

# Origen: Heretic or Prophet?

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## **Introduction**

Origen was born in 185 or 186 AD and died in approximately 254 AD, probably at the age of 70 after suffering persecution and imprisonment. It is widely agreed that he was an extraordinary man. He began earning a living as a teacher at the age of 18 and demonstrated exceptional character. The 1911 Encyclopedia states:

*As a boy he showed evidence of remarkable talents... His character was as transparent as his life was blameless; there are few church fathers whose biography leaves so pure an impression on the reader... He could not have been what he was unless two generations before him had labored at the problem of finding an intellectual expression and a philosophic basis for Christianity (Justin, Tatian, Athenagoras, Pantaenus, Clement). But their attempts, in comparison with his, are like a schoolboy's essays beside the finished work of a master.<sup>1</sup>*

His literary productivity was unmatched in ancient times, and if the estimate of 6000<sup>2</sup> various works is accurate, it is still an excellent achievement in modern times. But he was unique in a more vital area: by his application of what we know today as the scientific method to the study of scripture. It was his work on the Hexapla<sup>3</sup> which exemplifies his in-depth knowledge of and logical approach to scripture. Together with this unsurpassed foundation and with the guidance of Greek philosophy he was able to uncover the mysteries of the most spiritual Gospel. His 32 book commentary on the Gospel of John was the pinnacle of his work.

## **Two Camps**

Most seem to agree on Origen's industrious life, but there is great controversy about the truth (orthodoxy) of all his teachings. This was a problem in his day, exemplified by his need to leave Alexandria, and it continues today. The difficulty centers on Origen's spirituality. His highest goal was to extract the deeper spiritual meaning from Scripture, and as we will see, this causes great conflict for those who do not share his spiritual view, which they therefore label 'mysticism' or 'speculation'. This verdict is given by those who do not understand Origen's allegorical methodology and do not share his broad scientific basis. Outlined below is the essence of the opposing viewpoints:

## **Origen: A Heretic**

The widely held belief is that Origen was a synthesizer of the teachings that came before him, taking what he learned from Greek philosophy and integrating it with early Christian teaching, building on the foundation created by Clement and under the influence of the Stoics. With this newly formed basis, he became overconfident and made speculations which were not supported by scripture. He did not have strong evidence of these specific teachings and the remaining writings available today do not properly support the teachings. Jean Daniélou praises Origen as truly great;

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<sup>1</sup> The 1911 Encyclopedia states, <http://31.1911encyclopedia.org/O/OR/ORIGEN.htm>

<sup>2</sup> "St. Epiphanius declared that Origen had written 6000 works-scrolls of undoubted value and of varied lengths." <http://www.stmarystlouis.bizland.com>

<sup>3</sup> Catholic Encyclopedia: "Hexapla: The name given to Origen's edition of the Old Testament in Hebrew and Greek, the most colossal critical production of antiquity." <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07316a.htm>

*In the course of our investigations, Origen has come before us in several guises, one after another—as an active Christian, as a learned exegete, as a philosophical genius, as a great master of the spiritual life. We may have been inclined to think that every new side of him we discovered was the main one. That is the way of it with really great men: they are equally good at all the possible ways of being great.*<sup>4</sup>

but the writer fails to grasp the whole of Origen's teaching and asks the reader to discard that which is speculative and was declared heretical long after his death.

*The perishable elements in his theology of the Bible, the things he derived from the culture of his time—the allegorical methods of interpretation he borrowed from Philo and the gnostics—in no way lessen the value of his work as a whole.*<sup>5</sup>

The Anathematism by the Emperor Justinian in 543 AD and its ratification at the Fifth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople in 553 AD was done to stop all of the radical sects which had formed on the basis of the 'speculations' of Origen, allowing the 'true' Christianity to flourish. The teachings that were condemned by the Fifth Ecumenical Council were not actually the teachings of Origen since there is little to no support for them in his remaining works. Rufinus was given the task of translating some of Origen's works into Latin, but said that he often had to change the texts given to him because they were not the words of Origen. He says in the Preface to his translation of Origen's Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans:<sup>1</sup>

*Although I wanted to touch along the coastline of a tranquil shore in my small boat and draw out tiny fish from the pools of the Greeks, you compel me, brother Heraclius, [1] to unfurl the sails for the high seas and, once I had set aside the task I had to translate the homilies [2] Adamantius [3] wrote in his old age, you persuade us to set forth in our language his fifteen books in which he discussed Paul's Letter to the Romans.*

*In these books, as he pursues the Apostle's thought, he is taken out into such a deep sea that anyone who follows him out there encounters enormous fear lest he be overwhelmed as much by the greatness of his thoughts as by the immensity of the waves. [4] Moreover you do not consider the fact that my breath is too weak to fill up such a magnificent trumpet of eloquence. The greatest difficulty of all, however, was that the books themselves have been tampered with. [5] For some of the volumes of the work are missing from the libraries of nearly everyone—indeed, I am unsure how this came about. To fill in these things and restore complete continuity to the Latin work does not come from my natural talent but, just as you who demand these things believe, probably by God's favor. And yet, lest I be spared any labors, you add that I am supposed to abridge this entire fifteen-volume work, a Greek text which has reached the length of some forty thousand lines or more, and, if possible, compress it to half the space. [6] These instructions were hard enough, as if imposed by a man who seems unwilling to appreciate the work load involved. Nevertheless I shall set out in the hope that by your prayers the things which seem to me to be humanly impossible might become possible as God assists me. But now, with your permission, let us listen to Origen himself, as he composes the Preface of the work at hand. [M833]<sup>6</sup>*

By the end of this work Rufinus lets us know how much he actually changed its contents:

*But I, who defer more to my conscience than to my name, even if I seem to add some things and fill in what is missing and abbreviate what is too long, [7] do not think it right, however, to steal the title from him who laid the foundations of the work and supplied the material for the construction of the building. Of course let it be left to the reader's discretion, when he has tested the work, to ascribe the work's merit to whom he wants. For our purpose is not to seek the readers' applause but a harvest of those who make progress.*<sup>7</sup>

Rufinus is seen by many to have been an admirer of Origen, but when you examine his comments closely, it is quite possible that Rufinus did not truly understand Origen's teaching. From the fragments of writing which we possess from Origen, we know that he does not use superfluous language and it would be hard to imagine condensing his well-thought-out and well-documented commentaries without losing great insight to his philosophy.

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<sup>4</sup> J. Daniélou, Origen. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955. ISBN: 0404623816, page 310

<sup>5</sup> J. Daniélou, Origen. pages 311

<sup>6</sup> Origen, Commentary on Romans, Preface of Rufinus 1-3

<sup>7</sup> Origen, Commentary on Romans, Epilogue of Rufinus 4

Origen is often referred to as “a humanist”, due to his unusually friendly theology. His humanistic tendency emanate from his personality and his pure spirit; his love for humanity and not through a rigorous study of the scriptures.

## **Origen: A Prophet**

Origen has been called a ‘diamond’, similar to the Prophet Ezekiel (Ezek 3:9) and it is suggested that Origen was one of the ‘teachers’ promised by Jesus (Matt 23:34). Origen brought new spiritual teachings, which were in harmony with the truths taught by Plato, Pythagoras, Homer and Solomon.<sup>8</sup> With his scientific analysis of the main versions of the Old Testament, he was able to extract the original spiritual meanings as they existed in their original form, as written by the Yahwehist (Solomon), before they were rewritten by the Jewish priests in the third century BC. The teachings condemned by Justinian were truly the core teachings of Origen. The Emperor needed to destroy this spiritual (humanistic) belief, and the freedoms which it brings, in order to maintain worldly power over the Roman Empire. In the Apocalypse of Peter<sup>9</sup> it was foreseen that the Leaders of this world would successfully use those who call themselves ‘men of God’ to maintain power over the ‘enlightened ones’ for long period.

*“And there shall be others of those who are outside our number who name themselves bishop and also deacons, as if they have received their authority from God. They bend themselves under the judgment of the leaders. Those people are dry canals.”*

*But I said, “I am afraid because of what you have told me, that indeed little are, in our view, the counterfeit ones, indeed, that there are multitudes that will mislead other multitudes of living ones, and destroy them among themselves. And when they speak your name they will be believed.”*

*The Savior said, “For a time determined for them in proportion to their error they will rule over the little ones. And after the completion of the error, the never-aging one of the immortal understanding shall become young, and they (the little ones) shall rule over those who are their rulers. The root of their error he shall pluck out, and he shall put it to shame so that it shall be manifest in all the impudence which it has assumed to itself. And such ones shall become unchangeable, O Peter.”*

Justinian is credited with the “great achievement” of re-writing and simplifying Roman law, but had he done this in a Christian manner, he would have built the two highest laws taught by Jesus (Matt. 22:36-40) into the very fabric of the law, and not have lived his life to the contrary.<sup>10</sup> But God was especially speaking through Habakkuk to likes of the Egyptians and Romans, which built their empires on massive bloodshed and inequitable class structures: “*Woe to him who builds a town with bloodshed, who establishes a city by inequity!*” (Hab. 2:12)

Fortunately for us though, Justinian’s clerics had to write the edict so precisely that, in effect, they actually preserved Origen’s true teaching within it.<sup>11</sup> These key spiritual teachings of Origen posed the greatest threat to the formation of the church’s powerful eternal damnation dogma, so they were specifically destroyed. The loss of the majority of his 32 book commentary on the Gospel of John removed his logical foundation for his vast spiritual knowledge, which disproves the eternal damnation dogma of the church. The entire loss the 10 books of the Stromata meant the loss of a logical reconciliation between Christianity and Ionian Greek philosophy, and thus, logic and reason were removed as a requirement for the interpretation of scripture: understanding was replaced by mystery.

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<sup>8</sup> R. Sträuli, Origenes der Diamantene, ABZ Verlag, Zürich, 1987. ISBN 3855160058

<sup>9</sup> Apocalypse of Peter (VII 79,20 to 80,25)

<sup>10</sup> U. Guggenbühl, Justinian I. – Kaiser, Kriegsherr, Kirchenvater, Zürich Museion 2000 1/96

<sup>11</sup> A. Harnack, History of Dogma, trans. N. Buchanan: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2000. ISBN: 1579100678 volume 3, p.186

His theology is inherently friendly to humans, as designed by the Creator. As Professor John Nash has shown in his Nobel Prize<sup>12</sup> winning work, a competitive environment in which everyone does what is best for themselves and simultaneously the best for others is far more efficient and stable than when each one does only the best for themselves; as once theorized in both Friedman's economic model and Darwin's evolution model. Nash shows that the central tendency of the world in which we live is not neutral (chaotic) but clearly good. He has shown that the commandment given to us by Jesus, "*Love thy neighbor as thyself*", is inherent in the laws of nature. This tendency for goodness is also observed in long-term positive developments in humanity and in the beautification of nature over the long-run.

For Origen, God patiently teaches all His children through multiple tests on Earth until each one has been fully restored to Him. In Origen's Commentary on John 8:47 he describes the broad continuum that currently exists; from demons, to men not of God, to men partially of God, to the Son of Man, and on to God. He defines the criteria of overcoming the "spirit of slavery" and beginning to learn the word of God through a "spirit of adoption" until one has heard all of the words of God and become perfect in every way, therefore achieving Divine Love.

*And consider if it is possible, in consequence of the statement, "We know in part, and we prophesy in part," (Cf. 1 Cor 13.9) for such a one to say, "And we are sons of God in part"? And again, "When that which is perfect has come, and that which is in part has been abolished," (Cf. 1 Cor 13.10) can one say that that which is perfect in regard to becoming a son of God will come when that which is in part for one to have become a son of God is abolished?<sup>13</sup>*

## **Examining the Evidence**

With a learned logic and reason from the study of mathematics and geometry, and with the knowledge of the Ionian Greek philosophy (love of wisdom); Origen tells us that we are ready to address the true meaning of the Scriptures.<sup>14</sup> His application of this technique to the versions of the bible at his time allowed him to not only find errors in the Greek translation, but also to find the censured passages removed from the Hebrew.<sup>15</sup> We must use these strict prerequisites to examine his remaining teachings and those of his students in order to rediscover that which has been incorrectly interpreted and completely censured from his vast body of knowledge. In this spirit, I will attempt to examine each of the points of "The Anathematizations of the Emperor Justinian against Origen"<sup>ii</sup> in order to find a logical explanation for the above mentioned diametrically opposed opinions of Origen's teaching.

***Point 1: "Whoever says or thinks that human souls pre-existed, i.e., that they had previously been spirits and holy powers, but that, satiated with the vision of God, they had turned to evil, and in this way the divine love in them had died out (apyugeisas) and they had therefore become souls (yukas) and had been condemned to punishment in bodies, shall be anathema."***

Contra-Origen: Adam was the first man or soul to inhabit the Earth and, with the help of Eve, violated God's laws in the Garden of Eden. "And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living." (Gen. 3:20) As the mother of the living, all have inherited the sin from her. S. Harent explains the inheritance of sin from the first-born human, Adam.

*Original sin may be taken to mean: (1) the sin that Adam committed; (2) a consequence of this first sin, the hereditary stain with which we are born on account of our origin or descent from Adam. From the earliest times the latter sense of the word was more common, as may be seen by St. Augustine's statement: "the deliberate sin of the first man is the cause of original sin" (De nupt. et concup., II, xxvi, 43). It is the hereditary stain that is dealt with here. As to the sin*

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<sup>12</sup> <http://nobelprize.org/economics/laureates/1994/nash-lecture.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Origen, Commentary on the Gospel of John 20.306.

<sup>14</sup> Letter of Origen to Gregory <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/origen-gregory.html>

<sup>15</sup> Letter of Origen to Africanus <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0414.htm>

of Adam we have not to examine the circumstances in which it was committed nor make the exegesis of the third chapter of Genesis.<sup>16</sup>

The church's position is that the soul is either at one with God, their Creator or being tormented in Hell for their wickedness waiting for the great day of Judgment. M. C. Steenberg summarizes the church's position on the existence of souls, both divine and corrupt.

*The bodies of men, after death, return to dust, and see corruption: (Gen. 3:19, Acts 13:36) but their souls, which neither die nor sleep, having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them: (Luke 23:43, Eccles. 12:7) the souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens (paradise) where they (are with Christ and) behold the face of God, in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies. (Heb. 12:23, 2 Cor. 5:1, 6, 8, Phil. 1:23 Acts 3:21 Eph. 4:10 Rom. 8:23) And the souls of the wicked are cast into hell, where they remain in torments and utter darkness, reserved to the judgement of the great day. (Luke 16:23,24 Acts 1:25 Jude 6, 7 1Pet. 3:19) Beside these two places, for souls separated from the bodies, the Scripture acknowledgeth none.<sup>17</sup>*

**Pro-Origen:** One of the meanings of death for Origen was the cooling of the heart to God by His children and their Fall away from Him. (PA<sup>18</sup> 2.8.3 and Ezek. 36:25-28) This Fall came after eons of harmonious life in Heaven by its countless created inhabitants. By choosing to follow the Light Bearer (Lucifer) instead of the designated King of Heaven (Jesus), one third of the heavenly souls were cast into Hell. (Rev. 12:3-4) J. Trigg explains Origen's teaching that the fallen souls had earned their dishonor.

*From the Platonists also Origen takes the concept of preexistence of souls as a way to explain apparent injustice in the way providence operates. Thus Origen explained the distinction between souls who are vessels of honor and those who are vessels of dishonor in Roman 9, not on the basis of unmerited election, but on the basis of those souls' behavior before they were conceived in the womb. (PA 3.1.21)<sup>19</sup>*

Each individual fallen soul slowly relearns its original divinity through many tests in multiple incarnations. Each fallen soul carries inside it a diamond that first must be dug out of the depths, and then carefully cut exposing each sparkling facet until the final blow delivers a perfect, shining light.

**Point 2: "If anyone says or thinks that the soul of the Lord pre-existed and was united with God the Word before the Incarnation and Conception of the Virgin, let him be anathema."**

**Contra-Origen:** From the Catechism of the Catholic Church we find the basis for this:

*The Father's only Son, conceived as man in the womb of the Virgin Mary, is "Christ", that is to say, anointed by the Holy Spirit, from the beginning of his human existence, though the manifestation of this fact takes place only progressively: to the shepherds, to the magi, to John the Baptist, to the disciples. (Cf. Mt 1:20; 2:1-12; Lk 1:35; 2:8-20; Jn 1:3 1-34; 2:11) Thus the whole life of Jesus Christ will make manifest "how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power." (Acts 10:38)<sup>20</sup>*

**Pro-Origen:** Origen recognized in Yahweh ("I am who I prove myself to be") the Word of God, His Wisdom and His Truth. In First Principles Origen writes:

*for it is written, "The head of Christ is God;" seeing clearly also that it is written, "No one knoweth the Father, save the Son, nor doth any one know the Son, save the Father" (for who can know what wisdom is, save He who called it into being? or, who can understand clearly what truth is, save the Father of truth? who can investigate with certainty the universal nature of His Word, and of God Himself, which nature proceeds from God, except God alone, with*

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<sup>16</sup> Catholic Encyclopedia <http://www.acns.com/~mm9n/sot/Original%20Sin/catholic.htm>

<sup>17</sup> M. C. Steenberg, Origen and the Final Restoration: A Question of Heresy. 25 November, 1999 [http://www.monachos.net/patristics/origen\\_apokatastasis.shtml](http://www.monachos.net/patristics/origen_apokatastasis.shtml)

<sup>18</sup> Origen, Peri Archon (PA), <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0412.htm>

<sup>19</sup> J. W. Trigg, Origen. London: Routledge, 1998. ISBN: 0415118360, pages 28-29

<sup>20</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church <http://www.vatican.va/archive/catechism/p122a3p2.htm>

*whom the Word was), we ought to regard it as certain that this Word, or Reason (if it is to be so termed), this Wisdom, this Truth, is known to no other than the Father only...<sup>21</sup>*

He acknowledged Jesus as the incarnation of the Word; the Son of God who was with God since the beginning of the Divine Creation. (John 1:1) He existed before the world was created, before Abraham (John 8:58) and before John the Baptist (John 1:15). His mission on Earth was to conquer Death and to open up the Gates of Heaven for the eventual return of all his divine subjects.

***Point 3: “If anyone says or thinks that the body of our Lord Jesus Christ was first formed in the womb of the holy Virgin and that afterwards there was united with it God the Word and the pre-existing soul, let him be anathema.”***

Contra-Origen: It was during the Immaculate Conception that the Son of God was placed in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the ‘Mother of God’. (Luke 1:28-35) By placing Jesus equal to God in all things at the Council of Nicaea, it follows that the birth of Jesus was a unique event in the history of mankind. We get the following explanation of the Catholic Church’s teaching of the birth of God in the form of Jesus.

*Jesus is truly God, and is uniquely holy by reason of his divinity. Mary is human, and is holy by the grace and merits of her son. Jesus is free of original sin because he is God. Mary was kept free of original sin by the grace of Jesus. She was conceived by her parents in the normal way, but from the moment of her conception she existed in a state of union with God. She was granted the kind of grace and holiness which would have belonged to all human beings had there been no original sin.*

*It is also Catholic dogma that Mary remained free from personal sin throughout her life (C 493). She was not immune to the problems of living in a world touched by sin. She had to cooperate with God's grace, and she had to cope with evil, above all the unjust murder of her son on the cross. Mary was tempted as we are. But she did not sin. She cooperated with God's grace, and in this she is a model for us. When we are tempted to think that sin cannot be defeated, Mary witnesses to the fact that the grace of Christ can conquer the powers of hell. Mary shows forth the goodness of God more than any other human being, except Jesus. Jesus is truly God, and is uniquely holy. Mary is the Mother of Jesus, and she is holy by the grace and merits of her Son and by her cooperation with God's grace.*

*The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, as we have said, is not found explicitly in the Bible, but it is consistent with Bible teaching. Matthew, Luke, and John, guided by the Holy Spirit, saw Mary as the first among believers and as one specially blessed by God. The Holy Spirit led these authors to develop a direction toward a better appreciation of Mary and of her role in God's plan. The Church followed the lines of development set by the New Testament when it proclaimed the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. We can be confident, therefore, that the Church was guided by the same Holy Spirit who led the evangelists. We have every reason for believing that it is God's will that Christ's Mother be honored as Mary, conceived without sin.*

*And it should be added that we have far more Scriptural reasons for believing in the Immaculate Conception than people have for attacking Catholic belief. Unless the Holy Spirit was absent from the Christian Church for the first 1500 years, the Church was guided by the Spirit to its belief about the Immaculate Conception. Finally, is it unreasonable that God would want to have the most perfect possible Mother for his only Son? The Immaculate Conception says as much about our reverence for Jesus as it does for our desire to honor Mary.<sup>22</sup>*

Pro-Origen: Physically, Jesus was born in the way every child has ever been born, with the incarnated spirit body and its soul entering the fetus at birth. (Cf. Phil. 2:7, Heb 2:17) Jesus’ human body was formed in the physical body of a virgin (spiritually pure) mother: Mary, the incarnation of the youngest daughter of the Archangel Raphael.<sup>23</sup>

The materialistic concept of a virgin birth of Jesus is a consequence of the adaptation of the Trinity dogma by the church at the Council of Nicaea and was not part of Origen’s spiritual theology.

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<sup>21</sup> PA 2.6.1

<sup>22</sup> From FAQ of the Virgin Mary <http://www.amm.org/faq/faq08.htm>

<sup>23</sup> R. Sträuli, Salomo der Königs Quelle, ABZ Verlag Zürich, 1989. ISBN 3855160074



Benedikt Bauer investigates the claim that Peri Archon is the basis for the Trinity dogma in the church, and brings out the fact that Origen's true theology was a clear differentiation between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit(s).

*Eine der umstrittensten Abhandlungen in Peri Archon findet sich in I 3,5-8. Grund für dieses Aufsehen ist eigentlich ein Fragment Justinians, das hier (in der dt. Übersetzung in, sonst neben den Text) eingefügt ist. Demnach hat Origenes gesagt: "Ich glaube, dass Gott Vater, der das All zusammenhält, zu jedem Seienden hindurchdringt und einem jeden aus seinem eigenen (Sein) verleiht zu sein, was es ist. Weniger weit als der Vater (wirkt) der Sohn, der nur zu den vernunftbegabten Geschöpfen hindurchdringt, denn er steht an zweiter Stelle nach dem Vater; noch weniger weit der heilige Geist, der nur bis zu den Heiligen hindurchdringt. Insofern ist also die Macht des Vaters größer als die des Sohnes und des heiligen Geistes; größer sodann die des Sohnes als die des heiligen Geistes; und die Wirksamkeit des heiligen Geistes ihrerseits übertrifft die von allem, was sonst heilig ist". In der Konsequenz bedeutet dies einen radikalen Subordinationismus: Vater, Sohn und Geist sind einander depotenzierend untergeordnet, und im Grunde ist der Übergang vom Vater bis zu den Geschöpfen fließend, denn der Unterschied zwischen dem Heiligen Geist und "allem, was sonst heilig ist", erscheint lapidar nur noch ein quantitativer, kein qualitativer Schritt mehr zu sein."<sup>24</sup>*

When we take the statement of Jesus "Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me" (Jn 14:11) meaning that "His Will is at one with God's Will"; and that the Holy Spirit(s) only support or speak through those who do God's Will, we discover Origen teaching that they all do the Will of God, but are subordinate as described.

***Point 4: "If anyone says or thinks that God the Word has become like to all heavenly orders, so that for the cherubim he was a cherub, for the seraphim a seraph: in short, like all the superior powers, let him be anathema."***

Contra-Origen: At the Council of Nicaea, God and the Word of God (Logos) were defined as one, a unity. Therefore, this belief is in direct conflict with the Creed of Nicaea as shown below and entitled to the judgment from that Council.

*To exclude Arian error, the Council produced its own creed, which we call the Creed of Nicaea to distinguish it from the Nicene Creed:*

*'We believe in one God, the Father, Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible;*

*'And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, only-begotten, that is, from the substance (ousia) of the Father; God from God, Light from Light, Very God from Very God, begotten not made, of one substance (homoousios, consubstantial) with the Father, through whom all things were made, both in heaven and on earth; who for us men and for our salvation came down and was incarnate, was made man, suffered, and rose again on the third day, ascended into heaven, and is coming to judge the living and the dead;*

*'And in the Holy Spirit.*

*'And those who say: "There was a time when he was not", and: "Before he was begotten he was not", and: "He came into being from nothing", or those who pretend that the Son of God is "Of another substance (hypostasis), or essence (ousia)" [than the Father] or "created" or "alterable" or "mutable", the catholic and apostolic church places under a curse.'<sup>25</sup>*

Pro-Origen: Origen agrees that He is the only begotten Son of God. But for Origen, the Logos is a separate reasonable being from God, who is the paradigm for all divine beings. His eternal closeness with God makes Him distinguishable from God for even the prophets.<sup>26</sup> Yet, as Zwingli notes in John 1:1 that "the Word is a divine being and not God."<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> B. Bauer, Das ewige Werden in Gott und das zeitliche Werden der Welt. Tactum Verlag Marburg 1996. ISBN 3-89608-649-9, page 43

<sup>25</sup> The History of Christianity, Lion Publishing Plc Oxford 1997. ISBN 0-7459-1625-2 pages 166-167

<sup>26</sup> Origen, Commentary on the Gospel of John 1.93.

<sup>27</sup> Züricher Bibel, Verlag der Zürcher Bibel, Zürich 1982

**Point 5: “If anyone says or thinks that, at the resurrection, human bodies will rise spherical in form and unlike our present form, let him be anathema.”**

Note: This English translation varies greatly from the meaning of the German, which reads as follows: “Wer behauptet oder glaubt, die Leiber der Auferstandenen seien [meist noch] ‘gebeugte Gestalten’, und wer nicht bekennt, dass wir als aufrechte [Gestalten] auferweckt werden – den treffe der Bannfluch!”

Contra-Origen: This is in conflict with the Apostle’s Creed which ends with; “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.”

Pro-Origen: Origen’s teaching that the fallen spirits gradually return to a perfect state through multiple earth lives was declared heretical by the Fifth Ecumenical Council. The associated spiritual resurrections that occur after each person dies are mostly of spirits that have not yet been restored to their original divine purity. J. Daniélou provides an example of a soul at the beginning of its journey (Mary Magdalen) and one near the end its journey back to divinity (John) as Origen taught:

*This is typical of Origen’s method of interpretation. Places are figures of spiritual states. Going up and going down correspond to the soul’s movements in the spiritual life. The different categories of people represent groups at different stages in the spiritual life. This might be due simply to the application of Christ’s visible acts, as recorded in the Gospels, to the spiritual life, a perfectly legitimate proceeding. When Origen represents Christ’s miracles of healing as figures of spiritual cures and takes Mary Magdalen at Jesus’ feet as a figure of beginners and John resting on his breast as a figure of the perfect, his “contemplation” is in both instances quite justified and in John’s case it is in the spirit of the text itself. But in the present passage something more than that is involved. The brothers of Jesus represent δυνάμεις. Downward movement is a figure of the Incarnation, in which, according to a theory familiar to Origen, the Word was accompanied by his brothers the angels, who came down with him. Consequently, the scene in the Gospels becomes a figure of this descent from heaven. The method is very close to Heracleon’s, even though detached from the doctrine of the pleroma and applied to the doctrine of the Incarnation.<sup>28</sup>*

**Point 6: “If anyone says that the heaven, the sun, the moon, the stars, and the waters that are above heavens, have souls, and are reasonable beings, let him be anathema.”**

Contra-Origen: Throughout the pagan cultures the celestial bodies have been seen and worshiped as gods, therefore it is quite logical that this point be made by the church in order to stop those pagan activities, and the worship of demons.

Pro-Origen: From Origen’s spiritual view, the celestial bodies are symbols of divine and fallen reasonable beings. Such symbolism has been prevalent throughout Greek literature. Compare Plato’s use in Timaeus 41. Celestial symbolism is a thesis unto itself, but I will give a short example of Origen’s view. He saw the sun as symbolizing Jesus “I am the light of the world.” (John 8:12), and the moon as symbolizing Jesus’ adversary; Lucifer. (Cf. Job 25:5, Is. 1:13-15 and 1 Cor. 15:41) Therefore, the significance of the solar eclipse at time of Jesus’ death becomes apparent; symbolizing the short-lived victory of Lucifer, which momentarily extinguished the Light of Jesus from this world. Only at the time of an eclipse, we can see that the moon emits no light of its own, whereas normally the moon only partially reflects the light [Truth] of Jesus. This partial use of the truth is the signature of the ‘master of lies’.

**Point 7: “If anyone says or thinks that Christ the Lord in a future time will be crucified for demons as he was for men, let him be anathema.”**

Note: Crouzel argues that this idea of a double sacrifice came from a misunderstanding of Origen’s teaching by Jerome.

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<sup>28</sup> J. Daniélou, Origen. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955. ISBN: 0404623816, pages 192-193



*In connection with the ritual scheme the cosmic and hypercosmic effect of the sacrifice of the Cross: as several texts show, He has purified everything, on earth as in heaven. That is why Origen speaks sometimes of a double efficacy of the one sacrifice. A similar affirmation in the Treatise on First Principles was understood in a wrong sense by Jerome: 'although Origen does not say so', Jerome nevertheless understands the matter as if Origen was affirming a duality of sacrifices, Christ having to be crucified again for the demons. But Book I of the Commentary on John of similar date to the Treatise on First Principles, clearly affirms the uniqueness of the sacrifice – 'the victim once offered - ten hapax thysiam' - and at the same time its double efficacy. The uniqueness of the sacrifice is also affirmed in the Treatise on First Principles itself. Jerome must have misunderstood. He sees a confirmation of his point of view in the idea that Christ was made man among men, angel among angels, whence, as Jerome extends Origen's thought in his own way, we get demon among demons. But that Christ became a man among men and an angel among angels is only said in a very precise context, that of the theophanies, not that of Christ's sacrifice, and nothing justifies us in extending it to that.<sup>29</sup>*

**Contra-Origen:** This is inconstant with the doctrine of eternal damnation, which is supported by 6 references in the New Testament (Matt. 18:8, 25:41, 25:46, Mark 3:29, 2 Thess. 1:9 and Jude 7).<sup>30</sup> Also, the Theodosian Code states:

*We authorize the followers of this law to assume the title Catholic Christians; but as for the others, since in our judgment they are foolish madmen, we decree that they shall be branded with the ignominious name of heretics, and shall not presume to give their conventicles the name of churches. They will suffer in the first place the chastisement of divine condemnation and the second the punishment of our authority, in accordance with the will of heaven shall decide to inflict.<sup>31</sup>*

**Pro-Origen:** Origen's teaching was actually that Jesus Christ came into this world to save all the lost (fallen) souls (Cf. PA 3.1.10), including those known to the church as demons; the princes of Heaven that fell into the deepest regions of Hell due to the large amount of guilt they had in helping to bring about the Fall.

For Origen, the Final Judgment occurred in the three days following Jesus' death on the cross. When He descended into Hell, after successfully passing all earthly tests, He conquered Lucifer and limited Lucifer's power over the inhabitants of Earth; creating a new epoch. The last demon that Jesus' love will conquer will be Lucifer (Death). (Cf. 1 Cor. 15:20-28) One example of the new epoch is seen in the disappearance of 'possession by evil spirit'. During the time of Christ, there are many documented cases of possession. (Cf. Mark 1:27, 3:11, 5:2-13, 6:7, 7:25, 9:14-29 and PA 3.2) After the final judgment on Lucifer, he and his evil spirits no longer have unlimited power over all the inhabitants of Earth; as they did at the time prior to Jesus' victory over him. In addition, he no longer can hold souls in hell against their will, as was the case before Jesus opened Heaven's Gate to all. (See Origen's discussion of demons in his Commentary on the Gospel of John 20.287-336.)

**Point 8: "If anyone says or thinks that the power of God is limited, and that he created as much as he was able to compass, let him be anathema."**

**Contra-Origen:** M. C. Steenberg defends the view that the Almighty God can do anything. (See also Luke 1:37):

*Conversely, if God created the human soul in Adam, from which all other souls (except that of Christ) have been begotten, then God can surely exterminate anything He has created, or anything man has made, at any time He sovereignly chooses: - which, if course, is the principal theme of both Gen. 6:7 and Rev. 18.<sup>32</sup>*

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<sup>29</sup> H. Crouzel, Origen. trans. A.S. Worrall. Edinburgh: T.& T. Clark, 1998. ISBN: 0567086399, pages 196-197

<sup>30</sup> Appendix on Aionios, <http://home.earthlink.net/~rgjones3/Damnation/damapp.htm>

<sup>31</sup> Medieval Sourcebook: Banning of Other Religions, Theodosian Code XVI.i.2, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/theodcodeXVI.html>

<sup>32</sup> M. C. Steenberg, Origen and the Final Restoration

Pro-Origen: For the peasant mind, it may be a comforting thought that God's power is unlimited, but with deeper analysis this simple notion becomes illogical. With the benefit of the teachings of Plato, Euclid, Pythagoras, and Democritus, it was clear to Origen that God could not have created the Spiritual Laws and Natural Laws that He did, and at the same time contradict those Laws. In this logical fashion, God's actions must be limited by His own Laws. This had a far deeper meaning for the priests and pharisees, who had usurped God's power by becoming His voice on Earth. They did not want their power limited in any fashion, but what resulted is a set of rules lacking logic and harmony with nature. From Origen's letter to Gregory we see his suggested basis for understanding the scriptures.

*And I would wish that you should take with you on the one hand those parts of the philosophy of the Greeks which are fit, as it were, to serve as general or preparatory studies for Christianity, and on the other hand so much of Geometry and Astronomy as may be helpful for the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures.*<sup>33</sup>

**Point 9: "If anyone says or thinks that the punishment of demons and of impious men is only temporary, and will one day have an end, and that a restoration (apokatastasis) will take place of demons and of impious men, let him be anathema."**

Contra-Origen: From the Westminster Confession we have the teaching about the wicked souls:

*And the souls of the wicked are cast into hell, where they remain in torments and utter darkness, reserved to the judgement of the great day. (Luke 16:23,24 Acts 1:25 Jude 6, 7 1Pet. 3:19)*<sup>34</sup>

Pro-Origen: Edward Moore aptly defends Origen's restoration theory, summarizing:

*The beauty of Origen's theory is that this truth is not forced upon us in a direct and violent manner, but is gradually revealed to us as an intelligible (or rational) as well as an existential verity.*<sup>35</sup>

## **The Verdicts from Today**

Contra-Origen:

*In the end, the doctrine of Universal Salvation cannot be faithfully paired with the more patristic notions of free will or final judgement, even though Origen energetically defends both; for he described 'judgement' solely as a tool for teaching, and thus removed from it any real sense of justice. He exaggerated the love of God to a degree that downplayed His righteousness: two features which the Church has been insistent to bring together in its teachings, rather than to separate. Here we must admit a severe flaw in Origen's thought. Ultimately, his view of universal restoration took the concept of free will full-circle, and ended with its absence; for if all are indeed to be restored to God, then the 'choices' one makes in life are really not choices at all—for the ultimate fruit of the decision is already determined by God.*<sup>36</sup>

Pro-Origen: Those who have had the preparatory education prescribed by Origen are able to glimpse into his brilliance, seeing that his theology includes the truths from all religions while simultaneously illuminating the dogmas that have tainted them throughout history. By resisting the materialistic view of creation and by accepting the existence of a spiritual world, one is ready to look for the pearls within scripture. (Matt. 7:6) It then becomes clear that the deeper meaning of the passages in Scripture deal with a spiritual world and its inhabitants that have existed long before the physical world was created billions of years ago for the sole purpose of completely restoring the Divine Spiritual World. We, the fallen will and have suffered separation from God for a material eternity, but this is only a short time for God. (2 Peter 3:8)

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<sup>33</sup> Origen's letter to Gregory <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1014.htm>

<sup>34</sup> Westminster Confession, Chapter XXXII <http://www.geocities.com/kwn49/westconf.html#wcchap32>

<sup>35</sup> E. Moore, Origen of Alexandria and apokatastasis: Some Notes on the Development of a Noble Notion <http://www.quodlibet.net/moore-origen.shtml>

<sup>36</sup> M. C. Steenberg, Origen and the Final Restoration

## Heretic and Prophet

By looking at the books of the Prophets a familiar pattern arises; one of Prophets being sent to teach the people of Earth (the fallen souls) knowing in advance that their divine message was not going to be widely accepted. God forewarns His Prophet Ezekiel of the problems that he will encounter. *“But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me: for all the house of Israel are impudent and hardhearted.”* (Ezek. 3:7) We consistently hear the Prophets admonishing the earthly leaders for how they oppress and kill His people (those loyal to God). In Micah we hear God’s messenger speaking to all the worldly leaders, and the inquisitors: *“And I said: Hear now, O heads of Jacob, and you rulers of the house of Israel: Is it not for you to know justice?”* (Mic. 3:1-3) Justice is a very misunderstood word in the teachings of Jesus, especially today. It is commonly confused with retribution and not with the justice taught by Jesus, which calls for an entire repayment of all debts (Matt. 5:26) but allowing for all to be saved. Jesus, the Word, the King of God’s heavenly creation, came to Earth to show us what divine Love is and to tell us what divine Justice means: *“Love thy neighbor as thyself, turn the other cheek, not one shall be lost!”* (Cf. Matt. 19:19, Matt. 5:39 and Luke 15:4-7) How can the ‘church’ that violated these teachings of the Son of God by condemning millions to their death say Origen’s humanistic theology is not the Will of God?

In his letter to Africanus, Origen recounts missing references in the Hebrew text of the Bible describing the treachery of the scribes and Pharisees against the Prophets, which he discovered in his work on the Hexapla, perhaps as a reminder to us about his own fate at the hands of the church.

*At present I shall adduce from the Gospel what Jesus Christ testifies concerning the prophets, together with a story which He refers to, but which is not found in the Old Testament, since in it also there is a scandal against unjust judges in Israel. The words of our Saviour run thus: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partaken with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore be ye witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of Gehenna? Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes; and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.” And what follows is of the same tenor: “O Jerusalem; Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.”*

*Let us see now if in these cases we are not forced to the conclusion, that while the Saviour gives a true account of them, none of the Scriptures which could prove what He tells are to be found. For they who build the tombs of the prophets and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, condemning the crimes their fathers committed against the righteous and the prophets, say, “If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.” In the blood of what prophets, can any one tell me? For where do we find anything like this written of Esaias, or Jeremias, or any of the twelve, or Daniel? Then about Zacharias the son of Barachias, who was slain between the temple and the altar, we learn from Jesus only, not knowing it otherwise from any Scripture. Wherefore I think no other supposition is possible, than that they who had the reputation of wisdom, and the rulers and elders, took away from the people every passage which might bring them into discredit among the people. We need not wonder, then, if this history of the evil device of the licentious elders against Susanna is true, but was concealed and removed from the Scriptures by men themselves not very far removed from the counsel of these elders.<sup>37</sup>*

This activity by the church leaders occurred not only before the birth of Jesus but continued afterwards as they removed from history and the history books all that which shows their true character and their true motives.

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<sup>37</sup> Origen’s letter to Africanus <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0414.htm>

When we look at the life and work of Origen from the viewpoint of the Prophets, it is quite possible to imagine him as being simultaneously a Prophet of God and a heretic in the eyes of those admonished by the Prophets; without any contradictions. What we know about Origen's method, his volume, and his precision of writing clearly suggests divinity. Everything was dictated and it took seven stenographers to keep up with him. He could speak logically and intelligibly on one biblical point for several hours without specific preparation. David G. Hunter says, "Origen's homilies were preached spontaneously, not prepared in writing."<sup>38</sup> These are all characteristics of a Prophet of God.

Through this analysis I was unable to find unequivocal proof from the church that Origen's theology is false, on the contrary, I find greater support for Origen's theology through logic, reason, Ionian Greek philosophy, and the natural sciences. It is not surprising that the Pro-Origen viewpoint allows for a full acceptance of the contrarian viewpoint, logically explaining its existence, but the reverse has not held.

*In his handling of the text Origen is at his best because here appears most lambently that quality of sweet reasonableness which was so characteristic of him (and so deplorably lacking in Jerome). It is the same sweet reasonableness which won the lifelong devotion of Ambrosius, evoked the eulogies of Gregory Theodorus, (later known as Gregory Thaumaturgus) and more than once enabled Origen to succeed in the task, which would have been considered impossible a century later, of winning large bodies of heretics back to the orthodox faith by argument alone without abuse or violence.<sup>39</sup>*

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<sup>38</sup> Origen's Writings <http://www.stmaryslouis.bizland.com/Chapter 2 of The Deans of the School of Alexandria--Origen.htm>

<sup>39</sup> R.P.C. Hanson, Allegory and Event. London, Westminster John Knox Press, 2002. page 178

## End Notes

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<sup>i</sup> Footnotes from the quoted sections of Origen's Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans:

1. See Introduction (7).

2. Cf. Epilogue of Rufinus (6).

3. Origen is often referred to as Adamantius, "Man of Steel" or "Man of Adamant"; cf. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.14.10 and Jerome, *Ep 43*. Eusebius says that he was known by this name even during his lifetime and that the epithet denoted the firmness with which Origen stood like a rock against heretics. Jerome thought it signified Origen's unwearied industry in producing innumerable books.

4. Cf. *Hom in en 9.1*.

5. *Interpolati sunt ipsi libri* See Introduction (7). The only other appearance of *interpolare* in the Commentary occurs in 10-43.2, where it is used to describe Marcion's work of tampering with the Scriptures.

6. See Introduction (7).

7. See Preface to Rufinus (2)

8. Hammond, "Last Ten Years," p. 404, elucidates Rufinus's intentions in this passage: "Rufinus' stand against such plagiarism, which seemed more surprising to his contemporaries than it does to us, was an implied criticism of Jerome's methods in his biblical commentaries. The procedure that he refuses here... is similar to that for which he had attacked Jerome and those like him earlier. By directly translating Origen, he himself will reveal to Latin readers the source of Jerome's vaunted learning as a biblical commentator." For a detailed examination of Jerome's plagiarism of Origen's Pauline exegesis, see C. Bammel, "Origen's Pauline Prefaces," pp. 495-513, in: *Origeniana Sexta: Origene et la Bible/Origen and the Bible*, ed. Gilles Dorival and Alain Le Boulluec (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1995).

<sup>ii</sup> The Anathematism of the Emperor Justinian against Origen (Labbe and Cossart, *Concilia*, Tom. v., col. 677.) It was issued in 543 AD but wasn't ratified into the church until the Fifth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople in 553 AD; at which time additional points were added to the original nine.