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THE CONDEMNATION OF ORIGEN

CYRIL C. RICHARDSON

Union Theological Seminary, New York

The condemnation of Origen is one of the saddest episodes in the history of the Christian church. The breadth of his thought, the keenness of his genius and the wide sympathy of his religion, contrast vividly with the narrow obscurantism of his monkish detractors. It is significant that the final defeat of Origen and the closing of the philosophic schools of Athens belong to the same era. It is as if a curtain were then drawn upon the intellectual freedom of the East, and along with certain garbled texts from his works all that was fine and liberal and mature in the faith and thought of Origen had been condemned. He who had striven for a religion truly catholic and had contended that all things were the church's heritage and all things were Christ's, was cast out of the church with imprecations of intolerance and fanaticism. The long controversies over Origen that reach their climax under Justinian mark the passing of much that was noble and enlightened in the early tradition of Greek Christianity.

The aim of this essay is to enquire into the origins and early history of this condemnation. As the later controversy on Origenism is well known and has received careful attention, we shall limit ourselves to the opposition aroused by his teaching during his lifetime and the succeeding fifty years. We shall attempt to show that, whatever may have been the motives that actuated Demetrius, the bishop of Alexandria, in his attack on Origen, two counts seem to have been involved in his condemnation. Not only his uncanonical ordination but also his doctrines were called in question. This charge of heresy, we shall further try to show, was due to an increasing aversion from pagan philosophy during the third century.

From the account of Eusebius, whose purpose in the *Ecclesiastical History* is to defend the uninterrupted line of orthodoxy in the church from the days of the Apostles,¹ and who

¹ Eusebius, *H. E.*, 5.22

with Pamphilus defended Origen in the Apology, there is hardly a hint that the latter was regarded in any way as heretical during his lifetime. In fact, from Eusebius' report, we learn that it was nothing but jealousy that prompted the action of Demetrius,² and from the number of visits that Origen paid to Antioch, Arabia, and Achaia to refute heretics and defend the faith, we are left with the impression that not only the keenness of his scholarship but also the unimpeachable orthodoxy of his belief was widely recognized in the Christian world of that day.

Over against this picture, however, must be placed some passages from the writings of Origen, which reflect at least opposition to his theological position, if not a deliberate charge of heresy. In the *De Principiis*³—which became the unfortunate butt of most of the later controversy—Origen wrote, in introduction to his discussion of the Consummation,

And this reminds us here, that if there be anyone imbued with reading and understanding subjects of such difficulty and importance, he ought to bring to the effort a perfect and instructed understanding, lest, perhaps, if he has had no experience in questions of this kind, they may appear to him as vain and superfluous, or if his mind be full of preconceptions or prejudices on other points, he may judge them to be heretical and opposed to the faith of the Church.

We may add to this the passage from the Lucan Homilies,⁴ For many, while they love us more than we deserve, discuss or speak of these things, praising our discourses and doctrine But others, calumniating our treatises, incriminate us with thinking those things which we have never known ourselves to have thought.

To come to a more definite statement of the actual doctrines assailed, we have the passage in the *De Principiis*,⁵ where heretics on the one hand had attacked his doctrine of the resurrection as too material, and some believers, whom he prefers to style

2 Eusebius is certainly not fair in his statement about Demetrius. He accuses him with first encouraging Origen after the fateful act of emasculation and then condemning him for it, because he lacked a true pretext and was really jealous of the ability of his subordinate (*H. E.*, 6. 8). Judged on the merits of the actual situation, however, Demetrius acted quite rationally. While Origen was a teacher in the Catechetical School it did not matter that he was a eunuch, but upon his ordination it was of grave consequence, if we may judge from the later Canon of Nicaea (no. 1). Even Eusebius admits it was an effective weapon in Demetrius' attack on Origen. Eusebius is not beyond self-contradiction. He first tells us that Origen committed this act to prevent scandal because of the ladies that attended his lectures (6. 8. 2) and follows it up by the assertion that he tried to keep it secret, and it was only later that Demetrius got to know of it.

3 *De Principiis*, 1. 6. 1.

4 *Luc. Hom.*, 25.

5 *De Principiis*, 2. 10. 1; 2. 10. 3.

“those that are feeble in intellect or lack proper instruction,” had objected to it as too “spiritual.” It is not surprising that such an opposition should have arisen. Origen was trying to steer his course between a Scylla of philosophic speculation on the one side, and a Charybdis of fundamentalism on the other. He was trying to forge out a Christian Platonism, at a time when the philosophers were attempting to exterminate the new rival faith, and the Christian church was most afraid of pagan thought.

There was undoubtedly a storm of opposition raised when Origen devoted himself to philosophic pursuits, attending the lectures of Ammonius Saccas,⁶ and openly teaching geometry, physics, and moral science.⁷ A reflection of this, perhaps, is evident in the fragment of his letter, written in defense of his study of philosophy, which Eusebius has preserved.⁸ The truth of the situation seems to be that the rapid expansion of Christianity had stimulated the Graeco-Roman world to its last great effort to dominate the religious life of cultivated society with a refined Neo-Platonism. The effect of this upon the Christian church was a deep and unyielding aversion from all heathen philosophy. Tertullian, the older contemporary of Origen, represents this school: the philosophers to him are the arch-heretics—though it is true of course that he invokes the authority of “*Seneca saepe noster*,” when it suits him. Origen, on the other hand, attempted a compromise. He grasped the fact that Christianity and philosophy can never be isolated, and the surest way to win the heathen world—so rightly proud of its heritage—was to set the Christian faith upon the firm basis of Platonic philosophy. The natural result was a tirade from the philosophers, because he was not philosophic enough, and a similar cry of antagonism from the fundamentalists, who saw doctrines like the resurrection crumbling in the hands of this ruthless “adamantine” theologian.

When we turn to the involved question of the condemnation by Demetrius,⁹ the only statement of Origen that has come

⁶ *H. E.*, 6. 19.

⁷ Gregory Thaumaturgus, *Orat. de Orig.*, c. 8.

⁸ *H. E.*, 6. 9. 12.

⁹ The story of Epiphanius, that Origen in a moment of weakness sacrificed to the gods, and this necessitated his removal from Alexandria, is absolutely incredible (*Haer.*, 64). As Schrökh has shown (*KG.*, p. 34) it is substantiated by no other source and is best explained by Epiphanius' disagreeable nature and credulity.

down to us is in the early part of the sixth book of the Commentary on St. John. There he speaks of the "storm in Alexandria" which he had successfully weathered, despite the enemy who assailed him "with the bitterness of his new writings so directly hostile to the Gospel," and who stirred up against him "all the winds of wickedness in Egypt." Yet here Origen makes no definite statement of details and does not put forward any defense against the calumnies that he hints Demetrius had issued against him. That the question of his irregular ordination¹⁰ in Palestine was involved, is implied by Eusebius (*H. E.*, 6. 8. 5) and mentioned by Photius (Codex 118), who closely follows the account given in the Apology of Pamphilus. Although attested by no other sources, it probably did play an important part in the controversy. On the other hand, that it was the sole count against Origen, as his defenders Eusebius and Pamphilus would have us imagine, is highly doubtful. That some accusations of heresy were made we shall attempt to show.

There is evidence that Origen wrote a letter to his friends in Alexandria, defending both his doctrines and his actions. This apology at the same time launched an attack upon Demetrius¹¹ and imputed to the bishop and his followers motives that can hardly be called Christian. Fragments of this letter are preserved in Jerome's Apology against Rufinus, and in the latter's Epilogue to the Defense of Origen by Pamphilus. There, from the mesh and entanglement of the later controversy, we can extricate two definite facts. First, that to Origen, during this crisis in Alexandria, was imputed the teaching that the devil would finally be converted, and secondly, that he defended this

10 Origen was ordained by the bishops of Caesarea and Jerusalem (*H. E.*, 6. 8. 5). In Eusebius the irregularity of this concerned his being a eunuch. The passage in Photius that relates to his ordination raises a difficulty. He says Origen did not get leave from his bishop to go to Athens, the final destination of his journey from Alexandria. This is explicitly contradicted by Jerome (*De Vir. Illust.* 54) who tells us that he went with the authority of an ecclesiastical letter. The statement of Photius is perhaps more intelligible if the permission Origen failed to obtain is understood of his ordination, which Photius certainly mentions as uncanonical.

We may note that several years before this issue arose, Demetrius had objected to Origen's preaching in Caesarea on the grounds that he was only a layman (*H. E.*, 6. 19. 17ff). The Palestinian bishops, however, had warmly defended him, as it was at their request he had preached.

11 According to Photius (Codex 118) there were two Synods: One deposed Origen from the office of teacher, and the other from the priesthood. The evidence seems trustworthy, as Photius is following the Apology of Pamphilus and Eusebius, which contained an account of the whole matter (*Eusebius, H. E.*, 6. 23).

accusation of heresy by proving satisfactorily that his writings had been adulterated. Jerome,¹² quoting Origen, says,

Some of those who delight in bringing complaints against their neighbours, ascribe to us and our teaching the crime of a blasphemy, which we have never spoken. . . . For they say that I assert that the father of wickedness and perdition, of those who shall be cast out of the Kingdom of God, that is, the devil, will be saved; a thing which no man could say even though he had taken leave of his senses and was obviously insane.

Jerome then continues to prove that, in a certain dialogue—then extant—between Origen and a Valentinian Candidus, the latter had falsely reproached Origen with this particular doctrine and had adulterated his true words. Jerome, however, concludes that only in this dialogue was Origen's work garbled.

Rufinus,¹³ on the other hand, cites a further extract from the letter in which Origen complains that not only one man "took away the true statements which I made and then inserted what was false, to furnish grounds for accusation against me," but, "there are others also, not a few, who have done this, through a wish to throw confusion into the churches." He hints, also, that these accusations of heresy are not confined merely to the heretics, with whom he holds debate, for he adds, "though those who have dared to do this are impious and heretical men, yet those who give credence to such accusations shall not escape the judgment of God."

Whether this actual accusation concerning the devil was false or not is quite open to dispute. Certainly there is an apparent contradiction on this subject in the *De Principiis*, which was written before Origen left Alexandria.¹⁴ This is even more striking, considering we have only a Latin text of the work, and that edited, translated, and probably revised by Rufinus.

In the light of this evidence it seems possible that the Synod of Demetrius had accused Origen of heresy—perhaps of the particular point in question, and that he wrote this letter to his friends in Alexandria to defend his position.

We may now turn to the statement found in Eusebius,¹⁵ that Origen wrote a letter to Fabian of Rome and to many other

¹² *Apol. adv. Rufinum*, 2. 18.

¹³ *Epil. ad Pamphilum*, Migne, *P. G.*, 6. 625.

¹⁴ *H. E.*, 6. 24. 3, cf. *De Principiis*, 1. 8. 4. and 3. 6. 5. The latter passage is open to the interpretation that the devil will be saved.

¹⁵ *H. E.*, 6. 36. 3.

rulers of the church with reference to his orthodoxy. This seems to be clear evidence that his position was at least questioned. The problem is how he came to write to Rome. We know that at the time of the Sabellian controversy he was in Rome for a short period while Zephyrinus¹⁶ was bishop. It may be that he sided with Hippolytus against Zephyrinus and Callistus—certainly his doctrine verged nearer ditheism than patripassianism. An anonymous defense of Origen, cited by Photius,¹⁷ shows the extent of his efforts to combat Sabellianism. Döllinger¹⁸ points out, in addition, that on the question of penance the views of Origen and Hippolytus practically coincide. However this may be, he was certainly known in Rome and possibly had given some indication of his views on the great controversial question.

Between the death of Callistus and the accession of Fabian some six years elapsed, and during that time Origen had been expelled from Alexandria. The Roman church, if we may trust Jerome, concurred in the condemnation of Origen, but upon what grounds it is extremely difficult to say. The only evidence we have is in his thirty-third Epistle, written while he was still an ardent admirer of Origen. He says, "Origen stands condemned by his bishop Demetrius, only the bishops of Palestine, Arabia, Phœnicia and Achaia dissenting. Imperial Rome consents to his condemnation, and even convenes her senate to censure him, not—as the rabid hounds who now pursue him cry—because of the novelty or the heterodoxy of his doctrines, but because men could not tolerate the incomparable eloquence and knowledge, which when once he opened his lips made others seem dumb."¹⁹

Since Origen's ordination occurred in the year 231,²⁰ it is generally assumed that he was condemned during the episcopate of Pontian, whose term of office the Liberian Catalogue places between 230 and 235. Whether or not this convening of the

16 *H. E.*, 6. 14. 10.

17 Photius, *Codex* 117.

18 Döllinger, J. J. I. von, *Hippolytus and Callistus*, 1896, pp. 260ff.

19 Jerome, *Epistolae*, 33. 4.

20 Origen's final departure from Alexandria is dated by Eusebius in the tenth year of Alexander — i. e. 231 (*H. E.*, 6. 26). That this journey and the one mentioned in 6. 23 (about the time of the accession of Pontianus — i. e. 230) refer to the same event is shown by A. C. McGiffert in *P-N. F.*, (Eusebius) vol. I, pp. 396-7.

“Senate”—that is, of the prominent Roman clergy²¹—was in any way related to the Sabellian controversy, is a matter of pure conjecture. However, Origen certainly wrote a defense of his orthodoxy to Fabian after the Maximinian persecution, during which Pontian and Hippolytus had perished. According to Jerome,²² he “expresses penitence for having made erroneous statements, and charges Ambrose²³ with overhaste in making public what was meant only for private circulation.”

These two statements of Jerome obviously conflict. If the “Senate”, motivated by jealousy, condemned Origen on grounds other than doctrinal, why need he write to the bishop with reference to his orthodoxy? A possible solution of the vexed question is that he was condemned for heresy in connection with the Hippolytan controversy and for such statements as the conversion of the devil, but that jealousy had prompted the action against him. It is to be noted that Jerome does not refer to the uncanonical ordination. His words seem to imply that while it was universally admitted Origen was condemned for heresy, the charge was both unfounded and advanced from ignoble motives. If this is correct, it is responsible to suppose that when things had quieted down after the persecution and when old enemies, such as Demetrius and Pontian, were dead, Origen would write a thorough statement of defense to the Roman church, indeed to many other churches also, as Eusebius records.

There is one further question which arises concerning Origen’s condemnation during his lifetime. It is whether he returned to Alexandria after the death of Demetrius and, because of openly teaching his heresies, suffered a second deposition under Heraclas, his former pupil and the new bishop. The evidence for this is extremely doubtful. The first indication we have of it occurs in a letter²⁴ written a century after the lifetime of Origen. In the Epistle of the Egyptian Synod (339) the bishop Theophilus appealed to the expulsion of Origen from

21 Jerome uses the word *Senatus* for his prominent clerical opponents at Rome, in the phrase *Pharisaeorum Senatus* (cited from a Preface in Rufinus, *Apol.* 2. 24. *P. L.*, 21. 603). Cf. also *matronarum senatus* in *Ep.*, 43. 3. for the daily meetings of Christian ladies in high society.

22 Jerome, *Ep.* 84, 9.

23 The prominent Alexandrine who provided Origen with stenographers to take down his lectures (*H. E.*, 6. 23).

24 Cited in Justinian’s letter to Miennas, *Mansi*, ix, 513.

Alexandria by Heraclas. In addition to this, mention is made by Gennadius²⁵ of a work by the same Theophilus, in which he stated that he was not the first to condemn Origen and his views, but that the latter had also been condemned by the ancient fathers and especially by Heraclas, having been ejected from the priesthood and driven from the church. Similar statements about the action of Heraclas occur in the biographer of Pachomius²⁶ and in the spurious *Mystagogia* of St. Alexander.²⁷

A further confirmation of the story is to be found in the fragment of Photius,²⁸ where it is recorded that "in the days of the blessed Heraclas, Origen on Wednesdays and Fridays openly taught the heresy peculiar to him." Finally Heraclas expelled him from Alexandria, but Origen, while intending to go to Syria, came to Thumis in Egypt where the bishop Ammonius allowed him to deliver a lecture in the church. On hearing about this Heraclas deposed Ammonius and set in his place Philip.

Such evidence is hardly trustworthy²⁹ and a possible explanation of the story is that the names of the two bishops have been confused.³⁰ It may be that the assailants of Origen, never too careful or scrupulous, were responsible for this, seeing that a more famous reputation was attached to the name of Heraclas than to that of Demetrius.³¹ It is, however, possible that the confusion originated from the fact that the death of Demetrius and the accession of Heraclas to the episcopate occurred within a year of Origen's departure from Alexandria.³²

25 Gennadius, *De Viris Illustribus*, 34.

26 Vita Pachomii, Migne, *P. L.*, 73. 247.

27 See Routh, M. J., *Reliquiae Sacrae*, v. IV, p. 81.

28 This fragment is quoted at length by Döllinger, *op. cit.*, p. 264. He corrects the text in Fontani, *Novae eruditorum deliciae*, 1785, pp. 1 ff, by reference to a MS. in Munich.

29 The absence of any mention of this by Eusebius in the *History* or by Photius in the *Codex*, is rather convincing. In the *Apology of Pamphilus* which contained a full account of the proceedings and which Photius (118) closely followed for his resumé of the condemnation of Origen, there does not seem to have been a reference to Heraclas. It is hardly possible that, had Heraclas deposed Origen a second time, such silence of the event would have been maintained among the latter's apologists.

30 The only source, in this connection, that mentions the two bishops together is found in the epistle of the Egyptian Synod, to which we have already alluded, Mansi, IX, p. 504. The citation is from Peter of Alexandria, who refers to the bitter attacks that Origen made on the bishops Heraclas and Demetrius. This does not necessarily presuppose a double deposition of Origen.

31 Eusebius, *H. E.*, 6. 31; 7. 7.

32 Eusebius, *H. E.*, 5. 22; 6. 26.

This chronological fact leads us to consider a piece of evidence advanced by Döllinger in support of his thesis that Origen suffered a deposition under both bishops. According to Döllinger,³³ Eusebius implies that Heraclas deposed Origen since the notice in the Canon that Origen "passed over" (*transit*) from Alexandria to Caesarea is placed two years after the accession of Heraclas to the episcopate (year of Abraham 2294). Syncellus, who was much indebted to the Chronicle of Eusebius, also places the removal to Palestine during the episcopate of Heraclas (between A. M. 5728-30).³⁴ This shows that the notice was probably in the original of Eusebius and did not come through the translation of Jerome. It certainly does not prove, however, that Eusebius meant a second deposition of Origen at the hands of his former pupil. In the first place there is no hint of it in the *History*, and in the second place there is only *one* notice of Origen's removal to Caesarea in the Canon. If this refers to the condemnation under Heraclas, we are left without a single mention of that under Demetrius, and from the *History* it is obvious that this latter is the one on which Eusebius lays all the emphasis. What evidently has occurred is that the note in the Canon has been misplaced and considering that Demetrius died and was succeeded by Heraclas within a year of Origen's departure, it is not surprising that this should have happened. The mistake originated, evidently, in antedating the accession of Demetrius in the Canon—an error which can be traced back as far as the bishop Abilius.³⁵

In conclusion, then, it would seem that the story of a second deposition under Heraclas is highly doubtful. Nevertheless, there is some evidence from the writings of Origen and from other sources that his orthodoxy was impugned during his life-time and that a formal charge of heresy was laid against him by the Synod of Demetrius and possibly by Rome.

33 Döllinger, *op. cit.*, p. 262.

34 This is in the reign of Maximinius, which is far too late.

35 The accession of Demetrius to the episcopate, according to the *History* (5.22), was in the tenth year of Commodus. The Canon gives it in the ninth year. This mistake goes as far back as the bishop Abilius. Both the *History* and the Canon agree that he ascended the episcopal throne in the fourth year of Domitian and reigned for thirteen years, but the Canon places the accession of Cerdo, his successor, in the first year of Nerva, while the *History* dates this event by the first year of Trajan. If the imperial notices of the *History* are to be trusted, then Abilius reigned fourteen and not thirteen years.

II

Origen died about 253 and some fifty years elapsed before the first noteworthy attack that has been preserved was launched against his theology by Methodius.³⁶ What happened during these fifty years? First, the period was one of intermittent persecution. Decius, Valerian, Gallienus, and Aurelian all tried their hand at it and it culminated in the last great attack on the church by Diocletian. The Christian community, however, was rent from within as well as from without. The Novatian Schism, which originated in Italy, was not without its effect upon the East;³⁷ the vexed question of Sabellianism still lingered on, and the condemnation of Paul of Samosata resurrected the issue of Adoptionism.

In reading over the documents and correspondence on each of these questions, I can find no reference to Origen. Dionysius of Alexandria, accused by his namesake of Rome of tritheism, never rebuts an argument by reference to Origen, nor is he quoted in any single instance by orthodox or heretical theologians: Our first-hand evidence of this period, it is to be admitted, is only fragmentary, but from the records of Origen's pupils, Dionysius, (the successor of Heraclas to the episcopate), Theognostus and Pierius, it is obvious that in Alexandria he enjoyed a very high reputation.

We know that it was the allegorical principle of Origen, if not his actual authority, that Dionysius used in combatting chiliasm,³⁸ and his admiration for Origen is evidenced by the fact that he dedicated his *De Martyrio* to him. Furthermore, it would appear from the anonymous defense of Origen (cited in Photius)³⁹ that Dionysius showed a great veneration for his master, since his name is there mentioned as an orthodox defendant of him.

Of Theognostus we know even less. Photius⁴⁰ tells us that his doctrine on the Son and the Angels and other subjects closely resembled Origen's and that he was eager to exert himself in his defense. Pierius, who is of more importance, was

36 Socrates (*H. E.*, 6. 13) calls him the first of the great quaternion of revilers of Origen.

37 Eusebius, *H. E.*, 6. 43ff.

38 Eusebius, *H. E.*, 7. 24.

39 Photius, *Codex* 117.

40 Photius, *Codex* 106.

head of the School at Alexandria and the teacher of Pamphilus. His distinction in learning earned him the name of the "Young Origen" (so Photius tells us),⁴¹ "since Origen at that time enjoyed a very high reputation."

From these fragmentary notices we can say that the doctrines of Origen were firmly rooted in Alexandria during the fifty years succeeding his death, but the very fact that they were loyally defended by his former pupils shows that from some quarters they had been assailed.

The question naturally arises as to the source of these attacks. While no treatises previous to those of Methodius have been preserved, we may with some justification suppose that an anti-philosophical movement in the church was the main cause of the controversy.

We have already pointed out that one of the results of the Christian antipathy to the heathen world was an aversion from Greek philosophy. Persecution naturally increased this tendency of the Christians to separate themselves from all that was pagan. Bitterness engendered bitterness and hatred was met with isolation.

An interesting instance of this aversion from heathen thought may be cited from a contemporary of Methodius, Eusebius of Caesarea. He was admittedly a champion of Origen and was to a large extent influenced by the latter's doctrinal system which, as is evident from the *De Principiis*, had included much of the current Ptolemaic astrology. Now there are traces of this in Eusebius. In his *Commentary on the Psalms*,⁴² for instance, he has references to the earth being a sphere. In the later work on Isaiah,⁴³ however, he is careful to avoid such questionable statements and he even elaborates much of the system which Cosmas Indicopleustes later perfected. It seems plain that Eusebius did this in order to guard against the accusation of heresy from those who were opposed to all heathen thought and speculation. Contemporaneous with Eusebius was Lactantius,⁴⁴ who in the *Divine Institutes* waged war on such pagan ideas as the antipodes and the rotundity of the earth. In short, there was a sort of growing fundamentalism at the be-

⁴¹ Photius, Codex 119; see also Jerome, *De Viris Illustribus*, 76.

⁴² *Ps. Comm.*, 94.4 and 76.18.

⁴³ *Is. Comm.*, 4.22.

⁴⁴ *Div. Instit.*, 3. 24.

ginning of the fourth century, which preferred dogma to speculation and, looking askance at the philosophy and science of the heathen, asserted that only the knowledge recorded in sacred Scripture was final and definitive.

These instances, among many that might be adduced, provide a valuable side-light on the history of Christian thought. Early Christianity frequently appealed to the poets and philosophers of the heathen world to find support for its doctrines. It insisted on the fact that all that was most noble and pure in the Greek tradition was not at variance with Christianity, indeed was derived originally from the thought of Moses. Early apologists elaborated the points of kinship between the teachings of Plato and Christ in order to gain for the new religion the sanction of a highly cultivated society.

Two factors, however, tended to alienate the Christians from pagan philosophy. The first was the spread of Gnosticism and other heresies which could be directly traced to the attempt of Christians to compromise with heathen thought and so endanger the fundamentals of their religion. The orthodox polemic against the Gnostics, though itself much indebted to pagan learning, dwelt not a little on this Christian courting of the heathen world⁴⁵ and the consequent aversion of the church from philosophy was brilliantly caricatured by Celsus. He depicted the Christians as ignorant and credulous, not even troubling to seek an explanation of the things they believed. Similarly Clement of Alexandria, with his deeper sympathy with the Greek tradition, deplored those simple minds who despised philosophy and stupidly imagined it to be the invention of the devil.⁴⁶

The other factor in the situation was the increasing rigour of the persecutions. Opposition only created opposition and the Christians held the more tenaciously to all that was unique in their religion, emphasizing at once the distinctiveness and truth of their revelation. The harassing years of Diocletian, in particular, provoked from the Christians great controversial works attacking heathen philosophy with a vehemence and intolerance unknown to Justin or Clement. Indeed, the Christian aversion from pagan philosophy is far more marked in Lactan-

⁴⁵ Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, 2. 14. 2-7; Tertullian, *Apol.*, 47.

⁴⁶ *Strom.*, 1. 1. *fin.*, and 1. 9.

tius and the *Clementine Homilies* than in the early Apologists. The *Didascalia* even bans heathen books for Christian reading.⁴⁷

III

The very exclusiveness of Christianity lent added attraction to its gospel of divine revelation and made its mission the more effective. Heathen philosophers, such as Celsus and Porphyry, witnessed with growing concern the rapid spread of the new religion and grew afraid that it would usurp the place of philosophy in Greek and Roman society. No longer stressing such crude and barbaric calumnies against the Christians as Justin and Tertullian had been forced to meet, they devoted their energies to more serious and systematic refutations of the Christian position. These in turn engendered rebuttals.

One of the first opponents of Porphyry was Methodius who, according to Jerome,⁴⁸ wrote books in "polished and logical style" against the Neo-Platonist. This gives us a valuable introduction to the assailant of Origen. He was a staunch antagonist of Plato. Yet he was clearly a man schooled in philosophy with some knowledge of Platonism and not uninfluenced by it. His *Banquet of the Virgins* is written in close imitation of the *Symposium*, and many of his writings are cast in the form of imaginary dialogues. In a similar way, while the avowed assailant of Origen, he freely used his allegorical interpretation of Scripture.

However, despite this superficial influence of Platonism, Methodius caught little of its spirit and his attacks on Origen mostly concerned points where he thought the Christian father had been led astray by Greek philosophy. Methodius⁴⁹ defense of the bodily resurrection, his attack on the doctrines of eternal generation and the "coats of skin," are all directed against the Platonic elements in Origen's thought. This seems to have been the central factor in the controversy and to judge by the later attack of Marcellus of Ancyra⁵⁰ it was the unhappy union of Platonism with Christianity, especially in the

⁴⁷ *Didascalia*, 1. 6. 1.

⁴⁸ Jerome, *De Viris Illustribus*, 83.

⁴⁹ See the excerpts of Methodius preserved in Photius, *Codex*, 234-7 and in Epiphanius, *Haer.*, 64.

⁵⁰ Euseb. contra Marcellum, Migne, *P. G.*, 24. 761.

De Principiis, which was the chief cause of the orthodox antipathy to Origen.

One of the most unfortunate circumstances in the whole history of the interpretation of Origen has been the unwarranted stress laid on the *De Principiis*. No doubt this has been largely due to the novelty of such a writing, being as it is the first significant attempt to formulate a philosophy of Christian faith. Yet the speculative philosophy of Origen forms but a small part of his contribution to Christian life and thought. In the treatise *On Prayer*, in the *Exhortation to Martyrdom*, and above all in the Commentaries, there is revealed a very different character. In these Origen spoke to Christians: in the *De Principiis* he addressed himself to philosophers. Particularly in the Commentaries is there to be found a firm grasp of the basic principles of the Christian religion, graced with a wide sympathy and a wealth of biblical learning. Indeed, those champions of his orthodoxy—Pamphilus and Eusebius—made a happy point in the preface to their Apology when they maintained that the errors with which Origen was charged were not the subjects of systematic treatises but were thrown out in occasional and scattered references.

In general it is true to say that Methodius attacks the letter rather than the true meaning of Origen. He fails completely to understand the basic principles of his thought. His criticism, for instance, of the doctrine of eternal generation⁵¹ is vitiated by his inability to distinguish between creation as an action in time and as an "idea." Some of the points, however, which Methodius makes are admittedly well taken. Origen's speculations had at times endangered the Christian doctrine of man and tended to underestimate the value of the human body. Nevertheless, the narrow attitude toward Platonism had grave implications for the future history of Christianity and paved the way for the intolerance and fanaticism of later generations.

Unhappily, but little has been preserved of the defense of Origen by Pamphilus and Eusebius,⁵² which these attacks of Methodius called forth. From the one book extant in a Latin translation by Rufinus, it may be conjectured that the main body of the work consisted of citations from Origen, disprov-

⁵¹ Photius, Codex 235.

⁵² Migne, *P. G.*, 17, 542ff.

ing that he held the false doctrines with which he was charged and showing the misrepresentations which his words had suffered. His defenders labored the point that on the basic principles of the faith Origen could not be rightly assailed but that some of his more advanced speculations might be open to criticism.

This Apology brings us to the threshold of the Arian controversy when a new chapter in the history of Origenism opens. After Nicaea, it was largely a battle of quotations: new ideas were read back into the words of Origen and the heresies with which he was charged were far from his original position.⁵³ Thought had changed, and although the old forms and words remained, there was little attempt to preserve or to understand the meaning and spirit of the great champion of Christian Platonism and of enlightened faith.

⁵³ The difficulties in which later generations were involved through reading back new ideas into old texts are strangely evident when Origen can be defended as orthodox by Athanasius and accused of being the father of Arianism by Marcellus of Ancyra.