Origen
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Origen (c. 185–254 CE) was born into a Christian family in Alexandria, the Greek, Egyptian, and Jewish city at the edge of Egypt, circa 185 CE. As a young man, he instructed catechumens in preparation for baptism. He made several journeys and was asked to mediate in controversies about the Christian faith. After a conflict with his bishop in Alexandria, he settled in Caesarea Maritima in Palestine, where he had been ordained a priest, and founded a theological school. He wrote a large number of books, many of which consisted of commentaries on scripture, and numerous homilies of his were published as well. In his exploration, teaching, and apologizing, the Christian faith, he also drew on Greek, mainly Platonic, philosophy. Because of his philosophical speculations, during and after his life, he has been accused of heresy. A few years after being imprisoned and tortured in a period of persecution, he died around 254 CE.

Sources

An elaborate description of Origen’s life is found in the sixth book of Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea’s Church History (311–312 CE), even though this biography has hagiographic features, as P. Nautin (1977) demonstrated in his meticulous investigation of this source. His analysis will generally be followed here. Other data can be derived from Origen’s own works, the Letter of Thanksgiving by his pupil Theodore (also called Gregory), and from later authors such as Jerome. On the basis of a list of Origen’s works made by Eusebius in his Life of Pamphilus, which is lost, Jerome composed an adapted but still incomplete list in his Ep. 33. His inventory demonstrates that only a small part of Origen’s works has been preserved in Greek. A larger part has been preserved in Latin translations, and the majority of his works are lost.

As will be shown, scholars disagree about some essential elements of Origen’s life and works. The first bone of contention concerns the available sources. The Neoplatonic philosophers Porphyry and Proclus and a few other authors testify to the activities and writings of a philosopher Origen from Alexandria, who lived roughly in the same time as the Christian Origen. Because their information does not fully correspond with the Christian sources, some scholars are convinced that there were two Origenes; others endeavor to integrate the different testimonies, which seems preferable to the first hypothesis. In any case, the Neoplatonic evidence is far more limited than the numerous testimonies and works ascribed to the Christian Origen.

Origen’s Life and Work

Although Origen was born in a Christian family in which he grew thoroughly familiar with scripture, his parents gave him a pagan name (Origenes, also found as Horigenes), which means “son of Horus.” In Egypt, the god Horus used to be venerated as the son of Isis and Osiris. Around 201 CE, during the reign of Emperor Severus, the Alexandrian authorities organized a persecution of the Christians in which, according to Eusebius, Origen’s father was one of the martyrs. Because his property was confiscated, his wife and seven sons, of whom the 16-year-old Origen was the eldest, were left destitute. A rich Christian lady
recognized Origen's intelligence and was ready to sponsor and lodge him, so that he could pursue his studies. In her house he met a teacher called Paul who came from Antioch in Syria and whom Eusebius calls a heretic; he probably had gnostic persuasions. Eusebius describes that the young Origen could not avoid attending the meetings organized by Paul in the lady's house, but that, in keeping with the rule of the church, he never agreed to unite in prayer with him. This story may have idealizing traits (although Nautin, 1977, considers it trustworthy), but it characterizes the attitude that Origen maintained all during his life: he was eager to be informed about other religious and philosophical convictions, but all the same he wanted to be faithful to the apostolic tradition of the Christian faith as taught in his church (see below).

When Origen was 18, his bishop Demetrius asked him to assume the catechetical teaching of his church, since other instructors were not available because of the persecution. Origen has often been presented as the successor of Clement of Alexandria, who had fled the persecution, but the sources do not confirm this relationship. Eusebius says that Origen was a pupil of Clement, but this is probably the bishop's own conclusion, and the supposed existence of an established catechetical school cannot bear scrutiny. However this may be, Origen proved an effective and successful teacher of the Christian faith, eager to convince "heretics" that the true apostolic tradition was only transmitted in his church. He led an ascetic life, and here another theme comes up about which scholars disagree: according to Eusebius, Origen literally applied to himself Jesus' saying about those "who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 19:12) and secretly castrated himself in order not to succumb to sexual temptations. To be sure, self-castration was not unknown in Egypt. Decades later, however, Origen advocated an allegorical interpretation of this saying in his Commentary on Matthew (around 240 CE). Many scholars accept Eusebius' information about Origen's self-castration, but others argue - rightly, in my view - that it is probably based on slander with which his critics wanted to discredit him; as we will see, during and after his life, Origen received much opposition to his philosophical and speculative interpretations of scripture.

Apart from his activities as a catechist, Origen studied Greek philosophy with the Platonist Ammonius Saccas and also taught philosophy himself. Furthermore, he was interested in Jewish interpretations of scripture. Not only in Alexandria, but also elsewhere, his fame increased. He made journeys to Rome, to Athens, and to Palestine, and twice bishops invited him to Arabia in order to solve doctrinal controversies. His convert Ambrose - a former Valentinian gnostic - urged him to compose commentaries on scripture, provided him with stenographers, and supported him financially. Origen first commented on Ps 1-25 and Lamentations, and wrote books on the resurrection and other themes. At the end of the 220s CE, he started a Commentary on Genesis, in which he must have drawn on philosophical views. Although it is lost for the most part, it is most likely that it contributed to Bishop Demetrius' increasing suspicion of his intelligent, philosophically trained catechist.

In order to investigate the theological and philosophical questions that were raised by the apostolic tradition (see below), Origen wrote a fundamental work, On the First Principles (Tatpá ἀρχάς | Periarchón, De Principiis), which he completed around 230 CE. Most of it is lost in Greek, but it is still known in an adapted Latin translation by Rufinus of Aquileia (from 398 CE) and through other testimonies in Latin and Greek. Around 230 CE Origen also
traveled to Palestine again. When he was in Caesarea, the local bishop Theoctist and Bishop Alexander of Jerusalem invited him to preach and ordained him a priest, without consulting his own bishop Demetrius. He returned to Alexandria, but his strained relationship with Demetrius had deteriorated even more. Although in Eusebius' story the order of these events and the details of the conflict are not completely clear, the result was that around 232 CE Origen was forced to leave Alexandria. He settled in Caesarea, where he could continue his teaching activities, and often preached in the local church. A fine impression of his instruction of natural sciences, philosophy, and scripture in this town is given in the aforementioned *Letter of Thanksgiving* written by his pupil Theodore (or Gregory, which may be his Christian name).

For his investigations Origen made use of philosophical and other extrabiblical sources, such as the Jewish apocrypha *Enoch* and the *Prayer of Joseph*, and early Christian works that in his days were not usually included in scripture, such as the *Shepherd of Hermas* and the *Preaching of Peter*. His main interest, however, was to interpret scripture. In Alexandria his detailed study of the text of the Old Testament had led him to produce a parallel edition of four Greek versions of the Old Testament, namely the Septuagint and the translations made by Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion, in which he included text-critical signs to mark the differences. In Caesarea he completed this work and supplemented it with the Hebrew text, its transliteration, and other versions. After their four or six columns, these editions are called the Tetrapla (fourfold) and Hexapla (sixfold). For centuries this work remained of eminent importance for the text-critical studies and the interpretation of the Old Testament. It survived in part in numerous quotations in later patristic works and in other fragments, which are still relevant to present-day scholars.

In Caesarea Origen also continued to work on his *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, which he had started in Alexandria, and produced many other full commentaries and learned notes on Old and New Testament books. He wrote treatises *On Prayer, On Passover*, and an *Exhortation to Martyrdom*. His *Dialogue with Heraclides*, which dealt with the human soul and with Christology, was preserved thanks to stenographers. His numerous sermons were written down, of which a part survived, sometimes in Greek, more often in Latin translations by Jerome and Rufinus. An exceptional work that survived in Greek is his apology *Against Celsus*, which he wrote around 248 CE, 70 years after the Platonist philosopher Celsus had written a book *The True Doctrine* (Ἀληθὴς λόγος/Alethēs logos), which was directed against the Christians and propagated the traditional Greek worldview. Origen took Celsus' attacks seriously and tried to explain why they did not hold true.

In 250/251 CE Emperor Decius raised a *persecution of Christians* throughout the Roman Empire. Origen was among those who were imprisoned. According to Eusebius he suffered terrible tortures that he might deny his faith in Christ, although the intention was that he should not die. He did not give in and was released after Decius had been assassinated in 251 CE, but as a result of the tortures his health was broken. The exact date of his death is not clear, but probably it took place in or around 254 CE. Eusebius informs us that he reached the age of 69. Because he did not die immediately after being tortured, according to the standards of the church of his days he was not a martyr but a *confessor*, someone who confessed Christ in a period of persecution but was not killed.
Origen’s Interpretation of Scripture

In his interpretation of scripture, Origen usually pays attention to the literal and historical meaning of a passage. His high esteem of the letter of scripture appeared already from his meticulous work on the Hexapla. However, in line with the Jew Philo of Alexandria and Clement of Alexandria, he thought that the real significance of scripture could not be found in its literal and historical meaning, but in its allegorical or spiritual sense. Often he restricts himself to a twofold interpretation, or, in case he considers the literal meaning impossible, he presents only one or more spiritual interpretations.

In his systematic treatment of the understanding of scripture in his work First Principles (4.2–3), he basically distinguished three layers of interpretation, analogous to one’s body, soul, and spirit, and connects these with three corresponding groups of readers and listeners. Notwithstanding his recognition of the importance of the letter of scripture, he reproached Jews, heretics, and uneducated believers for interpreting the Old Testament only literally, without recognizing its figurative and spiritual language. Yet he acknowledged that plain, uneducated Christians (the ἄπλοοστεροί/haploosteroi or simpliciores) might be instructed by the letter of scripture, that is, its obvious, literal meaning, which he calls its "flesh" (σάρξ/sarx). In Origen’s view the second category of Christians, who had made a certain progress and might be called “psychic,” can understand scripture’s "soul" (ψυχή/psyche), by which he means its allegorical meaning as far as it does not pertain to Christ and heavenly things. As an example, he referred to Paul’s interpretation of the treading ox that should not be muzzled as an image of the apostles who were free to receive an income for their preaching (1 Cor 9:9–10). The third category consists of "perfect," spiritual Christians who can understand God’s true wisdom as it is revealed in the spiritual interpretation of scripture, which relates to the eschatological and heavenly salvation by Christ. This is scripture’s spirit (πνεῦμα/pneuma), at which Paul hinted, in Origen’s understanding, in 1 Cor 2:6–7 and to which he was supposed to refer in Rom 7:4, where the apostle says that “the law is spiritual.”

We may discern several reasons for Origen’s two- or threefold interpretation of scripture. First, by interpreting the Old Testament prophetically and allegorically with regard to Christ and the gospel, he could demonstrate that the Christian faith is not something completely new – this would be a shortcoming in the late antique world – but is rooted in the ancient and therefore venerable religion of the Jews. Second, his spiritual interpretation of the Old Testament books should prove that they speak about Jesus and the God whom Jesus called his heavenly Father, so that Origen could refute the Marcionites and Gnostics, who were convinced that the capricious, harsh, and jealous God of Israel should not be identified with Jesus’ good and generous Father in heaven. In other words, Origen’s spiritual interpretation of the Old Testament proved its fundamental agreement with the New Testament. Third, by means of his spiritual interpretation of both the Old and the New Testament, Origen taught his audience how to lead a truly spiritual life, in that he clarified how the soul can progress on its mystical journey to heaven.

His 27th sermon on the book of Numbers is famous in this respect. It has been preserved in a Latin translation by Rufinus, who may have supplemented it with elements from another exposition by Origen, since the length of the text exceeds by far the usual extent of his
sermons. For the 42 stages of the Israelites' wandering from Egypt through the desert to the promised land, which are enumerated in Num 33, Origen announced a twofold allegorical interpretation, first concerning one's conversion from a pagan lifestyle to moral improvement through the knowledge of God's law, and second with regard to the soul's ascent when it leaves the body. Origen admitted, however, that his second interpretation also concerns the soul's progress in the present life. This implies that his allegorical exposition of the 42 stages runs from the darkness of ignorance in which the soul lived in Egypt, through its exile in the desert of this world, where it progresses in virtue and faith and knowledge, until it will arrive in the promised land, the paradise of resurrection from the dead and eschatological salvation. In this context he did not explicate, but only hinted at the progress that the soul can make after the death of the body to which it was attached during its stay on earth, but one may conclude from Origen's allusions to the soul's progress in the heavenly abodes that he had more to say about this, which he passed over in silence in this context, or which has been omitted by Rufinus.

**Origen's Theological Investigations**

For Origen scripture and the church's apostolic tradition were the foundation of his Christian persuasions. According to Origen's preface to his work *On First Principles*, this apostolic tradition or proclamation (*ecclesiastica et apostolica traditio*) concerned the one God, the creator of all things and God of the righteous people mentioned in the Old Testament; the coming of his Son Jesus Christ, born from a virgin and the Holy Spirit, his passion, death, resurrection, and ascension; the Holy Spirit of the Father and the Son; the judgment of the souls after their lives on earth; the end of this world; the existence of good angels and of the devil and his evil angels; and the inspiration of scripture by God's Spirit. Besides this apostolic tradition, Origen's overall theology, anthropology, and cosmology were also indebted to Platonic philosophy in which he had been trained. Whenever he held that the apostolic tradition did not clarify philosophical questions (e.g. about the origin of the human souls and of evil spirits), he felt free to investigate such matters. He systematically expounded his investigations in his work *First Principles*, which has to be reconstructed from Rufinus' free and abridged translation and the other testimonia. The reason why Rufinus abridged and adapted Origen's Greek text is that at the end of the 4th century CE, this work was fiercely criticized – as we shall see – so that Rufinus thought it wise not to translate all of Origen's considerations that were considered unorthodox later on. It must be admitted that a good deal of the other testimonies to this work consist of such "unorthodox" passages that were quoted by Origen's later opponents, such as Jerome and Emperor Justinian, and that there is disagreement among scholars about their reliability. In my opinion, these passages from *First Principles* that are quoted critically and out of context, in order to demonstrate that Origen was a heretic, are indispensable to get a more complete view of this work, although they should not always be interpreted as Origen's own persuasions but rather as considerations in his search for possible answers to theological and philosophical problems. Often Origen presented different solutions, after which he left the conclusion to his readers.

In Origen's view, God first created spiritual, rational creatures (*logikai phusei* or minds (*dike*/*noes*), who should contemplate and love God in heaven. God was never without his only Son, who was His Wisdom and Word; because God's Son was eternally with His Father, Origen speaks of his "eternal generation" (*Princ. 1.2.4*).
In spite of their proximity to God in heaven, to different degrees almost all spiritual creatures grew saturated with contemplating him. Since God had created them with a free will, they used it to fall away from him. In response, God created a material world for the falling creatures, where they were attached to bodies that differed according to the gravity of their fall. Some creatures became angels and received angelic, spiritual bodies. Another category consisted of the devil and his angels, the demons, who received corresponding bodies. To other creatures God gave heavenly bodies like the sun, the moon, and the stars, who were therefore considered animated. An important category of rational creatures cooled down to human souls and incarnated in human bodies. This interpretation of ψυχή/psuchē (soul) in the sense of ψυχεῖται/psychesthai (to cool down) was common in contemporaneous philosophy, and Origen found a confirmation of this explanation in Matt 24:12, “And because of the increase of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold.” Other texts that he quoted from scripture in order to underpin his view of a fall of the creatures are Ezek 28:14–19 and Isa 14:12–22, which deal with the kings of, respectively, Tyre and Babel, who are said to have fallen from heaven (Princ. 1.4–8; 2.8–9).

As a consequence of Origen’s view of a primordial fall of the creatures, he was convinced that human souls had existed since the beginning of creation and were later on incarnated in human bodies, which was a Pythagorean and Platonic conviction (e.g. Plato Phaedr. 246–249; Tim. 41–42). Yet from this primordial fall, Origen excepted the soul of Christ, God’s only Son; because this soul was one spirit with Christ (1 Cor 6:7), Origen argued that it mediated between God and humankind by being born as God-man in Jesus Christ (Princ. 2.6). God destined Christ to save all other souls through his descent, incarnation, teaching, death, resurrection, and ascent, so that during their exile in human bodies they could be purified from their sins and be prepared for their own ascent and return to heaven. Here we see Origen’s alignment with the apostolic tradition of his church. In addition, he was convinced that, after the death of the body, the souls of the saints – the Christians – had to travel through several spheres where they would first be instructed about the things that had as yet been unclear to them. According to Rufinus he wrote that in the hereafter somewhere in the air paradise is a “school for souls” (schola animarum, Princ. 2.11.6), in which they are prepared for their further ascent. As far as souls would by then still be stained by their sins, they could as yet be purified in the hereafter.

In Origen’s view, God’s intention was to restore his creation to its original, spiritual state, so that the end would be similar to the beginning. In the end the saved human souls would be clothed in “spiritual bodies” (1 Cor 15:44); Origen interpreted this Pauline expression as “ethereal bodies,” which are therefore immaterial. He was very critical about plain, uninstructed Christians who expected to receive new material bodies in a material world to come. But since Origen was convinced that in the afterlife the rational creatures would keep their free will, he investigated the possibility that after their purification, ascent to heaven, and resurrection in spiritual bodies, they might again fall away from God. Origen did not teach so explicitly, but apparently he would not exclude this. He considered that, if a new fall should take place, God would create another material world in view of a new salvation, and that this might even happen several times, so that there might be a cycle of worlds or eons – an idea that was known in Greek philosophy. Yet the term “once” in Heb 9:26 made him remark that in such future eons (Eph 2:7) Christ need not repeat his suffering for salvation of those who would fall back, because his sacrifice for the removal of sin was
sufficient once and for all. Furthermore, if such a cycle of worlds should come about, Origen was convinced that ultimately God would overcome all resistance to his love, so that finally no new fall would occur anymore. This would be the ultimate "restoration of all" (ἀποκατάστασις πάντων/αποκατάστασις παντόν), for which he referred to Acts 3:21 (Princ. 2,3).

Although in a Letter to Friends in Alexandria (in jer. Ruf. 2.6 [18]) Origen vehemently denied that the devil as such would be saved, he distinguished the devil's evil will from his nature, which was not evil per se. So if the devil used his free will to return to God, God would accept and save him. In any case, Origen maintained with Paul that in the end God would be "all in all." Then death will be destroyed and Christ, the Son, will subject himself to the Father (1 Cor 15:26, 28).

Origen's speculation about a possible cycle of worlds may explain the accusation – to which we will come back – that he taught the reincarnation of souls. He did indeed uphold the soul's descent from heaven due to the primordial fall, and therefore its sinfulness prior to its incarnation in a body, but in his works he repeatedly and explicitly opposed the view of the soul's reincarnation as held by Pythagoreans, Platonists, and Gnostics, because it was not taught by the church and was not found in scripture (e.g. Or. Comm. Matt. 131–3; Cels. 1.13). This shows that, when he could not agree with a Greek, philosophical view, he did not hesitate to dissociate himself from it. However, if in his view it were possible that souls might decide to fall away from God even after their salvation in heaven, and God should decide to create a new world and new bodies for such souls, then we might consider this a sort of reincarnation – not in the present world, but in a hypothetical future world.

Apart from his First Principles, allusions to these speculations in later works of Origen, preserved both in Latin and in Greek, confirm that he did not change his mind, although he was aware of the tentative nature of his hypotheses and had grown more cautious to fully expound them because of the criticism with which he had met from the Alexandrian bishops Demetrius and his successor Heraclas (see below). Through his investigations of the philosophical questions raised by the apostolic tradition, he wanted to give an account of the Christian faith to educated believers and outsiders. He took a middle position between the plain Christians who had an antiphilosophical standpoint and were not interested in any dialogue with non-Christian philosophers, on the one hand, and Christian Gnostics who in their own way drew on Platonic philosophy and other extrabiblical traditions, on the other hand. His emphasis on the free will of the rational creatures, which had tremendous consequences for all of his theology and cosmology, served as an alternative to the gnostic persuasion – at least as he perceived it – that salvation was based on divine predestination, since in his view the Gnostics were convinced that they were saved because of their spiritual nature (e.g. Comm. Jo. 13.147–150; 28.173 Philoc. 25). Yet in spite of his philosophical training, his teaching of philosophy to his pupils, and his use of philosophical categories in his theological investigations, it is remarkable that in his extant works explicit references to philosophers are few, barring his apology Against Celsus in which he was engaged in a debate with a Platonic philosopher. Instead, Origen usually tried to find texts from scripture that confirm – or rather: seem to confirm – his view. Philosophical works About the Demons and The King is the only creator, which are ascribed to the philosopher Origen who may be identical with the Christian scholar, are lost.
Among scholars there is disagreement about the extent to which Origen drew on Platonic philosophy and — as I remarked before — how far the later hostile renderings of his speculations go back to Origen himself. Authors like E. de Faye, H. Koch, J. Daniélou, F.H. Kettler, P. Nautin, and J. Trigg recognized Origen's Platonic inclinations without any reticence or even overemphasized his philosophical viewpoints, but H. Crouzel was far more reserved in this respect. He strove for Origen's rehabilitation and canonization and emphasized that he should not be judged by the standards of later orthodoxy. P. Tzamalikos also plays down the influence of Greek philosophy on Origen, and M.J. Edwards even denies that Origen drew on Plato. The foregoing presentation of his theological and philosophical investigations rather sides with the first group of scholars, but includes H. Crouzel's insight that Origen did not propose any new doctrine but cautiously investigated the philosophical questions raised by the apostolic tradition of the Christian faith.

**Reception of Origen's Theology**

As mentioned before, Origen had a conflict with his Alexandrian bishop Demetrius, but the available sources are not clear about the details of the controversy. Most probably Demetrius criticized not only Origen's ordination and perhaps his alleged self-castration, but also his philosophical investigations of the Christian faith. He convened two local synods, as a result of which Origen had to leave Alexandria and moved to Caesarea. Demetrius was succeeded by Heraclas, who had been Origen's fellow student in philosophy. Around 347 CE Heraclas wrote a letter to Bishop Fabian of Rome in which he accused Origen of teaching the salvation of the devil, which attests yet another conflict. In this context Origen defended himself in his *Letter to Friends in Alexandria* and in other letters, now lost, to Fabian and to Emperor Philip. It is unknown how this conflict ended.

Apart from agreement and admiration, Origen's work, in the centuries after his death, also repeatedly provoked criticism and new controversies.

At the end of the 3rd century CE, Methodius of Olympus wrote a dialogue entitled *Aglauphon or On the Resurrection*, in which Origen's views of the soul's fall and preexistence and the resurrection of the dead in spiritual bodies are discussed and rejected. In this way texts that would otherwise have been lost have been preserved here. In the beginning of the 4th century CE, Bishop Peter of Alexandria also objected to these views.

During the great persecution of the church (303–311 CE), the priest Pamphilus wrote an *Apology for Origen*, coauthored by Eusebius of Caesarea, of which the first of six books has been preserved in a Latin translation made by Rufinus. The *Apology* includes nine accusations concerning Origen's alleged views of Christ's origin and ministry, his denial of the literal sense of scripture and of the chastisement of sinners after the resurrection of the dead, and his teaching on the soul's preexistence and reincarnation even into animals. In this work the allegations are refuted by means of quotations from Origen's works, many of which would otherwise have been lost.

Somewhat later in the 4th century CE, Bishop Eustathius of Antioch wrote a treatise *Against Origen: On the Ventriloquist*, in which he contested Origen's interpretation of the necromancy by the "witch" of Endor (1 Sam 28). Origen had not allegorized this story, but
had explained that, at Saul's request, the woman had really conjured up the dead Samuel. Eustathius maintained that the woman had deceived Saul with the help of demons and accused Origen of introducing idolatry and necromancy into the church. Moreover, he criticized Origen for "allegorizing all the scriptures" and for his view of the resurrection.

In the second half of the 4th century CE, Diodore of Tarsus also opposed the allegorical interpretations of scripture, of which Origen was the main representative. Because Diodore taught in Antioch, the exegesis in which literal and historical interpretations dominate and little room is given even to typological interpretations is called the Antiochian school, over against the Alexandrian school of Philo, Clement, Origen, and his pupils. Diodore's pupil Theodore of Mopsuestia, who was an influential exegete, expounded his hermeneutical views in the prologue of his Commentary on the Psalms, which is also called Treatise against the Allegorists.

In the 370s CE Bishop Epiphanius of Salamis criticized Origen on similar points as Pamphilus had listed. He also accused Origen of maintaining Christ's subordination to the Father, which was exploited by the Arians. In the 390s CE a controversy broke out. Jerome, who was a monk in Bethlehem, distanced himself from Origen. Epiphanius, Jerome, and Bishop Theophilus of Alexandria accused Bishop John of Jerusalem of being a protagonist of Origen's heresies. Rufinus of Aquileia produced his adapted Latin version of Origen's First Principles, but Jerome concluded that Rufinus had omitted or mitigated heretical passages. Therefore Jerome made a more literal translation of this work with the sole interest of revealing its heresies. Fragments of this more literal translation have been preserved in his Ep. 124 and are important for the reconstruction of this work.

However, as Pamphilus' Apology exemplifies, Origen's legacy met with consent and admiration as well. Athanasius of Alexandria demonstrated the agreement between Origen's view of Christology and Nicene orthodoxy. In different ways, he and authors such as Eusebius of Caesarea, the younger Jerome, Ambrose of Milan, Didymus of Alexandria, Basilus the Great, Gregory of Nazianzen, Gregory of Nyssa, and Evagrius Ponticus drew on Origen's works. Traditionally the composition of the Philocalia, an anthology of his works preserved in Greek, has been ascribed to Basilius and Gregory of Nazianzen. In the beginning of the 5th century CE, Rufinus published an abridged translation of Origen's huge Commentary on Romans, in which he cautiously altered or omitted passages that might challenge the orthodoxy of his time. Monasteries in Palestine and Egypt cherished Origen's views.

Midway in the 6th century CE, a new vehement controversy came about. Monks in Palestine and Egypt had elaborated on Origen's speculations. Alarmè by the teachings of these so-called Origenists, in 543 CE Emperor Justinian wrote a letter to patriarch Menas in which he quoted Origen's alleged views and proposed a list of nine anathemas. As a result, in 553 CE the Council of Constantinople condemned Origen and the Origenists on the basis of fifteen anathemas.

In the Western part of the Roman Empire, however, Origen remained influential through the Latin translations of his exegetical works, thanks also to Ambrose of Milan, who read Greek fluently and adopted many of Origen's interpretations of scripture.


