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## ***Impassibilitas et impeccantia: Jerome's Misunderstanding of Impassibility and Sinlessness in Evagrius Ponticus***

### ***Impassibilitas et impeccantia: Hieronimovo napačno razumevanje brezstrastnosti in brezgrešnosti pri Evagriju Pontskem***

*Abstract:* Jerome understood impassibility like Stoics as a complete lack of any emotion or desire. He mistakenly identified impassibility with *impeccantia* accusing Evagrius of making man a cold stone or a sinless God. Evagrius, however, did not identify impassibility with the state of modern apathy or insensitivity or as a lack of desires and impulses, but as a liberation from the passionate thoughts: gluttony, impurity, avarice, sadness, wrath, and acedia. Jerome did not read Evagrius texts in original Greek and had second-hand information about his teaching, so he misunderstood his concept of *impassibilitas et impeccantia*.

*Keywords:* Jerome, sin, Stoicism, emotions, *apatheia*

*Povzetek:* Hieronimovo razumevanje brezstrastnosti (*impassibilitas*) sledi stoiškemu, to pomeni: odsotnost čustev ali želja. Brezstrastnost je zmotno enačil z brezgrešnostjo (*impeccantia*), pri tem pa je Evagrija obtožil poskusa, da želi iz človeka narediti brezsrčen kamen ali za brezgrešnega Boga. Evagrius brezstrastnosti namreč ni razumel v smislu sodobnega pojma apatije ali brezčutnosti, pa tudi ne v smislu umanjkanja želja in dražljajev, marveč kot osvoboditev od strastnih misli: požrešnost, nečistost, pohlep, žalost, jeza in akedija. Hieronim ni bral Evagrijevih besedil v izvorni grščini, ampak je imel o njih zgolj informacije iz druge roke, zaradi česar je napačno razumel pojma brezstrastnosti in brezgrešnosti.

*Ključne besede:* Hieronim, greh, stoicizem, čustva, apatija

## 1. Jerome's Polemic with Pelagianism

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If we want to understand Jerome's polemic with Evagrius correctly, we should put it into the broader context of his polemic with Pelagianism. Over the centuries, this dispute, known as the 'Pelagian Controversy', has been seen as centrally concerned with the nature of grace (Von Harnack 1899, 170; Evans 1968, 7; Bonner 1972, 1; Rees 1991, 54), while other issues have been put aside. Gerald Bonner has correctly stated that »historians and theologians have too long tended to form their image of Pelagianism by looking through Augustinian spectacles« (1992, 48). As a result of that, 'Pelagianism' has been passed down over time as a centralized and organized movement aimed to deceive Christians on the correct understanding of grace (Brown 2000, 346–349). In recent decades, scholars have begun to realize that in using the term 'Pelagian Controversy', some patristic authors are much more diverse and nuanced than previous generations have allowed. Bonner rightly claimed that »we can no longer think of the Pelagians as a constituting a party with a rigidly-defined doctrinal system but rather as a mixed group united by certain theological principles which nevertheless left the individual free to develop his own opinions upon particular topics« (1970, 31; Teske 1997, 11; Rousseau 2009, 14). Bonner, in 1972, had already distinguished between the theological heresy and the historical controversy: »Dogmatic theologians use the word Pelagianism /.../ to describe the heresy which dispenses with any need for divine grace and denies any transmission of Original Sin.« Instead, as a historical controversy, 'Pelagianism' would be »an ascetic movement within the Christian Church during the late fourth and early fifth centuries, a movement composed of disparate elements which came, over time, to be associated under the name of the British theologian and exegete Pelagius« (1972, 1; 2018; Bugiulescu 2018).

Michael Rackett, in his dissertation entitled *Sexuality and Sinlessness*, rightly pointed out that the central theological principle of the Pelagian controversy was not so much an affirmation of human free will or denial of original sin as it was the affirmation of the possibility of sinlessness (2002a, 251–253). Even if Rackett fell into the same reductionist trap as previous scholars by replacing the central question of grace with the central question of sinlessness, nevertheless, he rightly drew the attention of scholars to the idea of sinlessness. Stuart Squires rightly follows Rackett in affirming that we should recognize sinlessness as one of the most important themes for Pelagius and his followers but refuses to claim that this is the heart of the matter (2013, 8). Even if sinlessness is not a central and crucial issue within the Pelagian controversy, it is still one of the movement's central ideas. Jerome's accuse of Evagrius confirms that sinlessness and impassibility, strictly connected with it, were seen as part of Pelagianism.

We know that Jerome, like Cassian, was one of the essential ascetic writers in the Western Church in the 4<sup>th</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> century. However, Elisabeth Clark, claiming that Jerome viewed the Pelagian debate as a »continuation of both the ascetic and the Origenist controversies« (1992, 221), is incorrect. If there is no doubt regarding the fact that Jerome considered Pelagianism as a continuation of the Origenist

controversy, it seems that he did not see this debate as an ascetic controversy. It is surprising that in his *Epistula* 130.16, which is one of his most essential discourses on consecrated life, there is no connection between asceticism and Pelagius. In this text, Jerome warns Demetrias against the danger of Origenism, especially the doctrine of the pre-existence of souls, but does not accuse Pelagius of distorting ascetic teaching (Squires 2013, 85–109). We do not know why: maybe because he did not notice any danger for the ascetic life in Pelagius' writings or because he thought it would be easier to accuse Pelagius of distorting the Gospel by introducing the corrupting influence of philosophy. However, in any case, his ascetic preoccupations are curiously absent. There is no doubt that Jerome detected the influence of Origen on Pelagius as the most important and most dangerous. Thus, when he accused Evagrius of proclaiming impassibility and sinlessness, he did so not because he was convinced that Evagrius as a monk distorted ascetic doctrine with his ideas, but because as an Origenist, he deviated from orthodox theological teaching as did his master. In other words, Jerome's criticism of Evagrius is strangely based not on ascetical principles but theological ones. Now let us start the detailed analysis of Jerome's texts which will confirm that perspective.

## 2. Jerome's Criticism of Evagrius

*Epistula* 133 *Ad Ctesifontem* is the third text written against Pelagius in 414, but it is also chronologically the first text in which Evagrius is mentioned. Jerome refutes Pelagius' denial of original sin, pointing out that he has drawn it partly from philosophers and partly from heretics. Quoting Is 14,13-14 he adds that it is the greatest presumption to claim not only likeness to God but equality to Him and so to compress the poisonous doctrines of all heretics which in turn flow from the statements of the philosophers, particularly Pythagoras and Zeno, the founder of the Stoic school. The Stoics affirm that it is possible to root out of the human mind what they call 'passions' (πάθη) – all vice may be destroyed roots and branches in man by meditation on virtue and constant practice of it. To maintain such a doctrine is to take man's nature from him, forget that he is constituted of the body and soul, and substitute mere wishes for sound teaching. Jerome refers to Rom 7,24, where St. Paul affirms that nobody can free man from the body of this death, then to Vergil (*Aen.* 6.733–734) and Horace (*Sat.* 1.3.68–69), who confirms that we cannot escape these feelings. He also quotes Tertullian (*Adversus Hermogenem* 9), who said that »the philosophers are the patriarchs of the heretics«. Jerome draws a powerful argument from Rom 7,19, in which the Apostle tells us that he has no power to do what he wishes. He quotes many different biblical passages affirming human weakness and the impossibility of living without sin (Rom 11,32; 3,23; Eccl 7,20; Prov 20,9). The heretics inspired by Greek philosophers say that a man may be 'without sin' and they describe this state by the Greek word ἀνάμαρτος. After that, Jerome sets forth the names of heretics affirming that doctrine: Manichaeus and Priscillian from Spain. These heretics have affinities with Gnosticism

which may be traced to the impious teaching of Basilides, who insisted that without knowledge of the law, it is impossible to avoid sin. Moreover, in this context, we find the attack on Evagrius:

»Evagrius of Ibera in Pontus who sends letters to virgins and monks and among others to her whose name bears witness to the blackness of her perfidy (that is Melania), has published a book of maxims on apathy, or, as we should say, impassivity or imperturbability; a state in which the mind ceases to be agitated and – to speak simply – becomes either a stone or a God. His work is widely read, in the East in Greek and the West in a Latin translation made by his disciple Rufinus. He has also written a book that professes to be about monks and includes many not monks at all he declares to have been Origenists and have certainly been condemned by the bishops. I mean Ammonius, Eusebius, Euthymius, Evagrius himself, Horus, Isidorus, and many others whom it would be tedious to enumerate.« (Hier., *Ep.* 133.3)<sup>1</sup>

Later on, Jerome states that if we would like to trace other masters of this heresy, we should go to Origen, who, commenting Ps 16,7, »My reins also instruct me in the night season«, affirmed that when a holy man has reached perfection, he is accessible even at night from human infirmity and is not tempted by evil thoughts. This is also the second position of Jovinian that »the devil cannot tempt persons baptized with water and spirit« (Hier., *Adv. Iovin.* 2.1). Jerome adds that if the arguments of these people and Pelagius were true, men would have no external need for God's grace to avoid sin. Therefore, there is no need to fast or any other form of self-restraint. The Pelagians argued that if the human will require external support, it ceased to be free will and criticized Christians for destroying the free will. To save human freedom, we must admit that we are no longer dependent upon God. Jerome tried to convince Ctesifont that human free will requires the help of God's grace. If in the Holy Scriptures many are called righteous, at the same time, Scripture clearly says that they have committed a lot of errors and sins before their complete conversion to God.

The same idea is repeated in *Commentary on Jeremiah 4* when Jerome mentions that while he started commenting on the book of the prophet in Bethlehem, there suddenly erupted the heresy of Pythagoras and Zeno regarding ἀπαθεία and ἀναμαρτησία, that is *inpassibilitatis et inpeccantiae*. It has been developed in the writings of Origen, his disciples Evagrius Ponticus, and Jovinian. This heresy became known not only in the East but also in the West and some islands like Sicily

<sup>1</sup> »Evagrius ponticus hiborita, qui scribit ad uirgines, scribit ad monachos, scribit ad eam, cuius nomen nigredinis testatur perfidiae tenebras, edidit librum et sententias peri apatheias, quam nos ‚inpassibilitatem’ uel ‚inperturbationem’ possumus dicere, quando numquam animus ulla cogitatione et uitio commouetur et – ut simpliciter dicam – uel saxum uel deus est. Huius libros per orientem graecos et interpretante discipulo eius rufino latinos plerique in occidente lectitant. Qui librum quoque scripsit quasi de monachis multos que in eo enumerat, qui numquam fuerunt et quos fuisse describit origenistas et ab episcopis damnatos esse non dubium est, ammonium uidelicet et eusebium et euthymium in ipsium euagrium, or quoque et isidorum et multos alios, quos enumerare taedium est.« The English translations are cited according to the Fremantle's translation in the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* series. Latin text follow the Hilberg's CSEL critical edition.

and Rhodes; it stained many people and has grown from day to day because heretics teach it in secret and deny it publicly (*dum secreto docent et publice negant*) (Hier., *Praef. in Hieremiam* 4).

Finally, Jerome made his total onslaught in *Dialogus adversus Pelagianos* written in 415–419. It is a Socratic dialogue between two fictional characters Atticus (Jerome's voice) and Critobulus (Pelagius' voice), where he developed the arguments presented in *Epistula* 133. Benoît Jeanjean's claim that *Epistula* 133 and the *Adv. Pelag.* »constituent un ensemble cohérent de textes qui présentent un objectif commun - réfuter la thèse pélagienne de l'impeccantia« (1999, 387–388) is not entirely accurate. In fact, in *Ep.* 133 and *Adv. Pelag.* 1–2 Jerome states that one may not be sinless, but in *Adv. Pelag.* 3, probably under Augustine's influence, he curiously departs from his previous statements adding that one may be sinless due to individual efforts. However, he does not allow this sinlessness to remain a permanent state because no matter how strong the will or how few temptations are, one may not avoid sin for the entirety of one's life but only for a 'short time'. Jerome did not allow that in *Adv. Pelag.* 1; 2. This change at the end of *Adv. Pelag.* 3 stems from a rejection of Augustine's position on sinlessness. Jerome read in Augustine's work a theology that he considered too pessimistic about the human condition. He felt the need to offer a theological position that attributed more agency to the individual to counteract the limitations that Augustine placed on the human will because of original sin. In comparison, it may seem to be an exaggeration to call him an optimist, the *Adv. Pelag.* are, by Jerome's standards, relatively equilibrated. This temperate position resulted from his rejection of Augustine on one extreme and, of course, Pelagius on the other (Squires 2013, 95–96). In his *Ep.* 133 and *Adv. Pelag.* 1–2, while he rejected Pelagius' understanding of grace, as Augustine had done, he saw free will as possessing more agency than did Augustine (*Ep.* 133.5).

Jerome's primary weapon of attack on Pelagius' theory of sinlessness was to paint him as an intellectual descendent of heterodox Christians who infected Christianity with non-Christian ideas (Rebenich 1992, 219). In the Prologue to *Adv. Pelag.* he repeats once again the same arguments he presented in *Ep.* 133:

»After writing the letter to Ctesiphon, in which I replied to the questions propounded, I received frequent expostulations from the brethren, who wanted to know why I any longer delayed the promised work in which I undertook to answer all the subtleties of the preachers of impassibility (*apatheia*). For everyone knows what the contention of the Stoics and Peripatetics was, that is, the old Academy, some of them asserted that πάθη, which we may call emotions, such as sorrow, joy, hope, fear, can be thoroughly eradicated from the minds of men; others that their power can be broken, that they can be governed and restrained, as unmanageable horses are held in check by peculiar kinds of bits. Tullius has explained their views in the *Tusculan Disputations*, and Origen, in his *Stromata*, endeavours to blend them with ecclesiastical truth. I pass over Manichæus, Priscillianus, Evagrius of Ichora, Jovinianus, and the heretics found throughout almost the whole of Syria, who, by a perversion of the

import of their name, are commonly called Massalians, in Greek, Euchites, all of whom hold that it is possible for human virtue and human knowledge to attain perfection, and arrive, I will not say merely at a likeness to, but equality with God; and who go the length of asserting that, when once they have reached the height of perfection, even sins of thought and ignorance are impossible for them. /.../ Origen is peculiar in maintaining on the one hand that human nature cannot pass through life without sin, and on the other, that it is possible for a man, when he turns to better things, to become so strong that he sins no more.« (Hier., *Adv. Pelag. Prologus*)<sup>2</sup>

Jerome mentioned several men whom he held responsible, either directly or indirectly, for attempting to corrupt the Church, such as the New Academics, Peripatetics, Gnostics, Basilides, Priscillian, Evagrius, Xystus, Messalians, Mani, Arians, and Marcion (Hier., *Ep.* 133.1–3; *Adv. Pelag.* 1.1.19–20). He spent much time and worked to link Pelagius with the Stoics, Jovinian, Rufinus, and, most importantly, Origen (3.15; 1.2; 3.19). He felt that if he could connect Pelagius' idea of sinlessness to Origen and then back to Greek philosophy, he would discredit his opponent and win (Elm 1997, 311–318). While all scholars agree that it was absurd of him to link Pelagius with the New Academics, Peripatetics, Gnostics, Basilides, Priscillian, Messalians, Mani, Arians, and Marcion, a disagreement has arisen about the influence that the Stoics (Cavallera 1922, 1; 323; Ferguson 1952, 78; Brown 2000, 368), Evagrius, Xystus, Jovinian (Duval 2003, 284–365; Hunter 2007, 259–268), Rufinus (Kelly 1975, 315–316), and Origen (Bostock 1999, 385–386) had on Pelagius.

Jerome offers a definition of sinlessness that he sees operating in Pelagius' works which, he believes, is rooted in Stoicism (Cavallera 1921, 127). According to the Stoics, he says, every individual experienced passions (πάθη, *perturbatio*) that must be removed through »meditation (*meditatio*) on virtue and constant practice (*exercitatio*) of it« (Hier., *Ep.* 133.1). In *Praefatio in Heremiam propheta* 4 he says that ἀναμάρτητος is a synonym for ἀπάθεια and in Latin *sine peccato*. He associates sinlessness with a pagan philosophical origin (Jeanjean 1999, 395–397; Rackett 2002a, 283–284). We know that the term ἀπάθεια was a philosophical one which later was adapted and used by theologians such as Clement of Alexandria, Origen,

<sup>2</sup> »Scripta jam ad Ctesiphontem epistola, in qua ad interrogata respondi, crebra fratrum expostulatio fuit, cur promissum opus ultra differrem, in quo pollicitus sum me ad cunctas eorum qui ἀπάθειαν praedicant, quaestiunculas responsurum. Nulli enim est dubium, quin Stoicorum et Peripateticorum, hoc est, veteris Academiae ista contentio sit, quod alii eorum asserant πάθη, quas nos *perturbationes* possumus dicere: aegritudinem, gaudium, spem, timorem eradicari et extirpari posse de mentibus hominum: alii frangi eas, regi atque moderari, et quasi infrenes equos quibusdam lupatis coerceri. Quorum sententias et Tullius in Tusculanis disputationibus explicat, et Origenes ecclesiasticae veritati in *Stromatibus* suis miscere conatur, ut praeteream Manichaeum, Priscillianum, Euagrium Iberitam [Al. Hiboritam et Hyperboritam], Jovianianum, et totius pene Syriae haereticos quos sermone gentili διεστραμμένως Massalianos Graece Εὐχίτας vocant; quorum omnium ista sententia est, posse ad perfectionem, et non dicam ad similitudinem, sed aequalitatem Dei humanam virtutem et scientiam pervenire, ita ut asserant se ne cogitatione quidem et ignorantia, cum ad consummationis culmen ascenderint, posse peccare /.../. Illud autem Origenis proprium est, et impossibile esse humanam a principio usque ad mortem non peccare naturam: et rursus esse possibile, cum se aliquis ad meliora converterit, ad tantam fortitudinem pervenire ut ultra non peccet.« (Hier., *Adv. Pelag. Prologus* [PL 23,517–519]) The same idea is repeated in 1.26; 2.6; 3.3; 3.13.

and Evagrius (Grovec 1973, 312; Nieścior 1996–97; Stewart 1998, 41; Driscoll 1999, 157; Tobon 2010). Jerome is convinced that Pelagius received his understanding of sinlessness from Evagrius, but modern scholars rightly point out that he did not understand what Evagrius meant by ἀπάθεια (Hier., *Ep.* 133.3). Driver, for example, claims that his »description of apatheia is little more than a caricature, and his supposed reliance on the ancient philosophers shows that Jerome had little understanding of their views« (2002, 303; Bell 1987, 148; Kelly 1975, 315; Rackett 2002b, 231; Somos 1999, 372; Colish 1990, 78; Casiday 2002, 370–372). Although the relationship between Pelagius and the Stoics has yet to be explored, Driver rightly rejected his argument of the equivalence of *sine peccato* and ἀπάθεια.

Furthermore, even if Jerome had quite a clear understanding of the Stoic definition of ἀπάθεια, he did not know the writings of Evagrius well enough to realize how the monk of Pontus had adopted the term for Christian usage by making it a means towards the end of a prayerful connection to God. At least, Cassian understood Evagrius better than Jerome (Rebenich 1992, 67–71). Both Cassian and Jerome rejected Pelagius' idea of sinlessness, but they did so from opposing positions. Cassian stood firmly on an Evagrian foundation while Jerome rejected Pelagius from an anti-Evagrian position. For Cassian, Pelagius was, we can say, »not Evagrian enough«, while Jerome thought that Pelagius was ,too Evagrian' (Squires 2013, 141–143). It was irrelevant that Pelagius may never have read Evagrius. What was of central importance was their relationships with Greek philosophy and the Christian appropriation of that philosophy. These relationships coloured their rejection of Pelagius. Cassian, with his dependence on Evagrius and his praise of the ascetic practices of the Egyptian fathers, constructed a definition of sinlessness that echoed the σκοπός of the desert monks. With his scorn for the monks of Nitria and their appropriation of Greek philosophy through Origen and Evagrius, Jerome constructed a definition that (indirectly) assailed those he had once praised. Furthermore, Jerome's equation of sinlessness with Stoic ἀπάθεια was just as misleading. Although Pelagius most likely had been influenced by certain aspects of Stoicism, Jerome's unfairness assumed that Pelagius, Origen, and Evagrius understood sinlessness through a Stoic perspective.

In the context of a dispute with Jovinian and the Pelagian controversy, Jerome understands the Greek term ἀπάθεια either as a state of complete absence of any movements in the human soul or as a kind of the divine state (*ut simpliciter dicam, vel saxum vel deus est*). In contemporary research on Evagrius, thanks to the discovery of many of his texts preserved in Greek under the name of Nil of Ancyra and a Syrian translation of his writings, we can reconstruct (probably better than Jerome himself) his understanding of impassibility, which was quite different than what is attributed to him by Jerome.

### 3. Impassibility and Sinlessness, According to Evagrius

Evagrius saw the spiritual life as πρακτική, and γνωστική (Bunge, 1996; Misiarczyk 2007, 117–184). The first stage is the fight against eight principle λογισμοί: glut-

tony (γαστριμαργία), impurity (πορνεία), avarice (φιλαργυρία), sadness (λύπη), anger (ὀργή), acedia (ἀκηδία), vainglory (κενοδοξία) and pride (ὑπερηφανία) (Stewart 2005; Misiarczyk 2007, 185–375; Brakke 2013, 213). Impassibility is the state of the soul reached after the victory over the first five λογισμοί, and it is at the exact moment the gate to γνωστική, the stage of the knowledge of God when the monk is attacked by vainglory and pride. Evagrius, from one side, defines impassibility as uprooting or removing all passions from the soul, from the other as just limiting their impact. Scholars proposed then that when Evagrius talked about uprooting or removing all passions, he had in mind the monastic life and speaking to beginners; he invited them to limit their impact (Joest 1993; Nieścior 1996–97; 1998; Driscoll 1999; Tobon 2010a; 2010b). Therefore, impassibility would not mean an absolute lack of passionate thoughts but a short and harmless time of staying in the soul without any consent of the will. This, however, clearly stands in contradiction with other texts of Evagrius, in which he defined impassibility as total liberation from the passions. The category of moderation and gradation can explain Evagrius' apparent ambivalence in the definition of impossibility. For the monk of Pontus, passion is the immoderate use of impulses, desires, or pleasure in general. The first degree of impassibility is to be free from this immoderate and incompatible use with their nature. This is the negative aspect of the whole process, i.e., freeing oneself from the improper use of an ontically good sphere, and this state would be an imperfect impassibility.

On the other hand, the second degree would be reserved for those advanced in spiritual life. It would include a positive aspect of the process, i.e., using impulses and desires in the right way, i.e., according to the measure determined by the ontic and moral order established by God as well as the individual choices of man, and following their nature, e.g., lust as a desire for virtue. Here we find the first fundamental difference between Evagrius and Jerome, who identified impassibility with the complete lack of emotion or desire in the Stoic sense. As we have already seen earlier, Jerome saw the sources of both Arianism and Pelagianism in Origen, and he interpreted the teaching of Evagrius about impassibility from the perspective of these assumptions. He mistakenly identified impassibility with *impeccantia* or *impassibilitas*, accusing Evagrius of wanting to make a man a cold stone or a sinless God (*vel saxum vel deus est*). As we have seen, Evagrius did not identify impassibility with the state of modern apathy, insensitivity, or - psychologically speaking - with denial or repression of feelings and emotions. If he claimed that love is the daughter of impassibility, he assumed that there was still some emotional component in that state. According to Evagrius, impassibility consists in freeing oneself from the passion because it is impossible to free oneself from the desires and impulses which belong to human nature. Either Jerome did not understand this subtle distinction, or the teachings of Evagrius had already reached him in some changed form since he identified impassibility with a will to free oneself from these natural desires and impulses.

While on the one hand, the lack of distinction between desires, impulses, and passions led to the identification of impassibility with indifference, i.e. an attempt



to make a man of stone; on the other, the identification of passion with sin led to the understanding of impassibility as sinlessness, i. e., a divine state. It is worth remembering that Jerome used the term *impeccantia*, which, as noted by G. Bunge in his time, meant the Pelagian teaching about the possibility of achieving a state of sinlessness on man's strength alone without the help of God's grace (Bunge 1986). Therefore, he applied the Pelagian ideas to the Evagrius concept of impassibility, seeing in it the influence of Origen and the sources of the Pelagian heresy. The absurdity of this accusation becomes evident if we remember that Evagrius in his teaching on impassibility was inspired more by Clement, not Origen, who used the Greek term ἀπάθεια very rarely. Jerome emphasized it, not fully understanding the teachings of Evagrius on this subject, mixing it with the Stoic ideal of dispassion and the Pelagian doctrine of sinlessness. Pelagians themselves, by identifying ἀπάθεια with *impeccantia*, created much confusion so that the later Christian authors such as John Cassian avoided it at all costs, replacing it with *puritas cordis* (Nieścior 1996; 1997; Joest 1993; Driscoll 1999; Stewart 2003). In the spiritual doctrine of Evagrius, however, impassibility meant neither the Stoic lack of any desire or insensitivity nor sinlessness understood in a Pelagian way. There is no doubt that, according to the monk of Pontus, ascetic practice, although it is a spiritual method of purifying a passionate part of the soul, remains ineffective without God's grace. Impassibility, according to Evagrius, would be a liberation from evil passions, i.e., from the use of desires and impulses against their nature and not their lack at all. Evagrius defines such a state as »the health of the soul« (*Practicus* 56), and if we were to describe the use of desires and impulses contrary to nature, impassibility would be a liberation from such improper use. Such a state is possible for man here on earth, but it is never absolutely permanent. This impassibility, however, is not achieved by shortcuts or voluntarism but by slowly and gradually fighting the first five passionate thoughts. It is a state, or better-said process, subjected to a specific gradation that develops parallel with the ascetic efforts. Different degrees of impassibility is achieved after victory over each passionate thought.

As we have seen, Evagrius' concepts of impassibility and sinlessness are more subtle than what Jerome attributed to him. Different theological and historical contexts, and also a polemical attitude influenced Jerome's interpretation of ἀπάθεια, one of the essential ideas of early Christian monasticism and sowed the seeds of distrust on it in later Latin Christianity.

## Abbreviations

**Adv. Iovin.** – *Adversus Iovinianum*.

**Adv. Pelag.** – *Adversus Pelagianos*.

**Aen.** – *Aeneis*.

**CSEL** – *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*.

**Ep.** – *Epistula* [Hilberg 1996].

**PL** – *Patrologia Latina*.

**Sat.** – *Satirae*.

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