Origen’s Christology in Pre-Nicene Setting

The Logos as the Noetic Form of God

Dragoş Andrei GIULEA
Concordia University Montreal

I. INTRODUCTION

It is an acknowledged fact that Christology plays a seminal role in Origen’s thought and, as expected, it has received an intense scrutiny in modern scholarship. Nonetheless, one cannot find an investigation particularly focused on the biblical idea of Divine Form, especially the μορφὴ θεοῦ of Phil 2,6, an essential theological concept of the first Christian centuries, and the Origenian Christology articulated through this concept.


The phrase μορφὴ θεοῦ was a key linguistic tool of early Christianity denoting God’s luminous countenance. Sometimes designating a gigantic and radiant anthropomorphic character, the expression intersects the anthropomorphic controversy, a central and formative discussion encountered in both early Jewish and Christian settings. Nevertheless, situating our investigation in the larger context of Origenian Christology, an analysis of the concept of μορφὴ θεοῦ will emphasize two central theoretical aspects, one regarding Christ’s divine condition, and one concerning his salvific acts, the economy of salvation.

In what concerns the divine condition, previous scholars have already noticed that Origen struggled to eliminate any material or corporeal connotation from the nature of the Logos, and thus to secure his theology from an unwanted influence of either Stoic materialism or early Jewish and Christian anthropomorphism. Moreover, Gilles Quispel and Gedaliahu Stroumsa have shown that Origen was a milestone in the fundamental change in the Western understanding of God’s nature; thus, the intersection of Jewish and Christian cultures with Greek philosophy entailed a gradual shift in the conception about God’s divine condition from a celestial figure frequently envisioned as possessing a certain divine countenance or form to its understanding as a formless divinity.

However, I would like to argue in this article that Origen belongs to a third category situated in between anthropomorphism and a perfectly formless divinity. In this way, his Christology should be more associated with the theorizations on the noetic Divine Form developed by the early Jewish and Christian intelligentsia (from Philo and Josephus to Justin,


3. Since Origen associates this expression exclusively with the Son, and not with the Father and the Spirit, he creates and filters a special Christological perspective around it.

4. For his reaction to Stoic materialism, see CROUZEL, Origène (n. 1); for reaction to the anthropomorphism of early Jewish and Christian cultures, see G. AF HALLSTROM, Fides simpliciorum according to Origen of Alexandria (Commentationes humanarum litterarum, 76), Helsinki, Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1984, and GIULEA, Simpliciores, Eruditi, and the Noetic Form of God (n. 2).

5. Operating with the distinction between the concepts of Gestaltmystik (a common position in ancient Jewish and then Christian traditions which accepts the contemplation of the “Form” of God) and Seinsmystik (a doctrine of Hellenistic origins envisioning mysticism as a pure, formless contemplation of the divine being), Quispel argues that Origen already belongs to the second category; see G. QUISPEL, Sein und Gestalt, in E.E. URBACH et al. (eds.), Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to Gershom G. Scholem, Jerusalem, Magnes, 1967, 191-195, p. 193. Furthermore, Stroumsa regards Origen as a main author of the passage from mystical anthropomorphism, which assumes the existence of a Divine Form to an intellectual, aniconic mysticism, which defends the standpoint of a formless God; see G. STROUMSA, The Incorporeality of God: Context and Implications of Origen’s Position, in Religion 13 (1983) 345-358, p. 353.
Clement, and Tertullian) as a reaction to anthropomorphism\(^6\). While emphasizing Origen’s orthodoxy in opposition to a long history who declared his writings heretical, modern scholars have sometimes the tendency to place Origen’s Christology more in connection with the post-Nicene vision of a Son of God possessing the same degree of divine existence with the Father. Anticipating the conclusion of this study, the concept of \(\mu\sigma\rho\phi\hat{\iota}\ θ\epsilon\omicron\omicron\) shows that Origen’s Christology, at least from this perspective, is more in tone with Justin and Clement than with Athanasius, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and Augustine; Origen’s \(\mu\sigma\rho\phi\hat{\iota}\ θ\epsilon\omicron\omicron\) does not denote the divine essence shared by the three divine persons, but Christ’s very refined divine subsistence, and belongs to a Christology of the noetic Divine Form.

Origen shares with the pre-Nicene authors the ontology of a very complex and diverse reality with many layers of materiality and incorporeality as well as of degrees of divine existence. While in modern times we simply divide the levels of existence in material and abstract, pre-Nicene authors distinguished between the corporeality of visible and spiritual beings (angels and demons) as well as between the perfectly invisible divine existence of the Father and the more manifested divine existence of the Son\(^7\). Although definitely assuming the genuine divinity of the Son of God, Origen envisions the Logos, more in tone with Clement of Alexandria, as possessing a certain Divine Form which ontologically resides beyond the realm of sensible (\(\alpha\iota\sigma\theta\epsilon\omicron\sigma\iota\kappa\iota\) shape and measure. Nevertheless, this fact does not imply that the Logos is necessarily abstract, but it is described as a very refined and radiant appearance able to be contemplated on the mount of transfiguration, or in heaven, and be imprinted within the luminous bodies of the resurrected.

In what regards the economy of salvation, Crouzel follows J.A. Alcain in discerning, in Origen’s Christology, five general soteriological narratives and their own specific vocabularies: mercantile, warrior-combat, juridical, ritual, and mystery\(^8\). Additionally, I argued in a previous study that a different salvific narrative and language – which I called “\(\varepsilon\iota\kappa\omicron\iota\kappa\) soteriology” and traced its roots back to the Pauline corpus – is also present in Origen’s writings\(^9\). In the present article we will see that Origen

\(^6\) For the theology of the noetic Divine Form, see Giulea, Simpliciores, Eruditi, and the Noetic Form of God (n. 2).

\(^7\) Ibid.

\(^8\) See J.A. Alcain, Cantiverio y redención del hombre en Orígenes, Bilbao, Universidad de Deusto, 1973; Crouzel, Origène (n. 1), pp. 253-256.

\(^9\) See D.A. Giulea, Eikonic Soteriology from Paul to Augustine: A Forgotten Tradition?, in Theoforum 42 (2011) 47-70. I preferred to call this soteriology “\(\varepsilon\iota\kappa\omicron\iota\kappa\)” in order to emphasize its ontological dimension. It deals neither with icons as pictures nor with a sheer moral aspect in which human beings are saved by imitating Jesus’ good deeds. To the contrary, the stress falls on the ontological condition of the human being created as a luminous \(\varepsilon\iota\kappa\omicron\) of Christ (according to God’s \(\varepsilon\iota\kappa\omicron\)), who subsequently lost this likeness through the fall. Further, the incarnation of the Divine \(\varepsilon\iota\kappa\omicron\) opens the possibility to recover
articulates the same eikonic narrative of salvation by means of the expression μορφὴ θεοῦ, which sometimes is deeply intertwined or even identical with the Divine Eikon (or the Image of God, namely, Christ).

This study intends therefore to recover Origen’s Christology of the Form of God by first presenting its roots in the context of its formation, namely, Jewish and Christian Hellenism. We will further unveil the ways in which, through this expression, Origen conceived of the Logos in himself (in his pre-incarnate condition) as Divine Form, and of the significant role the Divine Form plays in the economy of salvation and in the resurrected life. The Form of God is further conceived as the model according to which human beings are constantly recreated and will be reshaped at the eschaton. The study will conclude with some observations regarding the nature of the Divine Form in Origen’s thought, and finally distinguish it from its use in post-Nicene times, when such main stream authors as Athanasius, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and Augustine will constantly and systematically identify μορφὴ θεοῦ with the divine essence.

II. ORIGEN IN CONTEXT: THE FORM OF GOD IN EARLY JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN HELLENISTIC SETTINGS

As his writings attest, Origen was a committed enemy of the anthropomorphist position10. Nonetheless, he was not an isolated lone runner in this campaign but part of an anti-anthropomorphist trend emerging in the context of the ancient Greek philosophy, particularly with Xenophanes of Colophon11. This position was later adopted in Jewish Alexandrian setting, and defended by such authors as Aristobulus and Philo12, and subsequently assumed by several early Christian writers, for instance by Irenaeus, Clement, and Origen13.

this radiant ontology which imitates Christ’s celestial condition; some early documents even speak about a similarity with Christ’s heavenly form or body of glory. Within these categories, salvation is envisioned as the ontological (not only moral) recovery of this radiant condition which imitates Christ’s glorious status as a real image imitates its model.

10. See, for instance, Hom. Gen. 1,13; Comm. Rom. 1,22(19); Dial. 12; Cels. 4,37; Sel. Gen. 25. In the last two texts he elaborates a special argument against the literal reading of the anthropomorphist party. The one who accepts a literal reading of the Bible in a consistent way will have to accept the existence of all the limbs the Bible ascribes to God, from head to hands to feet to wings (e.g., Pss 15,8; 25,8; 90,4), which contradicts the idea of a human form.

11. See Xenophanes of Colophon (c. 570-480 BC), Fragmenta 11-23 as well as Testimonia 28,1;9, and 31,3-5.

12. For Aristobulus, see Eusebius, Pr. Ev. 8,10,1-2; for Philo, see, e.g., Op. 69 and Mut. 54.

13. See Irenaeus (Haer. 4,3,1) and Clement of Alexandria’s rejection of anthropomorphism in Str. 5.11,3 as a “Hebrew” doctrine. Unlike Paulsen, I would ascribe Origen’s anti-anthropomorphism mostly to his accepting this long philosophical trend and to the strong criticisms from such philosophers as Celsus rather than to Neoplatonism, a philosophical trend which chronologically succeeded Origen; see PAULSEN, Early Christian
Nevertheless, scholars have shown that, contrary to our modern expectations, all these anti-anthropomorphic philosophers and theologians pondered that God actually possesses a form. Thus, already the founding fathers of the anti-anthropomorphist theory – Xenophanes, Parmenides, and Plato – assumed that God was endowed with a spherical shape, the form of perfection. The idea that God possesses a certain form was largely spread among philosophically educated authors of late antiquity, and may be encountered for instance in Philo, Josephus, the Hermetic corpus, Justin, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, or Ps-Clement. All of them assumed that God owns a Divine Form (μορφὴ or εἶδος), and, additionally, that its nature is noetic (not in the sense of “mental”, but as a real entity so refined that only a purified mind, νοῦς, may perceive it). Some of them, for instance Philo and Josephus, maintained that human epistemic capacities are actually not able to perceive the Divine Form.

Among these writers who were part of the intellectual setting which shaped Origen as theologian, his Sitz im Leben, Justin Martyr and particularly Clement of Alexandria have to be mentioned for three fundamental elements shared with Origen. Firstly, they assume that God the Father was essentially formless and incomprehensible, and they never associate with him the expression “Form of God”. Secondly, they always relate the Form of God with the Son, and conceive of the nature of this Form as noetic, and that it may be contemplated only noetically. Thirdly, Clement and Origen share with other pre-Nicene authors the idea that reality includes various degrees of materiality and incorporeality, and even assume an ontological diversity within the divine realm.

Justin Martyr, for instance, defines God the Father as devoid of any shape or measure (οὐ σχῆμα, οὐ μέγεθος; Dial. 1.4 [PTS 47, p. 77]). At the same time, he opines that the Son possesses a form, namely the Form

Belief (n. 2), pp. 106-107. H.W. Attridge shows that anthropomorphism was a constant debate among Greek philosophers; see, The Philosophical Critique of Religion under the Early Empire, in ANRW 2.16.1 (1978) 45-78. It is in this setting that such authors as Apuleius, Celsus, and Numenius assume an anti-anthropomorphic stance and develop an apophatic discourse about God as STROUMSA points out in his The Incorporeality of God (n. 5), p. 345; cf. K.J. TÖRJENSEN, The Enscripturation of Philosophy: The Incorporeality of God in Origen’s Exegesis, in C. HELMER – T.G. PETREY (eds.), Biblical Interpretation: History, Context, and Reality, Atlanta, GA, Society of Biblical Literature, 2005, 73-84. For the list of Platonist, Pythagorean, and Stoic philosophers with whom Origen was acquainted – a list we have from his enemy Porphyry – see G. WATSON, Souls and Bodies in Origen’s Peri Archon, in ITQ 55 (1989) 173-193, p. 174.

14. See GIULEA, Simpliciores, Eruditi, and the Noetic Form of God (n. 2), pp. 266-267. For the ancient Greek sources, see the Orphic hymn 4.2; Xenophanes, Fr. 23 (Simplicius, in Ph. 23.18, Diogenes Laertius, Vit. 9.19); Parmenides, Ph. 8; Plato, Ti. 37c.

15. See, for instance, Philo, Somn. 1.232; Leg. 1.45; Josephus, Apion 2.190-1; Hermes Trismegistes, Tract. 11.16-17; Justin, I Apol. 9.1-3; Clement, Exc. Thdot. 10.1-3; Tertullian, Prax. 7 and 27; Marc. 1.3.2; Ps-Clement, Hom. Clem. 17.7-8 and 17.10-11. For a more detailed analysis of this topic, see GIULEA, Simpliciores, Eruditi, and the Noetic Form of God (n. 2).
of God. Human language, however, is unable to offer an adequate description of it\(^\text{16}\). Nevertheless, Justin believes that the contemplation of the Deity is possible only in a noetic way; it “cannot be seen by the same eyes as other living beings are. He is to be perceived by the mind alone (μόνῳ νῷ καταληπτόν), as Plato affirms”\(^\text{17}\). These basic elements will be later encountered in Clement and Origen.

In his turn, Clement of Alexandria conceives of the Father as formless and beyond knowledge, and employs for his description some of the most advanced Middle Platonist apophatic language\(^\text{18}\). According to Henny F. Hägg’s list of divine attributes, the Father is invisible, eternal, indivisible, incomprehensible, without limit (ἄπειρος), unknown (ἄγνωστος), unbegotten, without name, inexpressible, unutterable, uncreated, without beginning, without form (ἄσχημάτιστος), incapable of being circumscribed, uncontained, without passion, without need, incorruptible\(^\text{19}\).

Salvatore Lilla equally states that Clement describes only the Son as the One and the Monad, while the Father is beyond them, as he is also beyond any thought, concept, and knowledge\(^\text{20}\).

In contradistinction, the Son of God possesses a form, and in this case Clement employs a diverse cataphatic language\(^\text{21}\). In what regards the ontological condition of the Son, the Alexandrian asserts that God and his áγαλμα (i.e., “image”, “representation”, or “statue”) are noetic, not aesthetic\(^\text{22}\).

In his scholia to Theodotus – while responding to Theodotus’s

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tianis} (PTS, 38), Berlin, de Gruyter, 1994, pp. 43-44: “But neither do we use a multitude of sacrifices and garlands of flowers to honour those whom human beings formed and set up in temples and called gods, since we know that such things are dead and do not possess the form of God (θεοῦ μορφήν) …This we think is not only irrational but is also an insult to God, whose name, though his glory and form are beyond words (ἀρρητὸν δόξαν καὶ μορφήν) is given to things that are corruptible and need to be looked after”. Translation in D. MINNS – P. PARVIS, \textit{Justin, Philosopher and Martyr: Apologies, Oxford – New York}, Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 97.

17. Justin, \textit{Dial.} 1.3.7, in M. MARCOVITCH (ed.), \textit{Justini Martyris Dialogus cum Try-

18. See S.R.C. LILLA, \textit{Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Platonism and Gnos-


commentaries on the Johannine prologue and the titles of the Logos – Clement asserts that none of the existing realities (the Son included) is bereft of form and substance\textsuperscript{23}. Consequently, neither the spiritual and intelligible beings (τὰ πνευματικά καὶ νοερά), nor the archangels, nor the protoctists, nor even the Son himself can exist without form, shape, figure, and body (ἀμορφὸς καὶ ἀνείδος καὶ ἀσχημάτιστος καὶ ἀσώματος)\textsuperscript{24}. The Alexandrian conceives, as well, of various degrees of materiality between all these celestial entities. He avers that stars, for instance, are immaterial and without form (ἀσώματα καὶ ἀνείδεα) compared to the earthly things; however, the stars are measured and sensible bodies (σώματα μεμετρημένα καὶ αἰσθητά) from the perspective of the Son, as the Son himself is measured and corporeal from the Father’s perspective\textsuperscript{25}. Clement equally asserts that the nature of the Son consists of a kind of light purer even than the noetic one, and he calls it ἀπρόσιτον Φῶς (“inaccessible light”; see 1 Tim 6,16)\textsuperscript{26}. As a last observation, the Alexandrian states that the epistemic capacity through which the protoctists can perceive the Son and his Form is not the ordinary, or sensible, eye but the noetic eye given from the Father\textsuperscript{27}.

\section*{III. ORIGEN’S LOGOS IN HIS PRE-INCARNATE “FORM OF GOD”}

Playing an essential role in Origen’s Christology, the term μορφή (“form”) is frequently employed in the recurrent phrase the “Form of God” (μορφή θεοῦ). Its most exploited biblical references are the episode of the transfiguration (Jesus’ change of form, μεταμόρφωσις) and Phil 2,6 (the passage asserting that the Son was in the Form of God and took the form of a slave). In all these biblical contexts the term μορφή is associated

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<td>Clement, Exc. 10.2-3, in F. Sagnard (ed.), Clément d’Alexandrie: Extraits de Théodote (SC, 23), Paris, Cerf, 1948, p. 78.</td>
<td>He expresses this general philosophical principle in these words: “Whereas every existing thing is not bereft of substance, those bodies belonging to this universe do not have a similar form and body. … The Monogenes is peculiarly intelligible and possesses his proper form and substance, exceedingly pure and absolutely sovereign, and enjoys the power of the Father without mediation.”. Όλως γὰρ τὸ γενητὸν οὐκ ἀνούσιον μὲν, οὐχ ὅμοιον δὲ μορφὴν καὶ σῶμα ἔχουσι τοῖς ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ σώμασιν. … Ἐκεῖ δὲ ὁ Μονογενὴς καὶ ἰδίως νοερός, ἰδέων ἰόι καὶ ὅπερ αὐτὸ ῥήμα κεχρημένον, ἄκρως εἰλικρινεὶ καὶ ἱγκεμονικότατη, καὶ προσεχῶς τῆς τοῦ Πατρὸς ἀπολαύων δυνάμεως. My translation.</td>
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with Jesus Christ, which makes it an essentially Christological notion. Furthermore, the Pauline expression μορφή θεοῦ from Phil 2,6 denotes a divine title indicating the pre-incarnate status of the Logos 28.

We may begin with an illustration from the Commentary on John, a remarkable theological passage including the expression μορφή θεοῦ as a reference to the ontological condition in which the Logos subsists in se, the way the Son exists within the Father:

[W]hen the Son is in the Father (ἐν τῷ πατρί ἐστιν), being in the form of God (ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων) before he empties himself, God is his place (τόπος), as it were. And if indeed one considers him who, before he emptied himself, is in the essential form of God (ἐν τῇ προηγουμένῃ ὑπάρχοντα θεοῦ μορφῇ), he will see the Son who has not yet proceeded (μηδέπω ἐξεληλυθότα ἀπό τοῦ θεοῦ) from God himself, and the Lord who has not yet proceeded from his place (μηδέπω ἐκπορευόμενον ἐκ τοῦ τόπου ἑαυτοῦ) 29.

As we may see in the following Origenian texts, it is the same Divine Form of the Logos which the author identifies as the visual reality contemplated by the apostles on the mount of transfiguration. While speculating on the episode of the transfiguration in his Commentary on Matthew 12,36-37, Origen first states that all those who reached perfection are able to contemplate realities belonging to the invisible realm, which are eternal (τὰ μὴ βλεπόμενα διὰ τὸ εἶναι αἰώνια). The interpreter continues his thought by presuming that the Logos reveals himself not in a unique modality but in a large variety of ways accommodating his form to the receiver’s capacity of perception:

The Word has different forms (διαφόρους γὰρ ἔχει ὁ λόγος μορφάς) and he appears to each as is expedient for him to see (φαινόμενον ἑκάστῳ ὡς συμφέρει τῷ βλέποντι). He is never revealed to any man beyond his capacity to see (μηδενὶ ὑπὲρ ὃ χωρεῖ ὁ βλέπων). Perhaps you will ask, when Jesus was transfigured before those he led up the high mountain, did he appear to them in the form of God in which he previously was (ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ᾗ ὑπῆρχε πάλιν), so that for those below he had the form of a slave but for those who had followed him to the high mountain after the six days he did not have that form, but the form of God 30?

This rhetorical question will receive an obvious affirmative answer. The Logos shows his human visible form (the form of a slave) to the beginners, and he allows the advanced to contemplate, in the invisible realm, his invisible and eternal form, his Form of God:

If you wish to see how Jesus was transfigured before those he had led apart with him up the high mountain, then first see with me Jesus in the Gospels, for there he is more simply appreciated, and we might say ‘known according to the flesh’ by those who do not go up the high mountain by means of uplifting works and words (ἀναβαίνουσι διὰ τῶν ἐπαναβεβηκότων ἐργῶν καὶ λόγων), yet ‘known no longer according to the flesh’ by means of all the Gospels, for there he is known in his divinity (θεολογούμενον) and seen in the form of God (ἐν τῇ τοῦ θεοῦ μορφῇ ...) according to their knowledge. It is before such as these that Jesus is transfigured, not before any of those below\textsuperscript{31}.

This text plainly identifies Jesus’ Form of God revealed in the transfiguration with his pre-incarnate status. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that, in a few previous chapters (i.e., Comm. Mt. 12,31-33), Origen also identified Jesus’ form revealed in the transfiguration with his eschatological luminous condition, and even with the kingdom itself.

Other Origenian passages illustrate as well the idea that Jesus discloses his luminous Divine Form on the mountain of transfiguration. Contra Celsum 4,16, for example, acknowledges that Christ reveals in that episode his “other form”, his “higher nature”, and his “glorious and more divine” condition:

There are, as it were, different forms of the Word (διάφοροι οἰονεὶ τοῦ λόγου μορφαί). For the Word appears (φαίνεται) to each of those who are led to know him in a form corresponding to the state of the individual (ἀνάλογον τῇ ἕξει), whether he is a beginner, or has made a little progress, or is considerably advanced, or has nearly attained to virtue already, or has in fact attained it, ... our God was transformed when he went up a high mountain and showed his other form (ἄλλην ἔδειξεν τὴν ἑαυτοῦ μορφὴν) ... For the people down below had not eyes capable of seeing the transfiguration of the Word into something wonderful and more divine (τὴν τοῦ λόγου ἐπὶ τὸ ἐνδόξον καὶ θειότερον μεταμόρφωσιν). They were hardly able to receive him as he was, so that it was said of him by those not able to see his higher nature (τὸ κρείττον αὐτοῦ βλέπειν)\textsuperscript{32}.

A different place in Contra Celsum similarly equates the luminous countenance which Christ manifested on the mountain of transfiguration with the Form in which he existed before his incarnation: “But even while

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
he tabernacled and lived among us he did not remain with his primary form (ὁ ύπνοι ἔμεινεν ἐπὶ τῆς πρώτης μορφῆς). After leading us up to the spiritual ‘high mountain’, he showed us his glorious form (τὴν ἐνδόξον μορφὴν ἑαυτοῦ) and the radiance (τὴν λαμπρότητα) of his clothing”\textsuperscript{33}.

From all these materials we may draw a partial conclusion regarding the ontological status of μορφὴ θεοῦ. There is no indication in these texts – and particularly those in which Origen interprets the visionary and theophanic episode of the transfiguration – that he understands it in a metaphorical or allegorical way. The fact that he interprets other passages of the Bible in an allegorical manner is not a sufficient reason to conclude that he equally understands these passages allegorically. To the contrary, the texts display an obvious literal (or, at least, realistic) interpretation of the biblical narrative implying that the apostles contemplated a real, substantial light, which in biblical language is usually called the divine glory.

IV. THE ECONOMY OF THE LOGOS AND HIS POLYMORPHISM

The metaphysical foundation of this transformative conception about Christ subsists in a particular doctrine according to which the divine Logos is able to change his appearance or form. While Henri Crouzel entitles this conception the vision concerning “les différentes formes du Christ”, John McGuckin defines it as the doctrine of the “changing forms or appearances of Jesus”. The theory may also be labelled as the doctrine on the “changing forms of the Logos”, as Origen expresses it in the aforementioned passages from Comm. Mt. 12,36-37 and Cels. 4,16\textsuperscript{34}. In this way, the Logos exhibits the capacity to appear in a human form among human beings and in an angelic form among angels, assuming a shape according to the pedagogical and soteriological need of the creature who contemplates him, and thus accommodating his manifestation to the needs of all in order to become “all things to all men” (1 Cor 9,22)\textsuperscript{35}.

34. See the above quotations corresponding to footnotes 30 and 32.
35. E.g., Origen, Hom. Gen. 8,8; Comm. Jn. 1,31,225-6; Comm. Rom. 1,6(4); Comm. Mt. 15,24. McGuckin’s observation is also worth mentioning: “It is a principle which he [Origen] applies also to the pre-incarnate economy of the Logos. He appears for the sake of angels with an angelic role himself, and becomes man for the sake of men, constantly working the economy for others and tempering his appearances according to the need of the recipients for whose sake the whole economy is undertaken in the first place”. See J.A. McGuckin, The Changing Forms of Jesus, in L. Lies (ed.), Origeniana Quarta, Innsbruck – Vienna, Tyrolia, 1987, 215-222, p. 218. For a discussion of the angelic economy of the Logos, see also H. De Lubac, Different Manifestations of Christ, in his Aspects of Buddhism, trans. G. Lamb, London – New York, Sheed and Ward, 1953, 89-92. De Lubac points out that Philo makes also the affirmation that God manifests himself in creation in diverse forms (μορφαί) while remaining unchanged in his nature (φύσις; Somn. 1,232).
As we will further see, Origen conceives that the Logos, who in himself is in the Form of God, assumes a body for each form, and there conceals all his luminous divinity. The following passage is one of the most illustrative; it starts with a discussion on the diverse forms of Jesus’ body from the earthly body “without form and beauty” to the glorious body of the transfiguration.

Again when he said, *If a divine spirit was in a body, it must certainly have differed from other bodies in size or voice or strength or striking appearance or powers of persuasion*, how did he fail to notice that his body differed (τὸ παραλλάττον) in accordance with the capacity of those who saw it (πρὸς τοῖς ὀρῶσι δυνατῶν), and on this account appeared in such form (τοιοῦτο φαινόμενον) as was beneficial for the needs of each individual’s vision (βλέπεσθαι)? It is not remarkable that matter (ὕλην), which is by nature (φύσι) subject to change, alteration, and transformation (τρεπτὴν καὶ ἀλλοιωτὴν καὶ ... μεταβλητὴν) into anything which the Creator desires, and is capable of possessing any quality (πάσης ποιότητος) which the Artificer wishes, at one time possesses a quality (ποιότητα) of which it is said, ‘He had not form or beauty’, and at another time a quality so glorious (ἔνδοξον) and striking and wonderful that the three apostles who went up with Jesus and saw the exquisite beauty fell on their faces36.

We may also note in this passage that a material body, even a transfigured and luminous one, is associated with the glory manifested on the mount of transfiguration. The image comes out as well when Origen describes Christ’s eschatological coporeality. And with this aspect we discover the various layers in which the Form of God is reflected within the sensible world. We will also see that all these forms of the Logos become models for humans:

The doctrine has an even more mysterious meaning (μυστικώτερον ὁ λόγος) since it proclaims that the different forms of Jesus (τὰς τοῦ Ἰησοῦ διαφόρους μορφὰς) are to be applied to the nature of the divine Logos (ἀναφέρεσθαι ἐπὶ τὴν τοῦ θείου λόγου φύσιν). For he did not appear in the same way (δυοίς φαινομέναι) both to the multitude and to those able to follow him up the high mountain which we have mentioned. To those who are still down below and are not yet prepared to ascend (ἀναβαίνειν), the Logos ‘has not form nor beauty’. … However, to those who by following him have received power to go after him even as he is ascending (ἀναβαίνοντι) the high mountain, he has a more divine form (θειοτέραν μορφήν). … But how can Celsus and those hostile to the divine Word, who do not examine the teachings of Christianity with a desire to find the truth, realize the meaning of the different forms of Jesus (τὸ βούλημα τῶν διαφόρων τοῦ Ἰησοῦ μορφῶν)37?

37. Ibid. A disputed fragment from his *Homilies on Luke* asserts that the vision which the apostles contemplated on the mount of transfiguration was not the glory in which the
However, Origen asserts that the Logos remains unchanged in its substance while assuming any of these forms, and first of all in his incarnation:

If the immortal divine Word assumes both a human body and a human soul, and by doing so appears to Celsus to be subject to change and remolding, let him learn that the Word remains Word in essence (τῇ οὐσίᾳ μένων λόγος). He suffers (οὐδὲν μὲν πάσχει) nothing of the experience (πάσχει) of the body or the soul.

The doctrine of the changing forms is closely linked to Origen’s conception about the multiplicity of the names or conceptualizations (ἐπίνοιαι) of the Logos. In fact, they reflect two dimensions of the diverse manifestations of the Logos in creation: (1) ontological (when the Logos assumes different forms); and (2) of activity, since each name represents a way the divine Wisdom operates in the world. The exegete himself associates the two dimensions in Contra Celsum: “Although Jesus was one, he had several aspects (εἷς ὤν πλείονα τῇ ἐπινοίᾳ ἦν); and to those who saw him he did not appear alike to all (οὐχ ἰδοὺς πᾶσιν ὀρθομένος). …his appearance was (ἐφαίνετο) not just the same to those who saw him, but varied according to their individual capacity (ὅς ἔχωρον οἱ βλέποντες)”.

Origen further gives some examples of divine titles-functions of Christ such as the “way”, “truth”, “life”, “bread”, “door”, and eventually recounts the event of the transfiguration.

Logos previously existed – since this is invisible to any creature – but a corporeal vision: “The Transfiguration on the mountain manifested to the disciples a token of the Savior’s future glory (δόξης). And he was manifested corporeally (σωματικῶς), to give their mortal eyes a vision (θέαν), even if they could not bear the exceeding greatness of his splendor (τὴν ὑπερβολὴν τῆς θείας λαμπρότητος), which was untempered and could not be borne by our eyes. The disciples showed that the glory that befits the divine essence (ἡ τῇ οὐσίᾳ τῇ θείᾳ πρέπουσα δόξα) is invisible (ἀθέατος) to, and unapproachable (ἀπρόσιτος) by, any created nature; they were unable to bear even this corporeal vision (σωματικὴν ὀψιν) manifested to them upon the mountain, but fell to the earth. But, when someone goes up with him, and is exalted with him, he sees (ὁρᾷ) the Word gloriously (ἐνδόξως) transfigured, and sees him as the Word Itself and as the High Priest who both takes counsel with the Father and prays to him”.

See also Cels. 4.5 and 4.14.
As McGukin points out, the transfiguration is Origen’s *locus classicus* for illustrating the doctrine of the changing forms. In what regards its origins, the doctrine reflects a more ancient Christian tradition present in such early documents as the *Ascension of Isaiah* 8.9-10 and 9.13, the *Odes of Solomon* 7.4-6, the *Acts of John* 29 and 89-93, the *Acts of Peter* 20, Irenaeus’ testimony on Basildes (AH 1.24.4), and the writings of Clement of Alexandria. And the episode of the transfiguration stands as the key example for the doctrine in most of all these ancient testimonies.

V. THE ROLE OF THE DIVINE FORM IN THE ECONOMY OF SALVATION: THE DOCTRINE OF SYM-MORPHISM

One of the chapters of the *Commentary on Matthew* describes the economy of salvation as the coming of the Son of Man to a status of dishonour, without form (εἶδος) and beauty, in order to restore human being to the conformity with the Divine Image (εἰκών) and Form (μορφή):

He “was in the beginning with God”; but because of those who had cleaved to the flesh and become as flesh, he became flesh, that he might be received by those incapable of seeing him in his nature as the one who was the Logos (αὐτόν βλέπειν καθό λόγος), who was with God, who was God, And being spoken of under physical forms (σωματικός), and being proclaimed to be flesh, he calls to himself those who are flesh that he may make them first to be formed like the Logos (μορφωθῆναι κατὰ λόγον) who became flesh, and after that lead them up to see him (ἀναβιβάσῃ ἐπὶ τὸ ἰδεῖν αὐτόν) as he was before he became flesh (ὅπερ ἦν πρὶν γένηται σάρξ).

43. McGuckin, *The Changing Forms* (n. 35), p. 215. He also pinpoints that Origen usually associates the episode of the transfiguration with the kenotic hymn from Phil 2.6-11 regarding Jesus’ change of forms from the pre-incarnate Form of God to the form of a servant (*ibid.*, p. 217).


The text equally discloses Origen’s beliefs about the goal of human existence: that is to contemplate the Logos in his glorious divine condition, in his Form of God, and eventually be transformed according to this paradigmatic countenance. I would call the theory of *sym-morphism* his tenet that human being may undertake this transformation towards the ontological (not only moral) similarity with the Form of the Logos; perhaps another Origenian formulation of the ancient idea of deification.

It is also remarkable that the passage describes the economy of salvation by means of the same “form” language: the Logos – who before the incarnation existed in the spiritual and glorious Form of God – assumed the physical form of the servant in order to allow the servant to be formed according to the spiritual and radiant Form of the Logos. In the larger design of the economy of salvation, the event of the transfiguration plays the significant pedagogical function of revealing both the pre-incarnate Form of the Logos and the goal and paradigm of human destiny, its eschatological deified and glorious condition. Origen expresses the same idea through philosophical terminology in order to make it more palatable to his Hellenistic audience:

The highest good (*summum bonum*), towards which all rational nature is progressing, and which is also called the end of all things, is defined by very many even among philosophers in the following way, namely, that the highest good is to become as far as possible like God (*similem fieri deo*).47

A passage from the *Commentary on Matthew* unveils in similar terms the same doctrine of the final con-formity or *sym-morphism* with Christ’s Divine Form. Moreover, the text identifies Divine Image (εἰκών), Divine Form (μορφή), and the figure of the Son of Man in his eschatological glory. One of the chapters envisions the economy of salvation as the

46. See also Harl, *Origène* (n. 1), p. 256: “Il viendra dans la gloire une fois qu’il aura préparé ses disciples par sa venue sans forme ni beauté, se faisant comme eux pour qu’ils deviennent comme lui, conformes à l’image de sa gloire, une fois que lui-même s’est fait conforme au corps de notre humiliation en s’anéantissant et en prenant la forme d’esclave. Mais il viendra à sa forme de Dieu et il rendra ses disciples conformes à cette forme”.

47. Origen, *Princ.* 3.6.1, in H. Crouzel – M. Simonetti (eds.), *Origène: Traité des Principes*, vol. 4 (SC, 268), Paris, Cerf, 1980, p. 236). See also Plato, *Theaetetus* 176B. In *Princ.* 3.6.5, Origen depicts a progression of the human being towards the status of a glorious body. G. Dorival critiques G. Bostock’s idea that humans could become completely immaterial as God, an idea not enough supported textually and making less sense in Origen’s system; see G. Dorival, *Origène et la résurrection de la chair*, in Lies (ed.), *Origieniana Quarta* (n. 35), 291-321, pp. 312-315. For the notion of spiritual progress, see also Princ. 1.3.8, where the advance is explained in terms of purification, perfection, and receiving the blessedness of the Trinity, but not as identity with the Trinity. To the contrary, Origen avers that a human may decade from the condition of blessedness because of negligence or satiation. See also M. Harl, *Recherches sur l’origénisme d’Origène: La «satiété» (κόρος) de la contemplation comme motif de la chute des âmes*, in *Studia Patristica* 8 (1966) 373-405.
coming of the Son of Man to a status of dishonour, without form (εἴδος) and beauty, in order to restore human being to the conformity with the Divine Image (εἰκών) and Form (μορφή):

But He also comes [i.e., at the end of time] in glory (ἐν δόξῃ), having prepared the disciples through that epiphany of His which has no form (εἴδος) nor beauty; and, having become as they that they might become as He, “conformed to the image of His glory” (συμμόρφος τῆς εἰκόνος τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ), since He formerly became conformed (συμμόρφος) to “the body of our humiliation”, when He “emptied Himself and took upon Him the form of a servant” (μορφήν δούλου), He is restored to the image of God (ἀποκαθιστάται τε ἐπὶ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ μορφήν) and also makes them conformed unto it (ποιεῖ αὐτοὺς συμμόρφους αὐτῇ)⁴⁸.

The same sym-morphic theory is expressed by means of “image” vocabulary, in contexts in which imago/εἰκών and μορφή are synonymous and refer to Christ’s glorious countenance. In so doing, Origen portrays the prelapsarian Adam as conformed to the heavenly Image of the Logos, and the same Image functions as the model of any future re-creation of the human being. Thus, a biblical phrase conveying the same message – “predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom 8,29) – plays a significant role in Origenian Christology and anthropology. According to Origen, the human being was created ab initio according to the model of Christ, the heavenly Adam (Hom. Jer. 2,1,1), and it will be finally reshaped according to the Image of his or her Creator (Cels. 6,63), the Image of the heavenly man⁴⁹.

Nevertheless, the process of becoming images of Christ starts already in this life: “All therefore, who come to him and desire to become participants in the spiritual image by their progress ‘are renewed daily in the inner man’ according to the image of him who made them, so that they can be made ‘similar to the body of his glory’, but each one in proportion to his own powers”⁵⁰.

To reach this status, the human being has to be purified and contemplate the Image of the Logos, an epistemic process which entails real transformative effects⁵¹. Origen develops this idea from the Pauline thought.

⁴⁹. See, for instance, Origen, Hom. Gen. 9,2; Hom. Exod. 1; Hom. Ezek. 13,2; Hom. Ps. 38,2,1; Hom. Jer. 2,1; 8,2; 14,8. The distinction between the heavenly and earthly man comes from Paul’s Rom. 6,6 and 1 Cor. 15,49; see also Origen, Comm. Jn. 2,47.
⁵⁰. Origen, Hom. Gen. 1,13. Translation in R.E. HEINE, Homilies on Genesis and Exodus (FC, 71), Washington, DC, CUA Press, 2002, p. 66; see also Origen, Hom. Lk. 8,2-3. For the spiritual and divinized bodies of the saints at the eschaton, see also Princ. 3,6,4 and 3,6,8.
⁵¹. E.g., Origen, Comm. Jn. 32,340 and 357; Hom. Gen. 6,1; Hom. Ezek. 3,1; 14,3; Comm. Rom. 7,8,8; 9,1,11.
found in 2 Cor 3,18: “But we all, beholding the glory of the Lord with unveiled face, are transformed into the same image”. Thus, he explains that the heavenly image shines in the person in whom the Logos has cleansed, in advance, earthly impurity. Purified of its filth, therefore, the image which God inserted within the human being according to his Image will shine as well brightly: “And when he has blotted out all those colors in you which have been taken up from the reddish hues of malice, then that image which was created by God shines brightly in you (resplendent in te imago illa, quae a Deo creatae est)”.

Several documents obviously equate the terms of “Image” and “Form” as Christ’s divine names. However, there are a few slight differences in the way Origen employs them. While in one place he clearly interprets the phrase “Image of God” in a spiritual or allegorical way as denoting the Son’s unity of nature, will, and action with the Father, the Alexandrian never offers a spiritual or metaphorical meaning for the expression μορφή θεοῦ, which is employed almost in the manner of the pre-Nicene writers.

The following passage equates Divine Image and Form and expressly shows that the eschatological destiny of the human being is to be shaped according to Christ’s Divine Form:

Moreover, I would like to investigate what he has said, ‘conformed to the image of his own Son’ (conformes imaginis Filii sui). Into which form (formae) may they be said to be conformed? For we read that the Son of God was at one time in the form of God (in forma Dei), and at another time in the form of a slave (in forma servi). … If these [virtues] are clearly formed in them [i.e., Christians] (in eis formentur) having become conformed into his image (conformes imaginis) they will be seen in that form (illam formam) in which [Christ] is in the form of God (in forma Dei).

It is quite obvious in this passage that the Latin expressions in forma Dei and in forma servi translate the Paulinian ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ and μορ-

52. Hom. Gen. 13,4, in W.A. BAEHRENS – L. DOUTRELEAU (eds.), Origène: Homélies sur la Genèse (SC, 7 bis), Paris, Cerf, 1976, p. 328: imaginem caelestis in te splendescere facito. 53. Ibid. 54. At the level of the human being, the terms “image” and “form” are not synonymous. While the “image” in the human being denotes a positive aspect, an imitation of the divine, since it is the image of the Divine Image, and denotes the human soul, reason, inner man, etc., the “form” implies a negative connotation. It is used in the expression μορφή δούλου (“the form of the servant”) and refers to Adam’s fallen condition as opposed to the Divine Form. 55. In Princ. 1,2,6, for instance, Origen asserts that the expression “Image of the Father” denotes the unity of nature, will, and action between the Son and the Father. Some classical investigations of the concept of Divine Image generally interpret it through Princ. 1,2,6; e.g., RÉDU, La sagesse (n. 1), pp. 258-260. It is also interesting that human being as the image of the Image of God also receives symbolic meanings in Origen, namely denoting the soul, intellect, or interior man, but not a real image or shape (see n. 57). 56. Origen, Comm. Rom. 7,7,4 (PG, 14, col. 1122A-C); see also Comm. Rom. 7,11,2.
φὴν δούλον of Phil 2,6-7, while conforms imaginis Filii sui renders the Pauline formula σωματόμορφος τῆς εἰκόνος τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ of Rom 8,29.

We have to notice that, in these contexts, Origen’s understanding of the “Divine Image” (εἰκών) and of its “image” in the human being implies a real or substantial dimension, as a sort of an actual entity or manifestation. This meaning differs from the more common and known interpretation of the term “image” in the human being, an interpretation based on those Origenian passages in which the term denotes human reason, soul, or virtue, therefore not a real, actual entity. However, in the latter contexts Origen pursues a different hermeneutical goal, most likely determined by a polemical attitude against both anthropomorphists and those who believed, like Irenaeus of Lyons, that human body is an ontological reflection of God’s Image.

VI. JESUS’ ESCHATOLOGICAL BODY AND THE ESCHATOLOGICAL ROLE OF THE DIVINE FORM: A MODEL FOR ALL WHO BECOME CONFORM TO GOD’S IMAGE

Origen’s notion of “body” is more comprehensive than the modern understanding of this concept. He imagines various types of bodies depending on the nature or the degree of their materiality: while the bodies of the visible world are physical, those of the invisible world are spiritual and glorious, possessing a luminous and intelligible type of substance. Furthermore, human bodies will also become glorious and God-like at the eschaton, following the model of their Saviour who was the first to receive a glorified and deified body and soul. The resurrection and change of Christ’s body into a glorious condition represents the model of any human deification. Additionally, Origen asserts that Christ’s deified body will possess an “ethereal” and divine quality:

We affirm that his mortal body and the human soul in him received the greatest elevation not only by communion (κοινωνίᾳ) but by union and

57. According to Origen, the image of God in the human being may be either the soul (Hom. Gen. 13,3), the inner man (Hom. Gen. 1,13; Comm. Rom. 7,4,8), or the reason (Comm. Rom. 5,1,28). In Princ. 4,4,9, the “inner man” is further portrayed as the “rational man” who “is recalled into the image and likeness of God who created him”; translation in BUTTERWORTH, Origen (n. 44), p. 327. Additionally, Origen sometimes internalizes the image of the heavenly man which Adam lost as well as the lost crown of glory, and sees them as qualities of the soul or intellect; e.g., Hom. Ezek. 13,2.

58. See, e.g., Origen, Princ. 4,4,10, trans. BUTTERWORTH, Origen (n. 44), p. 327: “More-over, the marks of the divine image in man may be clearly discerned, not in the form of his body (non per effigiem corporis), which goes to corruption, but in the prudence of his mind, in his righteousness, his self-control, his courage, his wisdom, his discipline, in fact, in the whole company of virtues; which exist in God essentially, and may exist in man as a result of his own efforts and his imitation of God.”
intermingling (ἕνώσει καὶ ἀνακράσει), so that sharing in His divinity (τῆς ἐκείνου θειότητς κεκοινωνηκότα) he was transformed into God (εἰς θεὸν μεταβεβληκέναι). ... by the providence of God’s will the mortal quality of Jesus’ body should have been changed into an ethereal and divine quality (μεταλαμβανεῖν εἰς αἰθέριον καὶ θείαν ποιότητα)59.

The term “ethereal” was a central attribute used to describe the souls in ancient Greek science and philosophy. Thus, Galen of Pergamum and Plutarch defined the soul as a “luciform and ethereal body”:

As if we must speak of the substance (οὐσίας) of the soul, we must say one of two things: we must say either that it is this, as it were, luciform and ethereal body (αὐγοειδές τε καὶ αἰθερῶδες σῶμα), a view to which the Stoics and Aristotle are carried in spite of themselves, as the logical consequence (of their teachings), or that it is (itself) an incorporeal substance (δισώματον οὐσίαν) and this body is the first vehicle (ὀχημα τὸ πρῶτον), by means of which it establishes partnership with other bodies60.

It is a remarkable fact that Origen designates the eschatological nature of the soul through the same essential attributes “luciform” and “ethereal”, in addition to the biblical notions of “spiritual” and “glorious”. His text, therefore, is a synthesis of biblical images and terms with scientific and philosophical concepts employed in his time61. The term “ethereal”, which presupposes a refined and subtle materiality, clearly shows that Origen envisions Jesus’ resurrected body not as a pure abstraction but as

59. Origen, *Cels*. 3.41 (SC, 136; pp. 96-98). See also Origen, *Princ.* 2.3.7, H. CROUZEL – M. SIMONETTI (eds.), *Origène: Traité des Principes*, vol. I (SC, 252), Paris, Cerf, 1978, p. 272: “[T]he bodily substance (substantia corporalis) itself, being united to the best and purest spirits, will be changed (permutata), in proportion to the quality or merits of those who wear it, into an ethereal condition (in aetherium statum), according to the apostle’s saying, ‘and we shall be changed,’ and will shine with light (refulgebit)”.


61. The term αὐγοειδές, for instance, represents a topos of Late Antiquity as it occurs as well in various other authors as an attribute of the soul, e.g., in Philipponus, *In De anima* 18.26; Plutarch, *De sera numinis vindicta* 26.565C; Proclus, *In Timaeus* 33BC; Iamblicos, *De mysteriis* 5,10,3; Hermias, *In Phaedrus* 69,18C; Symplicius, *In Physika* 615,31-35; et al. In a similar way, Philo characterizes the invisible and noetic world through this concept: “for the intelligible (τό νοητόν) as far surpasses the visible (τοῦ ὅρωτον) in the brilliancy of its radiance (λαμπρότερόν τε καὶ αὐγοειδέστερον), as sunlight assuredly surpasses darkness”. Philo, *De opificio* 30; text and translation in F.H. COULSON – G.H. WHITAKER, *Philo*, vol. I (LCL, 226), Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1981, pp. 24-25.
a glorious, pneumatic, and ethereal corporeality. It is an entity possessing a luminous nature, a body of a refined and radiant materiality. Additionally, as Crouzel observed, at the foundation of this transformation of the body lays a “philosophical axiom, which he [i.e., Origen] takes for granted, of the variable plasticity and instability of all matter”.

According to Origen, every human body in heaven will reach a glorious angelic or divine status similar to Christ’s body. This event takes place at the eschaton, since “perfection comes at the end”, following the completion of all the works of the divine economy. After resurrection, human bodies will become spiritual and permeated by God’s divine glory:

And now we must certainly ask whether in the consummation of all things, when ‘God shall be all in all’, the whole of bodily nature (corporis natura) will consist of one species (una specie) and whether the only quality of body (qualitas corporis) will be that which will shine with that unspeakable glory (inenarrabili gloria fulgebìt) which we must believe will belong to the spiritual body (spiritalis corporis).

Crouzel analyzes the eschatological evolution of the human being into its congruency with Christ’s glorious resurrected body, and he defines humans as images of this image of the Image. The trichotomic constitution of the human being – body, intellect, spirit – is also transfigured at


64. Origen, *Princ.* 3,6,8 (SC, 268, pp. 250-252); trans. Butterworth, *Origen* (n. 44). See also *Princ.* 3,6,4 (SC, 268, p. 242): “So far then as our understanding can grasp it, we believe that the quality of a spiritual body (qualitatem spiritualis corporis) is something such as will make a fitting habitation not only for all saints and perfected souls but also for that ‘whole creation’ which is to be ‘delivered from the boundage of corruption’. Of this body the same apostle has also said that ‘we have a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens,’ that is, in the dwelling-places of the blest. From this statement we may then form a conjecture of what great purity, what extreme fineness, what great glory (gloriae) is the quality of that body (qualitas corporis), by comparing it with those bodies which, although heavenly and most splendid (splendidissima), are yet made with hands and visible. For of that body it is said that it is a house not made with hands but ‘eternal in the heavens’, … From this comparison we may gain an idea how great is the beauty, how great the splendour (splendor) and how great the brightness (fulgor) of a spiritual body”. Trans. BUTTERWORTH, *Origen* (n. 44). See also *Princ.* 2,2,2; 2,10,3 (SC, 252, pp. 248; 380); 3,6,6 (SC, 268, pp. 246-248). *Prin* 3,6,6 equally declares that the spiritual and glorious condition of the human body is eternal.

the eschaton: the intellect lives according to the spirit (a gift God gives to all), and is vested with an ethereal body. However, in its transfiguration, according to Origen, human body preserves its individual outline which he calls “corporeal shape” (εἶδος σωματικόν), it is seen as common to the earthly and resurrected body, and will individualize the resurrected ones by preserving their previous distinctive bodily attributes.

Nevertheless, many other passages show that the model of the human resurrected body will be the Form of God or his “body of glory”, a Pauline term from Phil 3,21 referring to the same pre-incarnate condition of the Son of God, and not to Christ’s resurrected body. In the same vein of thought, resurrection is also seen as a new birth and a new baptism through fire and Spirit, when people will become “conformed to the glorious body of Christ sitting on his throne of glory”.

All these passages clearly demonstrate that the con-formity with the Logos is more than a spiritual union, as Crouzel equally demonstrates in the last chapters of his Théologie de l’Image. In fact, it is an ontological similarity with the Divine Form. As Crouzel also observes, Origen assumes that the eschatological human being receives the complete likeness with the Divine Image as well as the Form of God which Christ had before assuming a human form.

The theory of con-formity or sym-morphism, therefore, is particularly applicable at the eschaton. The aforementioned passage from Origen’s Commentary on Matthew identifies Divine Image (εἰκών), Divine Form (μορφή), and the figure of the Son of Man in his eschatological glory.

66. Ibid., p. 263.
67. See H. CROUZEL, La doctrine origénienne du corps ressuscité, in Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique 31 (1980) 175-200 and 241-266. In his monograph on Origen, Crouzel counts three theories through which Origen expressed his doctrine about the identity between the resurrected and the earthly body: (1) through material substance; (2) through the seminal reason (ratio seminalis, logos spermatikos); cf. Princ. 2,10,3 (SC 252,380); (3) through the corporeal form (εἶδος σωματικόν); see CROUZEL, Origène (n. 1), 326-330. Origen developed this theory for instance in his Commentary on Psalms (Fr. Ps. 1,5), and the fragment was preserved in Epiphanius, Panarion 64,14.
68. Phil 3,21 asserts that, at the eschaton, Christ will resurrect human bodies of humility and transform them into bodies con-formed to his body of glory (σύμμορφον τῷ σώματι τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ). Origen uses extensively this passage, for instance in Orat. 22,4, Comm. Mt. 13,21; 15,23-24; 17,30; H.Ps. 81,1.
69. Origen, Comm. Mt. 15,23 (GCS 10, p. 417). See also Comm. Mt. 13,21;27 (GCS 10, pp. 239;254), and Philocalia 3,21: “made conform to his body of glory”.
70. Origen, Comm. Mt. 15,24 (GCS, 10, p. 420).
73. Origen, Comm. Mt. 12,29.
At the end of his earthly existence, the Son of Man has also his constitution restored to the Form of God. As Origen expresses it, while “He formerly became conformed (σύμμορφος) to ‘the body of our humiliation’, when He ‘emptied Himself and took upon Him the form of a servant’ (μορφήν δούλου), He is restored [afterwards] to the image of God (ἀποκαθίσταται τε ἐπὶ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ μορφήν)”74. In the Kingdom, as Christ does no longer subsist in the slave’s form but in the Form of God, he will make humans, too, adapt to his heavenly countenance: while He is restored to the Image of God, He “also makes them conformed unto it (ποιεῖ αὐτοὺς συμμόρφους αὐτῇ)”75. Another passage supports the same idea: “If these [virtues] are clearly formed in them [i.e., Christians] (in eis formentur) having become conformed into his image (conformes imaginis) they will be seen in that form (illum formam) in which [Christ] is in the form of God (in forma Dei)”76.

To conclude, the Divine Form is present in a certain way in all the resurrected bodies and fashions them in a spiritual and luminous way. Christ’s body was the first to be deified and become a model of all the other resurrected bodies. Most likely, the μορφή θεοῦ is different from the corporeal shape (εἶδος σωματικόν) of each individual body, Christ’s included, and will mark and deify, through its radiant glory, all human bodies and their corporeal shapes.

VII. ORIGEN ON THE INEFFABLE NATURE OF GOD THE FATHER

Like Justin and Clement, Origen assumes that God the Father is ineffable and incomprehensible, and declines any anthropomorphic trait from his description77:

75. Ibid.
77. I prefer the classical terms of apophaticism and cataphaticism, following Harl and Crouzel, and unlike Mortley who denies a via negativa in Origen’s theology while qualifying it as a mystical theology of grace; cf. Harl, Origène (n. 1), pp. 88-91; CROUZEL, Origène et la «connaissance mystique» (n. 1), pp. 85-154, esp. p. 89; and R. Mortley, Origen: Christian Mysticim without the via negativa, in his From Word to Silence II: The Way of Negation, Christian and Greek, Bonn, Hanstein, 1986, 63-84, pp. 82-84. See also J.T. CHIRBAN, Developmental Stages in Eastern Orthodox Christianity, in K.T. Wilber et al. (eds.), Transformations of Consciousness: Conventional and Contemplative Perspectives on Development, Boston, Shambala, 1986, 285-314 and 322-323, who also describes Origen’s theology as merely cataphatic. I would regard the two ways as both valid in Origen.
Having then refuted, to the best of our ability, every interpretation which suggests that we should attribute to God any material characteristics (qui corporeum aliquid de deo intellegi suggerit), we assert that in truth he is incomprehensible and immeasurable (deum inconprehensibilem esse atque inaestimabilem). For whatever may be the knowledge which we have been able to obtain about God, whether by perception or by reflection, we must of necessity believe that he is far and away better than our thoughts about him (multis longe modis eum meliorem esse ab eo quod sensimus necesse est credi).

Rebecca Lyman put together a list of the terms used by Origen to describe God the Father: intellect (νοῦς), unbegotten (ἀγένητος), simple (ἁπλοῦς), one (ἕν, μονάς), incorporeal (ἀσώματος), unchangeable (ἄτρεπτος), invisible (ἀόρατος). One may notice that some of these terms are apophatic, a feature which he shares with Philo and particularly with Clement. Origen equally mentions “the unspeakable, unnameable, unutterable substance of the Father” and sometimes employs a similar negative language which describes God as beyond mind and substance: ἡ πέκεινα νου καὶ οὐσία.

A relevant question at this point, however, is whether Origen extends the attribute of absolute incorporeality to the whole Trinity. A few passages from De principiis expressly avow that it is only the substance of the Trinity that subsists in a completely immaterial and incorporeal manner:

as he follows the pre-Nicene tradition which distinguishes between the perfectly invisible and incomprehensible Father, and the Son who owns a Divine Form. Origen’s theology is not one-sided, and cannot be defined as either apophatic or cataphatic. Furthermore, one cannot affirm even in what regards the Father that Origen applies an exclusively apophatic theology, because he sometimes employs certain positive terms to describe God the Father. Likewise, the theology of the Logos is not exclusively cataphatic, since he is also divine, and in some places Origen uses apophatic terms to portray the Son.

78. E.g., Prin. 1.1.5 (SC, 252, pp. 96-98); trans. BUTTERWORTH, Origen (n. 44). See also Comm. Jn. 13.123-152 and many other texts. For modern scholarship, see STROUMSA, The Incorporeality of God (n. 5), pp. 345-358; AF HALLSTROM, Fides Simpliciorum (n. 4), pp. 64-69; J.F. DECHOW, Origen and Corporeality: The Case of Methodius’ On the Resurrection, in DALY, Origeniana Quinta (n. 2), 509-518; J.T. LIENHARD, Origen and the Crisis of the Old Testament in the Early Church, in Pro Ecclesia 9 (2000), no. 3, 355-366; TORJENSEN, The Enscripturation of Philosophy (n. 13). See also Origen’s difficulties with the term “incorporeal” (ἀσώματος) which does not appear in Scripture or the apostolic teaching in Prin. Pref. 8 (SC 252, p. 86). For the radical incorporeality of God’s nature, see, for instance, Prin. 1.1.6 (SC 252, p. 100): “God therefore must not be thought to be in any kind of body, nor to exist in a body”. Trans. BUTTERWORTH, Origen (n. 44).

79. LYMAN, Christology and Cosmology (n. 1), p. 47.

80. Origen, Prin. 4.4.1; trans. BUTTERWORTH, Origen (n. 44), p. 315.

But if it is impossible by any means to maintain this proposition, namely, that any being (\textit{natura}), with the exception of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, can live apart from a body (\textit{corpus}), then logical reasoning compels us to believe that, while the original creation was of rational beings (\textit{rationabiles naturas}), it is only in idea and thought that a material substance (\textit{materialum substantiam}) is separable from them, and that though this substance seems to have been produced for them or after them, yet never have they lived or do they live without it; for we shall be right in believing that life without a body (\textit{incorporea uita}) is found in the Trinity alone\textsuperscript{82}.

However, the authenticity of these phrases is still debated among the specialists in the field. These phrases come out only in Latin in Rufinus’ translation, and only in \textit{De principiis}. Yet the scholars have shown that “of particular concern to Rufinus was Origen’s teaching on the Trinity and the bodily resurrection”\textsuperscript{83}. Because of his will to make Origen congruent with the post-Nicene theological paradigm, Rufinus altered several passages about the Trinity. Consequently, some scholars even argued that these Trinitarian passages from \textit{De principiis} suffered as well alterations from Rufinus’ pen to be made in line with the post-Nicene Trinitarian language, and they may not represent Origen’s genuine vision\textsuperscript{84}.

Other passages raise the same problem. Origen states as well in \textit{De principiis} that one cannot find something corporeal in the hypostasis of the Son, which comes in the same line with the the assertion on the absolute

\textsuperscript{82.} Origen, \textit{Princ.} 2,2,2 (SC, 252, pp. 246-248). See also \textit{Princ.} 1,6,4 (SC, 252, p. 206): “we believe that to exist without material substance (\textit{materiali substantia}) apart from any association with a bodily element (\textit{corporeae adiectionis}) is a thing that belongs only to the nature of God (\textit{dei nature}), that is, of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit”; trans. BUTTERWORTH, \textit{Origen} (n. 44). See also \textit{Princ.} 4,3,15 (SC, 268, p. 396-398): “But the substance of the Trinity (\textit{substantia trinitatis}) … must not be believed either to be a body or to exist in a body, but to be wholly incorporeal (\textit{ex toto incorporea})”. Trans. BUTTERWORTH, \textit{Origen} (n. 44), p. 312. See also \textit{Princ.} 4,4,1; 4,4,5: \textit{natura trinitatis} (SC, 268, pp. 402-412). The expression \textit{ex toto incorporea} (wholly, perfectly incorporeal) is an important specification since sometimes Origen characterizes other spiritual entities, too, like human souls, as incorporeal (\textit{incorporalis}); e.g. in \textit{Hom. Gen.} 1,13 (SC, 7bis, p.).

\textsuperscript{83.} See G.W. BARKLEY, \textit{Introduction}, in his translation of \textit{Origen, Homilies on Leviticus} (FaCh, 83), Washington, DC, CUA Press, 1990, p. 21. As R.E. Heine shows, it is certain that Rufinus altered primarily Origen’s Trinitarian expressions which he considered contradictory and, consequently, altered by heretics, for instance on the fact that the Father and the Son are of one substance; see Rufinus, \textit{Liber de adulteratione librorum Origenis}; \textit{Praef. ad Heraclitum}; \textit{Praef. De Princ.} 1,3, as quoted in HEINE, \textit{Origen, Homilies on Genesis and Exodus} (n. 50), pp. 33-35. In his study on Rufinus’s translation of Pamphilus’s \textit{Apology for Origen}, P. NAUTIN concludes that Rufinus altered the discussion of the Trinity, while everything else was almost literal; see P. NAUTIN, \textit{Origène: Sa vie et son œuvre}, Paris, Beauchesne, 1977, pp. 150-152. In general on Rufinus’ translation, see G. BARDY, \textit{Recherches sur l’histoire du texte et des versions latines du De principiis d’Origène}, Paris, Champion, 1923.

\textsuperscript{84.} E.g., E. De Faye considered particularly these \textit{De principiis} sentences on the perfect incorporeality of the Trinity as Rufinian insertions, and therefore spurious; see \textit{De Faye, Origen and His Work}, London, G. Allen & Unwin, 1926, pp. 84, 153.
incorporeality of the whole Trinity. Likewise, another place mentions that the Son is generated by the Father in an incorporeal way from the Father’s will. But these sentences come out again in De principiis, in Rufinus’ translation, and are still ambiguous, since Origen describes as “incorporeal” a large spectrum of beings. The whole question, therefore, remains uncertain.

However, Origen’s Trinitarian model implies different ontological degrees, in spite of the fact that all the three persons are considered divine, a vision which is more in tune with the pre-Nicene Trinitarian theology, for instance with Clement of Alexandria. Commentators have observed that Origen’s Trinitarian schema is either vertical – Father, Son, Holy Spirit – or a triangle in which the Father is ontologically on a different degree than the Son and the Spirit. The following passage from his Commentary on John clearly demonstrates this position: “This is why we say the Savior and the Holy Spirit transcend all created beings, not by comparison, but by their exceeding pre-eminence. The Father exceeds the Savior as much (or even more) as the Savior himself and the Holy Spirit exceed the rest.”

Modern scholars have noticed that, while the unity of the Trinity is expressed in post-Nicene times by means of emphasized ontological terms (especially ousia), Origen describes the unity between the Father and the Son (as Simonetti observes, the Spirit is not mentioned in these passages) in such active-dynamic terms as participation, will, and love. It is also significant that the Trinitarian paradigm which includes a hierarchy and degrees between the divine persons comes in the reports of Epiphanius and Jerome in which they accuse Origen of heresy. In spite

85. Origen, Princ. 1.2.2 (SC, 252, p. 112): ne forte ipsa ὑπόστασις (id est substantia) eius corporeum aliquid habeat.
86. See Origen, Princ. 4.4.1.
87. For a detailed analysis of Origen’s Trinitarian view, see J. Rius-Camps, El dinamismo trinitario en la divinización de los seres racionales según Origenes, Rome, Pont. Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1970; and Simonetti, Note sulla teologia trinitaria (n. 40).
88. Simonetti, Note sulla teologia trinitaria (n. 40), p. 292.
90. Simonetti, Note sulla teologia trinitaria (n. 40), p. 275. See also Rius-Camps, El dinamismo trinitario (n. 87). For Origen, see for instance Princ. 1.2.6, or Cels. 8.12, in which he affirms that the Father and the Son are two distinct hypostases but one in terms of harmony (τῇ συμφωνίᾳ) and will. Considering the ontological language, the case of ousia is central; generally, there are two passages in which Origen apparently employs the term as denoting the common divine substance of the Father and Son, as in post-Nicene times: Comm. Jn. 10,37(21), which seems to mention a common ousia, and Comm. Heb. (PG 14, col. 1308) in which Origen uses homoousios. However, Crouzel affirms that, since the interpretation of the first passage is not clear and the second passage is not accepted as authentic by several scholars (e.g., Simonetti, Note sulla teologia trinitaria [n. 40], p. 285), the prevalent conclusion is that Origen believed that the Father and the Son are also distinct in ousia (see Crouzel, Théologie de l’image [n. 65], p. 104).
91. See Epiphanius, Panarion 64,4,3; Ancoratus 63,3; Jerome, Contra Joannem Hierosolymitanum 7; Ad Avitum 2,6; Contra Rufinum 2.
of the fact that their reports emphasize the epistemic dimension, and may also not represent Origen’s accurate thought and terminology (for instance, it is important whether Origen used the term “see” or “know”, a refined distinction in his epistemology of the divine realm, etc.), the hierarchy is mentioned. Yet, it is in tone with Origen’s vertical schema, and most likely strikingly distinct from the post-Nicene conception about the equality of essence and rejection of any hierarchy.

We have to notice that this Trinitarian vision entails a significant consequence. Within this Trinitarian paradigm, the Son is differently manifested than the Father, he is less concealed and un-grasped, and in that realm he is manifested in a form which human beings are not able to perceive as a corporeal shape.

VIII. The Divine Form as Christ’s Glory and Visible Divinity

At the end of this examination of the various texts and situations in which Origen employs the expression μορφὴ θεοῦ, we may raise the question regarding the reference of this phrase. What is the nature of μορφὴ θεοῦ according to Origen? A first observation is that he definitely rejected any form of anthropomorphism. However, at the opposite pole, Origen never uses the expression μορφὴ θεοῦ as a sheer metaphor, allegory, or empty stylistic parlance. A certain sense of the term μορφή may lead into this direction, since in some contexts this Greek word may mean “modality”, “manner”, or “way”, and the expression ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ might be translated as “in the modality of God”, “in the way of God”, “as a God”. However, as seen in Origen’s commentaries of the episode of the transfiguration, the apostles did not contemplate this form in a completely invisible way; it was not a mere feeling or thought but a real manifestation in front of their spiritual eyes, a perceptible reality which can be apprehended. Moreover, since Origen never qualifies μορφὴ θεοῦ as sheer metaphor or allegory, it would be a methodological mistake to interpret the phrase as a metaphor or as an empty stylistic parlance.

Consequently, the reference of this expression should reside somewhere in between anthropomorphism and sheer metaphor. As the above pages have shown, Origen’s pre-Nicene context may offer a solution. We have seen that Justin and Clement viewed the Father as formless and the Son possessing a Divine Form that may be contemplated in a noetic manner, and this position matches also with Origen’s texts. Additionally, Origen shares with Clement a hierarchical vision of the world and Trinity. In creation, there are many degrees of materiality and incorporeality. Angels are sometimes portrayed as incorporeal (but this is true only from human perspective), while they are actually beings possessing a spiritual and ethereal corporeality.
Nevertheless, Origen’s conception is slightly different from Clement’s. While Clement envisions the Divine Form as an exceedingly refined noetic shape close to perfect immateriality, a form which primarily the protoctists are allowed to contemplate, while it is unclear whether humans have access to it, Origen descends the Divine Form to earth where the disciples have a direct access to it, and identifies it with God’s glory and luminous divinity manifest in heaven and on the mount of transfiguration.

Indeed, Origen frequently equates the phrase μορφὴ θεοῦ with Christ’s divine glory and divinity. Divinity, according to him, is not an imperceptible and abstract essence but a noetic light, a real entity possessing a genuine manifestation. In this way, a few Origenian passages identify the Divine Form which the apostles contemplated on the mount of transfiguration with Christ’s radiant divinity. In a text from Contra Celsum Origen equates divine glory with Christ’s divinity, and defends the standpoint that the luminous apparition on the mountain was Jesus’ divine condition. The text begins with a reference to the “divinity within him [i.e., Jesus] which was hidden from the multitude (τὴν ἔνδον καὶ ἀποκεκρυμένην τοῖς πολλοῖς θειότητα)” and continues by depicting the external manifestation of this hidden luminous divinity in the event of the transfiguration:

For not even with the apostles themselves and disciples was he always present or always apparent (αἰτὶ συνήν ἢ ἀεὶ ἔφανεντο), because they were unable to receive his divinity (αὐτοῦ χωρῆσαι τῇν θεορίαν) without some periods of relief. After he had accomplished the work of his incarnation his divinity (θειότης) was more brilliant (λαμπροτέρα).

The same idea seems to come out in an aforementioned passage in which Origen states that, on the mount of transfiguration, Christ “is known in his divinity (θεολογούμενον) and seen in the form of God (ἐν τῇ τοῦ θεοῦ μορφῇ...θεωρούμενον) according to their knowledge. It is before such

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92. Christ’s divinity and glory are clearly equated also in Com. Eph. 3,16-17. See also Harl., Origène (n. 1), p. 251: “La gloire du Christ est sa divinité”.

93. Cels. 2,64 (SC, 132, p. 436). See also the same view on divinity in Cels. 1,60, 1,66, 2,8, 2,34, 7,17, 8,42; Hom. Lev. 2,3. Likewise, divinity is clearly conceived in Cels. 4,5 (SC, 136, p. 198) as a sort of grace able to dwell in a person: “The power and divinity of God come to dwell among men through the man whom God wills to choose and in whom He finds room”. Trans. BUTTERWORTH, Origen (n. 44).

94. Cels. 2,65 (SC, 132, p. 438). For the light of divinity, see also Cels. 1,60 (SC, 132, p. 238); Princ. 4,4,9 (SC, 268, p. 424); et al. Of course, there are also some passages which can be interpreted as referring to Christ’s divine nature, e.g., Cels. 1,47;56 (SC, 132, pp. 200:228); 3,28 (SC, 136, p. 68). It is also remarkable that Cels. 7,46 (SC, 150, p. 126) equates God’s eternal power (ἀΐδιος δύναμις) with his divinity. See also Cels. 4,5: 6,4; 7,17; Princ. 2,6,1. Additionally, in Princ. 4,4,9, Origen equates the intellectual light with the divine nature (divina natura) worshiped and contemplated by the heavenly powers and the purified human minds.
as these that Jesus is transfigured, not before any of those below.”95. These texts demonstrate that Origen did not envision divinity as an abstract genus or essence, or an intangible essence isolated in heaven and accessible only to the divine Persons. To the contrary, he rather conceived it as a manifest reality of a luminous constitution, a divine appearance in history, either as a hidden divine power, or as the divine glory which the apostles contemplated on the mount of transfiguration.

Considering once more the nature of the Divine Form, is it endowed with a shape? It is significant to notice that Origen never asserts that the Logos is deprived of μορφή and divine glory, his light of noetic nature. Additionally, Rufinus generally translates μορφή through forma, as for instance De principiis 1,2,8 (erat in forma Dei) demonstrates. In general, the text of De principiis itself does not seem to make God deficient of forma, therefore of μορφή. In all instances in which Crombie’s ANF translation, for example, asserts that God does not have form, colour, and magnitude, the original Latin words are habitus, color, and magnitudo96. Furthermore, De principiis 1,2,2 [SC, 252, p. 112] clearly shows that habitus, color, and magnitudo are always associated with corporeality (either sensible or intelligible)97. Additionally, the same passage avows that the hypostasis of the Son does not possess these attributes because it is beyond body98. A similar word to habitus is schema, likewise a term specific exclusively to the realm of corporeality, which includes the spiritual bodies of angels, equally endowed with a schema99. Unlike these attributes, the term forma is applied to the divine realm, beyond corporeality; in the expression forma Dei, it becomes a divine title associated with the divine and incorporeal sphere. The Son in his hypostasis cannot possess a habitus and a schema (shape and figure) as well as colour and measure, since he is incorporeal (Princ. 1,2,2), but he possesses a forma Dei100.

How was then possible to be seen by the apostles? How will be possible for all the resurrected to become con-form with God’s Form at the eschaton, and what would be in this case the real meaning of the doctrine

96. See, for example, Princ. 1,2,2; 1,2,4; 2,4,3; 4,1,27.
97. See also Princ. 2,4,3 (SC, 252, p. 284): “For in no other way can anything be seen (uideri) except by its shape (habitum) and size (magnitudinem) and colour (colorem), which are properties of bodies (specialia corporum)”. Trans. BUTTERWORTH, Origen (n. 44). See also Princ. 2,10,2 (SC, 252, pp. 376-378).
98. Likewise, in Cels. 6,71 (SC, 147, p. 358) Origen conceives of the Logos as immaterial, incorporeal, and invisible.
99. See Princ. 2,10,2. The Latin schema obviously renders the Greek σχῆμα, “form”, “shape”, “figure”. See also the aforementioned assumption of Clement that God is ἀσχημότιτος.
100. See also his affirmation that Christ is the invisible Image (ἀόρατος εἰκόν) of the invisible Father (Princ. 4,4,1; GCS, 22, p. 349).
of sym-morphism? As Origen affirms, prophets and apostles did not “see” (uidere) God in a sensible way with corporeal eyes, but they knew (nosse, cognoscere) him, or contemplated his noetic Form in a noetic way\textsuperscript{101}. Most likely, this knowledge is beyond shape and measure. Likewise, the Form of God, associated only with the Son, is a reality belonging to the divine realm in which the ordinary categories of shape and measure do not function. This fact does not imply that the Form of God is a mere metaphor, but that it is a reality which cannot be perceived by the ordinary capacities of perception and thought, and cannot be expressed in the frame and categories of ordinary knowledge and language. To the contrary, when human beings are able to cross the boundaries of everyday experience from seeing to knowing (to noetic perception), the Form of God may be perceived as a reality of a radiant phenomenality. Moreover, given Origen’s Trinitarian hierarchy, which echoes other pre-Nicene visions, for instance Clement, this Form may be a measured shape from the Father’s perspective, as only the Father perfectly knows the Son as the Son also knows the Father. And lastly, in what concerns the resurrected human beings, the imprint of this glorious Form will be marked in a certain way on their spiritual bodies in order to make them sym-morphous with the one who created them in his Image, and saved them by re-creating them as images of his glorious Form.

IX. THE SHAPELESS FORM OF GOD AS DIVINE ESSENCE IN POST-NICENE TIMES

A final observation should be done in this discussion with regard to the post-Nicene understanding of the expression “Form of God”. It is very striking that such main post-Nicene authors as Athanasius, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and Augustine never use the expression μορφὴ θεοῦ in Origen’s way, which is distinct and actually close to the traditional pre-Nicene understanding of this phrase. To the contrary, in a programmatic way, they interpret μορφὴ θεοῦ as a mere expression denoting the divine essence\textsuperscript{102}. Among them, Basil and Gregory explicitly confirm


\textsuperscript{102} My investigation of the way Athanasius of Alexandria, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and Augustine of Hippo – to mention briefly some of the most illustrious post-Nicene names – use the Pauline expression μορφὴ θεοῦ (Phil 2,6) led me to the conclusion that,
the identity between μορφὴ θεοῦ and the divine nature. While Basil states, "[i]n my opinion, I say that existing in the form of God (Phil 2,6) means the same as ‘existing in the substance of God’,"103, Gregory plainly affirms that, “the ‘form of God’ is certainly the same thing as his essence” (ἡ δὲ μορφὴ τοῦ θεοῦ ταυτὸν τῇ οὐσίᾳ πάντως ἐστίν)104. This common interpretation is surprising and explainable only as a strong reaction in the context of the Arian controversy. All these authors reacted against Arianism, because assuming a form of the Son would imply a lesser status than the Father’s, and, therefore, at least the subordination of the Son if not even an ontological condition less than divine.

X. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The concept of “Divine Form” plays a central and catalytic role in Origen’s Christology. The Alexandrian preserves a pre-Nicene hierarchy within the Trinity, which implies ontological degrees. While the Father is concealed and portrayed by means of apophatic terms, the Son possesses a Divine Form. However, in spite of being more manifested than the perfect invisibility of the Father, the Son’s Divine Form is not part of the corporeal realm (either angelic or of the visible world), which implies shape, colour, and measure, the defining categories of human everyday knowledge and experience. Consequently, although a certain inscrutable dimension characterizes the Divine Form, too, it is not a sheer abstraction, metaphor, allegory, or stylistic parlance.

In this way, this study argues that Origen’s vision should be placed in a third category in between anthropomorphism and the post-Nicene position of a perfectly formless divinity of the Son, namely, within the context of the pre-Nicene speculations on the intelligible or noetic Divine Form. Such authors as Justin, Irenaeus, Clement, Tertullian, and Origen himself rejected anthropomorphism and considered instead that Christ owned a noetic Divine Form. Nevertheless, since this significant step forward from anthropomorphism implies ontological degrees within the divine realm, a more manifested condition of the Son, and even his subordination to the Father, it will be abandoned at the time of Arian controversy. Furthermore, the main post-Nicene theologians, from Athanasius to Basil of Caesarea,

in the dozens of instances they employ the expression, its meaning is constantly denoting the divine nature. In post-Nicene times, the phrase becomes a sheer parlance commonly indicating Jesus’ divine essence shared with the Father.


to Gregory of Nyssa, to Augustine, will simply identify the Form of God with the common divine essence, with God’s *ousia*.

In contradistinction, Origen never identified the expression of *μορφὴ θεοῦ* with the divine essence (substance or nature) as the post-Nicene writers explicitly and programmatically did, but he always related it exclusively with the Son, as the pre-Nicene authors. Furthermore, he associated it with a Trinitarian conception implying hierarchy and ontological degrees), with the doctrine of a polymorphic Logos, and the vision of a universe composed of many layers of materiality and incorporeality, all of them shared with other pre-Nicene writers.

In spite of the fact that the Origenian concept of *μορφὴ θεοῦ* encapsulates a certain semantic ambiguity – whether it does or does not denote a refined noetic outline accessible only from the Father’s perspective – it is described as a divine light and glory, and thus reveals a clear luminous reality. This form is not an abstract essence or genre, and Origen’s Christology is not only a doctrine about a sheer abstract and intellectual Logos invisibly manifested in the prophets, Scriptures, and the hearts of the Christians while inviting them to a purely spiritual encounter and union with God. Yet, Origen’s Christology involves an obvious phenomenology of the Form of God in which visibility plays a central role. The Logos subsists in a Divine Form which the angels enjoy and the most advanced apostles and disciples are allowed to contemplate. It is noetic, luminous, beyond any corporeal shape, colour, and measure. Residing beyond the corporeal realm, and subsisting in between corporeal shapes and Father’s perfect invisibility, the *μορφὴ θεοῦ* is envisioned in a way closer to the pre-Nicene doctrines of the noetic Form of God than to the post-Nicene view according to which the Son shares the essence and ontological condition of the Father.

In what concerns the presence of the Form of God in the economy of the Logos, Origen assumes that the Son possesses different forms in addition to the highest one, the Form of God in which the Son subsists in the bosom of the Father. In the incarnation, this Form is concealed within his body, and is brightly manifested on the mount of transfiguration as divine glory or divinity. Through his incarnation and economy, the Logos intends to restore in human beings the likeness of this Form which Adam lost in Paradise. In so doing, the Logos calls humans to recover their *con-formity* and *sym-morphism* with his Divine Form. At the eschaton, this *sym-morphism* will be accomplished as human beings will recover their likeness with the Divine Form and become radiant as their model.

This transformative language and the polymorphism of the Logos equally reflects a common pre-Nicene Christological view in which the pre-incarnate Christ owns a Divine Form, takes it off, and assumes various other shapes – angelic or human – in order to make himself accessible, to guide and recover all, and make all conform to his Divine Image or Form.
However, this doctrine regarding the changing forms of the Logos will also fade away once it will no longer be allowed by the second ecumenical council of Constantinople in 553.

**Abstract.** — The article investigates Origen’s Christology from a less explored perspective, through the concept of *morphē theoū*, exclusively associated in his writings with Jesus Christ. The study argues that the concept should be understood in a third way in between anthropomorphism and the post-Nicene position of a perfectly formless divinity, namely, through the pre-Nicene theories on the noetic Form of God. While the post-Nicene writers interpreted *morphē theoū* in a programmatic way as the common essence of the Trinity, pre-Nicene theologians employed it exclusively in connection with the Son, and placed its discussion in the context of a hierarchical model of the Trinity which admits internal ontological degrees. Thus, although the Form of God is placed within the sphere of the divine, beyond the corporeal realm characterized by the categories of shape, colour, and measure, it is however more manifested than the perfectly invisible Father. The Form of God is contemplated in a noetic way as the divine glory on the mount of transfiguration and in the kingdom of God. By means of this concept, Origen elaborates a complex Christological vision theorizing on the pre-incarnate condition of the Logos, his incarnation and return to the first status as well as on the economy of salvation in which the Logos descends as Divine Image to reconstruct, according to his Form, those who once were created according to it. Likewise, the goal of human justified existence becomes the knowledge and contemplation of Christ’s Divine Form, while in the kingdom humans will be *con-formed* to this archetype and become its luminous imitations.