

2. LETTER OF JUSTINIAN TO THE HOLY COUNCIL ABOUT ORIGEN AND THOSE LIKE-MINDED⁵³

Our zeal was and is to protect from disturbance the holy, catholic and apostolic church of God and to condemn whatever springs up in any way that is contrary to the orthodox faith. Since therefore it has become known to us that there are indeed some monks at Jerusalem who follow Pythagoras, Plato, Origen the Adamantine and their impiety and error and teach accordingly, we have thought it necessary to take thought and carry out an investigation concerning them, lest through their pagan and Manichaeian deceit they utterly destroy many. For, to mention a few things out of many, they assert that there were minds without any number or name, with the result that there was a henad⁵⁴ of all the rational beings through identity of substance and operation and through power and their union with and knowledge of God the Word, and that when they reached satiety with divine love and contemplation, corresponding to the turning of each to what is worse, they clothed themselves with more subtle or denser bodies and were allotted names, and that this is the origin of the existence of the heavenly and ministering powers. Moreover, [they assert] that the sun, the moon and the stars, belonging themselves to the same henad of rational beings, became what they are through turning to what is worse, while the rational beings who for the greater part grew cold in divine love were named souls and were decked in our more dense bodies, and those who had reached the acme of evil were bound to cold and dark bodies and became and are named demons; and that from the state of the angels originates that of the soul, and from that of the soul that of demons and human beings, and from the whole henad of rational beings one mind alone remained undeviating and constant in divine love and contemplation, and it became Christ and King and a human being; and that there will be a total destruction of bodies with the Lord himself first shedding his own body and [then] of all the others; and that all will be raised again to the same henad and become minds (as they were in their pre-existence), when indeed the devil himself and the other demons are restored to the same henad, and when impious and godless human beings will be with godly and

53 The text is preserved in the Byzantine chroniclers Georgius Monachos (or Hamartolus) and Cedrenus. CPG 6886 refers to editions in Migne, but the best text is that in de Boor's edition of Georgius Monachus' *Chronicon*, II, 630–3. The heading I give is based on that in Georgius and does not go back to the original despatch of the letter. The date of the letter must be the spring of 553.

54 A 'henad' is a unity distinct from, and dependent on, the unity of God himself, the 'monad' (Wallis 1972, 147).

inspired men and the heavenly powers and will enjoy the same union with God that Christ too enjoys, just as in their pre-existence, with the result that there will be no difference at all between Christ and the remaining rational beings, neither in substance nor in knowledge nor in power nor in operation. For Pythagoras said that the origin of everything was the monad;⁵⁵ and again Pythagoras and Plato, after asserting there is a whole company of bodiless souls, say that those who fall into some sin or other are made to descend into bodies as a punishment. Plato in consequence called the body a fetter and a tomb, since the soul is (as it were) fettered and buried in it.⁵⁶ Then about the coming judgement and retribution of souls he says again, ‘The soul of one who has been a lover of boys and lived guilelessly with philosophy is set free in a third thousand-year cycle,⁵⁷ and having thereby grown wings is released and departs in the thousandth year, while as for the others, when they end this life, some will enter the places of punishment under the earth and pay the reckoning and penalty, while others, raised by justice into a place in heaven, will lead a life worthy of how they have lived.’ It is easy to realize the absurdity of this account; for who taught him the cycles of thousands of years, and that after the elapse of a thousand years each of the souls then departs to its own place? As for what is said incidentally, it would be unsuitable for the utterly licentious, let alone such a philosopher; for to those who had achieved pure philosophy he united the dissolute and lovers of boys and declared that both would enjoy the same rewards.⁵⁸ So Pythagoras, Plato, Plotinus and their followers, who agreed that souls are immortal, declared that they exist prior to bodies and that there is a great company of souls, of which those that transgress descend into bodies, as I said above, the vindictive and wicked into leopards, the ravenous into wolves, the treacherous into foxes, and those mad after women into horses.⁵⁹ But the church, following

55 The preceding sentence comes verbatim (doubtless via the plaint presented by the Palestinian monks) from Theodoret, *Cure of Hellenic Maladies* II. 22 (SC 57.1, p. 144, 13–14).

56 The preceding two sentences are taken verbatim from Theodoret, *Cure of Hellenic Maladies* V. 13 (SC 57.1, 229–30). Plato, *Gorgias* 493a mentions as a traditional saying that the body (Fä:") is a tomb (F–:").

57 The Byzantine writers who preserve Justinian’s letter, incredulous that even Plato could have been so favourable to pederasty, give the text, ‘The soul of one who has been a lover of boys and lived wickedly with philosophy is set free after being punished in a third thousand- year cycle.’ But it is likely that the original text followed Theodoret more closely (see the following note) and I emend accordingly.

58 The quotation from Plato (*Phaedrus* 249AB) and the comment that follows are taken almost verbatim from Theodoret, *Cure of Hellenic Maladies* XI. 40–1 (SC 57.2, 405–6).

59 The preceding sentence (save for the final phrase, ‘and those mad after women...’) comes verbatim from Theodoret, *Epitome of Heretical Myths* V. 9 (PG 83. 480C).

the divine scriptures, affirms that the soul is created together with the body, not first one and the other later, according to the insanity of Origen.

On account of these wicked and destructive doctrines, or rather ravings, we bid you most sacred ones to assemble together, read the appended exposition attentively, and condemn and anathematize each of these articles together with the impious Origen and all those who hold or have held these beliefs till death.

The Acts of the Council of Constantinople, trans. Richard Price (Liverpool University Press, 2009), II:282-284