) and forms (μορφαῖς)” (Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 198). See Antoine Guillaumont, “La Vision de l’intellect Par Lui-Même Dans La Mystique Évagrienne,” *Mélanges de l’Université Saint-Joseph* 50 (1984): 255–62, 255–56.

⁹ When the three parts of the soul “work together not only according to the will of the Creator but are also in mutual harmony,” *hesychia* – inner stillness – arises, a fruit of perseverance that renders “imageless prayer” possible. See Gabriel Bunge, *Dragon’s Wine and Angel’s Bread: The Teaching of Evagrius Ponticus on Anger and Meekness*, trans. Anthony P. Gythiel (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2009), 15. See Seth M. Stadel, “Prayer without Anger and Sadness: The Syriac Adaptation of Evagrius’ Chapters on Prayer,” *Parole de l’Orient* 45 (2019): 341–62, 344–45, n. 20.

¹⁰ See *De oratione* 54 (Évagre le Pontique, *Chapitres sur la prière*, 266): “Whoever desires to pray truly must not only rule over irascibility (θυμοῦ) and desire (ἐπιθυμίας) but also become free from any passionate conceptual representation (νοήματος ἐμπαθοῦς)” (see Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 192); *De oratione* 62 (Évagre le Pontique, *Chapitres sur la prière*, 274): “When, out of its great longing (τῷ πολλῷ πόθῳ) for God, your intellect (νοῦς) gradually withdraws from the flesh (σαρκός) and turns away from all representations (νοήματα) arising from perception (αἰσθήσεως), memory (μνήμης), or temperament (κράσεως), filling itself with reverence and joy, consider then that you have approached the boundaries of prayer (ὅροι προσευχῆς)” (see Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 192). See Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, “The Poetic Performance of the Praying-Mind: Evagrius Ponticus’ Theory of Prayer and its Legacy in Syriac Christianity,” in *Bibliothèque de l’Ecole des Hautes Etudes, Sciences Religieuses*, vol. 185, ed. Andrei Timotin and Philippe Hoffmann (Brepols Publishers, 2020), 332–33; Bitton-Ashkelony, “The Limit of the Mind (Noῦς): Pure Prayer According to Evagrius Ponticus and Isaac of Nineveh,” 301.

A νοήμα έμπαθές is a mental image infused with a strong emotion (πάθος). These νοήματα form when the intellect internalises an image – for example, a person’s face – along with an intense emotion, such as resentment. Once formed, this “resentful” νοήμα is stored in memory, and recalling the image will also bring back the associated emotion. Due to the added force of the πάθος, these νοήματα έμπαθῆ become extremely vivid, persistent, and intrusive. They can invade consciousness, even during sleep, through dreams, rekindling the original emotion. This process reflects the “thickening” of the νοῦς, that is, its “sinking” into corporeality and emotional states, which undermines its clarity and function.¹¹

The intellect (νοῦς) will not see (όράω) the “place of God” (τόπος τοῦ Θεοῦ) in itself, if it has not become higher than all representations (νοήματα) related to objects; it will not rise higher if it has not stripped away the passions (πάθη) that bind it, through representations, to sensible objects (αἰσθητά πράγματα). And it will lay aside the passions through virtues (ἀρετή), and bare thoughts (ψιλοί λογισμοί) through spiritual contemplation (πνευματική θεωρία); and this, in turn, [it will lay aside] when that light (φῶς) appears (έπιφαίνω) to it, which, at the time of prayer, models/marks out (έκτυπώ) the “place of God.”¹²

As it progresses in knowledge and moves through various contemplative stages, the intellect reaches, at a given moment, a state of “true prayer” or “pure prayer” – a state proper to the “pure” intellect which, at the end of the ages, will be fully stripped of any trace of corporality,¹³ according to Evagrius theory.¹⁴

¹¹ See Monica Tobon, ‘*Apatheia* in the Teachings of Evagrius Ponticus’ (University College London, 2011), 147–52.

¹² *De malignis cogitationibus* 40 (Évagre le Pontique, *Sur les pensées*, 288, 290; Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 114–15, modified).

¹³ Hans Urs von Balthasar highlights a “gulf” (*Kluft*) not only between divine and created reality but also between intellectual/spiritual and corporeal reality (see Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Metaphysik und Mystik des Evagrius Pontikus,” *Zeitschrift für Askese und Mystik*, 1939, 31–47, 33: “*Zur Kluft zwischen Gott und Welt gesellt sich eine zweite, innerweltliche: die zwischen Geist und Körperwelt*”). While Evagrius does not completely deny the existence of incarnate beings, he views the “intellectual being” as the only consistent and enduring reality. According to Fabien Muller, Evagrius appears as an “intellectualist” for whom God is essentially intellectual, and ascetic practice aims at the “complete intellectualisation of the human being.” Even if this conception may seem foreign to contemporary sensibility, the material body remains, in the Evagrius perspective, a necessary instrument for the realisation of this intellectualisation. See Fabien Muller, “The Metaphysics of Evagrius Ponticus,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 98, no. 3 (2024): 267–92, 291.

¹⁴ See Guillaumont, “La Vision de l’Intellect Par Lui-Même Dans La Mystique Évagrienne,” 255. The “stripped” quality of the intellect at the time of prayer, which Evagrius presented as a spiritual ideal, signified the closest earthly equivalent of the “naked” state of the intellect at the original creation of rational beings – a state to which we will eventually return, according to Evagrius teachings. See *KG* 6.20; 6.85; 1.58; 2.77; 3.66; 3.68; 6.58; 6.81 (Évagre le Pontique, *Les six centuries des ‘Kephalaia gnostica’*, 225, 253, 45, 91, 125, 241, 251). See Elizabeth A. Clark, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton University Press, 1992), 69, and n. 159.

“Pure prayer” manifests as an “intense and transitory process,” in which the intellect, freed from images and conceptual representations, penetrates into a “formless” state (ἀνειδεος), thereby entering into direct communion with God without intermediaries. This noetic experience is not only iconoclastic¹⁵ in nature, but also captures an epistemological shift from multiplicity to simplicity¹⁶: “Prayer, however, is the prelude to immaterial and non-multiform knowledge (ἡ δὲ προσευχὴ προοίμιόν ἐστι τῆς ἀϋλου καὶ ἀποικίλου γνώσεως).”¹⁷

Although some scholars¹⁸ have equated “pure prayer” (καθαρὰ προσευχή)¹⁹ with “true prayer” (ἀληθὴς προσευχή)²⁰ or with “spiritual prayer” (πνευματικὴ προσευχή),²¹ considering all three to be the highest level of contemplation, G. Bunge introduces an important conceptual distinction. Therefore, for Bunge, “pure prayer” does not represent the ultimate goal but an essential stage on the path to “spiritual prayer.”²² Καθαρὰ προσευχὴ considers prayer from the perspective of the one who prays, establishing purity from passions as a necessary condition for the intellect (ὁ νοῦς) to pray “as it ought” (ὡς δεῖ προσεύξασθαι).²³ “Pure prayer,” in a certain sense, forms the “flower” of the “practical” aspect²⁴ of prayer, but it does not provide insight into its content, nor does it consider it from God’s perspective.²⁵

In contrast, “spiritual prayer” – as the “daughter” of pure prayer²⁶ and the true “goal” (σκοπός)²⁷ of the “ascent of the intellect to God” (ἀνάβασις νοῦ πρὸς Θεόν)²⁸ – is the prayer for which the entire spiritual warfare with demons is fought, being “saving and most pleasant”

¹⁵ For Evagrius, the Origenian idea that God, in His absolute incorporeality, cannot be represented in images is closely linked to an ascetic discipline aimed at freeing the intellect from all images that “darken” the vision of God. This iconoclasm against mental images was associated with an ascetic discipline of the body and accompanied by criticisms of those who ascribed corporeality to God. Such debates over divine and human corporeality constituted the Egyptian branch of the Origenist controversy. See Elizabeth A. Clark, “New Perspectives on the Origenist Controversy: Human Embodiment and Ascetic Strategies,” *Church History* 59, no. 2 (1990): 145–62, 154.

¹⁶ See Bitton-Ashkelony, “The Limit of the Mind (Noûς): Pure Prayer According to Evagrius Ponticus and Isaac of Nineveh,” 300.

¹⁷ *De oratione* 85 (Évagre le Pontique, *Chapitres sur la prière*, 300; Evagrie Ponticul, “Despre rugăciune,” 537).

¹⁸ See Tobon, “*Apatheia* in the Teachings of Evagrius Ponticus,” 51; Bitton-Ashkelony, “The Poetic Performance of the Praying-Mind,” 328.

¹⁹ *De oratione* 68, 71 (Évagre le Pontique, *Chapitres sur la prière*, 280, 284).

²⁰ See *De oratione* 54, 56, 61, 65 (Évagre le Pontique, *Chapitres sur la prière*, 266, 268, 274, 278).

²¹ See *De oratione* 63, 72 (Évagre le Pontique, *Chapitres sur la prière*, 276, 286).

²² See Gabriel Bunge, *Rugăciunea în Duh și Adevăr [Prayer in Spirit and Truth]*, trans. Ioan I. Ică jr and Maria Cornelia Ică jr (Deisis, 2015), 251.

²³ See *De oratione* 51 (Évagre le Pontique, *Chapitres sur la prière*, 264).

²⁴ See *De oratione*, *Prologue* (Évagre le Pontique, *Chapitres sur la prière*, 212.23).

²⁵ See Bunge, *Rugăciunea în Duh și Adevăr*, 257, 262.

²⁶ See *De oratione* 56, 53 (Évagre le Pontique, *Chapitres sur la prière*, 268, 266).

²⁷ See *De oratione* 47, 73 (Évagre le Pontique, *Chapitres sur la prière*, 260, 286).

²⁸ *De oratione* 36 (Évagre le Pontique, *Chapitres sur la prière*, 248).

(σωτήριος, καὶ προσηνεστάτη), for man, but “hostile and most hateful” (πολέμιος καὶ ἐπαχθεστάτη) for demons.²⁹

Therefore, according to Bunge, the theological core of Evagrian teaching on prayer should not be found in “pure prayer” but in “spiritual prayer,” which corresponds to “prayer in Spirit and Truth” (ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ) and which “is worked” (ἐνεργεῖται) “in” (ἐν ᾗ) “perfect and spiritual love” (τὴν τελείαν καὶ πνευματικὴν ἀγάπην).³⁰

Philosophers’ Prayer and the Christian Prayer

Although Evagrius’s definitions of prayer show certain similarities to those developed by his predecessors in the Greek philosophical world,³¹ his concerns were nonetheless different in scope and intention. For example, the Platonic philosopher Maximus of Tyre (2nd century AD) asked, in the treatise *Whether One Should Pray* (Εἰ δεῖ εὐχεσθαι), whether prayer has any meaning, questioning its very usefulness. This question led him to distinguish between the prayer of philosophers and that of ordinary people: while the prayer of the latter seems to be a request for goods not yet possessed, the prayer of philosophers is a “conversation” (ὁμιλία) and a dialogue with the gods about goods already possessed and, at the same time, a demonstration of their virtue.³²

²⁹ See *De oratione* 50 (Évagre le Pontique, *Chapitres sur la prière*, 262; Evagrie Ponticul, "Despre rugăciune," 531).

³⁰ *De oratione* 77 (Évagre le Pontique, *Chapitres sur la prière*, 292). See Bunge, *Rugăciunea în Duh și Adevăr*, 263.

³¹ On prayer in Greek philosophers, see Édouard des Places, "La Prière Des Philosophes Grecs," *Gregorianum* 41, no. 2 (1960): 253–72. Regarding cultic prayer in Greek religion, see Édouard des Places, *La Religion Grecque. Dieux, Cultes, Rites et Sentiment Religieux Dans La Grèce Antique* (A. et J. Picard, 1969), 153–70.

³² *Orationes* 5.8 (Maximus Tyrius, *Dissertationes*, ed. Michael B. Trapp, Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana (B. G. Teubner, 1994), 45.187-190): Ἀλλὰ σὺ μὲν ἠγῆ τὴν τοῦ φιλοσόφου εὐχὴν αἴτησιν εἶναι τῶν οὐ παρόντων, ἐγὼ δὲ ὁμιλῶν καὶ διάλεκτον πρὸς τοὺς θεοὺς περὶ τῶν παρόντων καὶ ἐπίδειξιν τῆς ἀρετῆς – “But you consider the philosopher’s prayer to be a petition for what is absent, whereas I hold that it is a conversation or dialogue with the gods concerning what is present, and a manifestation of virtue” (Maximus of Tyre, *The Philosophical Orations*, trans. Michael B. Trapp (Clarendon Press, 1997), 49). M.B. Trapp (Maximus of Tyre, *The Philosophical Orations*, 49, n. 39) considers this conclusion debatable, arguing that prayers in Plato are – and are defined as being – prayers of petition. In this sense, he refers specifically to *Leges* 801a.6: ἄρ’ οὐκ εὐχὰς εἶναι τοῖς θεοῖς οἷς θύομεν ἐκάστοτε – “Are not all songs themselves prayers to the gods, to whom we offer sacrifices on each occasion?” (see Platon, *Legile*, trans. Ștefan Bezdechi (Editura IRI, 1995), 213) and *Definitiones* 415b.2: Εὐχὴ αἴτησις ἀνθρώποις ἀγαθῶν ἢ δοκούντων παρὰ θεῶν – “Prayer is a request by men for goods, or for what appears to be goods, from the gods” [John M. Cooper, ed., "Definitions," in *Plato: Complete Works*, trans. D. S. Hutchinson (Hackett Pub, 1997), 1684].

The discourse on prayer by Clement of Alexandria was aimed at educated pagans, especially philosophers, and had an apologetic tone, affirming that the only truly pious person is the γνωστικός, that is, the Christian who possesses spiritual knowledge.³³ Despite the philosophical language employed, Clement's reflections bear a strong biblical influence and are closely connected to Jesus' evangelical teachings on prayer.³⁴ Prayer therefore receives a Christological and pneumatological basis, with Clement developing certain ideas from Tertullian and anticipating Origen's reflections³⁵ on the mediation of Christ and the support of the Holy Spirit³⁶ granted to those who pray.³⁷

³³ In Clement of Alexandria's view, the quality of the *gnostikos's* prayer must reflect his spiritual superiority. See Alain Le Boulluec, "Les Réflexions de Clément sur la prière et le traité d'Origène," in *Alexandrie antique et chrétienne: Clément et Origène*, by Alain Le Boulluec, ed. Carmelo Giuseppe Conticello, Collection des études augustiniennes 178 (Institut d'études augustiniennes, 2006), 137–49, 138.

³⁴ In *Stromata* 7.7.49.6–7, there is a clear allusion to Matthew 6:5–6, and in *Stromata* 7.7.46.1 to Matthew 6:8. Regarding the encoded use of the Scriptures by Clement of Alexandria, see Marco Rizzi, "Il Fondamento Epistemologico Della Mistica in Clemente Alessandrino," in *Origene Maestro Di Vita Spirituale*, ed. Luigi F. Pizzolato and Marco Rizzi (Vita e Pensiero, 2001), 91–122.

³⁵ See *Peri euchēs* 10.2 (Origenes, *Origenes Werke*, II, ed. Paul Koetschau, Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller Der Ersten Drei Jahrhunderte (J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1899), 320–321; Origen, *An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer, First Principles: Book IV, Prologue to the Commentary on the Song of Songs, Homily XXVII on Numbers*, trans. Rowan A. Greer (Paulist Press, 1979), 100–101). See Lorenzo Perrone, "Le dinamiche dell'atto orante secondo Origene: la preghiera come ascesa, colloquio e conoscenza di Dio," in *Origene maestro di vita spirituale: Milano 13-15 settembre 1999*, ed. Luigi Franco Pizzolato and Marco Rizzi, Studia Patristica Mediolanensia 22 (Vita e pensiero, 2001), 132.

³⁶ Christians are called to venerate "the Logos and – through Him – the Father" (See *Stromata* 7.7.35.1.1-3: λόγον ... καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ τὸν πατέρα). Clement, in turn, advocates for a "spiritual" prayer, insofar as striving for a "spiritual existence," realised "through boundless love," is equivalent to achieving "union with the Holy Spirit" (*Stromata* 7.7.44.5.4-6.1: πνευματικός εἶναι σπουδάσας διὰ τῆς ἀορίστου ἀγάπης ἦνεται τῷ πνεύματι; Clément d'Alexandrie, *Les stromates. Stromate VII*, ed. Alain Le Boulluec, Sources chrétiennes 428 (Éditions du Cerf, 1997), 155). See Lorenzo Perrone, "Prayer and the Construction of Religious Identity in Early Christianity," *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 53, no. 3/4 (2003): 260–88, 281–83, and n. 57.

³⁷ In *Stromata* VII, Clement discusses the possibility of a direct dialogue between the one who prays and God, from intellect to intellect. He envisions a voice of conscience that requires neither sounds nor sensory perceptions, but which guarantees contact and understanding between the soul and divine power through immediate intellection. In this way, Clement adapts the ancient concept of "interior discourse" (λόγος ἐνδιάθετος) to his spiritual aim (*Stromata* 7.7.39.6.2-4): "And even if we whisper (ψιθυρίζοντες) to Him without opening our lips, [praying] with silence (μετὰ σιγῆς), we have cried out (κεκράγαμεν) from within (ἐνδοθεν); for God perceives (ἐπαίει) without interruption (ἀδιαλείπτως) all inward conversation (τὴν ἐνδιάθετον ὁμιλίαν)" (Clément d'Alexandrie, *Les stromates. Stromate VII*, 141). On the theme of "interior discourse," see Claude Panaccio, *Le Discours Intérieur: De Platon à Guillaume d'Ockham* (Éditions du Seuil, 1999).

The work *On Prayer* (ca. 235 AD)³⁸ by Origen, written as a response to philosophical criticisms and as a commentary on the “Lord’s Prayer,” remains “the most organic and profound reflection among all the euchological treatises of Christian Antiquity.”³⁹ The ideal model of “spiritual prayer,” initially outlined here, is subsequently integrated into *Against Celsus*⁴⁰ (ca. 249 A.D.) as a defining element of Christian identity. In response to Celsus’s claims about the superiority of the Platonic philosophical path, Origen contends that prayer is the only genuine way to God. In contrast to the elitist view of his opponent, he emphasises the universal nature of prayer, accessible to everyone, including the “simple” (ιδιώτης)⁴¹ believer, as long as they are morally and spiritually engaged.⁴²

³⁸ Περὶ Εὐχῆς = *De oratione*. See W. Gessel, *Die Theologie Des Gebetes Nach "De Oratione" von Origenes* (Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh, 1975).

³⁹ Perrone, "Prayer and the Construction of Religious Identity in Early Christianity," 283.

⁴⁰ Πρὸς τὸν ἐπιγεγραμμένον Κέλσου Ἀληθῆ λόγον = *Contra Celsum*. See Lorenzo Perrone, "Prayer in Origen's 'Contra Celsum': The Knowledge of God and the Truth of Christianity," *Vigiliae Christianae* 55, no. 1 (2001): 1–19.

⁴¹ *Contra Celsum* 7.46 (Origenes, *Origenes Werke*, II, 197.18).

⁴² Origen states that “men, praying to be of God” (ἄνθρωπους, εὐχομένους εἶναι θεοῦ) (*Contra Celsum* 7.46, Origenes, *Origenes Werke*, II, 197.27–28; Origen, *Contra Celsum*, Reprinted, ed. Henry Chadwick (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003), 434) “ascend to the eternal power of God” (ἀναβαίνουσιν ἐπὶ τὴν αἰδίων δύναμιν τοῦ θεοῦ) (*Contra Celsum* 7.46, Origenes, *Origenes Werke*, II., 198.19–20; Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 435). In this way, Christians distinguish themselves from idolaters, as they despise “the human art of image-making” and strive to ascend (ἀναβαίνω), through reasoning (λογισμός), to Him, the God over all” (*Contra Celsum* 8.53, Origenes, *Origenes Werke*, II, 269.7–9: τὰ μὲν τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης περὶ τὰ ἀγάλματα τέχνης ὑπερφηφήσασιν ἀναβαίνειν δὲ πειραθεῖσι τῷ λογισμῷ ἐπ’ αὐτὸν τὸν ἐπὶ πᾶσι θεόν; see Origen, *Contra Celsum*., 491). In this manner, Origen reconfigures the model of “spiritual prayer,” emphasising the need for the harmonious integration of all parts of the human being. Thus, “he who has come into a pure (καθαρός) and holy (ἅγιος) realm before God – in his soul (ψυχὴ), in his spirit (πνεῦμα), and, I believe, also in his body (σῶμα) – has received a certain divine spirit (πνεῦμα θεῖον).” [*Contra Celsum* 2.51, Origenes, *Origenes Werke*, I, ed. Paul Koetschau, *Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller Der Ersten Drei Jahrhunderte* (J. C. Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, 1899), 174.19–22: ἐν χώρᾳ καθαρᾷ καὶ ἀγίᾳ γενόμενος κατὰ τὴν ψυχὴν ἑαυτοῦ καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα, οἶμαι δὲ καὶ τὸ σῶμα, τῷ θεῷ, παραδεξάμενος θεῖόν τι πνεῦμα Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 106]. See Perrone, "Prayer and the Construction of Religious Identity in Early Christianity," 286, and n. 72. Authentic prayer, within the framework of Origen’s trichotomous anthropology – echoing 1 Thessalonians 5:23: “May the God of peace himself sanctify (ἀγιάσαι) you entirely (ὁλοτελεῖς); and may your whole (ὀλόκληρον) spirit (πνεῦμα) and soul (ψυχὴ) and body (σῶμα) be kept blameless (ἀμέμπτως) at the coming (παρουσίᾳ) of our Lord Jesus Christ” – engages the whole human being: body, soul, and spirit, with the *pneuma* occupying the highest position and serving as the seat of man’s true nature. In its most intense moments, “spiritual” prayer fosters an inner transformation: the soul, having mastered the body, is itself transfigured into “spirit” (see *Peri euchēs* 9.2). Thus, the act of prayer guides the soul of the one who prays – detaching from the body, “following the spirit” – toward the transformation of its very nature and the attainment of an authentic spiritual state. See Perrone, "Le dinamiche dell’atto orante secondo Origene: la preghiera come ascesa, colloquio e conoscenza di Dio," 128, 129.

The Origenian conception merges the two ancient definitions: prayer as “ascent” (ἀνάβασις)⁴³ towards God⁴⁴ and as dialogue or “conversation” (ὁμιλία) with God.⁴⁵ Beyond these ideas, which are also embraced by other Church Fathers, his view is heavily influenced

⁴³ Evagrius Ponticus is credited as the originator of this definition [*De oratione* 36 (Évagre le Pontique, *Chapitres sur la prière*, 249): Προσευχὴ ἐστὶν ἀνάβασις νοῦ πρὸς Θεόν], which was set to have a long-lasting influence. The formula was adopted by St. John of Damascus in the treatise *De Fide Orthodoxa* [3.24, Bonifatius Kotter, ed., *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, II: Expositio Fidei, Patristische Texte und Studien 12 (Walter de Gruyter, 2011), 167: Προσευχὴ ἐστὶν ἀνάβασις νοῦ πρὸς Θεόν ἢ αἴτησις τῶν προσηκόντων παρὰ Θεοῦ] and received an important addition: “Prayer is an ascent of the intellect (*noûs*) to God or a request for what is appropriate from God.” Subsequently, the formula was cited by Thomas Aquinas in *Summae Theologiae*, IIa IIae, q. 83, art. 13: “*Oratio este ascensus intellectus in Deum*” (Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Opera Omnia, Iussu Impensaue Leonis XIII P. M. Edita*, 9: *Summa Theologiae, Secunda Secundae Pars, Quaestiones LVII-CXXII* (Ex Typographia Polyglotta S.C. de Propaganda Fide, 1897), 205), and art. 5: “*Oratio este petitio decentium a Deo*” (197). See André Méhat, “Sur Deux Définitions de La Prière,” *Origeniana Sexta. Origène et La Bible: Actes Du Colloquium Origenianum Sextum, Chantilly, 1993* (Leuven) 30 (1995): 115–20, 117.

⁴⁴ In an attempt to demonstrate, against his critics, the value of prayer, Origen defines it as a process of spiritual elevation, inspired by Psalms 122:1 [ΠΡΟΣ σὲ ἦρα τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς μου τὸν κατοικοῦντα ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ – “To You, who dwell in heaven, I have lifted up (αἶρω) my eyes.”] and 24:1 [ΠΡΟΣ σέ, Κύριε, ἦρα τὴν ψυχὴν μου, ὁ Θεός μου – “To You, O Lord, I have lifted up (αἶρω) my soul, my God.”], biblical passages which he correlates with the “spiritual exercises” of the philosophical schools. Origen describes this elevation as a “lifting up (ἐπαίρω) of the eyes of the thinking faculty (οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ τοῦ διανοητικοῦ)” towards the contemplation of God, achieved by removing “imagination” (φαντασίαι) arising from material things. This inner concentration reflects an affinity with the Platonic theme of inner vision, which allows the one who prays to “rise above” (ὑπερκύπτειν) “created things” (τὰ γεννητὰ) and “converse” (ὁμιλεῖν) with God. Origen emphasises that the vision of God is achieved through prayer, uniting the Platonic *topos* of inner vision with the biblical motif of divine glory reflected on the “face” of God. Through an intertextual strategy, he cites 2 Corinthians 3:18: the petitioner’s eyes (ὀφθαλμοὶ) “reflect as in a mirror (κατοπτριζόμενοι) the glory of the Lord (τὴν δόξαν Κυρίου) and are transformed (μεταμορφούμεθα) from glory to glory (ἀπὸ δόξης εἰς δόξαν)”. This dynamic is correlated with the notion of an “effluence” (ἀπορροή) that pours over the one who prays, in reference to Psalm 4:7: “The light (τὸ φῶς) of Your face (τοῦ προσώπου σου), O Lord, has shone upon [or been marked upon] us (ἐσημειώθη ἐφ’ ἡμᾶς).” Origen understands this reflection of divine glory in a noetic register, as “partaking (μεταλαμβάνουσι) in an intelligible and more divine effluence (ἀπορροῆς γὰρ νοητοῦ τινοῦ θειοτέρου).” See *Peri euchēs* 9.2 (Origenes, *Origenes Werke*, II, 318.26–319.8; see Origen, *An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer.*, 99). See Perrone, “Le dinamiche dell’atto orante secondo Origene: la preghiera come ascensione, colloquio e conoscenza di Dio,” 128–129.

⁴⁵ See Méhat, “Sur Deux Définitions de La Prière,” 115–20.

by the practice of “spiritual exercises”⁴⁶ in Ancient Philosophy and by the Platonic theme of the soul’s “journey.”⁴⁷

Evagrius, primarily focused on personal prayer – more a matter of the inner self than of the church community – introduces a significant shift in the understanding of prayer. He regards it as an “inner technique,” designed to sharpen “attention to self,” in order to approach God. In this way, Evagrius builds on the philosophical tradition, emphasising that prayer is, above all, a “state (κατάστασις) of the intellect (νοῦς).”⁴⁸

Nous and Pneuma: Evagrius and Origen

It is challenging to determine the precise origin of Evagrius’s idea that the intellect is the faculty that prays, but it may have been influenced by I Corinthians 14:15, where the spirit and the mind are presented as the two faculties that pray: “I will pray (προσεύχομαι) with the

⁴⁶ On the connection between “spiritual exercises” and Ancient philosophy, see Pierre Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, Nouvelle édition revue et augmentée, Bibliothèque de l’évolution de l’humanité 41 (Michel, 2002). According to Monaci, the Origenian model of guiding the soul towards the ideal of perfection combines Hellenistic philosophy and spirituality within the framework of Christian spirituality and worship; see Adele Monaci, “Un Invito Alla Vita Perfetta: Il PERI EYXHΣ Di Origene,” in *Il Dono e La Sua Ombra. Ricerche Sul ΠΕΡΙ ΕΥΧΗΣ Di Origene*, ed. Francesca Cocchini, *Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum* 57 (Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 1997), 117–38.

⁴⁷ See André Méhat, “Le “Lieu Supracéleste” de Saint Justin à Origène,” in *Forma Futuri. Studi in Onore Del Card. M. Pellegrino* (Bottega d’Erasmus, 1975), 282–94; see Perrone, “Prayer and the Construction of Religious Identity in Early Christianity,” 286–87.

⁴⁸ If there is one term that attests to the continuity of thought between the two eponymous works dedicated to prayer, it is undoubtedly νοῦς, along with the entire semantic constellation organised around it: νοερός, νόημα, νοέω and, in certain contexts, their compounds: Λόγος and its derivatives – γνώσις, θεωρία etc. The persistent presence of these terms – especially the word νοῦς (35 times in Origen and 49 times in Evagrius) – creates an atmosphere common to both treatises. Through this vocabulary, priority is given, in the context of prayer, to the anthropological dimension of knowledge and, within it, to the complex unity between the knowing subject and God as the “object” of knowledge. For Origen, see Dominique Bertrand, “Piété et Sagesse Dans Le Peri Euchês,” in *Origeniana Quinta: Historica, Text and Method, Biblica, Philosophica, Theologica, Origenism and Later Developments: Papers of the 5th International Origen Congress, Boston College, 14-18 August 1989*, ed. Robert J. Daly, *Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium* 105, *International Colloquium for Origen Studies* (University Press : Peeters, 1992), 475–76. Evagrius uses the same vocabulary, but for him prayer is described as an increasingly intense struggle against λογισμοί, διαλογισμοί, and νοήματα (see *De oratione* 9, 46, 53–55, 68–71, 123–24, 148; Évagre le Pontique, *Chapitres sur la prière*, 226, 258, 266–68, 280–84, 340, 364). See Dominique Bertrand, ‘L’implication Du Nous Dans La Prière Chez Origène et Évagre Le Pontique’, in *Origeniana Septima: Origenes in Den Auseinandersetzung Des 4. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Wolfgang Bienert and Uwe Kühneweg, *Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium* 137 (Leuven University Press, 1999), 359, and n. 28.

spirit (πνεῦμα), but I will also pray with the mind (νοῦς); I will sing (ψάλλω) with the spirit, but I will also sing with the mind."⁴⁹

Origen believed that "the prayers of the saints are filled with power, especially when, praying (προσεύχομαι) 'in spirit' (πνεῦμα), they also pray 'with the mind/intellect' (νοῦς), like a light rising from the discursive thought (διάνοια) of the one who prays."⁵⁰

By relating I Corinthians 14:15⁵¹ to Romans 8:26⁵², Origen clarifies that prayer presupposes a real synergy between the Holy Spirit and the intellect, between God and man: "Our intellect (νοῦς) could not pray if the spirit (πνεῦμα) did not pray before it, as if the intellect were in a state of obedience to it."⁵³

The "intellect" is, therefore, in a relationship of obedience to the "spirit," which strengthens it and comes to its aid.⁵⁴ As St. Apostle Paul wrote, we do not know how to pray if the "spirit" does not take the initiative within us.⁵⁵ Paul is also the one who confirmed the necessity of uniting the two faculties in the act of prayer.⁵⁶

⁴⁹ 1 Corinthians 14:15: προσεύξομαι τῷ πνεύματι, προσεύξομαι δὲ καὶ τῷ νοῖ· ψαλῶ τῷ πνεύματι, ψαλῶ δὲ καὶ τῷ νοῖ.

⁵⁰ Origen, *Peri euchēs* 12.1 (Origenes, *Origenes Werke*, II, 324.13–24): Πρὸς δὲ τούτοις δυνάμειος πεπληρωμένους νομίζω τοὺς λόγους τῆς τῶν ἁγίων εὐχῆς, μάλιστα ὅτε προσευχόμενοι "πνεύματι" προσεύχονται "καὶ τῷ νοῖ," φωτὶ ἐοικότε ἀνατέλλοντι ἀπὸ τῆς τοῦ εὐχομένου διανοίας (Origen, *An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer*, 104).

⁵¹ Origen does not consider the context of the verse, which is part of St. Paul's discussion on glossolalia (chapters 12 and 14 of the Epistle), where praying "with the spirit" meant praying "in tongues" – an effect of a special charism. He cites only this verse, treating it as an isolated maxim and emphasising its first part ("I will pray with the spirit"), which he interprets in light of the verse from Romans 8:26. See Méhat, "Sur Deux Définitions de La Prière", 115–16.

⁵² "For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words" (τὸ γὰρ τί προσευξόμεθα καθὸ δεῖ οὐκ οἶδαμεν, ἀλλὰ αὐτὸ τὸ Πνεῦμα ὑπερπεντηγᾶνει στεναγμοῖς ἀλαλήτοις).

⁵³ Origen, *Peri euchēs* 2.4 (Origenes, *Origenes Werke*, II., 302.1–2): νοῦς προσεύξασθαι, ἐὰν μὴ πρὸ αὐτοῦ τὸ πνεῦμα προσεύξηται οἰονεὶ ἐν ὑπηκόῳ αὐτοῦ (Origen, *An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer*, 85). See Méhat, "Sur Deux Définitions de La Prière," 116. For Origen, the Christian's prayer becomes "spiritual" through the gift of the Holy Spirit, which enables man to attain authentic prayer. Once the Spirit is received, man no longer relies solely on his own limited strengths, but the Spirit joins him and gives voice to his requests in a way that surpasses human understanding. This radical idea is supported by Romans 8:26, where St. Paul emphasises that man knows neither what nor how to pray, but the Spirit intercedes for him before God "with sighs too deep for words," thus compensating for human weakness. See Perrone, "Le dinamiche dell'atto orante secondo Origene: la preghiera come ascesa, colloquio e conoscenza di Dio," 126–27.

⁵⁴ *Commentarii in epistulam ad Romanos* 48.4–9 [A. Ramsbotham, "The Commentary of Origen on the Epistle to the Romans. III," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 14, no. 53 (1912): 10–22, 18].

⁵⁵ See *Peri euchēs* 2.4 (Origenes, *Origenes Werke*, II, 301.25–26); 2.3 (301.4–15).

⁵⁶ *Scholia in Matthaem* 4.25 (Origenes, *Origenes Werke*, X, ed. Erich Klostermann and Ernst Benz, *Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller Der Ersten Drei Jahrhunderte* (J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1935), 347.4–6): προσεύξηται πνεύματι, προσεύξηται δὲ καὶ τῷ νοῖ; *Fragmenta ex commentariis in epistulam ad Ephesios* 19 [J. A. F. Gregg, "The Commentary of Origen upon the Epistle to the Ephesians: Part II," *The Journal of*

However, when Origen, based on this cooperation, distinguishes the specific roles of each, he does so to assign the decisive influence to the spirit (πνεῦμα).⁵⁷ If persistent prayer is in view, the intellect (νοῦς) “prays” (προσευχή), but only the spirit (πνεῦμα) can “intercede with boldness” (ἐντευξίς).⁵⁸ Furthermore, not content to limit itself to simple “mediation” (ἐντυγχάνειν), the spirit (πνεῦμα) intensifies the “request” (ὑπερεντυγχάνειν), reaching a form of prayer accompanied by “ineffable sighs” (στεναγμοῖς ἀλαλήτοις).⁵⁹

The passage from I Thessalonians 5:23⁶⁰ was regarded as the immediate source of Origenian anthropological trichotomy. “This spirit (τὸ πνεῦμα),” Origen clarifies, “is not the Holy Spirit (τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα), but a part (μέρος) of the human composition (συστάσεως)⁶¹ ... If it were the Holy Spirit, he would not say: ‘The Spirit (Τὸ πνεῦμα) [Himself] bears witness with (συμμαρτυρεῖ) our spirit (τῷ πνεύματι ἡμῶν)’ [Romans 8:16].”⁶² St. Apostle Paul thus

Theological Studies os-III, no. 11 (1902): 398–420, 419.46]: προσεύξομαι τῷ πνεύματι προσεύξομαι καὶ τῷ νοῦ.

⁵⁷ When someone offers their prayer to God “with a clear voice and words spoken with resonance” (*cum quis clara voce et verbis cum sono prolatis*), “as if to edify those who listen” (*quasi ut aedificet audientes*), they are praying “with the spirit” (*hic spiritu orat*). However, for the prayer to be fully received, it must be offered “not only with voice and words, but also with the mind, and with the heart” (*si non solum verbis et voce, sed et mente oremus et corde*). See Origen, *In Numeros Homilia* 10.3 (Origenes, *Origenes Werke*, VII.2: Die Homilien zu Numeri, Josua und Judices, ed. W. A. Baehrens, Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller Der Ersten Drei Jahrhunderte (J. C. Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, 1921), 73.21–74.2); 11.9 (92.26–30).

⁵⁸ In *Peri euchēs* 14.5 (Origenes, *Origenes Werke*, II, 332.18–25), Origen distinguishes several forms of prayer: προσεύχομαι (“to pray”) refers to the intellect (νοῦς); ἐντυγχάνω and ὑπερεντυγχάνω (“to intercede”) refer to the spirit (πνεῦμα), understood “as the better part and as possessing boldness toward the one to whom it makes intercession” (ὡς κρείττονος ὄντος καὶ “παρῆρσιαν” ἔχοντος “πρὸς τὸν,” ᾧ ἐντυγχάνει) (see Origen, *An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer*, 111). Starting from 1 Timothy 2:1 – “I urge then, first of all, that petitions (δεήσεις), prayers (προσευχές), intercessions (παρακλήσεις), thanksgivings (εὐχαριστίες) be made for all people” – Origen defines these types of prayer in *Peri euchēs* 14.2 (Origenes, *Origenes Werke*, II., pp.330.21–331.11): “Petition (δέησις) is a supplication (ικεσία) offered by one who lacks something, in order to obtain it; prayer properly so called (προσευχή) is that which is offered with doxology (δοξολογία), in a more elevated and noble manner, concerning greater things; intercession (ἐντευξίς) is a request (ἀξίωσις) addressed to God by one who possesses a certain greater boldness; thanksgiving (εὐχαριστία) is the acknowledgment (ἀνθομολόγησις), with prayer (μετ’ εὐχῶν), for the good things received from God.” (see Origen, *An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer*, 109)

⁵⁹ See *Peri euchēs* 2.3 (Origenes, *Origenes Werke*, II., 301.19–21; Origen, *An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer.*, 84–85); *Peri euchēs* 14.5 (Origenes, *Origenes Werke*, II, 332.21–25; Origen, *An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer.*, 111). See Jacques Dupuis, *L’esprit de l’homme: Étude Sur l’anthropologie Religieuse d’Origène* (Desclée de Brouwer, 1967), 73–4.

⁶⁰ “May your whole (ὀλόκληρον) spirit (πνεῦμα), soul (ψυχή), and body (σῶμα) be kept blameless (ἀμέμπτως) at the coming (παρουσία) of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

⁶¹ τοῦτο τὸ πνεῦμα οὐκ ἔστιν τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα, ἀλλὰ μέρος τῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου συστάσεως.

⁶² *Dialogus cum Heraclide* 6.20–7.1 (Origène, *Entretien avec Héraclide*, Réimpr. de la 1ère éd., rev. et corr, trans. Jean Scherer, Sources chrétiennes 67 (Cerf, 2002), 68–71): Ὁρίγηνης εἶπεν· «Σύνθετον εἶναι τὸν ἄνθρωπον μεμαθήκαμεν ἀπὸ τῶν ἱερῶν γραφῶν. Φησὶν γὰρ ὁ ἀπόστολος· Ὁ δὲ Θεὸς ἀγιάσαι ὑμῶν τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ τὸ σῶμα· τὸ δὲ Ἀγιάσαι ὑμᾶς ὀλοτελεῖς, καὶ ὀλόκληρον ὑμῶν τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ

clearly distinguishes between a divine *Pneuma* and a human *pneuma*. The human “spirit” is the one described in I Corinthians 2:11: “For who among men knows the things of a man except the ‘spirit’ of the man (τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου), which is in him?” – a passage where Paul attributes to it the knowledge of what lies within us.⁶³

Moreover, in Origen, this spirit (πνεῦμα) clearly appears to be distinct from the soul (ψυχή); it is “related (ὑκειωμένον) to our intellect (νοῦς)”⁶⁴ – the higher part of the soul –, yet it remains separate from it.⁶⁵ In Origen’s view, the spirit (πνεῦμα), as the superior element within the human composite, represents the source of the good life, which transcends the ordinary life of this world. It signifies the origin of moral goodness and ultimate knowledge. However, the act of moral decision-making belongs to the soul, more precisely to the intellect (νοῦς), which embodies the personal aspect of the human subject. In this intellect (νοῦς), a law is inscribed⁶⁶ – “the law written in hearts” (Ὁ γραπτὸς ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις νόμος) or “written naturally in our governing part” (φύσει ἐγγεγραμμένου τῷ ἡγεμονικῷ ἡμῶν)⁶⁷. This law, being ultimately the foundation of any moral responsibility⁶⁸, is “engraved” within us by the “spirit” (πνεῦμα).⁶⁹

As H. Crouzel observes, the trichotomous division in Origen’s anthropology is evident in the chapters of *On First Principles* dealing with “pre-existence.” In that original state, ψυχή

καὶ τὸ σῶμα ἀμέμπτως ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τηρηθείη, – τοῦτο τὸ πνεῦμα οὐκ ἔστιν τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα, ἀλλὰ μέρος τῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου συστάσεως, ὡς διδάσκων ὁ αὐτὸς ἀπόστολος λέγει· ‘Τὸ πνεῦμα συμμαρτυρεῖ τῷ πνεύματι ἡμῶν.’ Εἰ γὰρ ἦν τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, οὐκ ἂν ἔλεγεν· ‘Τὸ πνεῦμα συμμαρτυρεῖ τῷ πνεύματι ἡμῶν.’

⁶³ See *Dialogus cum Heraclide* 7.10-12 (Origène, *Entretien avec Héraclide*, 70).

⁶⁴ *Fragmenta ex commentariis in epistolam ad Ephesios* 19 (Gregg, “The Commentary of Origen upon the Epistle to the Ephesians: Part II,” 419.47–48): οὕτως ἔστιν τι πνεῦμα ὑκειωμένον ἡμῶν τῷ νοῖ.

⁶⁵ See also *De principiis* 2.8.2 [Origenes, *Origenes Werke*, V, ed. Paul Koetschau, Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller Der Ersten Drei Jahrhunderte (J. C. Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, 1913), 155.2–6], where Origen states that St. Paul, desiring to teach us “spiritual things”, “joins and associates the intellect with the holy spirit rather than with the soul (*mentem magis quam animam spiritui sancto coniungit et sociat*). See Origen, *On First Principles*, First Edition, II, ed. John Behr, Oxford Early Christian texts (Oxford University Press, 2017), 227. As J. Dupuis explains, the Latin expression “*spiritus sanctus*” does not refer here to the Holy Spirit but to the spirit of man, a view confirmed by the citation from 1 Corinthians 14:15. Origen frequently resorts to this understanding, as evidenced by Dupuis’ detailed analysis (ch. III: “La nature du *pneuma* humain,” 90–125). See Dupuis, *L’esprit de l’homme: Étude Sur l’anthropologie Religieuse d’Origène*, 65, n. 23.

⁶⁶ See *Commentarium in evangelium Matthaei* 18 (Origenes, *Origenes Werke*, XI, ed. Erich Klostermann and Ernst Benz, Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller Der Ersten Drei Jahrhunderte (Akademie Verlag, 1976), 33.30, 34): *cor et conscientia hominis ...cor principale et conscientiam* – “the heart and conscience of man... the principal heart and conscience” (see Origenes, *Der Kommentar zum Evangelium nach Mattäus*, III, trans. Hermann J. Vogt, Bibliothek der griechischen Literatur 38 (A. Hiersemann, 1993), 62).

⁶⁷ *Philocalia Origenis* 9.2 (Origène, *Philocalie*, 1-20, ed. Marguerite Harl, Sources chrétiennes, no 302 (Editions du Cerf, 1983), 354.19–20, 21–22).

⁶⁸ See *De principiis* 1.3.6 (Origenes, *Origenes Werke*, V., 57.11-20; Origen, *On First Principles*, First edition, I, ed. John Behr, Oxford Early Christian texts (Oxford University Press, 2017), 75, 77).

⁶⁹ See Dupuis, *L’esprit de l’homme: Étude Sur l’anthropologie Religieuse d’Origène*, 69–72 *passim*.

was not a πνεῦμα, but a νοῦς – more precisely, a νοῦς that lived according to the πνεῦμα, like the soul of the “saint” who, even in this world, although “fallen and heavy,” continues to follow the guidance of the “spirit.”⁷⁰

Henri de Lubac⁷¹ also identifies the νοῦς – and not the πνεῦμα – as the third fundamental element of the human being. He explains that Origen could not have distinguished in the structure of man between ψυχή and νοῦς, since “ψυχή is nothing else than a degraded νοῦς, as a result of the original fall.”⁷² Regarding the πνεῦμα, the difficulty in defining it, according to de Lubac, arises from the fundamental ambiguity it carries in Origen’s work: sometimes, the πνεῦμα appears as a reality that must be safeguarded from perversion; at other times, however, it manifests as a dimension beyond any influence of evil, with only the ψυχή being susceptible to incline in one direction or another.⁷³ This oscillation is attributed to the fact that, in a certain sense, the πνεῦμα is one with the soul itself, but, in another sense, it surpasses it, transcending the entire human being and even the order of creation – being a “partaking in the Spirit of God.”⁷⁴ There is, therefore, a “transcendence of man above himself,”⁷⁵ as de Lubac describes it, which cannot be achieved solely through human effort.⁷⁶ Consequently, when discussing man, it can happen that, in certain contexts,

⁷⁰ The use of the term “spirit” to indiscriminately translate both νοῦς and *mens*, as well as πνεῦμα and *spiritus*, has caused confusion, obscuring the true distinctions between these concepts in Greek and Latin. To eliminate ambiguity, Crouzel suggests translating νοῦς and *mens* as “intelligence,” and πνεῦμα and *spiritus* as “spirit.” See Henri Crouzel, “L’anthropologie d’Origène Dans La Perspective Du Combat Spirituel,” *Revue d’ascétique et de Mystique* 31 (1955): 364–85, 365.

⁷¹ See Henri de Lubac, *Histoire et esprit. L’intelligence de l’Écriture d’après Origène* (Aubier, Éditions Montaigne, 1950), 156–157.

⁷² See *De principiis* 2.8.3 (Origène, *Traité des principes: introduction, texte critique de la version de Rufin, traduction*, I, ed. Henri Crouzel and Manlio Simonetti, Sources chrétiennes 252 (Éditions du Cerf, 1978), 348.175–177): *quod mens de statu ac dignitate sua declinans, effecta uel nuncupata est anima; quae si reparata fuerit et correctata, redit in hoc, ut sit mens* – “The mind/intellect, declining from its state and dignity, became or was called soul; and if it is restored and corrected, it returns to being mind/intellect” (Origen, *On First Principles*, II., 233). See Origenes, *Origenes Werke*, V, 161.2–3: *παρὰ τὴν ἀπόπτωσιν καὶ τὴν ψύξιν τὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ ζῆν τῷ πνεύματι γέγονεν ἡ νῦν λεγομένη ψυχή* – “because of the falling away and the cooling from living according to the spirit, what is now called soul came to be.”

⁷³ See *Homiliae in Leviticum* 2.2 [Origenes, *Die Homilien zum Buch Levitikus*, trans. Agnethe Siquans, Werke mit deutscher Übersetzung, Band 3 (De Gruyter, 2022), 86.10–13]: *“animam”... et illam esse, quae uel in peccatum ruere possit uel conuerti a peccato. Nam corpus sequela eius est ad quodcumque delegerit; et spiritus dux eius est ad uirtutem, si eum sequi uelit* – “The ‘soul’ (*anima*)... is she who can either fall into sin or be turned from sin; for the body (*corpus*) is her follower in whatever she may choose; and the spirit (*spiritus*) is her guide to virtue, if she wishes to follow it” (Origenes, *Die Homilien zum Buch Levitikus*, 87).

⁷⁴ See Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Le Mysterion d’Origène,” *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 26 (1936): 513–62.

⁷⁵ de Lubac, *Histoire et esprit. L’intelligence de l’Écriture d’après Origène*, 157.

⁷⁶ See *In Jeremiam* 16.6 (Origenes, *Die Homilien zum Buch Jeremia*, trans. Alfons Fürst and Horacio E. Lona, Werke mit deutscher Übersetzung, Band 11 (De Gruyter, 2018), 384.18–388.9).

the spirit is put in parentheses.⁷⁷ Thus, the trichotomy – which in Origen must be understood from a dynamic anthropological perspective rather than as a static description of an essence – no longer appears incompatible with the traditional soul–body distinction.⁷⁸

Evagrius distinguishes himself from Origen in his use of anthropological terms. The term πνεῦμα is seldom used in reference to man, and when it is, it signifies the same reality as νοῦς. In this way, H. Crouzel argues that “the fine Origenian demarcation between the spirit that is in man and the intellect is suppressed.” The former – participation in the Holy Spirit, a divine gift that does not strictly belong to the “substance” of man but acts as the “pedagogue” of the soul, or more precisely of the νοῦς, taking the initiative in good deeds, prayer, and

⁷⁷ See *Commentarium in evangelium Matthaei* 17.27 (Origenes, *Origenes Werke*, X, 658): συνεστήκαμεν ἐκ ψυχῆς καὶ σώματος (ὑπερκείσθω δὲ νῦν λέγειν ὅτι καὶ ἐκ πνεύματος): “We are constituted of soul and body, let it be deferred for now to say that [we are composed] also of spirit.” See Origenes, *Der Kommentar zum Evangelium nach Mattäus*, II, trans. Hermann Josef Vogt, Bibliothek der griechischen Literatur 30 (A. Hiersemann, 1990), 279.

⁷⁸ See *Commentarii in Epistolam ad Romanos*, Liber 7.3 [J. P. Migne, ed., *Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Graeca*, vol. 14 (Paris, 1862), 1106 A]: *Bene autem non animae, sed spiritui, qui melior est in homine pars, est, dicitur reddere testimonium Spiritus Dei* – “[The Apostle] says, in a fitting way, that the Spirit of God gives witness not to the soul, but to the spirit – which is the ‘better part of man.’” (2, Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Books 6-10*, trans. Thomas P. Scheck (The Catholic University of America Press, 2002), 64); Liber 7.4 [Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 14, 1110 C]: *cujus utique anima vel mens, qui est interior ejus homo, supergreditur et ascendit omne quod corporeum est, quod visibile, quod sensui subjacet et aspectui, et ipsius divinæ naturæ efficitur capax* – “[Paul], whose soul or intellect, which is his ‘inner man,’ surpasses and ascends beyond all that is corporeal, visible, and subject to sense and sight, and becomes capable of the divine nature itself.” [9, Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Books 6-10*, 69–70]; Liber 7.4 [Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 14., 1110 C]: *Sed hæc tanta et talis animæ ejus substantia quæ rationes et intelligentiam cælestium divinatorumque sensuum tenet* – “But even such and so great an essence of his soul, which holds the reasons and understanding of celestial and divine senses.” (9, see Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Books 6-10.*, 70). See also Origen’s *Commentary on Psalm 30:6* [*Selecta in Psalmos*, J. P. Migne, ed., *Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Graeca*, vol. 12 (Paris, 1862), 1300B–C]: “and Scripture sometimes calls reason “spirit” (Πνεῦμα δὲ ἡ Γραφή ποτὲ μὲν τὴν διάνοιαν καλεῖ), as in the passage that the virgin be holy “in spirit and body” (πνεύματι καὶ σώματι); at other times, [it calls] “spirit” the soul (ποτὲ δὲ τὴν ψυχὴν), as in: “For as the body without the spirit is dead” (Ὡσπερ δὲ τὸ σῶμα χωρὶς πνεύματος νεκρὸν ἐστὶ); at other times, [it calls] “spirit” the conscience joined to the soul (ποτὲ δὲ τὸ συνευγμένον τῇ ψυχῇ συνειδός), as in: “No one knows the things of man except the spirit (τὸ πνεῦμα) that is in him... Now, ‘spirit’ signifies the intellect (Νῦν τὸ πνεῦμα σημαίνει τὸν νοῦν); “for the intellect joined to the Lord becomes one spirit” (ὁ γὰρ κολλώμενος τῷ Κυρίῳ νοῦς ἓν γίνεται πνεῦμα); Psalm 26:6 [Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 12., 1281 B]: “The sacrifice is a contrite spirit, that is, one who has humbled his own soul...” (Θυσία δὲ ἐστὶ πνεῦμα συντετριμμένον· ὁ συντρίψας τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ψυχὴν). By contrast, in *Contra Celsum* 2.51 (Origenes, *Origenes Werke*, I., 174.20–21), mention is made of the soul, the spirit, and the body, but also a “certain divine spirit” (θεῖόν τι πνεῦμα): “whoever has stood upon pure and holy ground before God in his own soul and spirit (κατὰ τὴν ψυχὴν ἑαυτοῦ καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα) (and, I think, also in the body – οἶμαι δὲ καὶ τὸ σῶμα), and has received a certain divine spirit (θεῖόν τι πνεῦμα).” (Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 106) See de Lubac, *Histoire et esprit. L’intelligence de l’Écriture d’après Origène*, 157–58, n. 109.

contemplation – renders the active aspect of grace. The latter, representing the higher part of the soul, the organ of virtue and vision, the “high peak,” indicates the passive and receptive side of the supernatural. This is the very essence of personality: clothed in a subtle body, it alone constituted man in the pre-existence and will similarly do so after the resurrection. From this perspective, ψυχή appears to be reduced, for Evagrius, to the lower part of the soul in Origen’s framework – the seat of imaginations and passions.⁷⁹

In turn, D. Bertrand⁸⁰ claims that, “although they recognise the decisive importance of the intellect in the whole human being, nevertheless neither Origen nor Evagrius considers it a solitary star, an invariant and invariable ‘high peak’ of the soul.”⁸¹ Building on this interpretation, the νοῦς itself risks becoming “impure and a slave,” not because of the body or the soul – which it should surpass – but because it has the real capacity – remaining what it is – to lose itself, like the demons and under their influence. In this context, it invests its contemplative energy in things that do not align with its nature.⁸² Bertrand offers an example

⁷⁹ See Henri Crouzel, “Recherches Sur Origène et Son Influence. II,” *Bulletin de Littérature Ecclésiastique* 62, no. 2 (1961): 105–13, 111.

⁸⁰ Bertrand, “L’implication Du *Nous* Dans La Prière Chez Origène et Évagre Le Pontique,” 361, and n. 41, 42.

⁸¹ Such a modern equivalence between thinking and being, along the lines of Descartes’ *cogito ergo sum*, is incompatible with ancient and Patristic conceptions, according to which, apart from God, all spirits are subject to movement. See Origen, *Peri euchēs* 6.1 (p.312.5: οἶμαι δὲ ὅτι ἡ τῶν λογικῶν κινήσεις δι’ αὐτῶν ἐστι κινήσεις – “I think that the movements of rational beings are movements from within themselves;” Origen, *An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer.*, 93), and Evagrius Ponticus, *De oratione* 51 (Évagre le Pontique, *Chapitres sur la prière*, 264): Τὰ γὰρ τοῦ ἀλόγου μέρους πάθη ἄρξαντα οὐκ ἐᾶ αὐτὸν λογικῶς κινεῖσθαι – “For once the passions of the irrational part have begun, they no longer allow it [the intellect] to move rationally” (Evagrius Ponticus, “Despre rugăciune,” 531). See Irénéé Hausherr, *Les Leçons d’un Contemplatif: Le Traité de l’oraison d’Évagre Le Pontique* (Beauchesne et ses Fils, 1960), 72.

⁸² See KG 2.48 (Évagre le Pontique, *Les six centuries des ‘Kephalaiā gnostica’*, 81): “if the *nous* advances along its own path – that of its essence – it encounters the holy powers; but if [it advances] along that of the instrument (*organon*) of the soul, it falls among demons” (Evagrius of Pontus, *The Gnostic Trilogy.*, 232). See also Nikólaos Loudovikos, *Analogical Identities: The Creation of the Christian Self*, *Studia Traditionis Theologiae* 57 (Brepols, 2019), 117. Regarding the intellect (*noûs*) travelling its own path, see *Scholion 28 on Proverbs 3:5*; *Scholion 59 on Proverbs 5:8*; *Scholion 198 on Proverbs 19:16* (Évagre le Pontique, *Scholies Aux Proverbes*, ed. Paul Géhin, Sources Chrétiennes 340 (Éditions du Cerf, 1987), 121; 151; 295). The concept of the intellect travelling a path is attested earlier, for instance, in Philo, *De Plantatione* 97–98. (Philo von Alexandria, *Philonis Alexandrini opera quae supersunt*, Reprint, II, ed. Paulus Wendland (De Gruyter, 2021), 142.26–30): ἕως μὲν γὰρ εἰς τὴν σοφίας ὁδὸν οὐ προσελήλυθεν ὁ νοῦς, τετραμμένος δὲ πόρρω πλανᾶται, τῶν τῆς ἀγρίας ὕλης ἐπιμελεῖται φυτῶν, ἅπερ ἦτοι ἄγωνα ὄντα ἐστεῖρωται ἢ γεννῶντα ἐδωδῖμων ἐστὶν ἄφορα – “For as long as the intellect has not approached the path of wisdom, but, having turned aside, wanders far off, it attends to the plants of wild matter, which are either barren, being unfruitful, or, though bearing fruit, are unfit for eating” [Philo of Alexandria, *On Planting: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*, trans. Albert Cornelis Geljon and David T. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria Commentary Series*, volume 5 (Brill, 2019), 60]. See Evagrius of Pontus, *The Gnostic Trilogy*, 232.

from each author: in Origen,⁸³ the νοῦς almost disappears, being mentioned only through the phrase νοῦς ἀδόκιμος⁸⁴ (“a reprobate intellect”) from Romans 1:28⁸⁵; and in Evagrius, following the nine beatitudes of the intellect and the monk,⁸⁶ the νοῦς appears very rarely and mainly in a negative context manner.⁸⁷

According to Bertrand, Origen and Evagrius share a common fundamental conception of the intellect – an orientation that appears to contradict the traditional image of their Platonic idealism.⁸⁸ As a constitutive element of the human being, located within the person, the νοῦς traverses the path of salvation on behalf of the whole person through Trinitarian faith. When it responds to the Holy Spirit and allows Him to dwell within the entire human composite, the νοῦς becomes a powerful agent of human renewal, being saved by the Word of God, especially through the practice of prayer.⁸⁹

⁸³ *Peri euchēs* 29 (Origenes, *Origenes Werke*, II, 381 sq.).

⁸⁴ See *Peri euchēs* 29.12: ἀδόκιμον νοῦν (Origenes, *Origenes Werke*, II, 387.5); 29.15: ἀδόκιμον νοῦν (Origenes, *Origenes Werke*, II, 390.24); 29.16: ἀδόκιμον νοῦν (Origenes, *Origenes Werke*, II, 391.23).

⁸⁵ “And God delivered them over to a worthless mind [reprobate intellect], to do the things not proper” (παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς ὁ θεὸς εἰς ἀδόκιμον νοῦν, ποιεῖν τὰ μὴ καθήκοντα).

⁸⁶ *De oratione* 4–5, 117–125 (Évagre le Pontique, *Chapitres sur la prière*, 222, 337–340).

⁸⁷ See *De oratione* 141 (Évagre le Pontique, *Chapitres sur la prière*, 354): “But your intellect sets itself against virtue and truth.” (ἀλλ’ ὁ νοῦς σου ἐναντιοῦται τῇ ἀρετῇ καὶ τῇ ἀληθείᾳ) (Evagrie Ponticul, “Despre rugăciune,” 546); *De oratione* 146 (Évagre le Pontique, *Chapitres sur la prière*, 360): “The impassioned and impure intellect.” (τὸν ἐμπαθῆ, καὶ ἀκάθαρτον νοῦν) (Evagrie Ponticul, “Despre rugăciune,” 547); *De oratione* 152 (Évagre le Pontique, *Chapitres sur la prière*, 368): “And your intellect dwells on the pleasant things of this tent.” (καὶ ὁ νοῦς σου τὰ τῆς σκηνῆς περιέπει τερπνὰ) (Evagrie Ponticul, “Despre rugăciune,” 548).

⁸⁸ Regarding Origen, see the conclusions of Eric Osborn, “The Intermediate Word in Origen’s ‘On Prayer,’” in *Origeniana Secunda*, ed. Henri Crouzel and Antonio Quacquarelli, Quaderni Di «Vetera Christianorum» 15 (Edizioni dell’Ateneo, s.p.a., 1980), 95–103 (103: “For Plotinus, as for Origen, prayer is the way to the unknown God, or to the transcendent first principle”). A fragment of Porphyry, a student of Plotinus, cited by Eusebius of Caesarea in *Ecclesiastical History* 6.19.6 (Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, II, trans. J. E. L. Oulton and H. J. Lawlor (William Heinemann, 1964), 58, 59: “For this man was a disciple of Ammonius, who, in our days, had the greatest proficiency in philosophy” – ἀκροατῆς γὰρ οὗτος Ἀμμωνίου τοῦ πλείστην ἐν τοῖς καθ’ ἡμᾶς χρόνοις ἐπίδοσιν ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ), claims that Origen attended the lectures of Ammonius Saccas in Alexandria, whom Porphyry’s *Life of Plotinus* presents as the teacher of Plotinus. According to this passage, the two leading Greek thinkers of the third century, the Christian theologian Origen and the pagan philosopher Plotinus, shared the same master. If Plotinus is considered the most important continuator of Plato’s philosophy, Origen is the first great theologian to systematically employ Greek philosophy – a blend of Platonism, Stoicism, and Aristotelian elements – to formulate and develop Christian doctrine. For an analysis of the convergences and divergences between Origen and Plotinus, see Henri Crouzel, *Origène et Plotin: comparaisons doctrinales*, Collection Croire et savoir 17 (Téqui, 1992).. Regarding the interpretation of Evagrian mysticism as a “mystique d’intellectualisation,” see Hausherr, *Les Leçons d’un Contemplatif: Le Traité de l’oraison d’Évagre Le Pontique*, 152–53.

⁸⁹ See Bertrand, “L’implication Du Nous Dans La Prière Chez Origène et Évagre Le Pontique,” 361, and n. 46; 359, n. 30.

Although aware of the intellect's struggle with demons, Origen emphasises its capacity for knowledge and reflects on prayer. Once the *voũç* has been directed towards prayer, Origen considers his task complete. From this point, Evagrius Ponticus takes over the struggle, shifting focus from knowledge to lived experience. He encloses himself in the "place of prayer," an expression that captures the lived experience *hic et nunc*. For Evagrius, the *voũç* no longer needs to be strengthened through the gathering of knowledge, but through the "trials" that define the challenge of prayer, both in its negative and positive aspects⁹⁰. Thus, he teaches a tactical, "antirrhetic method" (ἀντιρρητική, the science of combating evil thoughts), through which a person frees himself or herself from the influence of demons. This spiritual "rearmament" – never fully achieved in this life – gradually strengthens the contemplative capacity of the one who prays.⁹¹

Even if, in his treatise *On Prayer*, Origen shares several notions about "spiritual exercises" with philosophical schools, he nevertheless does not develop the concepts of contemplative prayer or the "praying intellect."⁹² This is the major contribution of Evagrius, who understood prayer as the driving force of the *voũç*, awakening the intellect to exercise its own function, that is, its highest and purest activity.⁹³ Through this approach, Evagrius introduced a decisive change in how inner prayer was conceptualised and redirected the discourse on prayer in Eastern Christianity from Late Antiquity.⁹⁴ Especially his work, *Chapters on Prayer*⁹⁵ – intended for a close and erudite friend – is considered a masterpiece of the era's

⁹⁰ See Evagrius, *De oratione* 16 (Évagre le Pontique, *Chapitres sur la prière*, 232; Evagrius Ponticus, "Despre rugăciune," 525).

⁹¹ See Evagrius, *De oratione* 24 (Évagre le Pontique, *Chapitres sur la prière*, 238; Evagrius Ponticus, "Despre rugăciune," 526). See Bertrand, "L'implication Du Nous Dans La Prière Chez Origène et Évagre Le Pontique," 362.

⁹² Although Origen approaches prayer from a contemplative perspective, he did not develop a systematic theory of the "praying intellect." In his *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* 14:15 ("I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind"), Origen emphasises the inner disposition necessary for prayer, insisting that one must renounce malice and anger. Origen believed that praying in this manner helps one become better prepared "to unite with the Spirit of the Lord" (*Peri euchēs* 10.2; Origenes, *Origenes Werke*, II, 320.12–321.14). In conclusion, although Origen's influence on Evagrius in various aspects of his thought is undeniable, the latter's originality is equally evident, especially regarding the conceptualisation of prayer. See Bitton-Ashkelony, "The Poetic Performance of the Praying-Mind," 329.

⁹³ Evagrius, *De oratione* 83–84 (Évagre le Pontique, *Chapitres sur la prière*, 298, 300). See Bitton-Ashkelony, "The Limit of the Mind (Noũç): Pure Prayer According to Evagrius Ponticus and Isaac of Nineveh," 297–99 *passim*.

⁹⁴ See Bitton-Ashkelony, "The Poetic Performance of the Praying-Mind," 329. Evagrius' teaching on "pure prayer" is among the most stimulating and innovative mystical theories of Late Antiquity. See Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, "Theories of Prayer in Late Antiquity: Doubts and Practices from Maximus of Tyre to Isaac of Nineveh," in *Prayer and Worship in Eastern Christianities, 5th to 11th Centuries*, by Derek Krueger and Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony (Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 20: "Viewing Evagrius' theory in the broader context of Christian and non-Christian discourse on prayer in late antiquity, we can see its radical originality."

⁹⁵ Evagrius does not explicitly cite Origen in *On Prayer*. Unlike Origen's treatise, which follows a solid, didactic structure with elaborate sentences, Evagrius adopts a laconic, incisive style. D. Bertrand argues that this stylistic choice was deliberate, intended to set Evagrius apart from his predecessor. Furthermore, a

mystical and philosophical literature. Evagrius is the first author to elaborate a coherent terminology and theory of contemplative prayer, which he calls “pure prayer”⁹⁶ (προσευχῆς καθαρᾶς),⁹⁷ integrating it organically into his own mystical system. This new conceptualisation

comparative reading of the two works *Peri euchēs* reveals Evagrius’ emphasis on the monastic dimension, which, according to Bertrand, indicates “a clear delimitation from his master.” See Bertrand, “L’implication Du Nous Dans La Prière Chez Origène et Évagre Le Pontique,” 356–59.

⁹⁶ At the request of St. John Cassian, Abba Isaac summarises the theory of “pure prayer” (*oratio purissima*), in which the intellect contains no figure, memory, image, or form [see *Conlationes* X, 5 (Jean Cassien, *Conférences. VIII–XXIV*, ed. Eugène Pichery, Sources chrétiennes 54 (Les Éditions du Cerf, 1958), 78–79): *ad illam orationis purissimam perveniet qualitatem, quae non solum nullam diuinitatis effigiem nec linamenta corporea, ..., in sua supplicatione miscebit, sed ne ullam quidem in se memoriam dicti cuiusquam uel facti speciem seu formam cuiuslibet characteris admittet* – he will attain that most pure quality of prayer, which does not mingle in its supplication any representation of the divinity nor any corporeal form; indeed, it does not even admit within itself any memory of a spoken word or any image or form of an act of whatever kind” (see John Cassian, *Conferences*, trans. Colm Luibhéid, *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (Paulist Press, 1985), 128). G. Bunge is convinced that the famous “Abba Isaac,” who taught John Cassian the “fiery prayer,” can be none other than Evagrius himself, whom Cassian met in Egypt and whose writings and teachings he drew on extensively without explicitly citing him (Gabriel Bunge, *Akedia: Pliktiseala și terapia ei după avva Evagrie Ponticul sau sufletul în luptă cu demonul amiezii*, trans. Ioan I. Ică (Deisis, 2007), 144; see Clark, *Origenist Controversy*, 66, n. 124). For A. Guillaumont as well, this “prayer of an intellect detached from every form,” expounded by Cassian through Abba Isaac in Books IX and X of his *Conferences*, reflects “a true *De oratione*, essentially marked by that of Evagrius.” (see Antoine Guillaumont, *Les ‘Képhalaia gnostica’ d’Évagre le Pontique et l’histoire de l’origénisme chez les Grecs et chez les Syriens*, Publications de la Sorbonne série patristica Sorbonensia 5 (Éditions du Seuil, 1962), 61)

⁹⁷ *Historia monachorum in Aegypto* records the exhortations of John of Lycopolis (from the Thebaid) regarding the “pure intellect”: “See to it whether all is well with you in your prayers, whether the purity (*katharós*) of your thought (*diánoia*) has not been clouded, whether your intellect (*noûs*) does not suffer certain distractions when you stand before God in prayer (*euchē*); lest some foreign thought (*logismós*), slipping in, turn your intellect (*noûs*) toward something else, lest some memory of unseemly thoughts trouble your thought (*diánoia*).” (Ἄλλ’ ὁρᾶτε εἰ εὖ ἔχει ὑμῖν ἐν ταῖς προσευχαῖς, εἰ μὴ τὸ καθαρὸν τῆς διανοίας ὑμῶν τεθόλωται, εἰ μὴ ὁ νοῦς ὑμῶν ῥεμβασμούς τινας πάσχει εἰς εὐχὴν τῷ θεῷ παριστάμενος · μὴ ἕτερός τις παρεισελθὼν λογισμὸς τὸν νοῦν ἐπ’ ἄλλο τι στρέφῃ, μὴ μνήμη τις τῶν ἀτόπων ἐνθυμημάτων παρενοχλῆ τῇ διανοίᾳ) “Therefore, you also, O children, pursue stillness (*hēsychía*) with perseverance, constantly training yourselves in contemplation (*theōría*), in order to acquire a pure intellect (*katharós noûs*), as you pray to God.” (Ὡστε οὖν καὶ ὑμεῖς, ὧ τέκνα, τὴν ἡσυχίαν μεταδιώξατε πρὸς τὴν θεωρίαν ἀεὶ γυμναζόμενοι, ἵνα καθαρὸν κτήσησθε νοῦν τῷ θεῷ προσευχόμενοι) [see *Caput* I, 23; A. J. Festugière, ed., *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto: Édition Critique Du Texte Grec* (Société des Bollandistes, 1961), 17.140–144]; I, 62 (33.410–34.412); see also Norman Russell, trans., *The Lives of the Desert Fathers (The Historia Monachorum in Aegypto)*, with Benedicta Ward, Cistercian Studies Series 34 (Mowbray [u.a.], 1981), 55, 62.] E.A. Clark regards these exhortations as confirmation that Evagrius cannot claim originality for the concept of “pure prayer,” since it had already been transmitted and practiced earlier within the Egyptian monastic tradition (see Clark, *Origenist Controversy*, 68).

spread rapidly, becoming a normative reference for Greek, Latin⁹⁸ and Syriac⁹⁹ authors, both in Late Antiquity and in later periods.¹⁰⁰

Conclusion

The foregoing analysis has sought to illuminate the distinctive yet deeply interconnected approaches to contemplative prayer developed by Origen and Evagrius Ponticus, with particular attention to the anthropological categories – *nous*, *pneuma*, and *psychē* – that underpin their respective theologies.

Origen's contribution was foundational in at least two respects. He established prayer as a form of spiritual ascent (*anabasis*) and interior dialogue (*homilia*) with God, grounded in a pneumatological anthropology that assigned the human *pneuma* a decisive mediating role in authentic prayer. Drawing on Romans 8:26 and 1 Corinthians 14:15, Origen articulated a

⁹⁸ The influence of Evagrius Ponticus on John Cassian's writings has long been recognized in academic circles. See Salvatore Marsili, *Giovanni Cassiano Ed Evagrio Pontico: Dottrina Sulla Carità e Contemplazione*, Studia Anselmiana Philosophica Theologica 5 (Herder, 1936). Owen Chadwick, *John Cassian. A Study in Primitive Monasticism* (Cambridge University Press, 1950). Columba Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (Oxford University Press, 1998). Panayiotis Tzamalikos, *The Real Cassian Revisited: Monastic Life, Greek Paideia, and Origenism in the Sixth Century*, Supplements to 'Vigiliae Christianae', volume 112 (Brill, 2012).

⁹⁹ This influence was indicated by one of the leading experts on Eastern Christian spirituality. See Irénée Hausherr, "Contemplation: Évagre Le Pontique'," in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité, Ascétique et Mystique, Doctrine et Histoire*, vol. 2 (G. Beauchesne et ses fils, 1932), 1775–85; Irénée Hausherr, "Les Grands Courants de La Spiritualité Orientale," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 11 (1935): 114–38; Irénée Hausherr, "Le "De Oratione" d'Évagre Le Pontique En Syriaque et En Arabe," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 5 (1939): 7–71.; Hausherr, *Les Leçons d'un Contemplatif: Le Traité de l'oraison d'Evagre Le Pontique*. "Blessed Mar Evagrius" is the author most frequently cited by Syriac-speaking spiritual writers, especially by the most important among them, Isaac of Nineveh, for whom he is the master *par excellence*. See Antoine Guillaumont and Claire Guillaumont, "Le Texte Véritable Des *Gnostica* d'Évagre Le Pontique," *Revue de l'Histoire Des Religions* 142 (1952): 156–205, 156. Evagrius influence is also reflected in the terminology and the concept of "pure prayer" in later Syriac texts. For example, an anonymous 6th–7th century text, translated by S. Brock, treats this subject [see Sebastian P. Brock, ed., *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life*, Cistercian Studies Series 101 (Cistercian Publications, 1987), 181–184]. The same concept is addressed by Dadisho (second half of the 7th century AD), a contemporary of Isaac of Nineveh, in his work *On Pure Prayer* [see Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life*, 303–312]. See also Antoine Guillaumont, "Les Versions Syriaques de l'oeuvre d'Évagre Le Pontique et Leur Role Dans La Formation Du Vocabulaire Ascétique Syriaque," in *III Symposium Syriacum (1980). Les Contacts Du Monde Syriaque Avec Les Autres Cultures (Goslar 7-11 Septembre 1980)*, ed. R. Lavenant, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 221 (Pontificium Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1983), 35–41.

¹⁰⁰ See Bitton-Ashkelony, "The Limit of the Mind (Noûç): Pure Prayer According to Evagrius Ponticus and Isaac of Nineveh," 293–94, and n. 14, 21. See also Guillaumont and Guillaumont, "Le Texte Véritable Des *Gnostica* d'Évagre Le Pontique," 156–57.

vision of prayer as a synergy between the human intellect and the Holy Spirit – a dynamic in which human weakness is taken up and transformed by divine initiative. His work *On Prayer* remains the most systematic and theologically rich euchological treatise of Christian Antiquity, integrating Platonic themes of inner vision and ascent with a distinctively Christological and pneumatological framework.

Evagrius, taking Origen as his point of departure, redirected the discourse on prayer in a more experiential and ascetic direction. Where Origen theorised the conditions and structure of spiritual prayer, Evagrius inhabited the “place of prayer” as a lived reality, mapping the intellect’s struggle against demonic thoughts and charting the path toward “imageless prayer.” His definition of prayer as a “state of the intellect that abolishes every earthly representation” reflects both an epistemological and an ascetic programme: the *nous* must be progressively purified – through virtue, contemplation, and the antirrhetic combat against *logismoi* – until it is capable of approaching the “Immaterial in an immaterial way.”

The anthropological distinction between Origen and Evagrius is equally significant. While Origen preserved a nuanced trichotomy of body, soul, and *pneuma* – with the *pneuma* functioning as the superior yet partly transcendent dimension of the human composite – Evagrius largely collapsed this distinction, identifying *pneuma* with *nous* and assigning the lower functions of passion and imagination to the *psychē*. This simplification, as scholars such as Couzel and Bertrand have observed, represents not a diminishment but a sharpening of focus: the *nous*, for Evagrius, is the arena in which the entire drama of salvation and contemplation is played out.

Ultimately, Evagrius’s decisive innovation lay in his transformation of contemplative prayer from a theological reflection into a coherent, terminologically precise, and experientially grounded discipline. His *Chapters on Prayer* established a normative vocabulary and theory of “pure prayer” that spread rapidly across the Greek, Latin, and Syriac worlds, shaping monastic spirituality well beyond Late Antiquity. In this sense, Evagrius may be regarded as the founding theorist of Christian contemplative prayer.