

the Picture

This is my representation of a modern icon of Origen by a present day iconographer named Eileen M^c Guerin. There are no ancient icons of Origen because he was declared a heretic in the 6th Century and the Orthodox Church does not generally preserve icons of heretics. You will notice that Origen is preaching from a pulpit, with a scroll that reads "attend above all else to the reading of the scriptures." Below him, bent in pious attention to his words are a crowd of characters, including in the first row Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory Thaumaturgus, Melania the elder, Maximus the Confessor, and Gregory of Nyssa. Behind them are rows of other mothers and fathers of the early Church, from both the Greek and Latin traditions which include Barbara of Alexandria, Marcella, Jerome, John, Basil the great, and Cyril of Alexandria. They are the men and women whom tradition remembers ^{as} ~~as~~ the architects and defenders of Christian Orthodoxy. The authors and advocates of the Christian councils and creeds. Collectively they are "the saints" and we can read their names from the saintly haloes around their heads. Notice however that Origen has no halo, he is not a saint. The modern icon captures

the historical irony that this heretic taught the saints. These saints were avid readers of Origen, in some cases even anthologizing or translating his work for wider audiences. After St. Paul, Origen was thought of as being the most titanic intellectual figure of the first 3 centuries. In the breadth of his writings and in the depths of his influence, he is equalled by few among the Christian Church fathers. The early church fathers were thought leaders, theologians, and teachers who guided the early church in the formation of correct thinking and application of the Holy Scriptures. Origen was a leading teacher of his time, and through his writing, a powerful influence on the early church. His literary works laid a foundation for much thinking that followed. Some of his theology was eventually declared heretical at the Council of Constantinople. Still, he was one of the first to work out a systematic theology and he had no previous foundation for guidance. Also his life, particularly the years he withstood torture rather than renounce Christ, speaks of a greater story of devotion to Christ. Origen taught through his words but lessons are also gleaned from his life.

Origen was born in Alexandria, Egypt, to Christian parents. His father Leonides, taught him the scriptures and Greek liberal arts. While he was still very young, Rome beheaded Origen's father because of his faith. This event cemented Origen's desire to live true to the faith for which his father died and became a saint. ^{Saint LEONIDES} Origen wanted to join his father in martyrdom. This early Church period in Origen's life was a time of sorting out ideas, as Christians studied the apostolic scriptures and debated and formalized doctrine. Early Church fathers like Origen were vital for sorting through the Apostles teaching and distinguishing true theological pathways from erroneous ones. Gnosticism was a prevalent heresy and camps formed around other doctrinal variations, many of which were errant. Origen was a powerful voice in correcting the Gnostics, he was a witness to pagan influences on church teaching, and he also defended the Church from those influences. It was vital to early church leaders, many from simple origins, to have support from those trained in logic + reasoning. Origen's philosophical prowess factored into his approach to the scriptures,

helping others. At only 18, the Bishop of Alexandria, Demetrius, gave Origen charge of the church school, and he was a great success. He made the school all the more prestigious under his headmastership. Eusebius, who is the main source of information on Origen's life called him "adamatus" OR "Man of Steel", because of Origen's strict asceticism. He was a teacher who believed in applying the Scriptures to his life, not simply talking and writing about them. However, his life was not without controversies. It was rumored that Origen castrated himself taking Matthew 19:12 as a literal command. Origen denied this story, though Eusebius believed it was true, explaining it as a rash act of youth that Origen did, so he could safely instruct both men & women.

Origen's later teachings made it clear that he rejected such a literal application of this passage.

Origen was head of the school in Alexandria from 203-231.

For a time he taught preparatory courses such as dialectics, physics, mathematics, geometry, astronomy, Greek Philosophy, and speculative theology, but he eventually

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criticism. The Emperor then instigated backlash against the school and expelled teachers from Alexandria.

Origen fled to Palestine and taught there. The Palestinian Bishops valued Origen's teachings even if the Bishop of Alexandria decried Origen for teaching without official sanction.

~~15 years later~~ ^{IN} 230, Alexander, Bishop of Jerusalem + THEOCTIGUS, the Bishop of Caesarea ordained Origen to the priesthood so there could be no objection to his preaching.

This made Demetrius, the Bishop of Alexandria even angrier. Eusebius speculates Demetrius was jealous of Origen's influence. He deposed Origen from his headship of the school and from the priesthood + excommunicated him from the church of Alexandria.

Next, Origen went to Caesarea, and with the help of THEOCTIGUS founded a new school, where he taught from 231-254.

Instruction at Caesarea was modelled closely after the school of Alexandria and he made his students read

"Every one of the writings of the ancients whether philosophers or poets, accepting and rejecting nothing (according to St Gregory THAUMATURGUS) "accepting & rejecting nothing" (for we had not the necessary discrimination) Aside from these, he introduced

his students to all the schools of Philosophy so that they would not get stuck, before they had the capacity to judge any one set of opinions, ~~or~~ or became attached to any one teacher other than God & the prophets.

In 250 AD, Emperor Decius began persecuting Christians, and Origen was caught up in this & would have died, but Decius insisted he not be allowed death until Origen renounced his faith. Origen refused to yield his unwavering confidence in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and suffered over 2 years of imprisonment, torture, and public pressure to Recant. After his Release from prison, Origen died of complications from his injuries less than a year later.

Now we ask the question was Origen a philosopher or a Christian?

In comparison to his predecessor Clement, Origen at first seems less concerned with philosophy. But as seldom as Origen cites the pagan philosophers, their influence on him is significant. It seems it would be accurate to call Origen^A a Christian Platonist; he made a sincere attempt to express

the Christian truths in Platonic language. He has even been called one of the founders of NEOPLATONISM. In 553 AD The Council of Constantinople declared Origen a heretic. This decision was based on several teachings with which the ORTHODOX Church disagreed. Notably, Origen taught that the TRINITY was a hierarchy of first Father, then Son, then Holy Spirit, whereas the ORTHODOX Church taught they are co-equal persons. Origen also believed that all could be saved, including Satan, and also ~~that~~ believed that all souls were assigned to bodies based on their level of sin - the worst becoming demons, then humans, and then angels. The Greater Church teaches and believes that angels + humans are distinct created beings with human souls created at conception. Hence, large categories of his works, and the works of writers influenced by him were destroyed. It cannot be denied that some of Origen's ideas are contrary to Catholic Doctrine, but these were declared heretical only centuries after his death. He ~~himself~~ himself submitted his writings entirely to the

judgement of the church. The following quote is attributed to Origen: ^{+ I believe it's very important to what he says.}

O Church! If I who seem to be your Right hand, bearing the name of priest and preaching the word of God, should ever offend against your Canon and your rule of Faith, thus giving scandal: Let the universal church in unanimous accord cut me off, her Right hand, and cast me away from her.

This is a powerful statement of his deep commitment to the Church's discipline & faith, showing his willingness to be excommunicated if he transgressed its rules.

At the Vatican City, April 25, 2007 in the general audience: Pope Benedict dedicated his CATECHESIS TO Origen of Alexandria. The audience was held in St. Peter's Square in the presence of more than 25,000 people. Origen, said the Pope, took up the legacy of Clement and carried it toward the future in such an innovative way as to effect an irreversible turn in the development of Christian thought. The pope

said Origen was a true master and an exemplary witness of the doctrine he transmitted. The "irreversible turn" effected by Origen, said the Pope, substantially involved "grounding theology in the explanation of Scripture".

The characteristic of Origen's doctrine lies in the constant invitation to pass from the reading to the Spirit of Scripture in order to progress in knowledge of God.

This "allegorism" coincided with the development of Christian Dogma through the teaching of the Doctors of the Church, who in one way or another, learned from Origen.

The "inspirational core" of Origen's work according to Pope Benedict is his 3 level reading of the BIBLE. This threefold interpretation alluded to the 3 most important ways in which Origen devoted himself to the studying of the Scriptures, they are not in sequence, more often than not, they overlap.

First of all, Origen read the Bible determined to do his utmost to ascertain the biblical text and offer the most reliable version of it. This was the first step, to know

3rd & lastly, even before his ordination to the priesthood, Origen was deeply dedicated to preaching the bible and adapted himself to a varied public. Origen can also be perceived in his Homilies, wholly dedicated as he was to the systematic interpretation of the passage under examination which he analyzed step by step in the sequence of the verses.

St. Jerome in his epistle 33 lists the titles of 320 books and 310 homilies by Origen. Unfortunately most of these works have been lost, but even the few that remain make him the most prolific author of Christianity's first 3 centuries.

In his homilies Origen took every opportunity to recall the different dimensions of the sense of the sacred scripture that encourages a process of growth in the faith. The 1st is the literal sense, the 2nd is the moral sense, what we must do in living the word, and finally the spiritual sense, the unity of scripture which throughout its development speaks of Christ.

Pope Benedict concluded his catechesis by asking the faithful to welcome into their hearts

the teaching of this great master of faith. The Pope said it is the word of God, through the action of the Holy Spirit, which always guides us to the whole truth. He said "Let us pray to the Lord that he will give us thinkers, theologians, and EXEGETES who discover this multifaceted dimension, this ongoing Timeliness of Sacred Scripture. It's newness for Today. Let us pray that the Lord will help us to read Sacred Scripture in a prayerful way, to be truly nourished with the true bread of life, with his word.

Now, I am concluding my presentation with "What Can Today's Christians gain from studying Origen's life & writings."

So much of what Origen wrestled with is also relevant to our times. He had to decide how to face persecution, how to defend the faith against those who discredited it, how to apply the scriptures to his own life, how to get along with other Christians who disagreed with his position on Scripture. Historical figures

were subject to the pressure of their times, as we are. They did their best to understand God, scripture, and their humanity, against the backdrop of their days.

Origen's story demonstrates the development & growth of a Christian thought leader, full of traumatic influences, missteps, and imperfect thought. Yet through it all, he had an unwavering commitment to Christ, even in the face of persecution.

Origen is an unlikely hero for modern ~~times~~ believers. And yet it's hard not to gain perspective from learning about this prolific writer, biblical philosopher, and tenacious theologian who lived, wrote, and taught with intensity and passion during the tumultuous early years of Christianity: Origen really did understand that scripture is all about Christ and he wanted to see that everywhere. The problem with that, is that he could kind of go overboard, and because of that could either deny or ignore the basic historical and obvious literal reading of some texts.

I think that when you're looking at Origen and the other church fathers, you have to look at both the positive & negative. What did they get right? What did they get wrong? What good can we take from them, how did they impact the history of the Church, when they were writing? Did they have access to the documents that we have today? I think that we have to be a little more generous to church fathers. They didn't have the resources, or history that we have today.

They couldn't pull up log offs on their computers. It's a different world, so I think that we can't judge them by the standards that we would use today.

What will others say of our lives hundreds of years after our deaths. Will we be defined by our greatest sins or immature decisions of youth, or will the steadfastness of our lives for Christ be the last word of our testimony? In studying & discussing those who came before us in the faith, I think we do well to apply mercy, discernment, and wisdom remembering that they were Brothers or sisters in Christ, often doing their best in the context of their times & circumstances.
The end!

delegated these subjects so that he could focus on instructing the advanced students in Philosophy, Theology, and Scripture. At this time he also wrote hundreds, perhaps thousands of works with the help of a large staff of clerks & assistants to whom he ~~did~~ dictated. These works also include his most famous writings which are titled "On first principles", "Hexapla" and "Contra Celsum".

- ① On first principles was Origen's work on systematic theology and was the very first of its kind.
- ② ~~Contra~~ Contra Celsum is a work of apologetics defending the truth of Christianity.
- ③ Hexapla was a monumental work, of 28 years of research and writing. It was an analysis of the Old Testament written to respond to Jewish and Gnostic critics of the faith. It is a 6 column comparison of the Hebrew Old Testament, the Greek SEPTUAGINT (SEPTUAGINT), and 4 other Greek versions, along with Origen's commentary.

~~also Origen's hundreds of.~~

In 215 AD The Roman emperor Caracalla visited Alexandria but faced student protest and