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IN WESTERN CIVILIZATION**



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Origenian, English and Kabbalistic Influences in Johann Wilhelm Petersen's Apokatastasis Doctrine

The Case of *Mysterion Apokatastaseos Panton*

ELISA BELLUCCI, HALLE*

1. Introduction

In 1698 a treatise called *The Eternal Gospel of the Universal Return of All Creatures* appeared anonymously in Germany.¹ Its contents were in a certain way quite radical and problematic. The text supported the idea of universal salvation at the end of time, the apokatastasis, an idea which cannot go unnoticed if one considers the condemnation of such a position in the article 17 of the *Confessio Augustana*.² The treatise was authored by Johanna Eleonora Petersen (1644–1724) – as some of her contemporaries immediately recognized –, a woman who developed her ideas and theological positions inside the so-called Pietistic movement.³ Two years later

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1 Das Ewige Evangelium Der Allgemeinen Wiederbringung Aller Creaturen./Wie solche unter andern In rechter Erkänntuß Des Mitlern Zustandes der Seelen nach dem Tode tieff gegründet ist / Und nach Außführg der endlichen Gerichte Gottes dermaleins völlig erfolgen wird. Vorgestellet / Und zum Preiß des ewigliebreichen Gottes / auch zur Erweckung einer heiligen Gegen-Liebe verkündiget / Von einem Mitgliede der D. Ph. G. Zu Ende ist beygefüget ein kurtzer ANHANG Von einigen harmonischen Schrifft-Stellen / und verschiedenen sonderbahren Zeugnüßen LUTHERI. Gedruckt im Jahr Christi 1698.

2 The *Confessio Augustana* was the basic common confession of the Lutheran faith. In this article a separation between blessed and condemned people is clearly stated, moreover the position of the Jews and the Anabaptists on the second coming of Christ is rejected. See Irene DINGEL (ed.), *Die Bekenntnisschriften der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche*, Göttingen 2014, 113.

3 On Johanna Eleonora Petersen's life and ideas see: *The Life of Lady Johanna Eleonora Petersen* written by herself. *Pietism and Women's Autobiography in Seventeenth-Century Germany*, ed. and trans. by Barbara BECKER-CANTARINO, Chicago 2005; Ruth ALBRECHT, *Johanna Eleonora Petersen. Theologische Schriftstellerin des frühen Pietismus*, Göttingen 2005. For an introduction to Pietism see Shantz H. DOUGLAS, *An Introduction to German Pietism. Protestant Renewal at the Dawn of Modern Europe*, Baltimore 2013. Scholars generally distinguish between a Pietism of the church and a radical and separatist Pietism, to which the Petersens belong, see Hans SCHNEIDER, *German Radical Pietism*, Lanham et al. 2007. For the attribution of this treatise to Johanna Eleonora Petersen, see ALBRECHT, *ibid.* 279.

another anonymous treatise on the same theme entitled *Mysterion Apokatastaseos Panton* was published.⁴ The author was this time Johann Wilhelm Petersen (1649–1727), Johanna Eleonora's husband.⁵ His life and his theological positions were marked by meeting the Pietists of Frankfurt, where he met Johanna Eleonora von und zu Merlau, whom he married in 1680. After their marriage, the Petersens started working on the same themes in very close cooperation. They developed common ideas, so that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish what comes from Johanna Eleonora and what from Johann Wilhelm Petersen.⁶ Johanna Eleonora wrote about fifteen texts, Johann Wilhelm more than one hundred. Although their works present similar themes, the way they discussed and developed them differs. Johanna Eleonora's texts are edifying devotional literature, where the author makes numerous references to Scripture and very few to other authors. On the other hand, Johann Wilhelm's texts reflect his university education. They are more systematic, they proceed sometimes through questions and answers and they often take other authors into consideration. Johann Wilhelm Petersen seems, therefore, to play the role of a defender of their ideas against other theologians' charges, but these ideas very probably originated with Johanna Eleonora.⁷

According to Johann Wilhelm Petersen's *Autobiography*, the couple discovered the doctrine of apokatastasis in 1696, by reading Jane Lead's (1623–1704) manuscript *Eight Worlds*.⁸ The English mystic had established, together with John

4 *Mysterion Apokatastaseos Panton*, Das ist: Das Geheimniß Der Wiederbringung aller Dinge, Darinnen In einer Unterredung zwischen Philaletham und Agathophilum gelehret wird, Wie das Böse und die Sünde ... solle aufgehaben und vernichtet; Hergegen die Creaturen Gottes ... durch Jesum Christum, Den Wiederbringer aller Dinge, ... errettet werden ... / Offenbahret durch Einen Zeugen Gottes und seiner Warheit, 1700.

5 On his life and the development of his thought until 1692, see Marcus MATTHIAS, Johann Wilhelm und Johanna Eleonora Petersen. Eine Biographie bis zur Amtsenthebung Petersens im Jahre 1692, Göttingen 1993.

6 On the relationship between them, see ALBRECHT, Johanna Eleonora Petersen (n. 3) 122–128.

7 The first text on apokatastasis, *Das Ewige Evangelium*, as well as the first important text on the Millennium, *Glaubens-Gespräche mit Gott* (1691), were authored by Johanna Eleonora Petersen. In the case of the Millennium, a long series of treatises authored by Johann Wilhelm Petersen appeared after *Glaubens-Gespräche* to defend the couple's position against the criticism of theologians.

8 *Lebens-Beschreibung Johannis Wilhelmi Petersen, Der Heiligen Schrift Doctoris, vormahls Professoris zu Rostock, nachgehends Predigers in Hanover an St. Egidii Kirche, darnach des Bischoffs in Lübeck Superintendentis und Hoff-Predigers endlich Superintendentis in Lüneburg*, 1719. They received the manuscript from Baron Dodo von Knyphausen, who was their protector and helped them financially after Johann Wilhelm Petersen was removed from his office as superintendent in 1692. Jane Lead's *The Wonders of God's Creation. Manifested in the Variety of Eight Worlds; As they were made known Experimentally to the Author* was written in 1695 in English and translated into German in 1696 in Amsterdam. The Petersens read the German version. On the relationship between the

Pordage, the Philadelphian Society, a group untied to any particular confession. The two treatises authored by the Petersens refer to this society. Indeed, both were signed with the initials “D. Ph. G.,” meaning “a member of the German Philadelphian Society”. Initially, Johann Wilhelm and Johanna Eleonora were both suspicious of Lead’s statements, since the English theosophist’s position was based on visions which she had experienced. The couple sought therefore to refute this justification of her source by referring to several biblical passages (Mt. 25 and Mk. 9). They changed their mind on Lead’s position when they “discovered” other passages in the gospel (Rev. 21:5 and 5:13 f.) that allowed them to re-evaluate her ideas through the authority of Scripture.⁹

The first treatise published, *The Eternal Gospel* (1698), does not mention Jane Lead at all. It is a text of 144 pages where only a few authors are quoted, although those quoted include Luther and Origen. The publication of this text led to considerable criticism, which was perhaps the reason why Johann Wilhelm Petersen authored a second text on the same topic.¹⁰ *Mysterion Apokatastaseos Panton* (1700) is a more voluminous work (about 650 pages), and it presents a completely different structure. It is divided into various sections. The two central sections are a dialogue between Philaletha and Agathophilus, who, like a teacher and a disciple, are engaged in a conversation on apokatastasis, explaining its meaning through the voice of other authors. Through this dialogue, Johann Wilhelm Petersen builds up an anthology of texts and authors from different centuries on universal salvation. The treatise presents, moreover, an introduction and a preliminary report, this last is Johanna Eleonora Petersen’s *The Eternal Gospel*.¹¹

Petersens and Jane Lead, see ALBRECHT, Johanna Eleonora Petersen (n. 3), esp. 276–356; Burkhard DOHM, Böhme-Rezeption in England und deren Rückwirkung auf den frühen deutschen Pietismus. Jane Lead und das Ehepaar Petersen, in: Wilhelm KÜHLMANN/Friedrich VOLLHARDT (eds.), *Offenbarung und Episteme. Zur Europäischen Wirkung Jacob Böhmes im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert*, Berlin/Boston 2012, 219–240. On Jane Lead, see Julie HIRST, Jane Leade. *Biography of a Seventeenth-Century Mystic*, Aldershot 2005; Ariel HESSAYON (ed.), *Jane Lead and her Transnational Legacy*, London 2016.

9 Lebens-Beschreibung (n. 8) 297–299.

10 For example, Philipp Jacob Spener (1635–1705) expressed his doubts on the doctrine advanced in *The Eternal Gospel* and stated that it was not sufficiently proved through biblical passages, see Philipp Jacob Spener, *Letzte Theologische Bedencken und andere Briefliche Antworten* 1711, Teil 3, ed. by Dietrich BLAUFUSS/Peter SCHICKETANZ, Hildesheim et al. 1987, 665–669. The professor of theology at the University of Rostock Johann Fecht considered this doctrine atheistic and the author of *The Eternal Gospel* a “new evangelist”: *Disputatio Theologica Inauguralis, libellum recentissimum, sub rubrica Das ewige Evangelium der allgemeinen Wiederbringung aller Creaturen/examinans, quam jussu maxime Reverendi ordinis Theologici, in illustri Universitate Rostochiensis, Praeside Dr. Johanne Fechtio.*

11 In the footnotes I indicate the two central parts of the treatise as “Gespräch I” and “Gespräch II”.

2. The doctrine of the apokatastasis in *Mysterion Apokatastaseos Panton*

Unlike Jane Lead, the Petersens use Scripture as their main source for this doctrine, in order to prove that apokatastasis is strictly based upon it and not just the fruit of their imagination.¹² The word apokatastasis is taken from Acts 3:21, where the apostle Paul speaks about the “restitution of all things”, in Greek *apokatastasis panton*. However, they also quote other verses where this word is not found but which deal with God’s mercy or with restoration.¹³ As the title of Johanna Eleonora’s text shows, the apokatastasis is also called “Eternal Gospel” (“Ewiges Evangelium”). This definition is taken from Rev. 14:6.¹⁴ According to the Petersens, the “Eternal Gospel” is the last proclamation that will follow the “Gospel of faith”, namely the gospel announced after Christ’s Ascension, and the “Gospel of reign”, which indicates the thousand-year reign of Christ. The “Eternal Gospel” discloses universal salvation.¹⁵ While *The Eternal Gospel* refers only to Scripture to explain the meaning of the word *apokatastasis*, *Mysterion* also incorporates Jane Lead’s definition and further develops it by referring to other authors. According to the Greek, *apokatastasis* indicates a threefold condition: an initial state where everything was in an original, good condition of unity, secondly a degenerated condition (original sin) and thirdly a restitution to the original state. This threefold meaning is explained through ancient authors, such as Polybius, Plato and Cicero, through the astronomical metaphor of the astral re-conjunction and through the example of broken limbs taken from Origen: “To restore something means to bring it back to the place it comes from, as the broken limbs of the body are brought back to the place from which they were separated.”¹⁶ Some Kabbalistic authors are also quoted, such as Franciscus Georgius and Arcangelus Minorita. In his treatise *Harmonia Mundi*, Franciscus Georgius states that everything has its own order and measure, but this order is much greater when everything has its place in the universal order, in the same way as the body is more beautiful than

12 As Fecht stated: see note 10.

13 For example, Petersen quotes several letters of St. Paul, where the apostle speaks about the mercy of God towards everyone (Rom. 11:32) or about the figure of Christ as universal Redeemer, the one who will reconcile every creature with the Father (Rom. 5:10–21; 1 Cor. 15:21–28; Eph. 1:9 f.; Phil. 2:10–18; Col. 1:15–20). Moreover, not only in the New but also in the Old Testament indications of apokatastasis are present, e.g. in Ps. 145:9 David speaks about the mercy of God, a mercy towards everyone: “The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works.” Two other passages are taken from 1 Sam. 2:6 and from Wis. 16:13 f., where the authors state that the Lord kills and makes his creature alive again.

14 Das Ewige Evangelium (n. 1) 8.

15 *Mysterion* (n. 4), Vorbericht, p. 21.

16 *Ibid.*, Gespräch I, ii §§7–11 p. 3 f. (translation E. B.).

the single parts that constitute it, or a discourse than the single words of which it is composed.¹⁷

Apokatastasis is strictly linked to the Millennium (the Gospel of reign), a period during which the elect will reign with Christ, whereas sinners will still undergo punishments. The idea of eternal punishment, with which some biblical passages deal is therefore not rejected, but it acquires a “cathartic” meaning: punishment is something necessary to God’s economy of salvation.¹⁸ By referring to the treatise *Entretiens sur la Restitution Generale de la Creation*, published anonymously in 1697 in Cologne, Petersen explains that the word ‘eternity’ can have different meanings on the basis of the substance to which it is attributed.¹⁹ Only God is eternal, since he has no beginning and no end. For this reason each attribute which belongs to his substance is eternal in the sense that it has no beginning and no end. On the contrary, evil comes not from God’s essence, but from the will of creatures, it is an *ens morale*, it has a beginning and it will have also an end.²⁰ Therefore, the word ‘eternity’ attributed to this last kind of being means only a long period of time.²¹ Based on this distinction, Petersen also explains God’s attributes. Drawing on Jane Lead, Ernestus Sonnerus, Anne Conway, Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont and John Pordage, the theologian argues that eternal punishment would be against God’s justice. This is divided into a *justitia vindicativa*, through which God punishes sinners and which started with original sin, and a *justitia essentialis*, namely the justice proper to God’s essence, which will also remain when sin or sinners are no more.²² Apokatastasis is not contrary

17 Ibid. iv § 3 p. 6. Franciscus Georgius (1460–1540) belonged to the Franciscan order. The work *De armonia mundi cantica tria* was first printed in Venice in 1525. It was translated into different languages and was put on the *Index of Prohibited Books*. In this work the author seeks to reconcile the Bible, Plato and the Kabbalah, and he refers to different philosophical traditions such as the Augustinian, the Origenian and the Scotist. For bibliographical references see Girolamo TIRABOSCHI, *Storia della letteratura italiana* VII/2, Florence 1810, 446–448.

18 *Mysterion* (n. 4), Gespräch I, lv § 3 p. 29.

19 Ibid. xcvi § 14 p. 91. On this issue see also *ibid.*, Gespräch II, xix p. 18 f., where he distinguishes three meanings of the word ‘eternity’: 1. “Aeternitas absoluta, infinita, tam a parte ante, quam a parte post”, this is an eternity that has no beginning and no end. This meaning can be referred to God, who has an eternal essence, without beginning and without end. 2. “Aeternitas infinita a parte post”, namely an eternity that has a beginning but not an end. The gospel uses this kind of eternity when it deals with the good that comes from the creatures. 3. “Aeternitas periodica”, namely a certain cycle of time that has a beginning and an end.

20 *Ibid.*, Gespräch I, i p. 26. See also *ibid.* cclxxvi § 1 p. 250.

21 See also *ibid.*, Gespräch II, xii p. 14.

22 *Ibid.*, Gespräch I, cix–cxii p. 101–104. Bibliographical references on Ernestus Sonnerus (1572–1612) can be found in Gottfried Arnold’s *Unparteiysche Kirchen- und Ketzer-Historie*, where Sonnerus is linked to the Socinians. Anne Conway (1631–1679) was an English philosopher linked to the group of the Cambridge Platonists; she had also contacts with the

to this second kind of justice. Punishments can last several epochs (*aeonen*), necessary for the conversion of all sinners; pains are therefore given to sinners for their conversion, in accordance with *justitia vindicativa*, not *justitia essentialis*.

Apokatastasis is described as a “Wiederkehr” and not as a “Verderbung”: the individual essence will return to God but is not annihilated in God.²³ Petersen specifies, however, that only that which comes from God will be restored to its previous form. This means that the devil and fallen angels will not be restored as such, because the essence of evil does not come from God but, as was previously said, from the creatures’ will.

The central figure for the restitution is Christ, described as the “Erlöser”, “Wiederbringer” or “Erstgeborener”. Christ has both a divine and a human nature. The human nature is described by Petersen, who refers in turn to Sixtus Senensis and Anne Conway, as a *microcosmus*, which contains in itself the *macrocosmus* of the whole creation.²⁴ By taking the human nature Christ can save the whole creation which is contained in it.²⁵ On one hand, the figure of Christ as first-born and redeemer is taken from Origen and Clement of Rome, while, on the other, the same meaning is found in the Kabbalistic figure of Adam Cadmon. Christ is not created as all other creatures are. Referring to the Kabbalah, Petersen states that Christ is not a creature but rather a modification of the divine substance. The Kabbalistic sources quoted in *Mysterion* are Isaac Luria and *Kabbalah Denudata* of Christian Knorr von Rosenroth; there are also references to Johann Peter Spaeth, a theologian who converted to Judaism, having become dissatisfied with both Roman Catholicism and Lutheranism.²⁶ The Jewish Kabbalah is quoted to explain

Kabbalist van Helmont and the philosopher Leibniz, see Sarah HUTTON, Anne Conway. A Woman Philosopher, Cambridge/New York 2009; Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont (1614–1698/99) was a German Kabbalist who worked at the Sulzbach court together with Christian Knorr von Rosenroth; he travelled to England where he established contact with some of the Cambridge Platonists, see Allison P. COUDERT, *The Impact of the Kabbalah in the Seventeenth Century. The Life and Thought of Francis Mercury van Helmont (1614–1698)*, Leiden et al. 1999. John Pordage (1607–1681) was an English Christian mystic who, together with Jane Lead, helped to establish the group called the Philadelphian Society, see Nils THUNE, *The Behmenists and the Philadelphians. A Contribution to the Study of the English Mysticism in the 17th and 18th Centuries*, Uppsala 1948.

23 *Mysterion* (n. 4), Gespräch I, xlvi–xlvi p. 25 f.

24 Sixtus Senensis (1520–1569), originally a Jew, converted to Roman Catholicism, see John Warwick MONTGOMERY, *Sixtu of Siena and the Roman Catholic Biblical Scholarship*, in: *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 54 (1963) 214–234, 214 f.

25 *Mysterion* (n. 4), Gespräch I, cxxiv p. 123.

26 Isaac Luria (1534–1572) was a Jewish rabbi, considered the father of the modern Kabbalah, known also as the Lurianic Kabbalah, see Gerold NECKER, *Einführung in die lurianische Kabbalah*, Frankfurt a.M. et al. 2008. Christian Knorr von Rosenroth (1636–1689) was a Christian Kabbalist who worked together with Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont at the Sulzbach court in Germany, see Rosmarie ZELLER, *Wissenschaft und Chiliasmus*.

the figure of Christ better. However, according to Petersen, the Jewish tradition cannot be fully compared to that of Christianity, since it did not acknowledge the revelation of Christ.²⁷ Petersen concludes the discourse on the figure of Christ as first-born and redeemer by showing that a similar description can also be found in Origen and Clement of Rome.²⁸

Another important premise concerning final universal redemption is the doctrine of the middle state of the soul. It is necessary to admit this doctrine because otherwise it would be impossible to wait for the final judgement.²⁹ Moreover, supporting this doctrine, the Petersens openly criticize the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory, according to which souls receive the last judgment immediately after their death. In *The Eternal Gospel*, Johanna Eleonora Petersen states that this condition was recognized by the entire Greek church, although many authors dismissed it through the centuries. In addition to this tradition, Bernard of Clairvaux and Origen are explicitly quoted.³⁰ *Mysterion Apokatastaseos Panton* refers instead to Pierre Poiret's *L'Économie divine*, Abraham von Franckenberg, Antoinette Bourignon, and, finally, Thomas Burnet's *Theoria Telluris Sacra*.³¹ References

Heterodoxe Strömungen am Hof von Sulzbach. Wissenschaft und Chiliasmus bei Christian Knorr von Rosenroth, Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont und Henry More, in: Hartmut LAUFHÜTTE/Michael TITZMANN (eds.), *Heterodoxie in der frühen Neuzeit*, Tübingen 2006, 291–307. On Johann Peter Spaeth (Moses Germanus) (ca. 1642–1701) see Stefan LUFT, *Leben und Schreiben für den Pietismus. Der Kampf des pietistischen Ehepaares Johanna Eleonora und Johann Wilhelm Petersen gegen die lutherische Orthodoxie*, Herzberg 1994, 301–308.

27 *Mysterion* (n. 4), Gespräch I, cxxviii–cxxx i p. 128–137.

28 *Ibid.* cxxx § 9 p. 136. He quotes from Origen's *Commentary on John's Gospel*: "Christus etiam dicitur praeter haec Vir veniens post Johannem, ante ipsum existens, ut edoceamur, etiam Hominem Filii Dei Divinitati ipse commixtum ante fuisse, quam nascetur ex Maria, quem hominem dicit se nescire Johannes." He quotes then (Pseudo-)Clement of Rome's *Recognitiones*, Lib. I: "Christus ab initio & semper erat, per singulas quasque generationes piis, latenter licet, semper tamen aderat, his precipue, a quibus exspectabatur, quibus frequenter apparuit."

29 *Mysterion* (n. 4), Gespräch I, clvi p. 162.

30 *Das Ewige Evangelium* (n. 1) 1–10; *Mysterion* (n. 4), Vorbericht, p. 7. Other authors quoted in *Das Ewige Evangelium* are Augustine, Ambrose, Chrysostom, Irenaeus, Haymo, Smaragdus, Gersonus (*ibid.* 5), Bernard is quoted at the very beginning (*ibid.* 3), Origen at the end (*ibid.* 7).

31 *Mysterion* (n. 4), Gespräch I, cxlvi § 3 p. 155. Pierre Poiret (1646–1719) was a French mystic in close relationship with Antoinette Bourignon. His treatise *L'Économie de la Coopération de l'Homme avec l'Opération de Dieu* was published in 1687 in Amsterdam, see Marjolaine CHEVALIER, *Der Millenarismus von Antoinette Bourignon und Pierre Poiret*, in: *Evangelische Theologie* 59 (1999) 459–464, 459 f. Abraham von Franckenberg (1593–1652) was a German mystic. J. W. Petersen states that he examined in Dresden two manuscripts by Franckenberg that contain the doctrine of apokatastasis in the section on the place of the soul; for his bibliography, see János BRUCKNER, *Abraham von Franckenberg. A bibliographical catalogue with a short list of his library*, Wiesbaden 1988. Thomas Bur-

to this doctrine can also be found in Scripture, where the middle condition of the soul is indicated through the words “sea”, “death”, “hell” and “prison”, concepts that indicate different kinds of states after death.³² A further important source for the doctrine of the middle state of the soul, quoted in both *The Eternal Gospel* and *Mysterion Apokatastaseos Panton*, is Martin Luther. The theologian of Wittenberg admitted something in this direction, although without precisely recognizing and describing the condition of the soul after death. In a letter to Hans von Rechenberg – here quoted – Luther answers the question of whether it is possible that someone who dies without faith can be saved. Luther’s answer starts by refuting Origen’s position, since, according to the Alexandrian, God will save everyone, the devil included, a position that, according to Luther, cannot be asserted with certainty. The theologian of Wittenberg proceeds by stating that without faith nobody can be saved. He then seems to reconsider his position and admits: “Who would doubt that He can do that [i. e., save everyone]? But, that He will actually do that is impossible to prove.”³³ Universal salvation is admitted by Luther as a possibility, a possibility that becomes for the Petersens a certainty.

3. Considerations on the sources used in *Mysterion Apokatastaseos Panton*

Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann places *Mysterion Apokatastaseos Panton* in the Origenian tradition and claims that Petersen’s position is a rehabilitation of Origen.³⁴ The importance of Origen in Petersen’s work is, of course, unquestionable. However, it is necessary to question the role that the Alexandrian played for the Petersens by better analyzing the relationship between him and the other traditions utilized by Johann Wilhelm Petersen.

net (1635–1715) studied in Cambridge and was successively chaplain at the court of William III. The book *Theoria Telluris Sacra* appeared 1681 and was translated also in German and reprinted in several editions, see Kaspar BÜTIKOFER, *Der frühe Zürcher Pietismus (1689–1721). Der soziale Hintergrund und die Denk- und Lebenswelten im Spiegel der Bibliothek Johann Heinrich Lochers (1648–1718)*, Göttingen 2009, 355. On Burnet’s bibliography see Burnet, Thomas, in: ODNB 8 (2004) 929–932. For Burnet and his reception in contemporary natural history debates, see Friedemann STENGEL, *Aufklärung bis zum Himmel. Emanuel Swedenborg im Kontext der Theologie- und Philosophiegeschichte des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Tübingen 2011, 71–74.

32 As well as many other words, see *Mysterion* (n. 4), Gespräch I, cxlviii p. 158.

33 *Ibid.*, Vorbericht, p. 30 f. For the letter, see Luther, WA 10/2, 322–326 (translation E. B.).

34 Wilhelm SCHMIDT-BIGGEMANN, *Philosophia Perennis. Historical Outlines of Western Spirituality in Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern Thought*, Dordrecht 2014, 359–368.

In *Mysterion Apokatastaseos Panton* a large number of authors – more than one hundred – belonging to different traditions are quoted.³⁵ They could be divided into several categories: contemporary English authors, Kabbalistic traditions, Fathers of the Church (among them especially Origen), Luther, as well as several other authors from the 16th and 17th centuries. In *Mysterion Apokatastaseos Panton*, all these sources are used side by side, so that it is difficult to say which tradition is the most important.

In his *Autobiography*, Johann Wilhelm Petersen states that the decisive element in accepting the idea of universal salvation was the discovery of this doctrine in the *Revelation of John*. In addition to the last book of the Bible, other passages from both the New and from the Old Testament (Rev. 5:21; Rom. 5:10–21; 11:32; 1 Cor. 15:21–28; Eph. 1:9 f.; Phil. 2:10–18; Col. 1:15–20; Ps. 145; 1 Sam. 2:6; Wis. 16:13 f.) are also quoted in *The Eternal Gospel* as well as in *Mysterion Apokatastaseos Panton*. The Petersens' first concern is, therefore, to show that Scripture clearly supports universal salvation and the return of all created beings to God. Scripture is, ultimately, the first and only important source for the Petersens in corroborating apokatastasis and defending their position against charges that they are “new prophets” or “new evangelists,” as well as for proving that such a position was not just the fruit of personal revelations, as with Jane Lead.³⁶ *Mysterion Apokatastaseos Panton* is a further defense of Petersen's position. The treatise shows that this doctrine was supported by several witnesses from different periods and traditions, who, to varying degrees, acknowledged the truth of universal restitution. That this doctrine was not directly supported by Luther was, ultimately, not a problem for the Petersens, since, as Johann Wilhelm Petersen states in *Mysterion Apokatastaseos Panton*, God reveals his mysteries progressively and can show increasingly the depths of meaning in his word.³⁷ It is also clear from

35 To take into consideration each author quoted by Petersen would exceed the purpose and the length of this article. I have here noticed only those authors who are most extensively quoted by Petersen, seeking to give an impression of the variety of traditions used by him. Many other authors are mentioned by Petersen in addition to those whom I have noticed.

36 This was the charge addressed to them by Fecht and, indirectly, also by Spener: see note 10.

37 See *Mysterion* (n. 4), Gespräch I, cxl p. 148, and *ibid.*, Gespräch II, xxix § 3 p. 26. J. W. Petersen states that revelation did not end at the time of the Apostles; God can reveal increasingly and in different times the depth of meaning in his word. Luther could not totally grasp the truth of universal salvation since the condition of the church was not so ruined as in the time of Petersen, and, therefore, the times were not yet ripe to understand how great and how deep are God's love and mercy. Petersen's position appears quite controversial. On the one hand he declares himself a member of the Philadelphian community, a group who explicitly wanted to be detached from a particular church or confession, on the other hand, quoting Luther, Petersen embraces a position that seeks to adhere to the Lutheran confession. To explain the relationship between the Petersens and Lutheran orthodoxy better, as well as the position they take *vis-à-vis* this confession, it is necessary to take into consideration further elements that are beyond the scope of this article (such

Johann Wilhelm Petersen's *Autobiography* that the discovery of apokatastasis was mediated by the reading of Lead's manuscript, which undoubtedly played a fundamental role in the Petersens' acceptance of this doctrine. Lead's position was labelled as Origenian. However, the English theosophist denied the influence of the theologian of Alexandria, stating that she referred exclusively to her divine visions and not to "human-wisdom".³⁸

Nevertheless, it is difficult to believe that the couple heard of this doctrine initially from Jane Lead. The idea was also supported by Kabbalistic authors, whose texts had been known in the Pietistic circles of Frankfurt since the 1670s.³⁹ In addition to the German Kabbalah that had developed in the Sulzbach court around Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont and Christian Knorr von Rosenroth, Petersen refers to other kinds of Kabbalah: the Renaissance Kabbalah (Pico della Mirandola, Arcangelus Minorita, Franciscus Georgius, Guillelmus Postellus) and the Judaic Kabbalah (Abraham Coehen de Herrera and Isaac Luria), which was, however, received through the Latin translations of the Christian Kabbalists. Together with Jane Lead, the Kabbalistic tradition plays an important role in *Mysterion Apokatastaseos Panton*, explaining the meaning of the restitution of all things. Moreover, the Kabbalistic cosmology, which postulates the return of all creatures to the God-creator through the figure of Adam Cadmon, surely helped Petersen to embrace the idea of universal salvation.⁴⁰ Christ is seen by Petersen not only as redeemer. Through the parallelism with Adam Cadmon of the Kabbalah, Christ receives a cosmic meaning: he is the first born, everything is created through him and, therefore, everything will be restored by him.⁴¹ Petersen specifies that through Christ not only the sin of humanity will be redeemed. By referring to Col. 1:15 and to John's Gospel, Petersen stresses Christ as first born and the "beginning" of God's creatures. He is the *alpha* and also the *omega*, for this reason he will restore the whole creation, which comes from him, he will redeem sin "absolut", namely sin as such and not only the sin of individual human beings.

as their position concerning Confessio Augustana 17). It is however clear that their intention was not to be separatists or to depart from Lutheran doctrine. Indeed, in *Mysterion* Petersen claims that the doctrine of apokatastasis does not contradict the main tenets of Lutheran faith, which, against the papists, state that salvation cannot be obtained through good works but exclusively through Christ, see *ibid.*, Gespräch I, cxl § 1 p. 148. On the other hand, through apokatastasis the couple seem to want to overcome pure Lutheranism, stating that through this doctrine the main disputes among Lutherans, the Reformed and Catholics can be solved, see *ibid.*, Vorbericht, p. 19.

38 See BÜTIKOFER, Zürcher Pietismus (n. 31) 404.

39 On the relationship between the Kabbalists of Sulzbach and the Pietists of Frankfurt, see Andreas DEPPERMAN, Johann Jacob Schütz und die Anfänge des Pietismus, Tübingen 2002, 222–242; LUFT, Pietismus (n. 26) 297–301.

40 LUFT, *ibid.* 300.

41 See SCHMIDT-BIGGEMANN, Philosophia Perennis (n. 34) 363.

In addition to Scripture, Petersen also refers to Origen and to the issue on the double sacrifice of Christ: the corporeal one (for the sin of humankind) and the spiritual one (for sin as such).⁴² As in other cases, Origen's thought is inserted inside a wider discourse and quoted alongside other authors (in this case the relationship between *macrocosmus* and *microcosmus* is taken from Anne Conway). Once again, this suggests that it is impossible to study the reception of Origen in Petersen's work as such; rather, it is necessary to analyze it in relationship with the other traditions to which Petersen refers. This statement is further reinforced by Daniel Colberg in his work *De origine et progressu Haeresium et errorum in Ecclesia*, a text used by Petersen as source of quotations from Origen on this point. The defender of Lutheran orthodox theology Daniel Colberg claimed that Origen's position on the double meaning of Christ's sacrifice can be explained only through the pseudo-theosophy of Jacob Böhme.⁴³

Two further elements can be helpful in understanding the role of the Kabbalistic tradition in Petersen's *Mysterion Apokatastaseos Panton* better. Firstly, in Petersen's library catalogue one can note the presence of several Kabbalistic texts, whereas no text of Origen is listed.⁴⁴ This leads to the supposition that Petersen worked intensively on the Kabbalistic tradition, whereas he perhaps read Origen only at a later stage. Neither is Origen mentioned among the sources listed in Johann Wilhelm Petersen's *Autobiography*, where he quotes Jane Lead and the Dutch millenarian Petrus Serrarius as primary sources for the discovery of apokatastasis.⁴⁵ Secondly, Origen's position was not refuted only by Luther. His name was also used by orthodox theologians in Petersen's time in a pejorative sense: to be an Origenist meant to be a fanatic, "Schwärmer", as Daniel Colberg claims in his defense of Lutheran orthodoxy *The Platonic-Hermetic Christendom*.⁴⁶ Petersen

42 *Mysterion* (n. 4), Gespräch I, cxxxiv p. 123–126.

43 This is the only case where Origen is quoted not directly but from another text, namely Daniel Colberg, *Liber de origine & progressu Haeresium & errorum in Ecclesia*, 1694, 228, where the theologian of Greifswald refers to Origen to refute, among other ideas, his position on apokatastasis. For the assimilation of Origen's position to the theosophy of Böhme, see *ibid.* 229.

44 *Bibliotheca Petersiana id est apparatus librarius, quo, dum viveret, usus est Ioan. Guilielmus Petersenius*, Berlin 1731.

45 For the reference to Petrus Serrarius, see *Lebens-Beschreibung* (n. 8) 301 f.

46 *Das Platonisch-Hermetische Christenthum, Begreifend Die Historische Erzählung vom Ursprung und vielerley Secten der heutigen Fanatischen Theologie, unterm Namen der Paracelsisten, Weigelianer, Rosencreutzer, Quäcker, Böhmisten, Wiedertäufer, Bourgnisten, Labadisten, Und Quietisten/ausgefertiget von M. Ehre Gott Daniel Colberg, Frankfurt/Leipzig 1690–1691*. Daniel Colberg (1659–1698) was professor of theology in Greifswald, see Hans SCHNEIDER, *Das Platonisch-hermetische Christenthum*. Ehre Gott Daniel Colbergs Bild des frühneuzeitlichen Spiritualismus, in: Nicola KAMINSKI/Heinz J. DRÜGH/Michael HERMANN (eds.), *Hermetik. Literarische Figurationen zwischen Babylon und Cyberspace*, Berlin 2002, 21–42; Sicco LEHMANN-BRAUNS, *Weisheit in der*

is aware of this negative attitude towards the theologian of Alexandria and he knows that to quote him could invite criticism.

For this reason, he spends several pages in *Mysterion Apokatastaseos Panton* defending Origen from charges of heresy. He explains that this accusation comes from certain people, whose opinion became the widely-accepted judgment on the theologian. For example, the Alexandrian bishop Demetrius, who strongly criticized Origen, had a marked influence on several theologians in succeeding years. Origen's position was also compared to that of the heretic Marcion; but it is clear that Origen was not of Marcion's opinion since – Petersen explains – he did not believe in two principles. Even the errors ascribed to Origen during the Fifth Oecumenical Council of Constantinople were influenced by a particular position, that of Vincent of Lérins.⁴⁷ On the other hand, Petersen opposes to all of these critiques the example of Origen's good life. During the persecutions of the Emperor Severus he never disavowed his faith in Christ. He was a good example to a great number of believers, and he was praised by many other authors, not only his contemporaries but also some in the following centuries.⁴⁸ After rehabilitating Origen, Petersen is able to quote him as an ancient authority for the doctrine of apokatastasis. Like all other authors quoted, Origen is used by Petersen to reinforce his position, but, by following Petersen's account and by analyzing his text, it is clear that Origen was neither the primary source for the discovery of apokatastasis, nor the decisive factor in accepting it. The constant references to Origen and the fact that Johann Wilhelm Petersen spends so many pages defending his character should rather be explained as Petersen's reply to Colberg's indirect charge of fanaticism.⁴⁹

Weltgeschichte. Philosophiegeschichte zwischen Barock und Aufklärung, Tübingen 2004, 112–186.

47 Demetrius of Alexandria (death 231) was bishop of Alexandria between 189 and 231, see Wolfgang A. BIENERT, Art. Demetrios v. Alexandrien, in: LThK³ 3 (1995) 81. Marcion (2nd century) supported the existence of two Gods, one created the world and was linked to the Law of the Old Testament, whereas the other was linked to the New Testament and was described as good and merciful, see Barbara ALAND, Art. Marcion/Marcioniten, in: TRE 22 (1992) 89–100. For Vincent of Lérins (death before 450), see Martien PERMANTIER, Art. Vinzenz von Lérins, in: TRE 35 (2003) 109–111.

48 *Mysterion* (n. 4), Gespräch I, lxxvii–lxxxv p. 52–66.

49 Colberg does not quote directly the Petersens in his *Das Platonisch-Hermetische Christentum*. The name of the couple appears on the frontispiece image of the new edition in 1709/10, among those of other authors criticized in the treatise, such as Labadists, Bourignonists, Bohemists, Quakers, Anabaptists, etc. Origen was considered the chief of this fanatic tradition. Whereas Colberg does not criticize directly the Petersens, the name of the two theologians appears in Friedrich Christian Bücher's *Plato mysticus in Pietista redivivo* (1699), a text that was directly influenced by Colberg's *Das Platonisch-Hermetische Christentum*. On Bücher, see LEHMANN-BRAUNS, Weisheit in der Weltgeschichte (n. 46) 187–222.

4. Conclusion

To conclude, following Schmid-Biggemann's position, we can surely speak of Petersen's Origenism. The author makes use of the Father of the Church not only as ancient authority to defend the doctrine of apokatastasis, but he considers Origen also as a "witness" of God's wisdom, in the same way as Jane Lead, the Kabbalists, Luther and all the other authors quoted. In this respect, Petersen seems to follow Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's idea of a *philosophia perennis*, i. e. the transmission of God's wisdom through different – not only Christian – authors and traditions.⁵⁰ Apokatastasis is, therefore, originally a notion which comes from God's word. For this reason, it is difficult to determine which tradition is predominant and to establish whether Petersen was an Origenist or a Kabbalist. To consider the Kabbalah and Origen as alternatives could be misleading.

After all, these two traditions – Kabbalah and Origenism – have significant areas of agreement, and Petersen did not see a discrepancy between them. Origen's name appears in Christian Kabbalistic works, such as Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont's *Sketch of Christian Kabbalism*.⁵¹ The Kabbalistic tradition and Origenism are also conflated in the work of the English philosopher Anne Conway, whose *Principia Philosophiae* is extensively quoted in *Mysterion Apokatastaseos Panton*.⁵² However, from a historical point of view, one should be aware that Origen's position is not only mixed with but also mediated by other traditions, above all Jane Lead and the Kabbalah, with which Petersen came into contact first and which allowed Petersen to rehabilitate the figure of Origen.

50 On the concept of *philosophia perennis*, see SCHMIDT-BIGGEMANN, *Philosophia Perennis* (n. 34).

51 Francis Mercury van Helmont's *Sketch of Christian Kabbalism*, trans. and ed. by Sheila A. SPECTOR, Leiden/Boston 2012.

52 On Anne Conway's Kabbalism and Origenism, see Sarah HUTTON, Origen and Anne Conway, in: Alfons FÜRST/Christian HENGSTERMANN (eds.), *Autonomie und Menschenwürde. Origenes in der Philosophie der Neuzeit (Adamantiana 2)*, Münster 2012, 221–234. The difference here is that Conway discovered Origen first and then the Lurianic Kabbalah, while Petersen seems to start with the Kabbalah and then goes back to Origen.