

Origen

General History

Origen (185-255) was one of the greatest Christians who ever lived, and certainly among the greatest of Egyptian Christians. Only ATHANASIUS can rival him in stature among the sons of Christian Egypt. He was born of Christian parents at Alexandria and probably died at Tyre. In 202 his father, Leonidas, was martyred in the persecution under Emperor Septimius Severus. Various details and anecdotes of his youth have been recorded by the ecclesiastical historian EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA, not all of which may be authentic; but it is likely that about 204 Origen, in a fit of ascetical self-mortification, castrated himself, and that at a very early age he was put in charge of the CATECHETICAL SCHOOL OF ALEXANDRIA (though the exact nature of that school is uncertain). He must have known the works of CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, though he never mentions him.

His early poverty, which was at least in part voluntary, was relieved by a rich official called Ambrosius, whom Origen had persuaded to abandon GNOSTICISM for Catholic Christianity and who subsidized Origen's publications. Origen mentions his patron more than once and wrote one of his works, *The Exhortation to Martyrdom*, for his benefit.

By 231 Origen had visited Rome, Arabia, and Palestine briefly, and had begun collecting translations of the Old Testament. He had already made a name for himself as a Christian theologian and had produced his first important work. In that year he found himself in conflict with DEMETRIUS I (189-231), the bishop of Alexandria, who apparently resented his growing fame as a teacher. He visited Athens and then, probably in 232, went to Antioch, where he was summoned, as a leading Christian philosopher, to an interview with Julia Mamaea, the mother of Emperor Alexander Severus. He probably returned to Alexandria briefly but then left it forever, pursued by the enmity of Demetrius, who

succeeded in having Origen condemned by a synod at Rome as well as one at Alexandria.

The main charge must have been that during his recent travels he had been ordained presbyter by a bishop in Palestine, without his own bishop being consulted and in spite of his self-mutilation. Demetrius' successor, HERACLAS (231-247), continued the feud. The Eastern church, however, took no notice of these synods, and for the rest of his life Origen remained a *persona grata* among the churches of Asia, Palestine, Syria, and Arabia. He settled in Palestinian Caesarea, where he spent most of the rest of his life, making visits to Athens and [Arabia](#) and, during the reign of the persecuting emperor Maximinus (235-238), remaining for a considerable time in Cappadocian Caesarea with its bishop, Firmilian. In 249 he is said to have been imprisoned and tortured as a [confessor](#) during the persecution of Emperor DECIUS. He probably moved to Tyre about two years before his death.

Though Origen started writing late in his life, his output was enormous. Much of it survives in the original Greek, and even more in Latin translations made during the two centuries after his death, some by Rufinus and Jerome. Though most of his work took the form of [commentary](#) or sermon on biblical texts, the first major work, and the earliest that has come down to us, is one that he called *Peri archon* (Concerning First Principles), usually known by its Latin title *De principiis*. It is an attempt to show the common ground possessed by Christianity and certain forms of contemporary Greek philosophy, notably Middle Platonism (the eclectic, developed form of Platonism popular in the third century). It contains some of Origen's most daring thought, and is more concerned to push speculation beyond the limits of the Rule of Faith (though mostly without contravening it) than to interpret Scripture. It exists in a Latin translation and in fragments of the Greek, some quite long. It should be dated about 225. But Origen had already begun an extremely long [Commentary on Saint John's Gospel](#), of which nine books and several fragments survive in Greek. By the thirty-second and last

book he had reached only John 13:33.

This work contains a great deal of Origen's thought on the doctrine of the Trinity and on Christology; he wrote it gradually over a number of years. Next in order (between 232 and 234) we should probably place *Commentaries on Corinthians* and *On Ephesians*, and his homilies on Saint Luke's Gospel, as well as his remarkable book *On Prayer*, the first Christian work to contain a [commentary](#) on the Lord's Prayer.

In 235 his *Exhortation to Martyrdom* appeared, designed to support Ambrosius, who had been arrested during the persecution of Maximinus (though he was later freed). He then wrote a longer [Commentary on the Song of Songs](#) (he had written a shorter one earlier), a [Commentary on Romans](#), a vast [Commentary on Saint Matthew's Gospel](#), *Homilies on Leviticus*, *Homilies on the Psalms*, and, his crowning work, *Against Celsus*, extant in the original eight books.

CELSUS, a philosopher, had written an attack on the Christian religion about fifty years before. At Ambrosius' request, because it was troubling the mind of many Christians, Origen undertook to refute it, and did so thoroughly, taking it paragraph by paragraph, so as to make his book virtually an apology for Christianity; it can be dated to 248. We also have, in a manuscript discovered in the 1940s at Turah, near Cairo, a fragmentary account by an anonymous person of a conference between Origen and some clergy in a town in Arabia (modern Jordan) on points of controversy or uncertainty in doctrine, known as the *Dialogue with Heracleides*, in which what might be called the sweet reasonableness of Origen in discussion is very evident.

There also survive a large number of works by Origen that cannot be so accurately dated: *Homilies on 1 Samuel 28* (the witch of Endor), and on Judges, Exodus, Genesis, Numbers, Ezekiel, and Joshua, some of them sermons taken down in shorthand as he delivered them, as well as several fragments of other works and a few letters. Origen also, after spending a

large part of his life collecting copies of the Old Testament in Greek, about 243 produced a work known as the *Hexapla*, the Old Testament in parallel—the Hebrew text, its transcription into Greek letters, the Septuagint, and three (and sometimes more) other Greek translations of the text. It was long preserved in the library of the bishop of Palestinian Caesarea; some parts of it are extant.

Educated in Alexandria, which was then the cultural capital of the Roman empire, Origen had absorbed the intellectual heritage of Greek philosophy, which included what we would now call science in most of its branches, history, and theology. Only in imaginative power is he lacking; when he comes to face the literary forms, sometimes poetic and dramatic, of the Bible, he fails to realize their significance; shows no appreciation of poetry or drama; rarely quotes either; and writes a prose that seldom rises above the pedestrian.

But his thought represents a grand and sophisticated synthesis of Christian doctrine and Greek philosophy. His pupil Gregory Theodorus, whose *Eulogy of Origen* is extant, wrote of him that he did not indiscriminately accept all philosophy; that he owed most of all to Middle Platonism; that his ethics and psychology were largely Stoic; and that Aristotle supplied only his cosmology and his logic. But Origen's thought, which can be reconstructed with confidence in its main lines and in most of its details, is the most able, brilliant, and sophisticated production the Christian Church had hitherto seen or was yet to see until another great African, Augustine, made his appearance.

For Origen, God is One and Simple, pure, immutable Spirit, the original source of all existence and all goodness; he is One in contrast with the manifold, but the One to whom the manifold is moving, striving to return. To this superessential Essence (so abstract that we can scarcely predicate being of Him) Origen attributed self-consciousness and will; to Origen, God was always living and personal; here the biblical tradition made its impression on him.

God is omniscient and omnipotent, but he is not the predestining God of Old Testament and New Testament. He foreknows and foresees but does not foreordain. In Origen's view God's goodness and His justice are not contrasted or even kept in balance, but are identical. God, of course, punishes those who deserve punishment, but his punishment is never purely retributive; it is always remedial. Origen rejects altogether the notion of God's wrath; God is never angry. At one point he says that the worst thing that God can do to anybody is simply to leave him alone.

In this respect Origen carried the liberal theology of Clement much further. Origen's doctrine of God is firmly trinitarian. God's nature is to communicate and reveal Himself; and because He cannot change, He must always have been communicating Himself, from eternity. In order to communicate Himself, however, the One and Simple must become manifold, and He can do this only by abandoning His absolute immunity to change or experience (*impassibility*, *apatheia*) and assuming a form in which He can act and be an organ for acting. This is the Word (Logos) or Son.

The Logos is the perfect image of God, really and truly God; in fact, Origen can call him "Second God" (not "a second god"), echoing a Middle Platonist term. The Logos/Son has a distinct existence, an individual reality (Origen uses both *hypostasis* and *ousia* for this), from that of the Father, and this, too, is divine: "The Savior," he says, "is God not merely by participation (*metousia*) but in His own right (*kat'ousian*)." The Logos/Son has always been with the Father, and has always been distinct from Him. The generation or production of the Son is an act lasting from eternity. "There never was a time when He did not exist," says Origen, and elsewhere, "The Savior is eternally generated by the Father."

In this doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son, Origen has broken through the trinitarian scheme that had held in Christian theology before his day and had taught that for purposes of creation, revelation, and redemption, God had at one point unfolded Himself into a Trinity

(“economic trinitarianism”). The Logos/Son is a distinctly existing entity, the second reality (*hypostasis*) within the godhead. He is not absolutely simple, like the Father, but complex; in relation to the world He can be called a creature (*demiourgema, ktisma*). Above all, the Son is a mediator by constitution, as part of the godhead, in his preexistent eternal state independently of the Incarnation. In spite of parting from economic trinitarianism, then, Origen’s doctrine of the Son is necessarily subordinationist.

In certain important respects the Son is less than the Father. Origen’s speculations did not require a Holy Spirit, but the Rule of Faith insisted upon the Spirit’s being included in his trinitarian doctrine. Therefore Origen postulated the Spirit as the third reality (*hypostasis*) within the godhead and as part of the divine essence. He becomes the Holy Spirit through the Son and is the first creation of the Father through the Son. Origen uses the word trias of the Trinity.

All Persons are equal in divinity and dignity, and the substance that they possess is one. The evidence that Origen applied the word *homoousios* (consubstantial) to the Son is unsatisfactory and cannot be trusted. As the Son constitutes a stage of transition from the One to the manifold, so the Spirit represents a further stage of this process. Origen’s Trinity is therefore (like Karl Barth’s) a Trinity of eternal revelation, but it has degrees in it; it is an internally graded Trinity.

Origen’s doctrine of salvation (soteriology) is ingenious and unusual. God must always have had recipients of His eternal self-revelation. Therefore free rational spirits (souls) must have existed from eternity. All forms of Platonism always insisted that the soul is eternal and indestructible; being spiritual (*noetoi*) and rational (*logikoi*) is what constitutes all souls, whether angelic or human. All souls have from eternity been created to be obedient to God; and, to preserve God’s changelessness, they must all in the end return to free obedience, no matter what may have happened in the past.

Consequently, on philosophical, not humanitarian, grounds, Origen is a universalist; that is, he believes that everybody must, in the end, be saved. His account of how any souls came to fall from obedience to God is not clear, but he apparently believed that all created spirits must develop, and in the course of development sin; thus disobedience to God occurred. It occurred among souls before the world was created; Origen teaches, therefore, a premundane Fall. The story of Adam and Eve is only an allegory or parabolic account of what happened before the world began.

It was in order to cope with the situation brought about by the Fall that God created the world. The physical universe is the machinery for starting all men and women on their journey back to God after the premundane Fall. Every soul is ultimately born into the world either as a human being or (if very evil) as a devil. The world becomes a vast reformatory run by God. Note that Origen does not believe in reincarnation; in his [Commentary on Matthew](#) he explicitly rejects this doctrine more than once. Note, too, that Origen's conception of the world is not Gnostic.

For him the world is good, a state not of punishment but of purification. Physical matter, once it has served its purpose of enabling fallen souls to pass through this world, will disappear; it lacks ultimate reality. Evil, too, is unreal; it is the absence of good. Origen's anthropology envisages human beings as rational spirits united with physical bodies and possessing "animal" souls (roughly speaking, nervous systems). Whoever conquers the temptations and passions that reach him through his "animal" soul gradually achieves likeness to God (*homoiosis*). All men already possess, as free immortal souls, the indestructible image (*eikon*) of God.

Into this ingeniously devised framework Origen fits a no less ingenious account of the Incarnation. The Logos/Son in His preexistent state had always been helping angels and human beings in their struggle toward purification and union with God. For this purpose he chose his people

Israel and sent the prophets. But in order to lead people back to God, the Logos Himself had to appear and to become incarnate. His activity when incarnate was complex and varied.

For the duller and rougher souls He had to demonstrate a real victory over sin, to make a sacrifice, to offer a ransom to the devil, to bring obvious and easily intelligible salvation. For the more cultured and intelligent souls, he had to impart in addition new depths of knowledge as teacher and hierophant, and thereby to impart divine life and initiate the process of *homoiosis* and divinization for men.

Origen accepted that everyone must begin by believing in the historical Jesus. But for intellectuals this was only a beginning; they were to transcend this stage as quickly as possible and reach a state of mystical contemplation of the postincarnate Logos (the Logos no longer incarnate after the ascension), and nourish themselves on the eternal Gospel. In fact, though, Origen reproduces all the traditional language of atonement—conquest of demons, expiation of sin, ransom paid to the devil, sacrifice. All these things were, in his view, subsidiary to the main purpose of God, which was to educate men and women into salvation. E. De Faye rightly said that Origen's atonement doctrine was that of "Dieu éducateur."

Origen's account of how the Son of God became incarnate was as carefully worked out as the rest of his doctrine. The preexistent Logos/Son united Himself with a pure, unfallen, created spirit who had always cleaved steadfastly to Him; to this spirit or soul the Logos was united more closely than to any other, because of the soul's unceasing effort of will to cleave to Him; it was a fellowship, a union, but not a fusion. At the Incarnation, this spirit/soul took to itself a human body and an "animal" soul. The Logos preserved His impassibility; all the human experiences—hunger, sleep, suffering, emotions—were endured by the spirit.

The Logos was able to cause the body to assume all qualities necessary for His activity, varied and different as they were. That is why Jesus was not easy to recognize and why Judas had to identify him with a kiss. Even during the Incarnation the Logos united with all souls everywhere who would open themselves to Him, and acted independently of the human Jesus. At the death on the cross the “animal” soul of Jesus went to the underworld, the body to the tomb, and the spirit to God. After the Ascension the human Jesus was transformed into a spirit and the human nature disappeared, completely absorbed into the godhead. The Incarnation was therefore a closed incident.

As the human spirit of Jesus united itself with the Logos, so the soul of each of us can be united to Him, beginning necessarily with faith, first in the human Jesus of Galilee, then in the Crucified, then in the risen and glorified Christ, and so on up a scale of enlightenment, the Logos assisting at every step, until the “contemplative life” is reached, the pure spirit clinging in love to the deity. Origen was able virtually to dispense with traditional eschatology by allegorizing it.

Picturesque imagery is dissolved into morality; hell becomes the gnawing of conscience; the Second Coming can be anticipated in contemplation (*theoria*). The resurrection of the flesh is rejected: “A certain principle is inherent in the body; this is not corrupted and it is from this that the [nonphysical] body is raised in incorruption.” But this is only the beginning of the progress of each soul beyond this life. We must experience a series of different purgative processes in a series of different spiritual or intellectual worlds or existences (but never again as incarnate) before achieving our final destiny in return to God. Even the devil must eventually capitulate and freely obey.

Such is a rough sketch of Origen’s remarkable fusion of Christianity and Platonism. He was able to distill it from the Bible to his own satisfaction by the use of allegory. This was a system of biblical interpretation that drew its thought partly from pre-Christian Judaism, reflected occasionally

in the New Testament, but more from the exegetical method of PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA, a Jewish theologian writing in Greek and a contemporary of Saint Paul, who was deeply influenced by Greek philosophy and contributed much to the thought of both Clement and Origen.

A flexible and uncritical use of Philo's allegorizing (i.e., reading into the text a second meaning supposed to be latent within or beneath the ordinary surface meaning) enabled Origen to manipulate the text of the Bible so as to yield virtually whatever meaning he needed for his argument. This technique meant that his thought could be, and to some extent undoubtedly was, independent of scriptural control (or as independent as he chose). In consequence, Origen may be regarded as a great theologian, but he can hardly be described as a great biblical scholar, in spite of his immense exegetical labors and his popularizing the [commentary](#) form, which in fact he borrowed (as he borrowed the practice of allegorizing eschatology) from the Gnostics.

Origen was a devout churchman all his life; he championed the Christian church in his books, encouraged its martyrs, instructed its prayer, conducted its services, preached to its congregations, and on more than one occasion was called in to reconcile heretics or to convert the misled. In his own day he was regarded by most of his friends and followers as a great Christian teacher and philosopher, and this deserved reputation lasted long after his death.

It would be quite wrong to call him a heretic. By the standards of his own day he was not only orthodox but a defender and upholder of orthodoxy. It was only long after his death that serious accusations of heresy were brought against him, culminating in his condemnation at the Second Council of Constantinople of (553). But the charges brought there against Origen were caused partly by misunderstanding and misrepresentation, partly by complete lack of historical sense, and partly by the demand of contemporary pressures.

Origen's influence upon the Greek-speaking theologians of [the Eastern church](#) extended for well over a century after his death. His contribution to the development of the doctrine of the Trinity was a permanent gain and enabled the defenders of the Nicene Creed to overcome the influence of ARIANISM, even though certain other traits in his thought may have tended in the opposite direction. His tradition of interpreting the Bible in the interests of the spiritual development of the individual soul, especially displayed in his work on the Song of Songs and on the book of Numbers, extended its influence well into the Middle Ages in both East and West.

Origen has always appealed to individuals of intellect and insight through the ages—for instance, to John Scotus Erigena and to Erasmus—and probably always will. Indeed, international scholarship has seen a great revival in the study of Origen since the end of World War II, and an international Colloquium Origenianum has been founded to further this interest.

Perhaps Origen's greatest and most enduring achievement was to compel the church to recognize the necessity of coming to terms with contemporary non-Christian thought. So thoroughly did he achieve this that the church's attitude to philosophy was permanently altered by his work. Never again could it afford to ignore secular thought. Distant though he is from us in time, and distant in culture owing to his living in a late Greco-Roman civilization, and distant in thought because of his preoccupation with late Platonism, we can salute this great Christian Egyptian and recognize in him a kindred spirit as we in our generation struggle to express the Christian message in the language and thought of our day.

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P. C. HANSON

Origen in the Copto-Arabic Tradition

There can be no doubt that the condemnation of Origen in 231 and again in 232, and his deposition from the priesthood by Demetrius, the twelfth patriarch of Alexandria (189-231), disqualified Origen in the Coptic church. It is possible that his condemnation by Justinian in 543 as a heretic, as confirmed by the Second Council of CONSTANTINOPLE in 553, also was known to some medieval Copts, thus reinforcing their rejection of him.

No work by Origen was translated into Arabic during the Middle Ages—or even in the modern period. Furthermore, no trace of him can be found even in the patristic series on the Bible, in the dogmatic anthologies, or in the original works composed by the Copts in the Middle Ages.

The only mention of him is made in the context of the history of the church, when speaking of Demetrius or Dionysius of Alexandria. Even then, Origen always figures among heretics. Two particular Arabic medieval works make mention of him, the HISTORY OF THE PATRIARCHS and the Coptic Arabic SYNAXARION.

The History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria, composed by SAWIRUS IBN AL-MUQAFFA', bishop of al-Ashmunayn, in the mid-tenth century, speaks at some length of Origen in the [biography](#) of Demetrius:

There was a man [Evetts's correction "among them was the father of a man" cannot be justified] named Origen, who learned the sciences of the heathen, and abandoned the books of God, and began to speak blasphemously of them. So when the Father Demetrius heard of this man, and saw that some of the people had gone astray after his lies, he removed him from the church.

(*History of the Patriarchs*, Vol. 1, part 1)

The account of the battle against Origen goes on for several pages and occupies the major part of the [biography](#) of Demetrius. It is borrowed faithfully from book VI of the *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius of Caesarea.

The Arabic Synaxarion, composed during the first half of the thirteenth century, mentions Origen twice. The first mention is in the [biography](#) of Saint Demetrius, on 12 Babah, where the following is written: “During his time heretics appeared; here are the names of some of them: Clement, Origen, Arius and others. They composed deceitful books, such that Demetrius cursed them and excommunicated them.”

The second account is in the bibliography of Saint Dionysius (246-266), on 13 Baramhat, where we read:

During his time, numerous heresies appeared in religion. Thus in the districts of [Arabia](#) people were seen stating, in the error of their spirit, that the soul dies with the body and that it rises again with it at the resurrection. He called a synod against them and excommunicated them. Others followed the heresy of Origen and of Sabellius.

During the modern period, a timid rehabilitation of Origen has been slowly under way in the Coptic church, and certain of his works have recently been translated into Arabic.

KHALIL SAMIR, S.J.

Origen's Writings

Origen is decidedly the most prolific author of all time, since he has been accredited by his pupil, Saint Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis in Cyprus, with the authorship of at least 6,000 works, a number unsurpassed in the history of literary annals. Saint [Jerome](#) contests this estimate and reduces it to 2,000, which is still a majestic figure. Some baffled commentators

conjecture that Eusebius of Caesarea, in whose *Life of Pamphilus* this estimate is revealed, could have added a zero to a more acceptable figure of 600, which is an unauthorized statement.

Whatever the truth of that monumental figure may be, we must assume that in those days, the totality of all scholars in the CATECHETICAL SCHOOL OF ALEXANDRIA pooled their literary products under the name of their great mentor who presided over that institution, and Origen happened to be that leading personality. There is no authorized edition extant of this giant's multitudinous writings, and it has been suggested that an institution or learned society should undertake the task of assembling his works in a monumental series.

Though a great many of Origen's works are lost, and some are fragmentary, the residue thereof, together with such major items as the *Hexapla*, could furnish the world of religious scholarship with one of its most extended collections. In 1882 Brooke Foss Westcott, canon of Westminster and Regius professor of divinity at Cambridge University, attempted to make a chronological and topical survey of Origen's works in a worthy study published in *A Dictionary of Christian [Biography](#)*.

Chronologically speaking, the works of Origen are divisible into two groups. The first group belongs to the period of his presidency of the Catechetical School before his flight to Caesarea in 231. This first category included the following titles:

- *Hexapla* begun
- Commentaries on the Chronicles, Psalms, Genesis, and John, in several independent books
- Two books on the Resurrection
- Five books of [commentary](#) on Lamentations
- *On Prayer*
- Ten books of a miscellaneous character
- *De principiis*

- *On Free Will*

These are mentioned explicitly by Eusebius in his *Historia ecclesiastica*, the last two items belonging to the discipline of philosophy. After Origen's flight to Caesarea and his settlement in that city, his mind became free from the struggles in Alexandria, and his productivity multiplied. According to Eusebius, this order and content may be the consensus of this category starting in 231 and culminating in 249. It is known that Pamphilus collected most of this category for the library of Caesarea, even transcribing a major part thereof in his own hand. Falling into decay, this library was again restored by Eusinius, bishop of Caesarea, and later suffered dissipation like all antique collections. This category, based on the work of Eusebius, mainly consisted of the following items:

- 231-238: Commentaries on I Corinthians, Luke, Deuteronomy, and John; probably more than eight books
- 235-236: Letter to Gregory of Neo-Caesarea
- Commentaries on Genesis, books 9-12
- Mystical homilies on Genesis *Exhortation to Martyrdom* Nine homilies on Judges
- Nine homilies on Isaiah
- Thirty books of [commentary](#) on Isaiah
- 238-240: Twenty-five books of commentaries on the prophets
- 240: Letter to Julius Africanus on the Greek additions to Daniel
- Five books of [commentary](#) on Chronicles completed at Athens, and five more completed at Caesarea
- 241: Homilies on Psalms 26-38
- Commentaries on Exodus, Leviticus, Isaiah, the minor prophets, and Numbers
- Homilies and separate historical treatises
- Completion of commentaries on Psalms
- 244-: Four books of homilies on the Pentateuch, Joshua, Judges, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel

- Fifteen books of commentaries on the Epistle of Paul to the Romans
- *Hexapla* completed
- Commentaries on Matthew
- Epistles to Fabianus and others on miscellaneous items
- Three books of commentaries on I Thessalonians, Galatians, Ephesians, and Hebrews
- 249: *Contra Celsum*

Typically, Origen's works may be classified into the following categories: exegetical, dogmatic, apologetic, practical, epistles, and *philocalia* (literally, pastoral and episcopal chronography).

In his extensive article, Westcott meticulously records all details connected with each of these categories and follows the whereabouts of every fragment.

We must remember, however, that most of Origen's original writings in Greek and Coptic have been lost. We depend on the Latin translation of sections of his works by Rufinus essentially, and partly by Saint Jerome. It is through their labors that we can really become acquainted with Origen's massive contributions.

The first category of Origen's work, biblical studies and exegetical commentaries, is the most extensive among his contributions. He was conversant with Hebrew as much as Greek, and this throws much light on his treatment of the Old Testament books. According to Eusebius, Origen wrote twelve books of [commentary](#) on Genesis, eight of which were completed at Alexandria and the rest at Caesarea. [Jerome](#) states that these books were thirteen in number, including two of mystical homilies. The majority of these homilies survived in a Latin translation by Rufinus, though they fall short in details about Exodus and Leviticus.

Cassiodorus mentions four homilies on Deuteronomy. Twenty-six homilies on Joshua were composed by Origen later in his life. Numerous other

homilies on Judges, Kings, Samuel, and Job appear in Rufinus' Latin translation. The homilies on Psalms and Proverbs, partly written before leaving Alexandria, were elaborated and completed in Caesarea. Origen wrote a small treatise on Song of Solomon. Cassiodorus enumerates forty-five homilies on Jeremiah. Ezekiel emerges in twenty-nine books comprising twelve homilies. [Jerome](#) has preserved some of Origen's notes on Daniel, and extensive commentaries on the minor prophets have survived in twenty-five books cited by Eusebius. These homilies consisted largely of the intrinsic interpretation of each book.

The cumulative studies of the Old Testament are exemplified in Origen's monumental compilation the *Hexapla*, the Greek term for "sixfold." For the first time in the history of the Bible, this fabulous edition of the Old Testament comprised the Hebrew text in Hebrew and Greek letters and the Greek texts of Aquila, Symmachus, the Septuagint, and Theodotion reproduced in six parallel columns. In certain sections three further Greek texts were quoted in three additional columns, making the whole in nine columns. Saint [Jerome](#) states that he used the original of this enormous work in Caesarea, though only fragments have survived to modern times.

On the New Testament, it may be deduced from the fragmentary evidence available in Eusebius and elsewhere that much was accomplished by Origen, though concrete remains are sparse. On Matthew, Eusebius informs us that Origen completed twenty-five books, probably around 245-246, and this is confirmed by Saint Jerome. Fifteen books containing thirty-nine homilies appear on Mark, four books on Luke, and thirty-two books on John. On Acts, seventeen homilies are known to have survived in Greek, and the commentaries on the Epistles to the Romans figured in fifteen books.

On Corinthians, I and II, Origen's commentaries are recorded in eleven homilies, Galatians in seven homilies of fifteen books, and Ephesians in three books. For the rest, one book appears on Philippians, two on

Colossians, one on Titus, and one on Philemon. Thessalonians is represented in three books of two homilies, while Hebrews is the subject of eighteen homilies; but the treatment on the Catholic Epistles as well as the Apocalypse is uncertain and may not have been fulfilled by Origen as the end of his life approached.

On the second category, Origen's dogmatic writings, he treats the subject of the Resurrection in two books and a dialogue in two other books preceded by his philosophical treatise *On First Principles*, which seems to have excited opposition from writers such as Methodius and Saint Jerome. Written while he was still in Alexandria, the *First Principles* represents the most complete of Origen's philosophical opinions, intended for scholars rather than simple believers, for those who were familiar with the doctrines of Gnosticism and the teachings of Platonism.

This treatise, intended as a system of Christian doctrine or a philosophy of Christian faith, consists of four books. The first treats the final elements of religious philosophy, God, the world, and rational creatures. In the second book Origen elaborates the view that the visible world is a place of discipline and preparation. In the third book, he discusses the moral basis of his system. The fourth deals with its dogmatic basis.

In the subsequent categories, before leaving Alexandria, Origen wrote ten books of a miscellaneous character in which he discussed a variety of subjects in the light of Holy Scripture and of ancient philosophy. Included in its extant fragments are commentaries on the history of Susanna and Bel.

Of Origen's epistles and letters, known to number more than 100, though most are lost, the one addressed to Julius Africanus, written from Nicomedia around 240, appears to be of some significance because it contributes a reply to Julius' objections to the authenticity of the story of Susanna. Most of his letters, addressed to bishops, to scholars, and even to one emperor and his queen, all lost, would have enriched our

knowledge of his life and his defense of orthodoxy.

Perhaps the most important of this miscellany is a series of eight books written against Celsus. In his opposition to Christianity, Celsus puts his argument in the mouth of a Jew. Origen simply follows the arguments of Celsus systematically, in three parts: the controversy of the history of Christianity (books I and II), the controversy on the general character as well as the idea of Christianity (books III-V), and the controversy of the relations of Christianity to philosophy, popular religion, and national life (books VI-VIII). Origen refutes Celsus's thesis point by point, working his way toward the establishment of the moral power of Christianity, its universality, and its fitness for mankind.

In the category of Origen's practical writings, his prayer addressed to Ambrosius and Tatiana speaks of the efficacy of praying. Here his statements abound in beautiful thoughts. Prayers are to be rendered only to the Father and through Jesus to the Father.

Of Origen's miscellaneous works, his book *Exhortation to Martyrdom* is the most pathetic. Addressing Ambrosius and Theoctitus, a presbyter of Caesarea, incarcerated during the persecution of Maximinus (235-238), Origen reminisces on his experiences as a boy with his father's martyrdom and as a man with the multitude of Christians led to the gallows. His agonizing statements are meant to strengthen the believers who pledged to endurance. The blood of the martyrs is not spilled in vain; it is destined to gain others for the true faith.

Finally there is the *Philocalia*, a book of extracts of "choice thoughts" of Origen, compiled by GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS and Basil and addressed to Theodosius, bishop of Tyrana, around 382. The interest of this work, apart from the intrinsic excellence of its quotations, lies in the exposition of the place of the Catholic saints in Origen's teaching.

Moreover, the *Philocalia* deals with subjects such as the inspiration of

divine Scripture, Scripture as a perfect instrument of God, the special character of the persons in Scripture, the clarification of inaccuracies or obscurities in some scriptural phrases, the passages of Scripture that trouble heretics with ill-advised difficulties, the dark riddles and parables of the Scriptures, a reply to the Greek philosophers who disparage the poverty of style in the Scriptures, free will and fate, and a host of other questions and selections from Origen's vast heritage.

It is not easy to make a full evaluation of Origen's writings, for the simple reason that what survives from them is an infinitesimal fraction of the total. Nevertheless, even from the fragmentary remains of his works, in addition to the surviving translations of a limited number of his lost treatises by great and historic personalities such as Rufinus, Saint Jerome, and others, the modern scholar stands in awe and bewilderment at Origen's accomplishments.

In the field of biblical studies alone, he is accredited with more contributions than any other man in history. Among other major contributions, he is known to have been the founder of a school of interpretation as well as the textual editor of the Old Testament in Hebrew and Greek. His many books on the New Testament, in the form of commentaries or homiletics, are beyond all recognition. This article gives a mere bird's-eye view of what is traceable from his monumental writings. It is easy for any scholar to apply the canons of modern research to minor points of his work and to issue a critique of some of his detailed pronouncements.

Whereas this is to be expected in the incalculable mass of writing left by him, the fact remains that he has done more than any other person for practically all departments of religious studies. Controversies have arisen from his writings, as have numerous schools of thought for and against his thought. Even in his lifetime, he was assailed by ecclesiastical authorities for some of his doctrines that the church repudiated. But this should not minimize the immensity of his contributions or reduce his

place as the greatest mentor of the Christian faith in classical antiquity. We must remember that Origen the theologian lived in a transitional age, in the formative centuries of theological science. Thus it would be a grave error to judge his labors on the basis of developed theological systems of the modern age. The reader has to remember that Origen was the greatest builder of Christian letters at a time when the religious scholarship was still in its infancy.

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AZIZ S. ATIYA

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