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**HOPE FOUND, HOPE LOST
– ESCHATOLOGICAL ASPECTS
IN THE INTERPRETATIONS
OF ISRAELITES' WILDERNESS WANDERINGS.
TWO SIDES OF ONE STORY:
ORIGEN'S 27. HOMILY ON THE BOOK OF NUMBERS
AND JEROME'S LETTER 78****

In 1953 A.D. a New Testament scholar Charles Harold Dodd published his *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, a book that was to revolutionize thinking of Christian eschatology. In his book Dodd suggested that the apocalyptic realities are already present in the ministry of Jesus and the Apostles. On this basis he coined the term “realized eschatology” in which the apocalyptic prophecies of God’s kingdom have already been fulfilled. Realized eschatology replaces “the end is near” with “the end is here” and Dodd argued that we should understand Jesus’ message that “the kingdom of God is at hand” (Mk 1:15; Mt 3:2; 4:17; 10:7) with an emphasis on the kingdom’s actual, absolute presence.

The theme, rich with content, which – when interpreted allegorically – can be applied to eschatology, is without a doubt the Exodus of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, and then wandering through the wilderness to the promised land. One could state that reading the description of this wandering eschatological reference imposes itself explicitly. Could the Book of Numbers (33:1-49), which recounts this wandering, be interpreted within the rules, which C.H. Dodd took as determinants of the realised eschatology? How have the rules of the realized eschatology been previously used by the early Christian writers?¹ In

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¹ Of course the conception of the realised eschatology is characteristic for the many early Christian writers, not only for Origen but e.g. for Irenaeus of Lyon. A visible sign of this conception is using the word *παρουσία* with reference to the first coming of Christ in his incarnation. Cf. Ignatius Antiochenus, *Epistula ad Philadelphos* 9, 2; Iustinus Martyr, *Dialogus cum Tryphone Iudaeo* XIV; Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Adversus haereses* V 27, 1; Athanasius, *Oratio de incarnatione Verbi* 56, 3. See A. Houssiau, *La Christologie de Saint Irénée*, Louvain 1955, 139.

searching for the connections between Dodd's theory, in which the Gospel according to John plays a key role, and the journey of the Chosen People towards the promised land it seems all the more appropriate that the question of dependence of *Gospel of John* on the events of Exodus was the subject of extensive researches and this question seems to be confirmed². It is worth to take a look at how the two early Christian writers – Origen and Jerome, who left the exegesis of the fragment of *the Book of Numbers* describing stops of the Chosen People, perceived the history of this wandering through the desert³. This is all the more valuable that in existing studies both writings were ignored in the analysis of the eschatological views of both writers.

1. Origen – realized eschatology. Exegesis of the stops of the Chosen People in the desert on their way to the promised land the Alexandrian has included in the 27th of 28 homilies on *the Book of Numbers*, which unfortunately have been preserved only in Latin translation by Rufinus. These homilies, according to the earliest opinions have been delivered in Caesarea in Palestine after 231 A.D.⁴, and according to recent studies arose between 244 and 249 A.D.⁵, when Origen – as defined by Rufinus – was already an old man⁶. So they are the mature fruit of Origen's study on Scripture, long-standing homiletic practice and rich experience of the spiritual life⁷. An important aspect of these homilies is their pastoral dimension. Preacher focuses all attention of the audience on the issues of the Christian life and Christian spiritual journey which of course has an influence on the eschatological status of every men. In his works Origen tends as well to emphasize this continuity between the

² Cf. J.J. Enz, *The Book of Exodus as a Literary Type for the Gospel of John*, JBL 76 (1957) 208-215; R. Houston Smith, *Exodus Typology in the Fourth Gospel*, JBL 81 (1962) 329-342; M.J.J. Menken, *Observations on the Significance of the Old Testament in the Fourth Gospel*, "Neotestamentica" 33 (1999) 125-143.

³ There are just a few works focused on Origen's and Jerome's interpretations: E. Dal Covolo, *La tenda o il tempio? Origene, Omelie sui Numeri XVII e XXVII*, in: *Origeniana Nona. Origen and the Religious Practice of His Time*, ed. G. Heidl – R. Somos, Leuven 1989, 135-140; A. Cacciari, *Mansiones: sull'origine di un circolo ermeneutico*, "Adamantius" 10 (2004) 27-32; idem, *Lettura di HNm XXVII, in Omelie su Numeri*, in: *Lettura origeniana*, ed. M. Maritano – E. Dal Covolo, Roma 2004, 119-137. Very close to our theme is the article by A.-Ch. Jacobsen about geographical names in the Book of Joshua (*Allegorical Interpretation of Geography in Origen's Homilies on the Book of Joshua*, "Religion & Theology" 17:2010, 289-301). Nevertheless the eschatological views and interpretations are not the main point of interest in them and so we don't polemize with them.

⁴ Cf. A. von Harnack, *Die Chronologie der Altchristlichen Literatur bis Eusebius*, II, Leipzig 1904, 42.

⁵ Cf. A. Méhat, *Introduction*, in: Origène, *Homélies sur les Nombres*, ed. A. Méhat, Paris 1951, 10-11; R.P.C. Hanson, *Origen's Doctrine of Tradition*, London 1954, 1-30.

⁶ Cf. Rufinus, *Prologus in Omelias Origenis super Numeros*.

⁷ Cf. E. Stanula, *Wstęp. Życie duchowe w ujęciu Orygenes*, in: Orygenes, *Homilie o Księgach Liczb, Jozuego, Sędziów*, PSP 34/1, Warszawa 1986, 9-10.

present Christian life and its eschatological goal, to assume that eschatological statements must have a present as well as future relevance⁸.

The Book of Numbers – according to Origen – recounts the history of Israel, which begins with the Exodus from Egypt and reaches its culmination in the possession of the promised land⁹. This story shows “the magnificence of the good things that are to come, foreshadowed in images of the law”¹⁰. The sacred history of the people of Israel images the spiritual history of the new people of God as they “come up out of Egypt of this world and advance toward the promised land”¹¹.

Thus, Egypt and the Exodus from there – for Origen as well as for the many exegetes before him and after him – means first and foremost an internal transformation of man: conversion. It is a symbol of the world, of earthly life, of people living without faith. Egypt takes on the characteristics of everything that what is related to the matter, what is make-believe and illusion. According to Origen also a life without the perspective of eternity, focused only on earthly life, is a stay in Egypt. Therefore, in his homily 27. Scholarch of Alexandria said:

“We, then, when we were also in Egypt, I mean in the errors of this world and in the darkness of ignorance, did the works of the devil in lusts and desires of the flesh. But the Lord had pity on our affliction and sent the Word, His Only Begotten Son (1Jn 4:9) [...] in descending to the Egypt of this world”¹².

He did it to lead people out of this world – Egypt. Origen in his exegesis emphasizes above all the aspect of conversion in the interpretation of the Exodus from Egypt, but also recognizes its eschatological component:

“We have also stated – the Alexandrian says – that the Exodus from Egypt symbolizes the situation when the soul abandons the darkness of this world and blindness of the physical nature and moves to another age, which means either «Abraham’s bosom» (Lk 16:22), as in the case of Lazarus, or «paradise» (Lk 23:43), as in the case of the Thief, who believed on the cross, or other place known to God or other mansiones, the soul believing in God goes

⁸ Cf. B. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church*, Peabody 2003, 48.

⁹ Cf. K.J. Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen’s Exegesis*, Berlin – New York 1986, 52.

¹⁰ Origenes, *In Numeros hom.* II 1, ed. W.A. Baehrens, GCS 30, Origenes Werke 7, Leipzig 1921, 9: “Et per haec ostendimus «futurorum bonorum» magnificentiam in legis imaginibus adumbratam”, transl. by the author.

¹¹ Ibidem II 1, GCS 30, 8: “egrediens de mundi huius Aegypto et ad terram repromissionis”, transl. by the author.

¹² Ibidem 27, 2-3, GCS 30, 259: “Et nos ergo cum essemus in Aegypto, mundi dico huius erroribus et ignorantiae tenebris, operantes opera diaboli in concupiscentiis et voluptatibus carnis, miseratus est Dominus afflictionem nostram et «misit» Verbum «suum unigenitum Filium», qui nos de ignorantia erroris ereptos ad lucem divinae legis adduceret”, transl. R.A. Greer, in: Origen, *An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer and selected works*, New York – Ramsey – Toronto 1979, 249.

through, and having reached «a river whose streams make glad the city of God» (Ps 45[46]:5) receives there inheritance promised to the ancestors”¹³.

In the light of this statement it is easier to understand the eschatological aspect of the 27th homily on the Book of Numbers, and of the wandering of the Chosen People through the desert, which, according to Origen, also has this dual aspect – spiritual and eschatological¹⁴. Origen gives a possibility – but he does not develop it in detail – the eschatological exegesis of this wandering.

In the introduction to the present article, resembling basic ideas of the theory of the realized eschatology by Dodd, its Christocentric aspect was emphasized. It is necessary to note that origenian exegesis is thoroughly Christocentric as well. All Scripture speaks of Christ, and He is its hermeneutical principle. The written Word of God – Scripture – is a kind of incarnation of the Word and its writing down is primarily the work of the Logos. One cannot be surprised, therefore, that Christ-Logos stands as well at the base of the origenian exegesis of the Exodus and of the wandering of Israel in the wilderness.

In this context and in the context of the oeuvre, Origen's exegesis as an introduction to stops in the wilderness calls our attention to its christological content, eschatological and categories of realized eschatology. Origen, in fact, is speaking of the mansions to be occupied by the soul liberated from the body – that is, after its departure from this world, and after its passage into eternity – and of the passing through these mansions to the Father, he recalls words of the Gospel of John about Christ as “a gate” for every soul who passes through Him to various quarters. According to Origen, Christ is present in the whole world, but also in eternal life. In it, He is “a gate”, while in the present He is “a way”. But Christ is “a gate” only to those who have already reached eternal life¹⁵. Thus, the eschatological process has already begun, Christ is already a gate, but He will be “a gate” for souls in the future as well¹⁶. Thus everything which is realised in the eschatology, is for Origen (and for other early Christian writers) related to the incarnation of Christ, which definitively summarizes and changes the human history, while that which is unrealised and future concerns of man and his free decisions which will make whether a man will enter into the eschatological already realised Christ's gift or he will remain indifferent on it.

¹³ Ibidem 26, 4, GCS 30, 249-250: “Sed et illam figuram esse diximus exeundi de Aegypto, cum relinquit anima mundi huius tenebras ac naturae corporeae caecitatem et transfertur ad aliud saeculum, quod vel «sinus Abrahae», ut in Lazaro, vel «paradisus», ut in latrone, qui de cruce credidit, indicatur; vel etiam si qua novit esse Deus alia loca vel alias mansiones, per quae transiens anima Deo credens et perveniens usque ad «flumen» illud, quod «laetificat civitatem Dei», intra ipsum sortem promissae patribus hereditatis accipiat”, transl. by the author.

¹⁴ Cf. ibidem 27, 2.

¹⁵ Cf. P. Tzamalikos, *Origen Philosophy of History and Eschatology*, Boston 2007, 210. Similar conception of the Son-Christ can be seen in others Origen's works as well see *Contra Celsum* II 9; 64; VII 16; *In Ioannem comm.* 1, 4; 8; 9; 21; 24; 27; 2, 18; 34; 6, 19; 43; 10, 30; 19, 6; 32, 10; *In Matthaeum comm.* 12, 12 and others.

¹⁶ Cf. Origenes, *In Numeros hom.* 27, 2.

In the passage quoted above from the 27th homily¹⁷, Origen emphasizes that Christ descends to Egypt to draw his people from there. It can not be otherwise, since the biblical Chosen People was conducted in *the Book of Numbers* by Joshua, whose name Origen read as Jesus. Thus, in his spiritual interpretation, Jesus leads his people on a spiritual way and on an eschatological one too. It is He, who at various stages, becomes a gate for every soul so that it would finally reached the Father through the various mansions/stages¹⁸. He is its strength¹⁹. Moreover, the Son of God and the Holy Spirit under the appearances of the pillar of fire and the cloud, as they led Israel, also lead souls²⁰. The eschatological exegesis of the homily 27 is realised, because Christ has finally brought people from the slavery of sin of death, symbolized by the slavery in Egypt, while future or unrealised, because the man is still waiting for a series of unspecified (according to the hypothesis of Origen) stages of the posthumous wandering before he finally enters into heaven, which is the promised land.

The soul, that through the various stages of this wandering ascends, together with Christ, to come to where He came down from “not by necessity but because He deemed it right”²¹. To come into the world Logos-Christ needed forty two generations²², just as via forty two stages in the wilderness the Israelites had to come to promised land. Through forty two stages Christ descended to the earth and forty two stages a man needs to return with Christ to the Father²³. So Christ is present and acts on this eschatological way. Interestingly, the centuries before Dodd formulated his theory, Origen – in conclusion of his introduction on the presence of Christ in the Exodus of the Israelites – had shown this presence just in terms of realized eschatology:

“If you have understood how great a mystery that number of the descent and the ascent contains, then come and let us begin to ascend through the stages by which Christ descended, and make that the first stage which He passed last of all, namely, when He was born of the Virgin. Let this be the first stage for us who wish to go out of Egypt. In it we left the adoration of the idols and the worship of demons – not gods – and believed that Christ was born of the

¹⁷ Cf. note 12.

¹⁸ Cf. Origenes, *In Numeros hom.* 27, 2.

¹⁹ Cf. *ibidem* 27, 3; Num 33:1.

²⁰ Cf. Origenes, *In Numeros hom.* 27, 5.

²¹ *Ibidem* 27, 3, GCS 30, 260: “unde ille non necessitate, sed dignatione descendit”, transl. Greer, p. 249.

²² In this context Origen used probably the word *παρουσία* that might have been translated by Rufinus as “adventus”. See *ibidem*: “Sed primo omnium intueri mysterii rationem, quam qui diligenter observaverit, in scripturis inveniet in egressione filiorum Istrahel de Aegypto quadraginta et duas habitas esse mansiones; et rursus adventus Domini et Salvatoris nostri in hunc mundum per quadraginta et duas generationes adducitur”.

²³ Cf. *ibidem*.

Virgin and from the Holy Spirit and that the Word made flesh (Jn 1:14) came into this world”²⁴.

Christ’s work began with his coming into the world. The way of the soul also begins at this point. The coming of Christ is thus the onset of eschatology. People will ascend the path that Christ descended to the people²⁵. The wandering is already begun and still lasts, and its full meaning will be outlined at its end,

“when the soul has returned to its rest, that is, to the fatherland in paradise. [...] But for the time being the soul is on pilgrimage; it journeys on and make stages, doubtless because God has ordained them in His promises for the sake of some kind of profit. This is what is said in one passage, «I have afflicted you and fed you with manna in the wilderness, which your fathers did not know, so that is in your heart might be made known» (Deut 8:2-3, LXX)”²⁶.

A way through the desert is necessary for a Christian who is to be transformed from a fleshy man into the spiritual one. But it is also necessary for the soul, which is to ascend to God. Origen’s manner of presentation of the stay of the human soul in the wilderness, its wandering undoubtedly includes Platonic and Stoic ideas. However, it should be emphasized that the main source of this understanding is Holy Scripture and its allegorical understanding in which geographical and historical data of the Book of Numbers take on symbolic meanings, especially prophetic and eschatological ones²⁷. Realization of the ideal of the image of God by man is made gradually by going through such a way to God, as God went through to man in Jesus Christ. Explaining the biblical names of places where the Jews stopped after the Exodus from Egypt and before entering the promised land, Origen outlines the way that every soul has to go on in its spiritual development, and also after the resurrection in its eschatological way to heaven²⁸ to God, because, “when the soul sets out from the Egypt of this life to go to the promised land, it necessarily goes by certain roads and, as we have said, observes certain stages”²⁹.

²⁴ Ibidem: “Quodsi intellexisti, quantum sacramenti numerus iste descensionis adscensionisque contineat, veni iam et incipiamus per ea, quae descendit Christus, adscendere et primam mansionem istam facere, quam ille novissimam fecit, scilicet qua natus ex virgine est; et haec sit prima nobis mansio de Aegypto exire volentibus, in qua relicto idolorum cultu et daemoniorum, non deorum veneratione credimus Christum natum ex virgine et Spiritu sancto et «Verbum carnem factum» venisse in mundum”, transl. Greer, p. 250.

²⁵ Cf. ibidem.

²⁶ Ibidem 27, 4, GCS 30, 261: “verius intelliget [...] cum regressa fuerit ad requiem suam, id est ad patriam suam paradisum; [...] Sed interim peregrinatur et agit iter et conficit mansiones, utilitatis sine dubio alicuius causa per haec Dei provisionibus dispensata, sicut et quodam loco dicit: «afflixisti, et cibavi te manna in deserto, quod nesciebant patres tui, ut dinosceretur, quid est in corde tuo», transl. Greer, p. 251.

²⁷ Cf. Stanula, *Wstep*, p. 19.

²⁸ Cf. Origenes, *In Numeros hom.* 27, 6.

²⁹ Ibidem 27, 4, GCS 30, 260: “Sed et anima cum de Aegypto vitae huius proficiscitur, ut tendat

The eschatological wandering of the soul via the places through which it must pass to “gain an increase of enlightenment”³⁰, also has the aspect of the realized eschatology because these places have already been prepared, already “are with the Father” (Jn 14:2) what is very clearly highlighted by the Alexandrian Scholar³¹. Categories of the realized eschatology can also be seen in the interpretation of the first celebration of the Feast of Unleavened Bread during the wandering in the desert. Explaining how we celebrate the feasts “in part” the Alexandrian says:

“For every feast day that is celebrated on earth by human beings is celebrated in part, not completely or with the perfect title of a feast. But when you come forth from Egypt, then you will have a perfect feast”³².

Therefore the celebration, that will be fully celebrated in the eschaton, has already begun on the earth. It has been initiated, but its fullness will be revealed when we leave Egypt – which is the world. Similarly, Origen interprets the words “upon their gods the Lord executed punishment” (Num 33:4), indicating that the eschatological process of destruction of demons and gods has already begun, although “the day of punishment and of judgment has not yet come”³³. God has already “struck down and destroyed”³⁴ them, but final destruction will be made in the future.

Origen indicates that people live already “in the errors of this world and in the darkness of ignorance” and that “the Lord had pity on our affliction and sent the Word, His Only Begotten Son, to deliver us from ignorance of our error and to lead us to the light of the divine Law”³⁵. The corruption of the world has already occurred, but so has divine intervention in order to save human beings. God sent His Son³⁶. It should be emphasized – as it can be seen in the above considerations – that Origen also uses the characteristic vocabulary that is used to express the realized eschatology. For example there are words indicating that something has happened in the past: “already” – “iam”³⁷.

ad terram repromissionis, pergit necessario per quasdam vias et certas quasque, ut diximus, conficit mansiones”, transl. Greer, p. 250.

³⁰ Ibidem 27, 5, GCS 30, 263: “illuminetur amplius”, transl. Greer, p. 252.

³¹ Cf. ibidem 27, 5.

³² Ibidem 27, 8, GCS 30, 266: “Omnis namque dies festus, qui in terris ab hominibus geritur, «in parte», non in integro neque perfecto festivitatis titulo geritur; sed cum exieris de Aegypto ista, tunc erit tibi perfecta festivitas”, transl. Greer, p. 255.

³³ Ibidem, GCS 30, 267: “cum utique vindictae dies et iudicii nondum venerit”, transl. Greer, p. 256.

³⁴ Ibidem, GCS 30, 268: “quos Dominus percussit et exstinxit”, transl. Greer, p. 257.

³⁵ Ibidem 27, 2, GCS 30, 259: “cum essemus in Aegypto, mundi dico huius erroribus et ignorantiae tenebris, operantes opera diaboli in concupiscentiis et voluptatibus carnis, miseratus est Dominus afflictionem nostram et «misit» Verbum «suum unigenitum Filium», qui nos de ignorantia erroris ereptos ad lucem divinae legis adduceret”, transl. Greer, p. 249.

³⁶ Cf. ibidem 27, 10.

³⁷ Cf. ibidem 27, 9.11 and 12.

The wandering of the soul begins when it leaves this world. Origen clearly indicates that it would begin after the Exodus from Egypt, that is – after death, “when the soul leaves its dwelling place in the body”³⁸. Death is the brightness-day, it is a moment of liberation from the bondage of the world, the rejection of all that enslaves the soul. According to platonic theory of Ideas it is the liberation towards the light of truth, it is rejection of earthliness and carnality³⁹.

However, the real wandering of the soul through the various stages and particular stops, to its all mansions begins according to the Alexandrian later – after the resurrection⁴⁰, when the souls are “divested of their bodies or again clothed with bodies”⁴¹. Wandering concerns a future of hope, which will be fulfilled after the resurrection, when the soul ascends to heaven⁴². The moment of its beginning is its exit from Ramesse or the abandonment of all that which “in this world is set in agitation and disorder, and also in corruption”⁴³. Although further explanations made by Origen about wandering of the soul and its stops on the way through wilderness describe the spiritual way towards christian perfection as well some eschatological points are included in between them. In all stops Origen draws special attention to the spiritual development,

³⁸ Ibidem 27, 2, GCS 30, 258: “cum anima de corporis huius habitatione discedit”, transl. Greer, p. 248.

³⁹ Cf. ibidem 27, 7.

⁴⁰ It seems that at this point we touch one of the most debated points in Origen’s eschatological doctrine – the resurrection. Despite the mentioned formulations, some hesitation about the time of the wandering of the soul towards perfection can be felt in the deliberations of the Alexandrian. Is a moment of its beginning the death or the resurrection? Or maybe is it – as Origen says – “the ascent of the soul to heaven and the mystery of the resurrection from the dead” (Origenes, *In Numeros hom.* 27, 4)? It is actually difficult to determine whether Origen speaks of the “life” of the soul with its own substance after the death and after the first resurrection in anticipation of the second resurrection, and during this “life” the soul wanders (cf. idem, *De principiis*, praef. 5 and as it is shown in the cited above paragraph of *In Numeros hom.* 26, 4) or he tells of the wandering of the soul at the end of time, when the soul with the “spiritual” body will come to God and to the final resurrection (cf. idem, *De principiis* 2, 10, 1-2; , *In Numeros hom.* 27, 6). Cf. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church*, p. 51; M. Szram, *Ciało zmartwychwstałe w myśli patrystycznej przełomu II i III wieku*, Lublin 2010, 583-629. Or maybe it is “time” of the transition state, as it is indicated in the explanation of one of the stops, which Origen refers to as “Abraham’s bosom” (cf. Origenes, *In Numeros hom.* 27, 12). In *De principiis* (II 11, 6) Origen also suggests that human souls, after the death and before the final resurrection, will be in a kind of “school for souls” located “in the various places which the Greeks have termed spheres, ie, globes, but Which holy Scripture has called heavens”, where they will learn all that what Origen writes about in his exegesis of stops in the wilderness (cf. ibidem II 11, 3.5-6; idem, *Commentatorium Series in Matthaeum* 51). It seems that, as in many other places as well here Origen leaves opened the question, not giving a clear and definitive explanation. It is only certain that the Alexandrian says about the eschatological reality.

⁴¹ Origenes, *In Numeros hom.* 27, 2, GCS 30, 258: “anima corpore exuta, immo corpore suo rursus induta”, transl. Greer, p. 248.

⁴² Cf. ibidem 27, 6.

⁴³ Ibidem 27, 9, GCS 30, 268: “omnia in hoc mundo in commotionibus et perturbationibus posita sunt et in corruptela”, transl. Greer, p. 258.

to the deification, which at the time of the wandering are accomplished in the soul. He also emphasizes – as it is seen at the end of the homily 27 – the special role played by the incarnate Word of God, Jesus Christ, who walks with us this way and who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, and who has already begun to reign, and who will ultimately pass this reign to God the Father⁴⁴.

All this was in God's plan. By the fact that it happened in the past, in the history of the Chosen People and it was written down, it serves as a help for people on their way to the Father. It is a plan prepared by the Lord and written down at His command

“so that when we read them and see how many starting places lie ahead of us on the journey that leads to the kingdom, we may prepare ourselves for this way of life and, considering the journey that lies ahead of us, may not allow the time of our life to be ruined by sloth and neglect”⁴⁵.

God has already acted in the past having a plan of the eschatological fulfillment of the wandering of the Israelites, which will be fulfilled in the life of every man, who will walk no longer in the dark, but with God's plan realized in the history of Israel.

Of course, a certain element of realising of eschatology, as seen by the man, is included already in his earthly imitation of Christ, which leads him to a pre-state of final happiness. In this respect, the spiritual exegesis of the stages of wandering through the desert, that allows to get closer to Christ on earth, what is the prediction of the final eschatological state, can be seen as the beginning of the eschatological way.

Thus we can see in Origen's exposition the beginnings of the later formulated theory of the realized eschatology. Salvific activity of Christ has already begun. As it is pointed out by Brian Daley:

“The process of eschatological fulfillment has already begun, but is by no means complete; the Church experiences a tension, not only between present and future, but also between the salvation of the individual saint and that of the whole body of Christ. So, in explaining the meaning of the Kingdom of God, Origen likes to stress that God's rule is already a reality in those who obey his word”⁴⁶.

For there is no time when one can cease activity and rest. Man is called to grow, exceed himself “from the good, to what is better, and next – from what is better to the more perfect”⁴⁷. He is called to transcend this world created by

⁴⁴ Cf. *ibidem* 27, 13.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem* 27, 7, GCS 30, 265: “ut legentes nos et videntes, quanta nobis imminet profectio et quanta mansio ad iter, quod ducit ad regnum, praeparemus nos ad hanc viam et considerantes iter, quod nobis imminet, non segniter nec remisse vitae nostrae tempus permittamus absumi”, transl. Greer, p. 254.

⁴⁶ Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church*, p. 49. Cf. Origenes, *De oratione* 25, 1.

⁴⁷ Cf. Origenes, *In Numeros hom.* XVII 4.

the Lord, in which He acts continually and to watch continually the beginning of the reality and to refer everything to “Him who was in the beginning, nor is there any time when he abandons that beginning”⁴⁸.

2. Jerome – lost eschatology. Now it seems natural to make a reference to another work dedicated to the same subject, written by a man who for the first half of his life was an ardent follower of the Scholar of Alexandria, and in the other – after 393 A.D. – became his opponent. It is, of course, Jerome of Stridon, who in his letter 78, written in the summer 400 A.D., after the change of his attitude towards Origen, provides an explanation of the stages of Israel’s wandering through the wilderness⁴⁹.

Letter 78, which describes wandering of the Chosen People through the wilderness, was written at the request of Fabiola, the Roman matron and Jerome’s spiritual daughter, who spent some time in Jerusalem and Bethlehem, where she met him and for a while was staying in his monastery for women, deepening her knowledge of the Bible. Unfortunately, the description was not delivered to Fabiola as she had died in 399 A.D., and it was passed to Ocean together with the Letter 77. which is a laudatory epitaph in honour of the deceased⁵⁰.

Like Origen, Jerome interprets the names of the stops of the Chosen People on their way to the promised land. It seems, however, that at the starting point these two authors were guided by completely different assumptions. As Origen clearly emphasized the spiritual and eschatological purpose of his interpretation, Jerome seemed to be guided by more intellectual purpose of interpretation. A reading of Letter 78. continually confirms this. He, moreover, seems to corroborate it when in the course of his interpretations he states:

“I would wish to ask the prudent and studious reader that he might know I translate the words according to Hebrew truth; otherwise in the Greek and Latin books we find all but a few things corrupted. And I wonder that certain learned and ecclesiastical men wanted to carry over those things that are not in Hebrew and seek made-up explanations from what is badly translated”⁵¹.

⁴⁸ Ibidem 27, 12, GCS 30, 275: “qui erat «in principio», nec ab isto initio aliquando discedit”, transl. Greer, p. 264.

⁴⁹ Cf. B.R. Degórski, *Il cammino degli Israeliti dall’Egitto verso la Terra Promessa secondo la lettera 78 di San Girolamo*, DPa 13 (2004) 77-118.

⁵⁰ Cf. A. Cain, *The Letters of Jerome. Ascetism, Biblical Exegesis, and the Construction of Christian Authority in Late Antiquity*, Oxford – New York 2009, 172-177.

⁵¹ Hieronymus, *Epistula* 78, 11, ed. H. Pietras, *ŻMT* 55, Kraków 2010, 213: “Prudentem studiosumque lectorem rogatum velim, ut sciat me vertere nomina iuxta Hebraicam Veritatem. Alioquin in Graecis et Latinis codicibus praeter pauca, omnia corrupta repperimus: et miror quosdam eruditos et Ecclesiasticos viros ea voluisse transferre, quae in Hebraico non habentur, et de male interpretatis, fictas explanationes quaerere”, transl. J. Ferrante, <https://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/365.html> [access: 19.11.2016].

Jerome therefore stresses the cognitive and intellectual, and what can be called the scientific aim of his interpretation. He pays more attention to the accuracy of names, their etymology and geographical significance than to their theological significance. In this way he distances himself from the works of Origen, which of course he knew, but the ongoing Origenist controversy did not allow him to make reference to his works, however, as we shall see further, he certainly used them.

The possible eschatological reference of Jerome's interpretation is shown by the words from the Letter 77. that is a kind of exegetical key to the Letter 78⁵². Jerome, dedicating his exegetical work to Fabiola, writes to Oceanus:

“Hereupon she began to press me harder still, expostulating with me as though it were a thing unallowable that I should be ignorant of what I did not know, yet at the same time affirming her own unworthiness to understand mysteries so deep. In a word I was ashamed to refuse her request and allowed her to extort from me a promise that I would devote a special work to this subject for her use. Till the present time I have had to defer the fulfilment of my promise: as I now perceive, by the Will of God in order that it should be consecrated to her memory. As in a previous work I clothed her with the priestly vestments, so in the pages of the present she may rejoice that she has passed through the wilderness of this world and has come at last to the land of promise”⁵³.

Jerome at the starting point seems to take into account the eschatological significance of the stops of the Chosen People in the desert. The wandering is the passage through the wilderness of this world to the promised land – paradise. In the adopted assumptions, Jerome presupposes the eschatological aspect of his interpretation. However, a reading of Letter 78, after only first paragraphs, shows that Jerome failed to comply with his own assumptions. In fact, in his comprehensive exegesis – interpreting all 42 stops – there are almost no eschatological references. The primary aim and meaning of Israel's wandering through the wilderness is to present the Christian spiritual development. Why did Jerome ignore completely, the seemingly natural intrusive dimension of the interpretation? Why did he leave away the assumptions suggested by himself? Why – if even not referring to Origen – did he not follow in the footsteps of Origen's interpretation?

First however we have to examine whether Jerome, in his exegesis of the stops in the wilderness, was inspired by Origen's interpretations. After comparing

⁵² Cf. Cain, *The Letters of Jerome*, p. 177-178.

⁵³ Hieronymus, *Epistula* 77, 7, *ŽMT* 55, 201: “Extorsit mihi negandi verecundia, ut proprium ei opus huiusmodi disputatiunculae pollicerer, quod usque in praesens tempus, ut nunc intelligo, Domini voluntate dilatum reddetur memoriae illius: ut sacerdotalibus prioris ad se voluminis induta vestibus, per mundi huius solitudinem gaudeat se ad terram repromissionis aliquando venisse”, transl. W.H. Fremantle – G. Lewis – W.G. Martley, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3001077.htm> [access: 19.11.2016].

these two works we can give a general affirmative answer. Jerome certainly knew and used the Origen's work as in many places he followed his explanations. Of course, today it is very difficult to compare used vocabulary because we have only a Latin translation of Origen's homilies by Rufinus, but there are similarities in the interpretation of some of the stops. An example could be, opening both interpretations, an explanation of the number of stops in the wilderness – they both refer to the number of generations since the creation of the world to Christ⁵⁴; they both evoke similar meanings of Egypt⁵⁵; they both have the same understanding of the symbolism of “hands of Moses and Aaron”⁵⁶; the similar understanding of the name “Sochoth” of the first stop⁵⁷; in both there is a similar interpretation of the sixth stop, containing the same error concerning the number of disciples sent by Christ according to Luke⁵⁸. These similarities may indicate the use of the work of Origen by Jerome. Even more, it is testified by Jerome's comments correcting interpretations of other authors. Certainly many of them refer to the work of Origen. For example, the fourth stop, at which Jerome points out that “Indeed they wrongly think hiroth is towns, and it is manifest error to read the letter ain for the above mentioned letter”⁵⁹. Origen in his homily uses such an explanation of this name and so probably he is an object of Jerome's criticism⁶⁰. With the great probability it can be stated that also critical words on the explanation of the ninth stop refers to Origen, as Jerome wrote:

“otherwise in the Greek and Latin books we find all but a few things corrupted. And I wonder that certain learned and ecclesiastical men wanted to carry over those things that are not in Hebrew and seek made-up explanations from what is badly translated, so in this place they read the letter *Raphaca* for *Dephca* because *res* and *daleth* are distinguished by a small point, and translated *administration* and thence follows a similar tropology”⁶¹.

In his exegesis however, Jerome does not refer even once, either positively or negatively, directly to the name of Origen.

⁵⁴ Cf. Idem, *Epistula* 78, 2; Origenes, *In Numeros hom.* 27, 3.

⁵⁵ Cf. Hieronymus, *Epistula* 78, 2; Origenes, *In Numeros hom.* 27, 2.

⁵⁶ Cf. Hieronymus, *Epistula* 78, 2; Origenes, *In Numeros hom.* 27, 6.

⁵⁷ Cf. Hieronymus, *Epistula* 78, 4; Origenes, *In Numeros hom.* 27, 9.

⁵⁸ Cf. Hieronymus, *Epistula* 78, 8; Origenes, *In Numeros hom.* 27, 11.

⁵⁹ Hieronymus, *Epistula* 78, 6, ŽMT 55, 210: “Quidam male, *hiroth*, villas putant, errorque manifestus, quod pro supradicto elemento, *ai* litteram legant”, transl. Ferrante, <https://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/365.html> [access: 19.11.2016].

⁶⁰ Cf. Origenes, *In Numeros hom.* 27, 4.

⁶¹ Hieronymus, *Epistula* 78, 11, ŽMT 55, 213: “Alioquin in Graecis et Latinis codicibus praeter pauca, omnia corrupta repperimus: et miror quosdam eruditos et Ecclesiasticos viros ea voluisse transferre, quae in Hebraico non habentur, et de male interpretatis, fictas explanationes quaerere, ut in praesenti pro *Dephcca*, legant *Rephca*, litteram ponentes pro littera, eo quod *res* et *deleth* parvo apice, distinguantur, et interpretantur *curationem*: atque exinde tropologiam similem prosequuntur”, transl. Ferrante, <https://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/365.html> [access: 19.11.2016]. Cf. Origenes, *In Numeros hom.* 27, 12.

Jerome does not follow either in the footsteps of the Scholarch of Alexandria in the eschatological interpretation of the wandering of Israel in the wilderness. In this way, Jerome did not want to give reasons for being accused of accepting false Origen's doctrines, which were mainly related to the eschatology. In the period of criticism of Origen, Jerome justified himself that he approved his exegesis, but not doctrine. What is more – as mentioned above – in his interpretations he almost totally ignores the eschatological issues. Only in two places of his interpretation of the wandering in the wilderness does Jerome perhaps include small references to eschatology. Interpreting the number of stops in the wilderness he states that “in that mystery of number we should reach the kingdoms of heaven under which the Lord and Saviour came from the first patriarch to the Virgin”⁶². It is difficult to say whether in this case, “the kingdoms of heaven” means the eschatological reality or has a spiritual significance. Another reference to eschatology appears on the occasion of the 29th stop, which is explained by Jerome, *inter alia*, as a “messenger” and “preparation”. Jerome says that “about the messenger and preparation, we can say this briefly, that when we suggest great spurs to virtue to the children of necessity, we announce the rewards of the future to them and teach them to go to war prepared”⁶³. He shows, therefore, the task of the messenger as the proclamation of the eschatological reward as an encouragement to fight.

Based on the above, we can conclude that the eschatological issues were not of interest to Jerome. In his interpretations he only refers to the spiritual meaning of the stops in the wilderness and their significance for spiritual development, and above all their philological meaning. Jerome is seen primarily as a philologist, a biblical scholar, not a theologian. As an excellent summary of the issue, we can recall the words of B. Daley from his book *Hope of the Early Church*:

“Jerome was also an apostle of the flourishing new monastic movement, a spiritual director of many devout Roman women, a controversialist and a tireless ecclesiastical politician – all of which strongly influenced his theology. A compiler and a publicist rather than an original theological thinker or a metaphysician”⁶⁴.

And this is well illustrated by his commentary on the stops of Israel in his journey towards the promised land. Probably because of his violent attacks on Origen after 394 A.D. he did not follow Origen's interpretation even though it would have made his exegesis richer and deeper.

⁶² Hieronymus, *Epistula* 78, 2, *ŽMT* 55, 207: “in illo numeri sacramento perveniamus ad regna caelorum, sub quo Dominus atque Salvator a primo Patriarcha pervenit ad virginem”, transl. Ferrante, <https://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/365.html> [access: 19.11.2016].

⁶³ *Ibidem* 78, 31, *ŽMT* 55, 225: “De nuntio autem et accinctione haec breviter possumus dicere, quod *filiis necessitatis* grandes ad virtutem stimulos suggeramus, cum eis nuntiaverimus praemia futurorum, et accinctos inire bella docuerimus”, transl. Ferrante, <https://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/365.html> [access: 19.11.2016].

⁶⁴ Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church*, p. 101.

But in fact Jerome's Letter 78. has one very important eschatological meaning: reading together both Letters 77. and 78. – as Jerome wanted – we can see Fabiola as “the archetypal pilgrim who reached her final destination precisely because she had followed Jerome's spiritual direction. Jerome ever so delicately implies that acceptance of his exegetical programme is a matter of eternal salvation”⁶⁵. And thus, with almost nothing mentioned about eschatology, Jerome said everything about it.

(Summary)

The writings of Origen and Jerome, which are the source of the article, although in a different literary form – a homily and a letter – and written for a different purpose and at different times, both are exegesis of the chapter 33 of the Book of Numbers in which the stops of the Israelites in the desert on the road to the Promised Land are described. Both texts are the classic examples of allegorical interpretation of the Scripture. Both authors interpret the 42 “stages” of Israel's wilderness wanderings above all as God's roadmap for the spiritual growth of individual believers, but there are present as well eschatological elements in their interpretations. In the presented paper there are shown these eschatological ideas of both authors included in their interpretations of the wandering of the Chosen People on their way to the Promised Land, sources of their interpretations, similarities and differences, and the dependence of Jerome on Origen in the interpretation of the stages, with the focus on the idea of realized eschatology, present in Alexandrian's work. Origen has presented in his interpretation a very rich picture of the future hope, but Jerome almost nothing mentioned in his letter about hopes of the way towards God after death.

NADZIEJA ODNALEZIONA I UTRACONA
– ESCHATOLOGICZNY WYMIAR WĘDRÓWKI IZRAELITÓW
PRZEZ PUSTYNIĘ. DWA SPOSOBY WIDZENIA JEDNEJ HISTORII:
HOMILIA 27. NA KSIĘGĘ LICZB ORYGENESA I *LIST 78. HIERONIMA*

(Streszczenie)

Pisma Orygenesesa i Hieronima, które są bazą źródłową artykułu, choć w różnej formie literackiej – homilia i list – i napisane w innym celu i w różnym czasie, oba ukazują egzegezę 33. rozdziału Księgi Liczb w którym opisane są postoje Narodu Wybranego na pustyni na drodze ku Ziemi Obiecanej. Oba dzieła są klasycznym przykładem interpretacji alegorycznej tekstu Pisma świętego. Obaj autorzy interpretują 42 postoje podczas wędrówki Izraela po pustyni przede wszystkim jako Boży plan duchowego rozwoju chrześcijanina, lecz także obecne są w ich

⁶⁵ Cain, *The Letters of Jerome*, p. 178.

rozważaniach elementy eschatologiczne. W prezentowanym artykule ukazane są te eschatologiczne idee obecne w obu interpretacjach wędrówki Narodu Wybranego ku Ziemi Obiecanej, źródła ich interpretacji, ich podobieństwa i różnice, zależność Hieronima od Orygenesesa w jego interpretacji postojów na pustyni, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem idei eschatologii zrealizowanej obecnej w dziele Aleksandryjczyka. Orygenes w swej interpretacji przedstawił bogaty obraz eschatologicznej nadziei, podczac gdy Hieronim niemal w ogóle nie wspomina w swym liście o nadziei na drodze ku Bogu po śmierci.

Key words: Origen, Jerome, Book of Numbers, Israel, wandering, stops in the desert, eschatology, hope.

Słowa kluczowe: Orygenes, Hieronim, Księga Liczb, Izrael, wędrówka, postoje na pustyni, eschatologia, nadzieja.

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