# *ORIGEN*
# *ON FIRST PRINCIPLES*

Being Koetschau's Text of the *De Principiis*
Translated into English, Together with an
Introduction and Notes

BY

G. W. BUTTERWORTH

Introduction to the Torchbook edition

BY

HENRI DE LUBAC

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ON FIRST PRINCIPLES



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## INTRODUCTION TO THE TORCHBOOK EDITION

BY

## HENRI DE LUBAC*

### *Origen's Works*

When Origen died he left behind a massive body of writings numbering close to a thousand titles. This vast treasure, consisting chiefly of explications of holy Scripture, was widely used for more than a century without serious obstacles to its diffusion. There was of course no lack of criticism. It had appeared even during Origen's Alexandrian period, and it redoubled immediately after his death. In subsequent generations men like Methodius of Olympus, Peter of Alexandria, Eustathius of Antioch and Pacomius proved resolute and sometimes violent opponents. In any event it was inevitable that, as the labor of theological reflection proceeded and orthodoxy was progressively defined, the imprecisions and inadequacies in the exposition of the faith given by this greatest of ante-Nicene fathers should grow increasingly more noticeable. His very genius, which had made him play such an important part in the elaboration of the dogma, made him correspondingly more vulnerable afterwards. Nor, however, did Origen lack defenders from the very start. Apologies for him multiplied apace with the attacks against him. The admiration expressed by men as significant and as different as Athanasius and Eusebius of Caesarea could be taken for a definitive guarantee of his position. His works spread rapidly in the West as well as in the East, emerged unscathed from every skirmish and went on spreading. But from about 375 on everything changed. The massive offensive launched by Saint Epiphanius' *Panarion* unleashed the first of the storms in which Origen's writings were to founder. In the sixth century, the onslaught was still worse. The doctrinal excesses of the Syrian monk Stephen Bar Sudaili, who had concocted a strange system by mixing various traits borrowed from Gnosticism and the Cabbala with certain ideas taken from the *Periarchon,* provoked Justinian's thunderbolts. The list of fifteen anathemata, drawn up by

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the Council Fathers of 553 outside their official sessions, was not the worst by far; for their sources are in fact not Origen's works at all. There followed the physical destruction of his writings. It had begun at the end of the fourth century; but this time it was carried out systematically. The emperor-theologian was in earnest and so was the zealous faction which had alerted him. Nearly all of Origen's work perished. Only two letters and a few fragments remain of his vast correspondence which originally had had four or five sections. Of the exegetical works—although the principles of exegesis had not been involved in the controversy—barely twenty have come down to us in the original. Searches through the libraries of the Middle East could produce no more than "a few insignificant scraps." There is no way to measure such a loss. Epiphanius and Justinian have served the enemies of Christian civilization well.

Luckily there was a number of Latin translations. Some were made by Saint Hilary, Saint Jerome, and several others. The greater part came from the pen of Rufinus of Aquileia. Rufinus' translations have been unjustly maligned. Recent historians who studied them have rightly reacted against an unduly severe evaluation of their worth: the translations served their purpose well. They are fluent, clear and pleasant to read, which in itself is an advantage. Though their author claims to be "incapable of rendering the movement of Origen's sentences with the eloquence" of Jerome, he does in fact often seem to render the original with a genuine felicity. Of course, we would want them to be more faithful, more literal. Still, there is hardly a translation except that of the *Periarchon* which poses any really serious problems for the historian of dogma. The translation of the commentary on the Epistle to the Romans is an abridgment, and openly admits it. What is more, it was done from a corrupt text and Rufinus himself tells us that it caused him exceedingly painstaking labor. In other cases, the translator does not hesitate to make slight adaptations. Sometimes he paraphrases; less frequently he gives extracts. He does not hesitate to add to a passage what explanations he considers necessary for Latin readers. But since he honestly informs the reader of the kind of liberty he is taking, we may trust him when he writes on occasion *"Simpliciter ut invenimus transtulimus."* These words refer to the homilies on Joshua, on Judges, and on Psalms 36-38. With respect to the homilies on Genesis, Exodus, and Leviticus the translation admits to some expansion of the original, but without giving us any reason to doubt its faithfulness to the substance. Together, the translations are of incalculable value to us. When Rufinus set to work at the urgent request of his friend Macarius, convinced though he was that his



work could be of real value, he had no inkling of the unrivaled importance of his task. It is fortunate indeed that he did not let himself be discouraged by the quarrel that Jerome was trying to pick with him. He saved from final ruin some of the most precious monuments of Christian antiquity, works destined to mould Latin minds for a long time to come.

Even so, more than one historian has refused to make use of these translations. Such purism would be excessive even if the translations were ten times more suspect than they are: it is too much of an invitation to laziness and simple lack of inquiry. All kinds of precautions are necessary of course. One must not press a particular expression too far. One cannot rely upon a specific detail for fear that it may be a gloss. But when it is a question, not of a precise statement made in passing or of a specific point of doctrine, but of what constitutes so to speak the texture of thought and discourse, one stands on firmer ground. In this case more than elsewhere, the real cure does not lie in abstinence but on the contrary in massive utilization. In order to have a chance to reach the authentic Origen, one must pile citations on citations. In that way the parallel passages control, define, and comment on one another, especially when one examines, for example, a phrase in Rufinus' Latin, another in the Latin of Jerome, and finally a third preserved in the original Greek. Indeed such confrontations are not rare; and from them there emerges an impression of unity. Through all the variety of his works and through all the diversity of the versions in which they come to us, Origen looks most of the time surprisingly like himself.

By the same token, this consideration rules out another sort of suppression. Scholars at times have depreciated and even systematically brushed aside not only the homilies which we have only in translation but even those of which the Greek text still exists, and also such writings as the *Exhortation to Martyrdom*. These were considered simply as signs of a "popular Origenism"; they were "popularizations," written for public consumption, and unworthy to have a share in the reconstruction of the true Origen synthesis. Only the *Periarchon,* the *Contra Celsum* and up to a point the major commentaries could supply tried and true material. . . . Discrimination of this sort is wilful. It stems from a mistaken idea of Origen's personality and of the very nature of his thought. It is as evident as can be that not everything which came from the lips or the pen of this great man bears the same features, and that we cannot attach equal importance to it all. But nothing entitles us to think that all does not have the same sincerity, the same conviction. One must not forget that the books on Saint John's gospel and the *Exhortation to Martyrdom* are both

dedicated to the same Ambrose. Origen was not one of those curious and detached minds who "enter into sacred science like a tourist goes into a city to look up its monuments." His Christianity was not a speculation removed from life, nor a dream in the margins of the concerns of the great Church. In his highest meditations as in his most practical exhortations, his Christianity was "committed," to use the language of our day. We shall see the proof below. Historians who have failed to recognize this fact imagine him an intellectual who put on a mask to speak to the common people, a man whose interior life had its place outside the Christian community; these historians have gone astray in both their method and their interpretation. In trying to pick the trump cards out of Origen's work, they have not merely deprived themselves of sources of the first order; they have also distorted the meaning of the very sources they retained.

### *His Piety and Orthodoxy*

We must rid ourselves of the view, still far too common, which presents Origen as almost entirely an intellectual, esoteric and rationalizing, and see him as the man of the spirit, the apostle, the man of the Church which he was above all else. The daring of his genius must not blind us to the drives of his piety. The shortcomings of his doctrine—inevitable in a thinker of the third century who was the very first to build a theology—must not make us mistake the pure quality of his faith.

His intellectual formation, we must not forget, was entirely Christian; we might even say entirely ecclesiastic. Many features of his homilies remind us of it, if need be. "We of the Church," he says; "I, a man of the Church, living in the faith of Christ and set in the midst of the Church. . . ." Justin, Tatian, Clement and others like them were converts; because of a turn of mind due to their early formation they remained philosophers. But when Origen affectionately proclaims himself "a man of the Church," he underlines something like an inborn quality that is the mark of his whole genius. When he speaks of the "world," the word is often used in the sense it has in the gospels—the world that passes away, especially the evil world from which Jesus Christ comes to set us free. Despite the testimony of Eusebius, one may well ask whether he ever figured among Clement's disciples—we are far too much accustomed to see him in Clement's tow. Clement after his conversion kept the vocabulary of the Greeks that had already imposed itself on Philo, and then on Tatian; he still called the doctrine of Moses and of Christianity itself by the name of "barbarian philosophy." But Origen contrasts the "barbarians" who were the Egyptians, with the "saints" who were the great men of Israel. He had been introduced to the Bible on his father's knees, and he always maintained that outside the Bible "there is nothing holy." Except in *Contra Celsum* he almost never quotes from profane authors. He is not a man who professes in private, a lecturer, but above all a catechist and preacher. He is one of those who *ecclesiastice docent verbum*. He is quite willing to include idolaters, heretics and "philosophers" in a single sweeping condemnation. He knows that "the knowledge which converts men to lead a holy life comes only from . . . Christ" and that Christ is found only "in the Church" which is filled with his splendor—the Church, pillar and firm support of the truth, where the Son of Man dwells in fulness. From the moment when he becomes a priest, he is aware that he "exercises the teaching office of the Church, of which he bears the authentic character"; he wishes to be "the faithful steward of the divine mysteries." He compares the writings of the apostles to the trumpets of Israel's army which reduced to rubble the walls of Jericho, the whole machinery of paganism, and the systems of its thinkers. These, to him, are real idolaters because "they worship the inventions of their own mind." He sees these Doctors of the world in league with the heretics against the Christian faith, an insult to its simplicity. This "simplicity of faith" is, in his view, altogether different from a simple adherence to "the bare letter"; it is a positive virtue, a form of perfection. It is this simplicity which renders the bride of Christ so glorious, which causes her to be without spot or wrinkle. Origen professes for it a real worship; it is, he says, "the virginity of the soul." A childlike and humble spirit follows in its wake.

In Origen's devotion to the Person of the Savior one discerns a note of tenderness that is all his own. It is not just that in his apology against Celsus he spoke of Christ with a nobility mindful of Pascal. It is not just that in the *Periarchon* he exalted in particularly solemn terms the mystery of the Incarnation, that mystery more wonderful and more disturbing than all the others, which "we must contemplate with fear and trembling." It is not only that in his commentary on the Song of Songs he adopted the voice of the Church which comes from the Gentiles, to cry out: "For because of thy word, O Christ, which I recognized as the true word, I came to thee. For all the words which were said to me, and which I heard while I was in my own country, from worldly teachers and philosophers, were not true words. That only is the true word, which is in thee." He speaks in more intimate tones as well. He greets with deep emotion the first appearance of Jesus' name in the Bible, and observes that nowhere in the

Bible is the name ever borne by a sinner. We ought to imitate no one, he says, save only Jesus. Apart from Jesus, nothing to him is worthy of being loved. He would have us love Jesus with the same love that we owe to God; more, he would have us love God in him. He prays to him and would have us pray to him even as to the Father. The absence of Christ is for Origen a desert barren of righteousness. In his homilies vibrate some of the first notes of that human piety toward Jesus which to us seems to have become inseparable from our religion. Without cutting it off from its dogmatic roots he here brings to perfection an aspect of devotion which had not yet won its place in the great tradition and which was not to unfold fully until much later. A distant precursor of Saint Bernard, Origen celebrates the power and the sweetness of Jesus' name. He knows that Jesus can be "found" only in the solitude and silence of the heart. He wants us to seek him with zeal, with perseverance, if need be in anguish and sorrow; to live with him ever present; to ask him questions and to listen to his replies: this, to Origen, is what the search for the meaning of Scripture really means; he wants us to humble ourselves deeply so that we may deserve to hear the sweetness of his voice. He declares that all the good things which man can expect and which God can give are summed up in Jesus. He praises those who contemplate Christ and who remain bound to him "by a bond of tender affection"—and those who prefer to put their trust in his words rather than in their own conscience. Even as Origen smiles at Jesus' childhood, so he suffers with him the suffering and humiliation of his Passion which he at times evokes with startling realism. He admires the majesty of his silence. He also meditates on the first pages of the gospel; and from Jesus' submission to Joseph he learns that, no matter how great one may be, there is no better thing than to live in humble submission. He announces that there is no true Christian life in separation from the man who was the Christ and from Mary his mother. He often speaks of "my Jesus," "my Lord," "my Savior." This personal touch had become so much a habit with him that he at times slipped into introducing it even into his quotations from Scripture. It is a Pauline trait; but Origen's insistent usage makes something new of it, a sort of conquest of Christian piety. No doubt Tertullian had already spoken of "my Christ," but this expression simply meant: Christ as I see him, as my faith shows him to me and as I claim him to be, in contrast to the Christ whom Marcion imagines, "Marcion's Christ." In an analogous way, he could say that the true Christ is the "Christ of the Creator," the "Christ of Isaiah," the "Christ of the Prophets," and so on; or again, in a discussion of Moses or of Paul, he said just as easily: "my Moses,"



"my Apostle." . . . In these polemical chapters from the *Adversus Marcionem,* the point at issue was "two Christs," that is, two conceptions of Christ opposing one another. If Tertullian made use of the first person singular—*meus, mihi*—it was because of the personal character which he gave to the battle with his adversary. It was two men who fought a duel: "your Christ," says Tertullian in addressing Marcion. Two men, but in the name of two Churches: the heretical Church of Marcion and the great Church Catholic. Tertullian's "my Christ" was thus simply the equivalent of "the Christ of the Church, of the Catholic tradition, of the orthodox faith"; and the possessive pronoun simply expresses the personal attachment that this forceful fighter felt for that faith. But Origen is a man of another cast. Like John the Evangelist, he "reclined at the breast of Jesus." The one for whom he as a boy would have wished to meet martyrdom had forever enraptured the depths of his soul.

His piety was redoubled by a very strong concern with orthodoxy. For example, in one of his homilies on Saint Luke he says: "As for myself, my wish is to be truly a man of the Church, to be called by the name of Christ and not that of any heresiarch, to have this name which is blessed all over the earth; I desire to be, and to be called, a Christian, in my works as in my thoughts." Love and faith are fused in this outcry; it is the force of love which exacts rightness of faith. He often alerts us to the danger of false doctrines from which, he observes, "human nature finds it difficult to purify itself." Such doctrines are for him in the true sense, so to speak, "the abomination of desolation." He insists that one must protect oneself against them by vigilance and by prayer. Not content to invoke "the rule of the Scriptures" or "the evangelical and apostolic rule," he constantly appeals to "the rule of the Church," "the faith of the Church," "the word of the Church," "the preaching of the Church," "the tradition of the Church," "the doctrine of the Church," "the thought and teaching of the Church." In the bones of the paschal Lamb he sees a symbol of the "holy dogmas of the Church" of which not one shall be broken. He does not want "that there be any disagreement on doctrine among Churches." He is Adamantius, "the man of iron"; "doctrinal firmness" is one of the virtues closest to his heart. He exalts constancy in the faith and stability of dogma. Even before Saint Augustine, he speaks of "chastity of the heart," that is, of the understanding, and doctrines that stray from the rule of faith seem to him worse than evil ways of life. Again, he says that "one must guard oneself against committing an offense of the head" and against eating the sacred foods outside the temple, that is, "against harboring thoughts different from the faith of the Church

on divine dogmas." One must receive the faith of God in the spirit which the Church teaches us, and must not do like the heretics who search the Scriptures only in order to find some confirmation of their own doctrines. Their pride raises them "higher than the cedars of Lebanon" and their sophistries are full of deceit. But it is no use for them to pretend that they have a tradition which comes down from the apostles; they are professors of error. While the faithful Christian in no way strays from the great tradition, they appeal to secret Scriptures or to secret traditions in order to confirm their lies. Thus they want to make us worship a Christ whom they have invented "in solitude," while the only authentic Christ reveals himself "within the house." They disfigure those vessels of gold and silver which are the sacred texts, in order to fashion them into objects according to their own fancy. They are thieves and adulterers who seize the divine words only to deform them by their perverse interpretations. They are counterfeiters for they have coined their doctrine outside the Church. False teachers, false prophets, spinning out of their own minds what they propound, they are the liars of whom Ezekiel speaks. By a perverse trickery they often cover their idols, that is, their empty dogmas, with sweetness and chastity so that their propositions may be smuggled more easily into the ears of their listeners and lead them astray more surely. They all call Jesus their master and embrace him; but their kiss is the kiss of Judas.

Is this truly the same man as the "allegorist" of whom we have been told? And if the two representations are incompatible, which are we to choose? Tillemont was clear-eyed when he wrote that Origen "seems to have had a very humble spirit, very submissive to the Church, very respectful of her doctrines and decisions, very devoted to her unity." His feeling for the Church did in fact run as deep as his feeling for Christ. He was in the habit of calling her "Mother," and saw the Christians as her "children." The voice of her teaching was pleasing to him, and he was convinced that the more spiritual one grows, the more one recognizes the beauty of her face. He thought that the greatest misfortune is to be "cut off from the Mystery of the Church" like that plant from Jerusalem which, when transplanted into Canaan, withered at once because it was no longer cared for by the hand of God. All this surely is out of keeping with the sort of allegorism that many have attributed to Origen. But in turn it all is very much in keeping with the allegorism he actually practiced. And we must go further. Concern for orthodoxy and devotion to the faith, love for the "dogmas of the truth" are precisely among the reasons for Origen's allegorism. One of his goals is "to shut Pharaoh's mouth" with an explication of Scripture that "conforms to sound doctrine." For



example, when he runs up against anthropomorphic passages in the Bible, he feels the need to interpret them, not primarily in the name of reason, but in the name of the faith of the Church: *Alienum hoc est ab Ecclesiae fide.* Similarly, he supposes, "who will dare say that the Word of God is of no use and contributes in no way to salvation, but does no more than tell of events that happened in the past and have no relation to us? *Impia haec, et aliena a catholica fide sententia est.*" To maintain such an opinion, one must deny the unity of the Law and the gospel, the unity of the God of Moses and God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. On the contrary, to seek the "spiritual meaning" of Scripture in order to draw nourishment from it is to use Scripture in catholic fashion, *verbum Dei catholice tractari.* It is to receive the Word from Jesus' hands and to have him read it to you. It is to act as "a son of the Church." If there is one fundamental obligation for the Christian, it is that of keeping "to the rule of the heavenly Church of Jesus Christ, through the succession from the apostles." In concrete terms then, what is this rule? Saint Irenaeus had already given the answer: it is the interpretation of Scripture by the spirit.

### *Wisdom and the Cross*

How colorless the human wisdom of the philosophers looks to Origen beside these treasures of divine knowledge in which he thus steeps himself! His writings yield nothing comparable to those elaborations which Clement, in the first book of his *Stromateis*, devoted to the praise of philosophy. Not that Origen allows no place for the profane disciplines within ecclesiastical doctrine: for him, the spoils of Egypt are fair game! Origen did not invent this metaphor which was destined to become famous, but he did make it his own. When one thinks that it was to reappear from the pen not only of such men as Alcuin or John Duns Scotus, but also of Peter Damian and even Gregory IX, one is less inclined to view it as evidence of unbounded intellectualism. We note, besides, that these "spoils" are of value only if they are brought back to the holy land for the building of the Temple. By contrast, he who goes down into Egypt to devote himself there to the profane sciences runs great risks. If he lingers there as did Ader the Idumean, if he lets himself be seduced by philosophy, he will return only to corrupt the faith and to break up the unity of his brothers. Those who escape this ruin are rare indeed.

Yet these disciplines also have a propaedeutic role. For a person capable of acquiring genuine education it is desirable that he

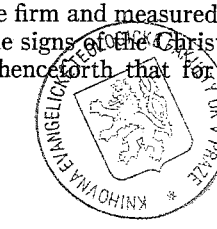
"draw from Greek philosophy the system of knowledge that is fit to serve as an introduction to Christianity." Certain ideas of geometry and astronomy," for example, will be useful to him also "to explain the sacred writings." By the same token, the apologist will imitate the patriarchs who did not hesitate to enter into unions with concubines or an alien woman, even in old age, with a mind to having descendants conceived in chastity. Thus he will bring together for his instruction "literature, grammar, geometry, arithmetic, dialectic"; "and if such marriages enable us to present our ideas, to discuss them, and to refute those who oppose them, and if in this way we should be able to convert a few men to the faith; if, by using their own methods more skilfully than they do themselves, we persuade them to accept the true philosophy of Christ and the true piety of God, then we can say that we have had children by dialectic or rhetoric, as by an alien woman or a concubine." And again, just as Moses accepted the counsel of his father-in-law Jethro, priest of an alien God, just so "if we happen to find a word of wisdom on the lips of a pagan, we should not immediately disdain the word itself because of the speaker; because it is not right for us to swell with pride and scorn the words of wise men on the pretext that we possess a law given to us by God. Rather, as the Apostle says, we must test everything and retain what is good." In any case, one must never make use of secular doctrines without first cleansing them and cutting out whatever in them is barren or dead. For, while every science comes from above, that is from God, there is not one that has not been more or less corrupted by the malice of men or of demons. No doubt, side by side with its falsehoods, "hellenic philosophy" contains elements of truth which are not to be despised; Saint Paul "saw a manifest greatness in the words of worldly wisdom"—only to judge them in the end all the more captious and vain. If one reviews everything that philosophy, Greek or barbarian, teaches, one will recognize that every time it fails to agree with Christ's teaching it is sheer folly. These "alien doctrines" must always be "controlled and held in subjection." Origen knows that this is not easy: "I, too, may tell what I have learned from experience, that rare is the man who succeeded in taking from Egypt only its useful things, and then going away to employ them for the service of God." Lest one be taken by surprise, one will always recall that philosophy and the faith, like Isaac and Abimelech, are now at peace and now at war, and that nothing must be accepted from the first until we have verified its agreement with the second.

Still more often Origen warns us against the dangers of philosophy. He condemns the "wisdom of the rulers of this world" without making distinctions. It is not just false knowledge, it is perverse



to the core. It consists above all of magic and divination, "the secrets of the Egyptians, occult philosophy, the astrology of the Chaldeans and Indians, the countless opinions of the Greeks concerning divinity." With this wisdom no compromise is possible. It is the wisdom of those who conspired against the Lord and crucified him. As for the "wisdom of this world," which consists of the profane arts and sciences, "poetry, grammar, geometry, rhetoric, music, and perhaps medicine," it too is dangerous in the form in which it is offered. Without being radically evil, it has become a tool of the demons; and its spirit is now contrary to Jesus Christ. It is an alien wisdom which God scatters to the winds, "the wealth of sinners." It is opposed to divine wisdom as the spirit of the world is opposed to the spirit of God. Its adepts seek to overthrow the gospel with the deceits of their dialectic. Origen compares it to the food consecrated to idols which the Apostle condemned, to "the leaven of the Pharisees" which Jesus denounced before his disciples, to the bar of gold that Achan stole at Jericho in spite of Joshua's order: a cursed object which seduces us with its brilliant beauty and contaminates the whole people. He accuses it of corrupting the faith with its sophistries as Eve was seduced by the guile of the serpent, of deceiving the wise man with the variety of its theses as Solomon was deceived by his wives. He points out that it invariably leaves those who follow it in uncertainty and doubt; like Abimelech's wife and maidservants, it remains barren so long as God has not come to heal it. "Do not touch," he says, "the furtive loaves of perverse doctrine. Do not long for the deceitful foods of philosophy which entice you away from the truth. This is the fast which is pleasing to God." True, Origen does not refuse the use of such nourishment "to those who have received full knowledge of the truth"; his language and method with a small group of fervent and cultivated disciples will be different from those he uses with the mass of the Christian people. But this is only normal, as any experienced educator will agree. The risks and the needs are not in fact the same in both cases; what is profitable in one could become fatal in the other. Thus one must always be alert "not to wound those who still have little training in Christ" and who might get caught in the trap.

In the last analysis, then, it is hardly an exaggeration to speak, with one of Origen's recent interpreters, of "the surprising aversion" that he feels toward this philosophy "which he knows very well nonetheless." No doubt one must make allowances for Origen's rhetoric. But there is in his faith in Christ a seriousness and sincerity, a power of conviction at once firm and measured and, all in all, a strength of faith that bears the signs of the Christian victory beforehand. Who could believe henceforth that for the use



of those whom he called the "perfect" Origen transformed Christianity into a sort of philosophical wisdom, that he made it into a "platonic gnosis" and abandoned the cross of Christ to the "beginners"? This manner of presenting his thought is unfaithful. And it is even more of a grievous mistake to propose that according to him salvation consists only in the work of the cross "for the ordinary Christian," while "for the Christian gnostic" it will be no more than "a higher teaching"; and that to the former, the redeemer and healer is present in the Christ of history, to the latter, the eternal Logos simply as a teacher. At the root of such interpretations we find the same misunderstanding which we have already noted in several of its forms. It is quite true that Origen throws into relief the role of the incarnate Logos as educator and illuminator of souls; but this trait, far from making him akin to the "gnostic" theologians, puts him in opposition to them. It is quite true also that he, once again following Saint Paul, means to preach a wisdom that surpasses "the simple faith" and that his "perfect believer" must go beyond the letter which the narrative of the Savior's Passion and death traces for him. But let us not forget that for him this wisdom is a grace of God, altogether different from that prideful and miserable knowledge which "the simplest of the Christians put to shame." It is this "true wisdom" which was given of old to such men as Isaiah and Jeremiah and which today is shared by those who are born in the Spirit. "When we understand, we understand by faith"; and to be "set free by the truth" we must "abide in the faith." Let us not ascribe to Origen's views some sort of disdainful arrogance. "Simple faith" or faith in the "simple letter" do not mean to him the faith of the simple or the lowly, of "those who are inferior according to human judgment." One of the characteristics of Jesus' preaching, Origen notes repeatedly, is that it is addressed to all, to the barbarians as to the Greeks, to the uneducated as to the learned. By the same token, he thinks, a true apostle of Jesus is recognizable by the fact that he "does not despise simple people." He who counts himself a believer and wise is, on the contrary, quite close to being an unbeliever if he disdains what the world takes for folly but what God has chosen: such are the Pharisees who, thinking themselves superior, keep themselves apart from the multitude.

Nor does Origen confuse wisdom with wisdom. We cite once again his clear declaration against Celsus' haughty reflections: "Human wisdom is what we call 'the wisdom of the world,' which is 'foolishness with God.' But the divine wisdom, which is different from the human if it really is divine, comes by the grace of God who gives it to those who prove themselves to be suitable persons



to receive it. . . . Celsus describes as *very uneducated* and as *slaves* and as *quite ignorant* those who . . . have not been educated in the learning of the Greeks. But the people whom we call very uneducated are those who are not ashamed to address lifeless objects. . . ." However, there is some excuse here for the error. It stems above all from the exegesis which Origen habitually gives to a text from the first Epistle to the Corinthians: "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." In the knowledge of which the Apostle here speaks, Origen sees no more than a knowledge that is still inferior, in other words a knowledge that is ignorant of Christ's person and work. Where Paul intended to speak of the "mystery of the cross" which he had "preached in all its starkness," Origin believes that it is simply a question of preaching the external fact of the crucifixion without revealing its mystery. Those who know only Jesus crucified, he thinks, are those who "suppose that the Word made flesh is the whole Word," who know nothing of his "glory" or his divinity. For this reason they are incapable of comprehending the meaning of the cross, which is to say that they do not know the mystery of our redemption. They have not as yet crossed the Jordan with the armies of the true Jesus and pushed on to the interior of the promised land to wage the final battles there. Origen sees in Paul's text an intention more restrictive than it really is. To him, the Christians who keep to this first sermon do not actually have "an elementary catechism"; they are at most still in the stage of a preparatory catechism. Such people are not necessarily weak in spirit; they may be wise according to the world. But they are still carnal men. As yet they know Christ only "according to the flesh," and if they wish to remain so, they would deserve the Apostle's blame. The Apostle decided at first to know nothing else while he was among them because they could then bear no more. Their soul had not been made ready. But when he wrote to them later, he made it clear that he possessed a wisdom nonetheless: a wisdom not of this world but of God, "a secret and hidden wisdom" which he "proclaims among the perfect." This wisdom does not annul the first knowledge but completes and transforms it. It is a more profound teaching which constitutes the understanding of the initial datum. It is the solid food which takes the place of the milk of infants, that is, once again, the milk not of the "weak," of those who are simple according to the world, but of the νήπιοι in the Pauline sense, of those who "had not yet been purified in their habits." There are not, then, two categories of Christians separated by the power of their intelligence. There is not a popular preaching and a different, more refined, teaching for the intellectuals. Our religion "is at once spiritual and corporeal."

And if in certain cases it is necessary to begin by preaching "the corporeal gospel," this must always be with the desire to come to the point of showing forth the "glory of the only-begotten Son" underneath "the form of a servant." Once one has aroused in the souls the taste for "the heavenly wisdom," one will be able "to communicate to it the knowledge which will lead it from the Incarnation even to the one who was with God in the beginning."

But the proclamation of Jesus crucified remains no less essential. For "the economy of the Passion" is central. It is "the Economy" *par excellence*. Origen knows that without the wood of the cross the leprosy of sin cannot be healed. He knows that it is the whole Church, without any distinction of categories, that was saved by the blood of Christ. He knows that the death of Christ is the Tree of Life for all of us, that all fruitfulness comes from this death as from the grain of wheat which must fall into the earth and seem to perish. He declares that all the glory and all the riches of the Church lie in Christ's Passion. For him, to be converted is "to come to the cross of Christ"; and the wisdom of the perfect consists not in some other knowledge, but in the contemplation of "the profound mysteries which Paul uncovers there for us" and then in rejecting all the more strongly the wisdom of the world. It is to be crucified to this world's wisdom. For there is total opposition between the narrow way of salvation shown to us in the cross of Christ, and the wide and easy way on which the philosophy of the wise men of the world seeks to engage us. The "vision of the Logos" can be attained only at the price of death to the world and at the cost of great tribulation; and no matter how sublime this vision may be, it will never make us lose sight of the crucified Jesus, at once priest and victim. There is no wisdom that excuses from taking up his cross and following him. Even supposing that, like Paul, one has been caught up to the third heaven, there is only one way not to fall back; and it is precisely this, to "take up the cross and follow Jesus in whom 'we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens.'"

Origen delights in commenting on the Prophet's oracles concerning the suffering Servant of Yahweh. He admires the profound "philosophy" which the Apostle discerns in the Passion. He binds himself to Paul's statement: Jesus "humbled himself even unto death and became obedient even to the cross." Sadly he confirms the fact that many do not understand this text and "imagine a Jesus inaccessible to suffering" and altogether superior, so they think, to all such abasement. "Under the guise of religious respect for Jesus," when they come to the rending cry *Quare me dereliquisti?* they wish to see no more than a token of humility. Origen himself, on the other hand, most certainly had



a vivid sense of the scandal of the *mysterium crucis*. To say that the Lord of Majesty was crucified, he who had come down from heaven, how "tortuous" such an affirmation appears; how hard to believe! Nonetheless, he will not blush at his Savior's cross. It is just this supreme humiliation of the Son of Man, which is ridiculed by the philosophers, from which the believer draws the power to scorn their laughter and their sarcasm. "The Christian faith has no fear of scandal." This scandal becomes a triumph of faith, and that which seemed "folly" is transformed into wisdom, "into a wisdom so great that it swallows all the wisdom of the Egyptians, that is, of this world." When the light of the cross penetrates the Christian's intelligence, it dispels all the dark shadows which the mistakes of the philosophers had accumulated there. It is this light of the cross which illumines the lives of the saints and makes them all martyrs, that is, witnesses of the Savior. It is the power of the cross that annihilates all evil desires; by it, "the whole army of sin and the flesh is put to rout." So great is this power that it procures healing and salvation not only for present and future generations, but even for those of past centuries. Even more, it is sufficient to save not only all mankind but also the celestial orders and powers. It is through union with the cross that our mutual union in the Father and the Son is realized. And no man was ever better placed to hear such a promise than he who hung with Jesus on the cross: "For he was a plant worthy of paradise, who was joined to the Tree of Life in this way." "The death of Christ reduced to impotence those powers which war against the human race. . . ." If the demons fear and tremble, the cause is again nothing else but the cross: the blood that flows down from it does not appease their thirst but destroys their power. It is the cross which has vanquished them and by which we shall vanquish them in our turn. "The power of the cross" is irresistible. And so we must faithfully bear its sign, take up "the standard of the cross" to meet its struggles and persecutions, so that we too may be able to say with Paul: "Far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

In summing up, we may say that there is, as it were, a twofold advent of the Logos in the soul. At the first advent, Christ barely begins to be known; the soul, still "untaught" [*rudis*] does not see his beauty; it discerns only the birth and the crucifixion in the flesh. But the second advent corresponds in some way, within the soul, to that advent which will be the consummation of the world; to him who reaches perfection, or simply Christian maturity, Christ appears transfigured in his beauty and his glory. Then, far from rejecting the mystery of the Incarnation or of the cross, the soul understands at last. Its faith becomes luminous. It finds its

own glory in this mystery "by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world." It sees in all clarity that this death to the world in Christ is a "blessed death." Such is, not the public and provisional teaching adapted to those who are "weak" or to the first stage of the beginners, but rather the final state of the perfect, itself a sign and anticipation within the soul of the final consummation. For to him for whom the world has been crucified and who no longer glories except in the cross, the end of the world has come, so to speak. With Romano Guardini, Origen could have said: "The cross is the absolute symbol."

# INTRODUCTION

BY

*G. W. Butterworth*

## I

### LIFE AND WRITINGS OF ORIGEN

'THE greatest teacher of the Church after the apostles'—such was the description of Origen which Jerome adopted from Didymus, the blind theologian of Alexandria, and inserted in the preface to his translation of the great master's *Homilies on Ezekiel*.[1] In the preface to his own work, *On the Meaning of Hebrew Names,* Jerome repeated the tribute, remarking that 'all but the ignorant' recognised it to be true.[2] Later on, when his enthusiasm for Origen had cooled, Jerome found it embarrassing to be reminded of these early laudations. Yet his first judgment was certainly sound, and few who study the works of Origen to-day will be disposed to contest it.

The story of Origen's life is easily accessible to the student,[3] and need not be retold here except in outline. He was born A.D. 185-186, probably at Alexandria, of Christian parents. At the age of seventeen he narrowly escaped death in the persecution of Severus, when his father Leonides was martyred and Origen was with great difficulty prevented from voluntarily sharing his fate. Owing to the departure of Clement from Alexandria in the same persecution the headship of the Catechetical School became vacant, and such was the ability and industry of Origen that he was appointed to fill this post at the age of eighteen. He laboured with increasing success as a teacher, working almost day and night with the crowds, including heretics and non-Christians as well as members of the Church, who attended his lectures or came to consult him privately. About A.D. 215 he visited Cæsarea in Palestine, where his friends Alexander bishop of Jerusalem and Theoctistus bishop of Cæsarea asked him to lecture in church on the Scriptures. Demetrius, patriarch of Alexandria, objected to this, for Origen had not been ordained. In spite of the

[1] See Jerome, *Praef. in Hom. Orig. in Ezech.* (Lommatzsch XIV 4). Rufinus, *Apol.* II. 13 (Migne P.L. XXI. 596).

[2] Rufinus, *Apol.* II. 16 (Migne P.L. XXI. 597).

[3] See Bibliography, p. xxvii. Most of our information comes from Eusebius, *His. Eccl.* Bk. VI.

protests of Origen's friends Demetrius demanded his return to Alexandria, and he obeyed.

During the next period of his life, lasting from twelve to fifteen years, Origen began the literary work which established his fame throughout the whole Church. A wealthy layman named Ambrose, whom he had restored from heresy to the orthodox faith, became his life-long friend, and supplied him with the means to write and publish his books. The first parts of the *Commentary on St. John* were composed then, and following them came the treatise on *First Principles,* a comprehensive investigation of Christian doctrine on a scale never before attempted. It is probable that this work aroused opposition. Origen's mind was such that he could leave no question unprobed; and in the effort to reduce the Church's faith to a single, logical system, based on the Scriptures as they were then understood, he was led into speculations which to simpler folk appeared fantastic and dangerous. Owing either to this, or else to jealousy on the part of Demetrius, or perhaps to a combination of both, the relations between Origen and his bishop became strained and he took advantage of an invitation to visit Greece. Calling at Cæsarea on the way, he was there ordained presbyter by Theoctistus and Alexander. This act caused a final break with Demetrius, who strongly disapproved of it; and when Origen returned to Alexandria at the conclusion of his visit to Greece it became evident that he must seek another home.

Demetrius called a synod of Egyptian bishops, who decided that Origen should no longer be allowed to teach at Alexandria. Soon afterwards he was excommunicated, on what grounds we do not know, except that Jerome tells us they were not doctrinal.[1] But the sentence, though accepted at Rome and throughout a considerable part of the Christian world, had little practical effect outside Egypt; and Origen was gladly received by Theoctistus at Cæsarea, where he became at once an honoured teacher of the Church. Here he worked from A.D. 231 for the rest of his life. In addition to his writing, he expounded the Scriptures to the ordinary church congregations and lectured on deeper theological subjects to educated students. One of these, Gregory, afterwards called Thaumaturgus, or the Wonderworker, has

[1] Jerome *Ep. XXXIII. ad Paulam.* The passage is rhetorical, but it suggests clearly enough that jealousy was the motive for Origen's condemnation, and ecclesiastical irregularities the excuse.



left us, in his *Panegyric,*[1] a striking description of Origen. No higher tribute has ever been paid by a pupil to a revered master. Gregory was a young man, on his way to study law at Berytus, when he met with Origen. At the time it seemed a chance meeting, but afterwards Gregory could only attribute it to divine providence. Origen's charm of manner, his generous friendship, his wide sympathy and consummate wisdom captivated him. For five years he remained at Cæsarea, and when at last he left to return to his native land he felt, to use his own simile, like the prodigal son going from his father's house into the far country. A letter of Origen's reached him shortly after, urging him to dedicate his great gifts to God's service in the ministry of the Church; and in spite of much genuine hesitation Gregory became bishop of Neo-Cæsarea, where he achieved marvellous success.[2]

The literary work of Origen was enormous in extent. Before he left Alexandria he had already written, besides the *First Principles* and five books of the *Commentary on St. John,* two volumes on *The Resurrection,* ten volumes of *Stromata* or *Miscellanies,* a *Commentary on Psalms* i—xxv, eight volumes on *Genesis* and five on *Lamentations.* This activity was continued at Cæsarea. He produced *Commentaries* on almost every book of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments. A treatise on *Prayer* was addressed to Ambrose and Tatiana; and when, during the persecution of Maximin (235-237) Ambrose and Protoctetus, a presbyter of Cæsarea, were imprisoned, Origen wrote the *Exhortation to Martyrdom* for their encouragement. Of a different character are the eight books *Against Celsus,* which contain a detailed answer to a clever attack on Christianity made by an educated Greek about half a century before. Until he was sixty Origen would not allow his homilies delivered extemporaneously in church to be taken down and published. But he then withdrew his prohibition, and more than two hundred have been preserved, for the most part in Latin translations by Rufinus.

A further proof of his untiring industry, and also of his deep reverence for the Scriptures, can be found in the

[1] For the text see Koetschau, *Das Gregorios Thaumaturgos Dankrede an Origenes,* Leipzig 1894. Eng. trans. by W. Metcalfe, S.P.C.K. 1920, and *Ante-Nicene Christian Library,* Vol. XX., p. 36.

[2] For Origen's letter to Gregory see Koetschau's edition of the *Panegyric* already referred to; also Robinson, *Philocalia,* Ch. XIII. (p. 64). Eng. Trans. in Metcalfe *op. cit.* and *Ante-Nicene Christian Library,* Vol. X., p. 388.

*Hexapla*. This was a text of the Old Testament, in which six, and sometimes even more, different versions were placed side by side in columns for purposes of comparison. The six versions were the Hebrew, a transliteration of it in Greek characters, and the Greek versions of Aquila, of Symmachus, of the Septuagint and of Theodotion. It took Origen twenty-eight years to accomplish this task, the object of which was to ascertain the true text of the Septuagint. The work extended to fifty volumes, and being too large to be copied it did not survive for long. To-day nothing remains of it but some fragments, not inconsiderable in their total bulk, of the Septuagint.

Origen wrote many letters, and Eusebius was able to collect a hundred of them. Unfortunately all but three have perished. No loss of his writings is so regrettable as the loss of these letters. They would have given us a picture of the man, in his extraordinary attractiveness as a teacher and friend, which his theological compositions cannot be expected to supply. Those that remain are the letter to Gregory Thaumaturgus already referred to,[1] one to Africanus,[2] and portions of a third quoted in Latin by Jerome and Rufinus. The authenticity of this latter is not, however, absolutely beyond doubt. The letter to Africanus was in answer to one which Africanus had written on the subject of the History of Susanna, attached to the book of Daniel in the Septuagint. Africanus urged that it was a late addition and not part of the original Daniel. In quite modern critical fashion he argued that the story was not contained in the Hebrew; that it was different in style from the rest of Daniel; and above all that it contained plays on Greek words which in Hebrew would have been pointless. Origen's reply was to defend the passage. He was unwilling to reject a story which had great value for purposes of instruction and which had always been accepted in the Church. He had consulted Jewish scholars about the puns, but found that they would not commit themselves; there might possibly be Hebrew equivalents or analogies, although they could not produce them. This was Origen's own conclusion. In regard to the alleged difference in style, he replies simply that he cannot see it. Origen was no higher critic. This letter is of prime importance for all who would understand Origen's character, for it shows that he was

[1] See above p. iii.

[2] For the text see Migne P. G. XI. p. 47 ff. Eng. trans. *Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, Vol. X., pp. 369 ff.



essentially and before all else a Christian pastor, whose main concern was for the spiritual needs of Christians and the traditional faith of the Church. This remains true in spite of the undoubted fact that he was chiefly a teacher of the educated, and that he felt the *simpliciores* needed correction on many points.

Origen's later life at Cæsarea was varied by visits to different parts of Palestine, to Athens and to Arabia. The first Arabian visit was made in order to convince Beryllus, bishop of Bostra, of the falsity of his views on the subject of the Incarnation, and the second to deal with errors concerning the Resurrection. In both cases he was successful. All through his life Origen appears as a defender of orthodox doctrine against heresy; and what is more, as one who could win men to his own viewpoint by persuasion and sympathy. Finally, in A.D. 250, when the persecution of Decius broke out, Origen was imprisoned, probably at Tyre. His friend Alexander of Jerusalem died in prison. Origen himself was cruelly tortured, but bore his suffering with the same undaunted spirit that he had displayed since boyhood. The death of Decius in 251 gave him release from prison. But his health was broken by all that he had undergone, and he died at Tyre in 253, in the seventieth year of his age. His tomb was still to be seen there at the close of the twelfth century.

Origen is one of those figures, none too common even in Church history, of whose character we can say that we know nothing but what is good. He was humble and free from envy, caring neither for power nor wealth. He bore unmerited suffering, from friends and foes alike, without complaint. His life, from beginning to end, was hard and strenuous. His courage never failed, and he died in reality a martyr's death. He loved truth with a sincerity and devotion rarely equalled, and never excelled. Intellectually he stands pre-eminent and alone, towering above the Greek fathers as Augustine towers above the Latins. The wide sweep of his thought is amazing. He contemplates a universe, not small and narrow as was that of many of his contemporaries, but of immense magnitude, world following world in almost infinite sequence, from the dim primeval epoch when God created all souls equal and free, to the far-off event when after countless vicissitudes of degradation and suffering they shall return to their original unity and perfection, and 'God shall be all in all'. It may be that the Church of those days was right in warning her children

off these speculations, and keeping them to the path of a simpler and more definite faith; lest perhaps, through overmuch thinking on problems insoluble to man, weaker souls should find themselves, like Milton's angels, 'in wandering mazes lost'. We of these days, however, cannot help regretting, not without a sense of shame, that this salutary warning should have been accompanied, as it was, by fierce denunciations which are neither Christian nor rational. And yet the fact that Origen stands outside the formal calendar of Christian saints gives him a certain solitariness which is not altogether inappropriate. For it can be said with truth that there is no father of the Church whose works are more profitable for study and whose temper and character are more worthy of our imitation.

## II

### THE FIRST PRINCIPLES. DATE AND CIRCUMSTANCES OF ITS COMPOSITION

THE treatise on *First Principles* was written before Origen left Alexandria for good in A.D. 231, that is, before he was forty-six years of age. When we seek for a more precise date we encounter difficulties. Our sources of information are the treatise itself and Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* VI. 14-24. From the first we obtain the following facts.

In Bk. II., Ch. iii. 6 (see p. 91 below) Origen refers to his *Commentary on Genesis* I. 1, as a work already written. On the contrary, in Bk. I., Ch. ii. 6 (see p. 18 below), when mentioning Genesis I. 26, he promises to explain the verse more carefully when he reaches it in his Commentary. The verse was in fact expounded in the fourth book of the Commentary and Genesis I. 16-18 in the third. As there were eight books of this Commentary written before the year 231, it seems probable that the work was begun quite early, especially when we remember that Origen was engaged in several different compositions at the same time.

In Bk. II., Ch. iv. 4 (see p. 100 below) Origen refers the reader to his *Commentary on the Second Psalm*. Evidently this work also was being written contemporaneously with the *First Principles*.

In Bk. II., Ch. x. 1 (see p. 138 below) mention is made of the books on the *Resurrection* which were an early work, being themselves quoted, according to Eusebius, in the *Commentary on Lamentations*.



From these passages all the knowledge we obtain is that the books on *First Principles* were written at a time when Origen was also at work on the Commentaries on *Genesis*, the *Psalms* and *Lamentations*. These were not, however, his earliest compositions, for the books on the *Resurrection* preceded them, as did also the beginning of the *Commentary on St. John*, which he calls 'the firstfruits of my labours in Alexandria.'[1]

The question is, therefore, when were the Commentaries begun? This turns on our view of the chronology of Eusebius in the Sixth Book of his *Ecclesiastical History*. In Ch. 23 of this Book Eusebius implies that Origen began his Commentaries immediately after his return from the interview with Mammæa, the aunt of the Emperor Elagabalus (218-222), and the mother of his successor, Alexander Severus (222-235). Mammæa would have been at Antioch in the year 218, when her nephew visited the city after his victory over Macrinas. But the text of Eusebius appears to date this visit in the time of Alexander. If this were so, it would either be a visit at the beginning of Alexander's reign, of which otherwise we know nothing, or else one that occurred after 231. The latter is very improbable, since Eusebius does not mention Origen's departure from Alexandria until Ch. 26, after giving a long account of his exegetical work in that city in Chs. 24 and 25. While we need not suppose that every detail of Eusebius' chronology is correct, it is evident that he is taking pains to place events in what he regards as their proper order. We may therefore conclude that, although the mention of Alexander in Ch. 21 brings to his mind the invitation sent by this Emperor's mother to Origen, the incident belongs in reality to the reign of Elagabalus, whom Eusebius has mentioned under his true name Antoninus only a few lines previously. It was after 218, then, that Origen began his Commentaries, 'at the urgent desire of Ambrose, who not only employed innumerable incentives in the form of requests and exhortations, but also furnished abundant means for the work'.[2]

The *First Principles* may have been written, therefore, at any date between, let us say, 219 and 230. But in view of the fact that the references contained in it to the commentaries on *Genesis* and the *Psalms* are to quite early parts of these works, we can with reasonable certainty fix the date

[1] *Comm. in Ioh.* I. 2.
[2] Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* VI. 23.

not later than A.D. 225. Origen would then have been between thirty-five and forty years old when the work was complete.

It is true that some scholars favour an earlier date than this. Schnitzer gives 213 and Preuschen 212-215. These dates can only be maintained on the assumption that the chronology of Eusebius is altogether unreliable. But there is good reason on general grounds for holding to 218 as the time when Origen began his work of writing Commentaries. The first years of his adult life, after the departure of Clement in 202, were so fully occupied with teaching at Alexandria that, as we are distinctly told, he had no time to study the Scriptures properly. Then he called Heracles to take a share in the work of the school, and immediately began his researches on the Biblical text which culminated in the *Hexapla*. This was doubtless a preliminary to the production of the Commentaries. The need for these was only slowly becoming apparent in the Church; although Heracleon the Gnostic had written a Commentary on St. John some forty or fifty years previously, and it was this which in all probability inspired Origen to attempt his own work on the same Gospel. Then, after the first visit to Cæsarea, came the definite request of Ambrose that he should produce Commentaries systematically and on a large scale. With the request was joined, as we have seen, the offer of ample financial help which enabled Origen to accede to it.

The *First Principles* was a work of an entirely different character from the Commentaries. For if these latter were, at least in the form and scope which Origen gave them, new to the Church, the *First Principles* was a fresh departure altogether. Not that it was without precursors. Its originality consisted in its vastness of plan, in the unity of its purpose, and in the genius with which it was executed. Origen would certainly not have regarded himself as a pioneer, still less as a teacher of doubtful orthodoxy. He was the exponent of the Christian tradition to thoughtful and cultivated men; but he would subject that tradition to a far keener examination than his predecessors had ventured upon. De Faye, in his recent work on Origen,[1] has suggested that the *First Principles* was designed to take the place of the *Didaskalos*, or Teacher, which Clement had planned to follow on his *Protreptikos* and *Paidagogos*, but which he was never able

[1] Eugène de Faye, *Origène, sa vie, son oeuvre, sa pensée*. Paris, 1923.



to write.[1] It is more natural to suppose that the *Stromata* and the *Hypotyposes* were intended to be the continuation of the two works just mentioned. But it would appear that Clement himself composed a work on *First Principles and Theology*.[2] It is no longer extant; in fact we have no certain mention of it except in his own works. Perhaps it was never published at all in the strict sense of the word, but used solely for the students to whom Clement lectured in the Catechetical School. This treatise probably dealt with the origin of the world, among other subjects, and it is not unreasonable to regard it as having laid down the lines which Origen afterwards followed. In both works the substance was simply the lectures delivered to students in the School. Zahn has conjectured that a fragment found in John Malalas may refer to this lost work of Clement's. It runs as follows: 'The Syrian, the son of Agenor, was a man of wisdom, who composed his Arithmetical Philosophy in the Phœnician language. He suggested that first principles were incorporeal, that bodies underwent changes, and that souls entered into different kinds of animals. He first expounded these doctrines, as the most wise Clement wrote of them.'[3] The likeness between this and some of the contents of Origen's *First Principles* is at once evident. Even if Zahn's identification is not correct, we can yet see that Origen was dealing with questions which had been raised and discussed in the School before his time, and which were then admitted to be legitimate subjects for inquiry.

## III

### THE TRANSLATION OF RUFINUS. CIRCUMSTANCES OF ITS COMPOSITION

As I have already remarked, the grounds on which Origen was condemned by the Synod of bishops called by Demetrius in Alexandria were not doctrinal.[4] That is to say, the *First Principles* was not then and there held to be heretical; if it had been, the fact would certainly have come into prominence. None the less, the work could scarcely fail to cause offence, in so far as it came to the knowledge of the

[1] De Faye, *op. cit.* I. 28.
[2] Clem. Alex. *III Storm.* 13, 1 and 21, 2, and *Quis Dives Salvetur* 26, 8 (Stählin II 201, 12 and 205, 11 and III 177, 25, 26).
[3] Zahn, *Supplementum Clementinum*, p. 59.
[4] See above, p. ii.

*simpliciores,* who even in Clement's day were disposed to fear all thinking and to raise the cry, 'Only believe'.[1] As time went on the offence would be likely to increase. For Origen was not a lonely figure in the Church. He had many followers, who admired him not only for his interpretations of the Scriptures but also for his theological doctrines.

The first serious attack was made by Methodius, bishop of Patara in Lycia, in the early years of the fourth century. He wrote vigorously against Origen and his followers in regard to doctrines characteristic of the *First Principles,* viz: the eternity of creation, the pre-existence of souls and the spiritual nature of the resurrection body. At the Council of Nicæa Origen's name and authority do not appear to have been invoked by either side, but in the controversies which followed it was not long before the Arians discovered that some support for their distinctive teaching might be drawn from the considerable degree of subordination which he had predicated of the Son. Others, however, including such great names as Athanasius and the Cappadocian fathers, Basil and the two Gregories, while admitting that his works were not wholly free from error, yet regarded him as orthodox in the main and defended him.

Towards the end of the fourth century Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis in Cyprus, renewed the attack. In two works, the *Anchoratus* and the *Adv. Hæreses,* he includes Origen among the heretics, on the grounds previously set forth by Methodius and on others dealing with the nature of the Son and his relation to the Father. Origen was charged with teaching that the Son, though generated from the essence of the Father, was nevertheless a creature, bearing the title Son by courtesy and not by right; that the Holy Spirit was also a creature; and that one day the Kingdom of Christ would come to an end and all beings, including the devil himself, would be reconciled and restored to God.

Epiphanius felt it to be not enough to write against Origen; in his old age he travelled to Palestine in order to extirpate, if possible, from the minds of all who were well-disposed towards the great theologian every trace of what he considered to be pestilent heresies. Origen had now been dead nearly one hundred and forty years, and the Church had changed from being a body of persecuted believers into a victorious institution, honoured and privileged by the

[1] Clem. Alex. *Strom.* I. 43 i; (Stählin II. 28, 20).



State. The zeal for repression of which she had once been the victim was now directed against all who would not conform to the type of thought now in favour, a type more rigid than that which was held to be permissible for educated men in the days of Origen. Epiphanius was a true representative of his age in this respect. There were living near Jerusalem at this time Rufinus, who had established a monastery on the Mount of Olives in A.D. 377, and Jerome, who had dwelt similarly at Bethlehem since 386. Both were admirers of Origen; and so, too, was John, bishop of Jerusalem. Not one of these would have consented to be bound by every fragment of Origen's teaching, but they respected his genius and revered his memory. Jerome, in particular, had begun to translate Origen's *Homilies* even before he left Rome. He used Origen's Commentary on *Ephesians* freely in writing his own Commentary on that epistle, borrowing then without question much of Origen's speculation on the angelic beings which he afterwards repudiated. His prefaces, too, as we have seen, speak of Origen in the highest possible terms.

The first act of Epiphanius was to preach, at the invitation of the bishop, in the Church of the Resurrection at Jerusalem. The sermon was a fierce attack upon Origenism directed, as it seemed to those who heard it, against the bishop himself. He followed this up by urging the monks to dissociate themselves from their bishop until he had cleared himself from the suspicion of heresy. Jerome took alarm at this, for he was sensitive to the least imputation of heresy, and adopted the attitude recommended by Epiphanius. Rufinus, however, was the leading member of a group of clergy who supported the bishop. This caused the first breach between Jerome and Rufinus; but it did not last long, for after Epiphanius had returned to Cyprus the two friends were reconciled, and Jerome returned to communion with his bishop.

It is clear, however, that there still remained a diversity of feeling and outlook upon the subject of Origen which was likely to cause trouble if ever the dispute should arise again. To us Jerome appears to have shown extreme timidity in the face of an accusation which was not directed against him personally and which he could easily have rebutted. We must remember, on the other hand, that a charge of heresy, if substantiated, was then becoming a serious matter for any man of prominence in the Church, involving perhaps loss of liberty, or even of life itself.

Jerome, too, was a Latin, and had little sympathy with the Greek habit of thinking out problems. Anyway it is certain that, in spite of all he had previously written in Origen's praise, he determined that for the future he would say or do nothing to compromise himself.

There the matter might have ended, had not Rufinus returned to Italy in 397. He had read and lectured in Greek for many years, and was familiar with the writings of the early Greek fathers, including Origen. He brought back with him many manuscripts of these works. They were then unknown in Italy. Even Pope Anastasius, when asked a little later on to condemn Origen, while readily agreeing to do so on the basis of a few extracts from the *First Principles,* yet admitted that he did not know either the author or his writings. But there was a certain friend of Rufinus, named Macarius, who had heard of the *First Principles* and was anxious to read it, hoping to find in it some arguments to help him in a controversy in which he was then engaged with the *mathematici,* or pagan astrologers. He had dreamed of a ship coming to Italy laden with the spoils of the East; and when Rufinus appeared he interpreted the dream as an indication of his return and begged him to translate the work, for he was unable himself to read it in Greek. Rufinus hesitated, knowing well the odium which would gather round any man who seemed to be friendly towards Origen. Finally, however, he consented, and produced the version which is now before us.

Rufinus did not believe that the Greek text which had come down to him was in every detail authentic. He could not imagine a time when Christian thought had been more fluid than it was in his own day; and although he was well aware that Origen was a bold thinker, he felt it to be quite impossible that he should have differed on any material point from the theology of the fourth century. That the text of the *First Principles* did so differ was plain. It was daily being quoted as evidence of its author's heresy. Rufinus maintained, without any doubt in all honesty, that the text had been tampered with by heretics. To prove this he translated and published with his version of the *First Principles* the first book of the *Defence of Origen,* a work composed by Pamphilus the martyr in collaboration with Eusebius of Cæsarea, the Church historian.[1] The object

[1] S. Pamphili Martyris *Apologia pro Origene,* Migne P. G. XVII. 539.



of this work was to refute the attacks made on Origen by Methodius and others.

Jerome asserted afterwards that this book was written by Eusebius and not by Pamphilus; but this is contradicted by the statement of Eusebius himself and by the later testimony of Photius, who tells us that Eusebius and Pamphilus wrote the first five books together and that the sixth was composed by Eusebius alone after the martyr's death.[1] Rufinus attributes the first book to Pamphilus alone; and in this he was probably correct, since in it the name of Pamphilus is prefixed, in dialogue fashion, to all the paragraphs which state the objections made to Origen's teaching or introduce his replies, the latter being presented largely in Origen's own words. Moreover at the beginning of the book the first person singular is used. The authority of Pamphilus the martyr was very great, and it was a natural method of protection for Rufinus to make the *Defence of Origen* known to the Latin world as a preliminary to the publication of the *First Principles.*

The *Defence,* so far as we have it in Rufinus' translation, opens with five chapters wherein Origen's faith in regard to the Church tradition, the nature of heresy, and the doctrines of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, together with the Incarnation is defined by quotations made from his own writings. These chapters are wholly orthodox; for, as we have already said, Origen counted it his business to defend the Church tradition and to explain its meaning to intelligent men. Pamphilus sums up this section by exclaiming: 'What can be so correct as this, what so true, what so catholic, what more useful for general instruction even among those who rage against him with bitter enmity, what so entirely free from blame?'

We are, however, almost completely dependent upon Rufinus for our knowledge of what actually it was that Origen said and Pamphilus praised. Only in a few cases do we possess the Greek which enables us to check him, and when we can do this the result is not satisfactory. For instance, in Ch. IV., on the Holy Spirit, Rufinus writes as follows: 'But for us there is one God the Father, from whom are all things. There is therefore one true God who, as I said, is the fount of deity, and one Christ the maker of christs, and one Holy Spirit who makes the Holy Spirit in the soul of every saint.' Now Origen's own statement, as

[1] Photius, *Bibl. Cod.* 118.

Pamphilus quoted it in Greek, was to the effect that the Father's work embraces the whole universe, the work of the Son extends to rational creatures only, and the work of the Spirit is confined to the saints. The Son is therefore 'less' than the Father, and the Spirit 'still less' than the Son. It could not have been by accident or by a mere habit of loose translation that these offensive phrases were avoided; the omission was deliberate. When Pamphilus quoted this passage of Origen, clearly he did not realise that it might be called heretical. This point weakens considerably the contention of Rufinus that the text of Origen had been corrupted by heretics; if anything had changed it was the authorised theology of the Church.

The *Defence* goes on to enumerate nine charges made against Origen's teaching and to give answers to them in his own words supplemented by the explanations of Pamphilus. Most of the charges are easily disposed of; for they relate to questions which are satisfactorily dealt with in the *First Principles,* even though Origen's statements may sometimes lend themselves to perversion by hostile critics. For instance, some affirmed that he denied the literal truth of Scripture and the events of our Lord's earthly life. But Origen's teaching is quite clear: he only denied the literal truth in such stories as the Garden of Eden and the Fall, or others containing similar anthropomorphisms, where it seemed to him to be incredible. Ordinary historical facts he accepted readily enough, although often he did not consider them important or even edifying. The charge, therefore, while not wholly unintelligible, admits of a reasonable answer.

A more serious charge is that Origen denied the reality of punishment in the next life, because men would then have no bodies. Again, Origen's doctrine on these questions, though it ran counter to the gross materialism of many in his time, is both rational and scriptural. He found the term 'spiritual body' in the Scriptures and held fast to it. The body, he contended, must be suitable to the sphere in which it has to live, and in a spiritual world we shall need spiritual bodies. These would be the same bodies which we have now, because they would be garments of the same personality; but they would not resemble the earthly body in appearance or structure or function. Punishment, too, must be disciplinary and remedial in character and not a mere infliction of pain, which would be unworthy of God. All this is clearly and intelligently argued in the *First Principles;* in fact, it proceeds directly from Origen's idea of God and forms the basis of his whole system of theology. But it lay open to attack by men whose ideas of heaven were framed after the pattern of things on earth. Pamphilus spends much space in answering this charge on Origen's lines. Once again, however, we have to complain of a serious mistranslation by Rufinus. He deliberately omits the phrase 'spiritual bodies', found both in Origen and in Pamphilus. He could not possibly have claimed that heretics had inserted this in the text, when its source was so obvious. It was omitted in the hope of conciliating his Latin readers.



A further charge is that Origen held false opinions about the soul. Here, too, Pamphilus feels the need of defending him at some length. The Church, he says, had not spoken decisively on this question. If it had, then Origen might have been deserving of blame; but in fact many different opinions were held by Christians about the origin and nature of the soul. Moreover, here as elsewhere, Origen put forward his views for discussion, and not as settled dogmas. The last charge of all, and perhaps the most difficult one to counter, is that Origen taught the doctrine of transmigration of souls. Now any reader of the *First Principles,* if he takes into consideration, as he must do, the irrefutable evidence of Jerome and the Emperor Justinian, will be forced to admit that Origen at least allowed the possibility of transmigration. That is putting the case at its lowest. Pamphilus does not quote the evidence of the *First Principles.* He relies on passages from the *Commentary on St. Matthew,* in which Origen argues against the doctrine. We possess the Greek text of this passage, so that there can be no doubt of its genuineness. The argument runs as follows: if such transmigration should occur, it would happen, by hypothesis, as a punishment for sin. What then could prevent the process from going on infinitely, and destroying the possibility of a time when 'heaven and earth shall pass away'? If, on the other hand, men should at last, one by one and through infinite ages, become purified so as no longer to need bodies, what then becomes of the statement of Scripture, 'When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?' This reasoning is very different from that in the *First Principles.* It is possible that Origen's opinion had changed in the intervening years. Or he may have felt that more caution was needed in a commentary which would circulate widely among all classes

of Christians, than in a treatise which reflected for the most part the discussions between himself and his students in the Catechetical School.

One result of this examination of Pamphilus' *Defence* is to put us on our guard when reading Rufinus. Pamphilus, enthusiastic though he was, had felt it needful to exercise caution and to make certain admissions when defending Origen. Rufinus did not dare to let even Pamphilus speak for himself. What then would he do with Origen? He is perfectly candid with his readers, at least in a general way. He would alter Origen where he thought him wrong; not arbitrarily, of course, but in accordance with statements of an orthodox character to be found elsewhere in his writings. But to justify himself still further, Rufinus wrote a small pamphlet on *'The Corruption of the Works of Origen'* and attached it to the translation of the *First Principles*.[1] Here he gives more fully his reasons for altering the text. They are as follows:

(i) *It was impossible to suppose that so intelligent and learned a man as Origen should have contradicted himself. A difference between works written in youth and old age might be natural, due either to forgetfulness or to change of opinion in the interval. But Origen exhibits contradictions in the same passage, almost in successive sentences.*

This argument is answered by Jerome in his Apology, Bk. II., Ch. 16. Rufinus brings forward but one instance, namely, that in the same passage Origen says that the Holy Spirit is of the divine essence and also numbers him among created beings. This is from the *First Principles*. Jerome points out that Eusebius and Didymus had both accepted the offensive passage as orthodox. Neither Didymus, who was himself a commentator on the *First Principles,* nor Eusebius, had ever complained that the text had been interpolated by heretics. What Didymus said was that, to use Jerome's words, 'simple men like us' did not understand Origen's real meaning, which was quite orthodox. Of course it was, we must agree. For Origen accepted the Church tradition that Father, Son and Holy Spirit were consubstantial. What he had to account for was the order of the Persons, and in particular the priority of the Father. If Origen's solution of the problem was wrong, the proper course was to propose a better one.

[1] *Liber de adulteratione librorum Origenis,* Migne P. G. XVII. 615.



Jerome and Rufinus both preferred to leave this problem unsolved and to be content with the acceptance of a formula. But they dealt with Origen in different ways, the one calling him a heretic, the other defending him by imputing his reasonings to heretics.

(ii) *Other writers of unquestioned orthodoxy had had their works corrupted by heretics; as for instance Clement of Rome, Clement of Alexandria and Dionysius of Alexandria.*

In regard to Clement of Rome Rufinus was misled by the universal opinion of his day that the *Recognitions* were his work. As for the others, the natural inference is, as Jerome clearly sees, that (supposing the incriminated passages to be heretical) the authors may have made mistakes; or that incautious statements may have been allowed before the time of Arius but carefully scrutinized after; or that unskilful copyists may have changed the text inadvertently. We need not spend longer on this.

(iii) *Origen himself had complained, in a letter still extant, that his works had been corrupted by heretics.*

The letter of Origen, which Rufinus here professes to translate, is of great interest. It deals only with one specific point, the possibility of the devil's salvation. Origen denies that he ever asserted this; only a madman could have done so. A discussion had taken place between himself and a heretic, of which notes had been made and afterwards published. Origen declares that he had never given the matter a second thought until it was brought to his notice that an incorrect version was being circulated. He discovered on inquiry that the notes had been revised for publication with the object, as the author calmly admitted, of 'improving' them. The letter, as given by Rufinus, goes on to speak of a forged work which had been published under Origen's name and which contained heretical statements. The author of this was discovered and his work condemned as a forgery in his own presence by a group of Origen's friends.

The only point we need consider here is that relating to the devil's salvation. According to the *First Principles* Origen did assert that the devil would at last be saved. It is indeed an essential part of his system of thought. Again and again he returns to his favourite text, 'that God may be all in all'. Why then should he have denied it? We should be tempted to suppose that the letter is not authentic, but

for the fact that it was available to Jerome also and must therefore have been one of the collection of Origen's letters known then to all the Greek world. But again Jerome gives us at any rate a partial answer to the argument of Rufinus. He proves that the latter has not presented the letter fairly. He has omitted the first part, which explains the second. Jerome translates this first part for us.[1] It is a bold and outspoken defence of himself by Origen against Demetrius of Alexandria and others who had condemned him. The contents are quite in Origen's manner. The Scripture itself declares, he says, that leaders and princes may go wrong; this is now being fulfilled. Yet we must not hate them, but rather pity and pray for them. We must not speak evil of any man. Michael would not even rail at the devil, but left it to God to rebuke him. Now, Origen continues, not only gross sinners, such as adulterers and thieves, shall be shut out of the kingdom of God, but evil speakers too. So careful is he, therefore, in view of this warning, that he will not even rail at the devil. But as a result of this care, some have charged him with asserting the salvation of the devil, which only a madman would assert.

By suppressing the first part of the letter with its inconvenient criticism of bishops, and also the definite statement of Origen that he will not rail even at the devil, Rufinus has given a false impression of the letter, in spite of the superficial accuracy of such portions as he quotes.

Jerome goes on to relate another fact which bears upon this question. There was current a dialogue between Origen and Candidus, a Valentinian. Candidus asserted that the devil was of a wholly evil nature and could not be saved. Origen maintained that it was by his own fault and not by his evil nature that the devil fell, and that he might have been saved if he had so willed. Candidus turns this into an admission that the devil will be saved, which Origen denies.

It is clear from all this that what Origen was forced by the logic of his thought to assert was the theoretical possibility of the devil's salvation. In no way could he avoid this. When he is dealing with ultimate problems, as in the *First Principles,* he is certainly carried beyond this theoretical possibility. In the last resort, when God is 'all in all', there is no room for a devil as such. Must we then agree with Denis, that this letter, if genuine, would prove 'that

[1] Jerome, *Apol.* II. Chs. 18, 19.



Origen was weak enough to retract . . . not only what he had thought, but what he continued to think'?[1] We need not go so far as this. When working out a speculative theology, as in the *First Principles,* an author must be allowed freedom to indicate, not dogmatically but suggestively for discussion, where his principles appear to lead. Practical teaching to an uneducated multitude is another thing. More care would be needed then, and a bold teacher ought not to be pressed to reduce all his speculative conclusions to categorical dogmas. Origen may quite justly have claimed this protection, especially if it be the case, as he is said to have asserted in his letter to Fabian of Rome, that the *First Principles* was published in the beginning by Ambrose without his knowledge.[2]

We need not deal with the other examples given by Rufinus of the corruption of writings by heretics. They add nothing to the force of his argument. He has certainly not established any right to give the world a garbled version of Origen's work. On the contrary, he has laid himself under the suspicion that fear of heresy is with him a stronger motive than love of truth. Both when translating Pamphilus and when quoting Origen's letter he has shown himself willing to alter the text, or to omit portions of it, on no evidence whatever, and for no purpose except to conciliate the prejudices of his readers and to give greater authority to his translation. But if he uses so much freedom in framing this preliminary defence of his work, we must clearly examine the translation itself with critical eyes. For our desire is simply to discover what Origen taught. Only by adhering strictly to the truth can we rightly estimate his services to the Church and his position in the development of Christian doctrine.

## IV

### THE CONTROVERSY BETWEEN JEROME AND RUFINUS

BESIDES fortifying himself by the publication of the two abovementioned introductory essays Rufinus used another weapon of defence. In his own preface he referred in glowing terms to the previous translations of Origen's works made by Jerome. Now when we recall the disturbance at

[1] Denis, *De la Philosophie d'Origène,* p. 375.
[2] Jerome, *Ep.* lxxxiv *ad Pamm. et Ocean.* 9.

Jerusalem only a few years before, when Jerome had openly taken his stand against Origen, we can hardly acquit Rufinus of guile in making these allusions. Jerome, according to him, 'had inspired every one with a deep longing to read Origen and study him earnestly'. He had promised to continue his own translations, but the desire to be a 'father of the word' and not a mere translator had conquered him, and he was now much too busy with his own compositions. Consequently Rufinus had consented to 'take up the work which was begun and approved by him', although he confesses that he cannot bring to it an ability comparable with that of Jerome. He goes on to describe the method of his translation, and to declare that it was the same method as that followed by Jerome himself, who had so 'smoothed over and emended' any passages likely to cause offence, that ' a Latin reader would find in them nothing out of harmony with our faith'.

All this was strictly true, but seeing that Jerome had by this time changed his opinion about Origen we cannot be surprised that he took exception to Rufinus' statements when he heard of them. For their effect was at the very least to represent him as acquiescing in every doctrine of Origen which Rufinus had thought fit not to remove from his translation. In the quarrel at Jerusalem Rufinus had taken an opposite side to Jerome, as we have seen. That is to say, he was more liberal-minded than Jerome in regard to what was or was not permissible as speculation for purposes of discussion. If, knowing Jerome as he did, Rufinus really thought that he would take his eulogy as a sincere compliment, he must have been singularly dull. We must admit, however, that in his subsequent *Defence* he does protest most strongly that his praise was sincerely meant.

The translation of the *First Principles* soon came into the hands of Jerome's friends in Italy, of whom Pammachius, Oceanus and Marcella were the chief. They were horrified by some of the doctrines still remaining in it and by the implied suggestion that Jerome would raise no objection to them. They sent him, therefore, a copy of the work with a request for information. Jerome replied by making a faithful Latin translation of the whole of the *First Principles* and sending it to Pammachius with a covering letter.[1] He admits that he had once praised Origen

[1] i.e., *Ep.* lxxxiv *ad Pamm. et Ocean.*



for his good work; he would still do so if others would not praise his errors. Origen's doctrines on the nature of the Son and the Holy Spirit, on the pre-existence of souls, on the resurrection, and on the ultimate restitution of all things, when it will be 'the same for Gabriel as for the devil, for Paul as for Caiaphas, for virgins as for prostitutes', were poisonous heresies. No Latin writer had ever yet ventured to translate his works on the *Resurrection* and on *First Principles,* or the *Stromata* and the *Commentaries,* but only the *Homilies,* or popular addresses, which were harmless. The assertion that Origen's works had been corrupted by heretics Jerome denies; both Eusebius and Didymus had taken for granted that Origen held the incriminated views. Moreover, Jerome cannot believe that Pamphilus wrote the first book of the *Defence*; it must be by Eusebius. If, however, Pamphilus did write it, his martyrdom would wash away the fault.

Jerome's defence was in the main a reasonable one. He had a right to change his opinion of Origen if he so wished. But he was not candid enough to confess that in his previous writings he had adopted as his own without question some at least of the doctrines which he was now condemning, namely, the fall of souls from a heavenly state into human bodies and the subjection of Lucifer and the other opposing powers to the rule of Christ in his future kingdom. Moreover, he cannot restrain his pen from making remarks about Rufinus which are both spiteful and untrue. The letter, however, was not addressed to Rufinus and presumably need never have come to his knowledge. Jerome had enclosed with it a short letter for Rufinus, which Pammachius was asked to deliver. This was written in a different strain. It expostulated with him for the language he had used in the preface to the *First Principles,* but it also contained expressions of esteem and friendship which should have been sufficient to avert a quarrel between the two. Unfortunately Pammachius, by what we can only regard as a gross breach of faith, did not deliver this letter. Instead, he and his friends published Jerome's letter to him, and when this came to the knowledge of Rufinus, he felt it necessary to record his own case in the form of a lengthy *Defence.*

The *Defence* enumerates, as was inevitable, the instances in which Jerome in his early days had freely accepted Origen's opinions. If Jerome had frankly admitted a change of views all this would have been irrelevant; but, as we have seen, he shrank from doing this. Little exception can be

taken to the tone of Rufinus' statements; he writes warmly, but in a Christian spirit. The facts were proved beyond dispute from Jerome's own writings; he had actually used many passages of Origen which he now objected to. But over and above this there emerge from the discussion three points which reveal the different tempers of the two men. A consideration of these will help us to view the controversy in a true light.

First, Rufinus comments on Jerome's lack of charity. He is aware of his opponent's literary skill, that he can so handle words as 'to make one whom he wishes to injure and to wound appear to have received neither wounds nor injuries'. 'Any idle gossip stirs him up to fault-finding and vituperation.'[1] 'I will pardon him then, though he never pardons others, but condemns them for their words without any thought of charity.'[2] As for himself, he adds at the close: 'I ask for pardon, if I have handled the matter too roughly'.[3] Jerome's great services to the Church are sadly marred by his dogmatic and overbearing manner and by the use of his brilliant gifts for attacking those whom personally he disliked.

Again, Rufinus upholds the position that Christians are free to discuss questions even though they may not be able to reach the complete truth about them. Jerome and the world to which he belonged appear to have ruled out all discussion whatever. They are aware of no difficulties; they are troubled by no problems. It is important to remember that Rufinus, whose own belief was severely orthodox, should have been ready to defend Origen on this point, as Pamphilus had done before him. When questions are raised which the Apostle does not plainly answer, then, he says, 'we either say that we do not know, or that we stand in doubt; and that since we do not get a full understanding but only a hint of his meaning, we do not declare but suggest the explanation'.[4] It is evidence of a genuine feeling for truth that Rufinus should have left as much as he did of the inquiries of Origen, whereas Jerome regarded them as wholly illegitimate and productive of harm.

The third point is but a particular instance of the second. Origen's only motive in ascribing a pre-existence to souls was to defend the justice of God. The different surroundings into which men were born was to him a real difficulty.

[1] Rufinus, *Apol.* I. 3.
[2] Rufinus, *Apol.* I. 31 (a).
[3] Rufinus, *Apol.* II. 44.
[4] Rufinus, *Apol.* I. 39.



There is probably no other Christian father who has a heart so tender, so sensitive to human suffering, as Origen had. Jerome had once followed Origen in his explanation of the problem, but afterwards, terrified by the possibility of being thought a heretic, he contemptuously rejected all such speculations. They were, he said, of pagan origin. Rufinus answered him in words that are dignified and memorable: 'Neither you (i.e. Jerome) nor Origen are forthwith to be reckoned among pagans if, as you yourself have said, it was with the desire of vindicating God's justice and of answering those who assert that all things are governed by chance or fate, with the desire, I say, of showing that the providence of God which controls the universe is just, that you declared that each soul has acquired the causes of its inequality from its movements and feelings in that previous existence which it had in the heavenly places; or even if you said that it was in harmony with the good and unchangeable and simple nature of the Trinity that every creature should at the end of all things be restored to the original condition in which it was created at the first, and that this would happen after long punishments continuing through ages of time, which God inflicts on each soul not in the spirit of one who is angry but of a healer, whose admonitions are without fault, and who because his object is to restore and to heal will at last bring his punishments to an end. How far these words are true God must judge; but they seem to me to contain little impiety against God, nor any paganism, especially when they are spoken with the desire and intention of finding some argument by which the justice of God might be vindicated.'[1] The man who could write thus, at considerable risk to his reputation, deserves our respect and gratitude.

Jerome's friends in Italy sent him notes of the chief points of Rufinus' attack. His brother Paulinian saw a copy of the work and, committing some portions to memory, communicated them to Jerome in Palestine, whither he was returning after some years' absence. From these two sources Jerome obtained sufficient information to write two books of a counter *Defence*. His one anxiety is to clear himself from any suspicion of heresy. But he will not see that the only satisfactory way of doing this is to admit that, on his own principles, he had formerly made a mistake in including Origen's opinions in his works. He says that

[1] Rufinus, *Apol.* II. 9. (2).

these opinions were given side by side with others, for the reader to choose from, and that sometimes he had indicated his dissent from them. 'What is my fault?' he naively asks. The fault was that, if the opinions in question were poisonous heresies, he should not have inserted them in his *Commentary on Ephesians* without the slightest warning to the reader that they were such. If on the other hand they were permissible speculations he had no ground of complaint against Rufinus for translating them into Latin.

A copy of these two books was brought to Rufinus by the captain of a trading ship which was carrying goods to Aquileia. Rufinus was disposed to reply still further, but the Christian world was now becoming scandalized at this unedifying controversy, and Chromatius the bishop of Aquileia prevailed upon him to desist. Yet he sent back a letter to Jerome which was far from friendly in tone. He intimated, apparently, that he could have published if he had so desired other facts which would have destroyed his adversary's reputation for ever. Jerome answered with a third book of his *Defence*. It adds little to the others. One characteristic sentence may be quoted: 'We were once zealous in our praise of Origen; let us be equally zealous in condemning him now that he is condemned by the whole world.'[1] With this may be compared the utterance of Gelasius, in regard to authors whose works were prohibited to Latin readers after the Roman Council of A.D. 494. 'Rufinus, a highly religious man, wrote many books on ecclesiastical matters and certain commentaries on the Scriptures; but since the blessed Jerome controverted him on certain points concerning freewill, we must hold the same belief as the aforementioned Jerome; and this not only in the case of Rufinus, but of all persons whatever whom that man of faith and piety has censured.'[2]

Whatever the mistakes of Rufinus may have been, he could have stood little chance of obtaining a just hearing in the face of such a spirit as this.

## V

### CHARACTER OF RUFINUS' TRANSLATION

THE foregoing chapters have made it clear that we must look back upon Rufinus with two minds. First, we owe

[1] Jerome, *Apol.* III. 9. [2] Migne, P. G. LIX. 173.



him deep gratitude that he undertook the translation of the *First Principles* at all. He saw what a magnificent work it was, when most of his contemporaries were content to throw it aside as worthless. Apart from Rufinus we might have remained almost in the dark about its contents, and a whole world of Christian speculation characteristic of one of the most vigorous and brilliant periods of Church history would have been lost to us. And we must admire his courage; for with all his care to cut out or soften down the worst audacities of Origen he yet left enough to bring him into deep suspicion with the narrower minds who then controlled the Church in the west. On the other hand, the fact must be faced that we cannot trust him. We have already seen how he will alter anything that appears to him to need alteration, on no other evidence than his own subjective impression. His most recent defender, M. Gustave Bardy, says that 'the gaps and alterations which we discover here and there do not astonish us, for they were announced and foreseen'.[1] But the truth is that no one who had nothing to go upon except the innocent-looking prefaces of Rufinus would have the least conception of the scope of the changes which he made. There are not only long additions and omissions, but mistranslations, some deliberate, some perhaps unconscious, paraphrases in which the point and force of the original is completely lost, and countless minor alterations which must be studied in detail before their cumulative effect can be appreciated. After gathering every Greek fragment that can be found there is less than one-sixth of the original work available by which to check Rufinus. Included in this proportion are the most controverted, and therefore the more seriously altered, parts of the work. But even in the other parts, where fewer disputed points of doctrine occur, we can never be quite sure that we have Origen's thought as he himself expressed it. The sharp edges of the Greek have been rubbed smooth by the rhetorical prose of Rufinus, and even with a full knowledge of such other works of Origen as have come down to us in the Greek it is often impossible to reconstruct the original with any certainty.

All the fragments, whether in Greek or in Latin, that are available for checking Rufinus have been known to scholars for long past. But they have not been fully utilised.

[1] Gustave Bardy, *Recherches sur l'histoire du texte et des versions latines du De Principiis d'Origène*, p. 206, Paris, 1923.

The publication of Dr. Paul Koetschau's text of the *First Principles* in 1913 marked a new era. He placed in the body of the text all the material we possess which can justly claim to belong to Origen; and not only that, but he also quoted in footnotes many passages from Jerome and other writers which are indispensable for reference. This work renders all previous texts of Origen out of date, and consequently makes it imperative to read with caution all previous descriptions of his theology. 'It is not too much to say,' comments M. de Faye, 'that the confidence which has always been placed in these Latin versions renders obsolete every exposition of Origen's theology which saw the light before M. Koetschau's edition of the *De Principiis*.'[1] In the following translation I have followed Koetschau's reconstruction throughout; not simply because it is the only one we possess, but also because in the course of many years' reading of the text I have seen no reason to differ materially from his conclusions. I acknowledge with much gratitude all the help I have received from this admirable work.[2]

Koetschau's Introduction, pp. lxxxviii-cxxxvii, contains a complete examination of Rufinus' translation and a list of the passages available for correcting it. The reader who wishes to study the matter in detail will do well to turn to this. Here, however, I will make a brief summary of the material referred to.

i. The *Philocalia*,[3] a collection of extracts from Origen's works made by Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus, contains Bk. III. Ch. i and Bk. IV. Chs. i-iii of the *First Principles*. These form by far the greater part of the Greek fragments now extant.

ii. The treatise or letter sent by Justinian to Mennas, Patriarch of Constantinople, before the 2nd Council of Constantinople, A.D. 553.[4] This letter contains numerous extracts from the *First Principles*, which formed the basis on which Origen was condemned at the Council. Whether this condemnation took place at the Council itself, or previously at the local synod of A.D. 543, makes no difference for our purpose.

[1] Eugène de Faye, *op. cit.* i. p. 54.

[2] *Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der Ersten Drei Jahrhunderte. Origenes Werke, De Principiis, herausgegeben von Dr. Paul Koetschau.* Leipzig 1913.

[3] The *Philocalia of Origen*, by J. Armitage Robinson. Cambridge, 1893. Eng. Trans. of the *Philocalia*, by the Rev. George Lewis, T. & T. Clark, 1911.

[4] The letter is printed in Mansi, *Concilia*, Vol. IX. pp. 524-533.



iii. The fifteen Anathemas against Origen decreed at the above-mentioned Council or synod.[1] Koetschau gives a place in his text to Nos. 2 to 6 of these Anathemas, on the ground that they record, though not perhaps always word for word, the teaching of Origen in the *First Principles*.

iv. Various fragments taken from Antipater of Bostra, Leontius of Byzantium, Theophilus of Alexandria, Epiphanius, Gregory of Nyssa and others.

Koetschau admits in all forty-three Greek fragments, varying in length from a few words to the extensive passages taken from the *Philocalia*. Of these some fourteen are entirely missing from the text of Rufinus; nine are shortened, altered or incomplete; five are inaccurately translated; and the remaining fifteen are given with reasonable, though not always strict, accuracy.

As I have stated above, M. Gustave Bardy disputes the conclusions reached by Koetschau in regard to the passages taken from Justinian's letter to Mennas and the Anathemas. He contends that the former are divorced from their context and that in some cases they may be deformed or interpolated. This is not likely. The fact that there were many followers of Origen even in the sixth century—it was their existence and influence which made Justinian so eager to secure Origen's condemnation—would have rendered it necessary to be careful. There was also plenty of material for condemnation, according to Justinian's ideas, without the need of perversion or exaggeration. Bardy does not in fact deny that Justinian's letter gives us our best information about Origen's true teaching, though he would use it with caution. But he makes a strong objection to the inclusion of the Anathemas in the text. These have in view, according to him, not so much Origen himself as the 'so-called Origenists who were contemporaries of Justinian'.[2] An examination will show, however, that they differ but little from the letter of Justinian. In regard to Bardy's further objection to Koetschau's reconstruction of Bk. I. Ch. viii.,[3] on the ground that it is too hazardous, we must admit that the piecing together of the different fragments is ingeniously done and that too much reliance must not be placed on the

[1] For the text see Mansi, *Concilia*, Vol. IX., pp. 396-400.

[2] Bardy, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

[3] See below, pp. 66-68.

precise order and connexion of the passages. But there can be no doubt whatever that they belong to this chapter, for every fragment of testimony we possess speaks with the same voice about Origen's doctrine of the fall of the angels and their ultimate restoration. 'Who gave you leave', cries Jerome to Rufinus, 'to omit so much from your translation?'[1] Unless we fill the gaps left by Rufinus with the material which every other writer who deals with the *First Principles* declares to have been there, we can have no hope of ascertaining what Origen really wrote.

The Latin translation sent by Jerome to his friends in Italy has unfortunately been lost. Jerome's usual method of translation was no different from that of Rufinus, but on this occasion he adhered strictly to the original. 'In my translation of the *First Principles,*' he says, 'I expressed in a simple way what was contained in the Greek text.'[2] And Rufinus corroborates this when he complains of Jerome that 'he re-interpreted these very books which I had translated, and inserted all those passages which had been omitted by me as being of doubtful authenticity.'[3] Some years after, this translation, though carefully kept back from publication by Pammachius, was circulated in a garbled form by a friend to whom he had lent it for a short time. A copy of this came into the hands of one Avitus, who wrote to Jerome for an explanation. In reply Jerome sent him a true copy, accompanied by a letter containing long quotations, many of them literal, of the alleged heretical teachings of the work. This letter is extant and provides an authority of first-class character for supplementing the gaps in Rufinus' translation and correcting him elsewhere. Koetschau gives a list of more than fifty quotations obtained from it. All are printed in his edition, either as part of the text or in footnotes, and all are included in the present translation.[4]

M. Bardy, however, seeks to discredit Jerome's translation. Jerome, he says, changed the delicate *nuances* of Origen into categorical statements, presenting in an absolute manner theories capable of a generous interpretation; he may have translated Origen better, but he understood him less, lacking what Rufinus possessed, the sympathy which gives intelligence.[5] If Bardy means that Origen's theories

[1] Jerome, *Apol.* II. 11b.
[2] Jerome, *Apol.* I. 7.
[3] Rufinus, *Apol.* I. 21.
[4] For the letter, see Jerome, *Ep. cxxiv, ad Avitum.*
[5] Bardy, *op. cit.*, p. 206.



were always subject to revision, put forward, as he so often reminds us, for discussion rather than as unalterable dogmas, and that while Rufinus partly understood this temper of mind Jerome had no sympathy with it at all, then his contention is true. It is true also that Jerome means throughout to make the worst of Origen and Rufinus the best, each from his own viewpoint. The modern reader can and must allow for this. But no arguments will alter the fact that Rufinus has left many gaps which without Jerome's help we could not fill at all, and that time after time he deliberately transforms, abbreviates or renders inaccurately his original. Nor must we suppose that Origen's teaching, though offered in humility and with a readiness to be convinced by better knowledge, lacked definiteness. It was this definiteness which Rufinus feared, and which he endeavoured to obscure in his translation. On the other hand, Jerome's presentation of Origen, though blunt, is full and fair. The passages quoted in the Letter to Avitus have a genuine Origenistic ring about them and there is no evidence whatever of hardening or exaggeration.

Of Rufinus' ordinary method of translation we may gain the truest idea by studying the two long passages of which the originals are preserved in the *Philocalia*. Generally speaking, the subject matter is here unobjectionable and Rufinus, even when abiding by his own cautious rules, had no need to alter, omit or interpolate. The reader of the present translation can form his own judgment; for in it Origen and Rufinus are set side by side and the two translations are made to agree in wording so far as is possible, that is, wherever it seemed clear that Rufinus was endeavouring to adhere closely to his original. He does not often do this, it is true. His method, like that of Jerome himself, is what we should call paraphrasing rather than translating. But he gives the general sense, for the most part, of what Origen wrote; and where he does this we must be satisfied.

The two passages are Bk. III. Ch. i, on the subject of Free Will, and Bk. IV. Chs. i-iii on the Inspiration and Interpretation of the Scriptures.[1] Koetschau has examined these carefully and obtained the following results: Rufinus has omitted twenty-eight passages, the great majority of which, however, are very short, consisting of only a few words or a line or two. He has made twenty-two additions, again mostly not more than a few words in length. And

[1] See below, pp. 157 ff. and 256 ff.

there are forty-five cases of inaccurate translation, some being due to a misunderstanding of the Greek and others to the desire of altering it for dogmatic reasons. It must be sufficient here to make a few general observations on these irregularities.

Of the additions made by Rufinus many are for the sake of clearness. He is fond, too, of rhetorical embellishment and will often put in a didactic or pietistic touch that is wanting in Origen. Sometimes, when texts are quoted, he will add an extra one that occurs to him or insert a fresh illustration. In other cases a dogmatic motive is apparent. Origen's dry, scientific statements and candid admission of difficulties are scarcely ever left as they stand. The assertion that the intelligence of some animals comes near to human reason is carefully toned down.[1] The desire of Origen to prove the goodness of God is transformed by Rufinus into a desire to keep close to the faith of the Church and to test all things by 'the rule of piety'.[2]

Some of the smaller omissions may be accidental. Others are not highly significant. But Rufinus has evidently hesitated to reproduce Origen's statement that certain of Moses' laws were irrational or impossible.[3] Similarly, he does not care to translate Origen's criticism on a literal interpretation of St. Matt. v. 28, 29—what good would it do to cut out the right eye?[4] He fears the lengths to which allegorical interpretation may go and omits the advice to discover in Scripture the 'depths of the wisdom of God'.[5] In the longest of his two omissions it has generally been supposed that the same distrust is to be observed; but I have given reasons in the notes for thinking that Rufinus did not fully understand this passage.[6]

The inaccurate renderings are often pure mistakes. Not seldom Rufinus altogether misses the point of the Greek. On the whole, however, we can gather from him fairly well the main drift of the arguments. But in the case of a keen thinker like Origen the construction of every sentence, the balance of phrases and often the very order of the words are important; and it would be folly to deny that, for all the good intentions of Rufinus, we lose much when we turn to his version from the Greek.

[1] See below, p. 160.
[2] See below, p. 193.
[3] See below, p. 290.
[4] See below, p. 293.
[5] See below, p. 296.
[6] See below, p. 299.



## VI

### THE DOCTRINE OF THE FIRST PRINCIPLES

It is not clear what was the exact meaning attached by Origen to the title Περὶ Ἀρχῶν. The phrase may indicate that the work is an inquiry into the elementary principles of the Christian religion; or, interpreted in a wider sense, it may signify that Origen intended to present his readers with a complete philosophy of religion. This is suggested by his own assertion, made at the beginning of the book, that he was framing a 'single body of doctrine'.[1] There may be in addition some thought of the 'principalities', with whose history and destiny parts of the book are concerned, and also of the 'beginnings' of the universe, and consequently of the end which, in Origen's oft-repeated phrase, must be like the beginning. The word Ἀρχαί will cover all these meanings and probably Origen meant it to be understood in a comprehensive way. As we have seen, the title was not a new one, since Clement of Alexandria had already used it.

The thoughts to which Origen's speculations led him proved strange and disturbing to Christians of later ages. But we need not doubt that they were natural enough to the age and intellectual environment in which they arose. It never occurred to Origen that he was anything but an orthodox defender of the faith. All he tried to do was to work out its implications for the educated world of his time. Problems which do not arise in simple minds were continually being raised by his pupils and by the heretics in their rival theological schools. What is the explanation of apparently undeserved suffering? Has man free will, or is this an illusion? What happened before this world was created, and what will happen after it has come to an end? What is the origin and nature of the human soul? Are the stars alive? Are there worlds in the sky, where spirits live? Origen believed that it was right to investigate such problems. Not all of them could be solved. But some might be, and the Christian thinker must do his best.

Other problems were of even greater importance. It was universally acknowledged in the Church that Father, Son and Spirit constituted the Trinity, that each was divine, and that a vast gulf separated them from the universe of created beings. But no authority had as yet laid down precisely

[1] See below, p. 6.

how they were related to one another, or had attempted to answer a whole series of questions on the subject of the divine nature which present themselves at once to the mind of a thoughtful believer. This was the task which Origen, as a comparatively young man, took in hand. He was not altogether a pioneer, for Pantænus and Clement had prepared the way. Origen's achievement was to focus all previous speculation, after passing it through his own brilliant intellect, into a coherent system. Though subject to every limitation of his age, he yet had the scientific spirit and used a scientific method. He follows where reason leads him. He is sensitive to difficulties and often acknowledges ignorance. It is indeed his spirit and method rather than his conclusions which are of permanent value. For the Church, no doubt wisely in the main, set aside his chief doctrines, branding them as heretical. But she would not have reached so sure a conviction about the safe path of theological progress had it not been for the stimulus provided by this bold and clear thinker, who brought every question fearlessly into the light of day.

M. de Faye has rightly observed that Origen's system is in the same class with the Gnostic speculations of his time.[1] The Father is the fount and origin of all being, and is pure spirit. The problem is to connect him with the existent material world. The Gnostics bridged the gulf by a series of descents from spirit into matter, to be followed at last by a restoration of the spiritual seeds or sparks imprisoned in matter to their original home. On this theme they played with all manner of fantastic variations. The Christian theology, as expounded by Origen, severely avoids these extravagances; yet the process of descent and ascent runs through it all. The Son is begotten of the Father by an eternal act of will. Gnostic theories of emanation are rejected on the ground that they involve a division of the divine nature. The eternal generation of the Son is as it were an expansion rather than a division of the divine nature. But Origen, in his keen desire to represent this eternal act as proceeding from will and intelligence and not as a fatalistic process, sometimes describes the begetting as a creating, and the Son as a created being. It was this that puzzled Rufinus, how Origen could be both orthodox and unorthodox at the same time. But there is really neither any doubt about Origen's words, nor difficulty about his

[1] Eugène de Faye, *op. cit.* I., p. 100 f.



thought. He relied on such scriptural passages as 'the first-born of all creation'[1] and he emphasises over and over again the secondary position of the Son. The Holy Spirit is still less in degree, but all three are consubstantial, partaking of the fulness of the divine essence. Both Son and Spirit are genuine Beings, not simply divine attributes, and Origen had been taught that an indication of them was to be seen in the two cherubim who, in Isaiah's vision, cover the face of God.[2]

A fresh departure is made by the creation of rational beings, called either minds or souls. These are definitely outside the Godhead, as the Son and Spirit are definitely within. Nevertheless they are spiritual creatures, made in God's own image. Origen inquires whether they were made infinite in number and decides that they were not. By a curious limitation of the divine power, which is characteristic of his thought, he tells us that God made exactly as many as he could control. They were all equal, and apparently identical. But they had free will, and this faculty caused movements to arise within them. Some remained in their original condition, but others fell away from God. Thus was variety and diversity introduced into the world, not by God's ordering, but by the free action of created souls. The fall necessitated the use of bodies; at first bright and transparent bodies such as stars have, and afterwards darker and heavier ones. In this way the various orders of angelic beings arose and below them the daemons; for all are of one original nature and ascend or descend in accordance with the movements of their own wills. From one class of these spirits the human race was constituted, and the qualities of each human soul and the environment into which it is born are due to its merits or demerits in previous existences. God is entirely just and has no favourites; souls are the masters of their own destinies and each obtains what he deserves.

The matter which was necessary to serve as bodies for the fallen spirits was created by God and is not eternal. Other matter had to be created to provide them with a dwelling-place. Matter is such that it can be adapted to an infinite variety of forms and purposes. The sojourn of man in this present world is designed to discipline and educate him, so that he may rise in the scale of being. He may, however, fall; and just as the utmost heights lie open

[1] Col. i. 15.

[2] See below, pp. 32 and 311.

to him, so do the lowest depths. Punishment is always remedial, never purely retributive. However low a spirit may fall, he may rise again; and however high he may soar, a fresh fall is still possible. It was this condition of things which gave rise to Jerome's caustic criticism that according to Origen angels might become devils and the devil an archangel. That is indeed what Origen meant to assert; that as no limit could be placed to human wilfulness and sin, so no limit could be placed to the power of God's love, when once the human soul had responded to its healing and uplifting influence.

Logically speaking, such a process might continue indefinitely. But clear as was Origen's head, his heart insisted on having the last word here. Did not the Scriptures speak of a time when 'God shall be all in all'? Thus Origen was led to the belief that one day the love of God would prove stronger even than the freedom of man and that all created spirits would return to that unity and perfection which was theirs at the beginning. Then bodies, which had grown progressively finer as their wearers ascended, would either be discarded for ever, or would be etherealised into garments of the lightest and most tenuous nature conceivable. And this event, Origen knew well, must be far distant. He felt how intractable was the human spirit, how dull and impervious to enlightenment it could be. To meet this difficulty he assumed a succession of worlds, not identical in form, but each framed out of the materials of its predecessor and each, we may suppose, advancing a step further on the road to the ultimate perfection.

The pre-existence and the future re-incarnation of the human soul was a doctrine that met with much opposition in the Church on account of its obvious connexion with Greek and oriental speculation. But it led even Origen himself into a difficulty when he came to discuss the Incarnation. Jesus, as man, possessed a soul. Had this soul a pre-existence, like all others? Origen answered that it had. In the beginning, when other souls were declining from God, the soul of Jesus retained its innocence and continued by its own free choice in such close association with the Word of God that finally habit became changed into nature and an indissoluble union was created. It was this soul, already united with the Word of God, which took flesh of the Virgin Mary and appeared among men. And since there were multitudes of spiritual beings who had never come to earth, Origen supposed that Christ would visit them,



too, in their celestial abodes, would assume their nature and would even suffer for them.

The system thus outlined was based upon a belief in man's free-will. Origen is fully conscious of the importance of free-will and he devotes a long chapter to examining it and meeting objections. All the Gnostic systems, and most other speculations of this period, ran in a fatalistic direction. If Origen appears to us to spend unnecessary trouble in his effort to establish the fact of human freedom, we must remember that it is largely this which gives the Christian tone and colour to all his thought.

It is obvious that, however sincerely Origen started from the simple Christian faith, he ended in speculations which were only remotely connected with it. The real source of these speculations is to be found in the intellectual atmosphere of the time, in which the ideas of Platonists, Stoics and orientals were mingled. But Origen claimed to find it all in the Scriptures. Philo the Jew had discovered, or more probably perfected, a method of using the Old Testament by which its varied contents, words, phrases and stories, were made to suggest philosophical ideas. Christian teachers at Alexandria continued to use this method, chiefly, though not solely, for the Old Testament, the difficulties of which, moral, theological and historical, challenged the inquiring mind to discover hidden meanings. The Church had rested its faith too largely on the Old Testament, with arguments from miracle and prophecy, to be able to look at it boldly and confess that it recorded a gradually developing revelation of God. This never seems to enter Origen's mind as a possibility. For him the Scriptures are everywhere perfect and complete, when rightly understood, to the minutest detail. He feels that the marvellous success of Christianity in the face of a hostile world guarantees the New Testament story, and that this in its turn guarantees the Old which predicts it. The Scriptures being thus established as divine writings may be made the basis of any thoughts which the intelligent reader can put into them or extract from them. Origen has three chapters on the Scriptures and the true method of their interpretation. It would be an exaggeration to say that the method is wholly arbitrary, for it has its rules. But it despises the history, ignores the poetry, and turns all that is warm and human into frigid intellectual reasonings. Its greatest value was that, in the hands of Origen at any rate, it kept the idea of God on a high moral and spiritual level

and free from the distortions that are bound to creep in when the Old Testament is accepted in its literal sense as a perfect revelation. Beyond that, it preserved the treasure of these writings against possible rationalistic attack until the advent of happier days when the Church could with more certainty distinguish the temporary from the permanent and discern beneath superficial imperfections the abiding truth and divine inspiration.

The weakness of Origen's system, considered as a whole, lies in its assumption that the entire cosmic process is a mistake, due to the misuse of free-will. He regards it as axiomatic that the end must be like the beginning. Is there nothing, then, to be accomplished in these vast stretches of time? Can God do no more than restore things to the position they were in before the primeval fall? If we are to take Origen literally, it would appear that God cannot. History, however long drawn out, is but the mending of an original fault. We have it on good authority that in one passage he even said that perfected souls would be swallowed up in the divine essence from which they sprang.[1] Such a system of thought is at heart pessimistic, and it was perhaps some instinctive apprehension of this fact which caused the Church to turn away from it. But we must not be blind to the nobility of Origen's achievement. It is the work of a good and a brave man whose supreme desire was to know the truth. As such it is still worthy of our respectful attention, and wherever the love of truth is found, there will Origen never fail to receive his meed of gratitude and reverence.

[1] See below, pp. 254 f. note 10.

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