

Origen

Man of Adamant, Trial of the Church

A source-first historical biography

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1 A Father Quoted and a Name Anathematized

The Catholic Church still teaches prayer in words it learned from Origen. When the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains what it means to pray without ceasing, it cites his treatise *On Prayer* for the principle that prayer and good works must be united if the command is to be livable (CCC 2745, citing *De oratione* 12), and it returns to the same treatise to explain the usefulness of temptation in self-knowledge (CCC 2847, citing *De oratione* 29). When Pope Benedict XVI devoted two general audiences of his catecheses on the Fathers to Origen, on 25 April and 2 May 2007, he presented him as a figure crucial to the whole development of Christian thought, a teacher in whom life and doctrine were one, and the effective founder of the praying, theological reading of Scripture that monasticism would call *lectio divina*. Yet the same Church's eleventh anathema of the Fifth Ecumenical Council (Constantinople II, 553) lists "Origen" among the heretics whom every Christian must anathematize, between Eutyches and the generality of the condemned; and Origen has no feast, no cult, and no title of Saint, though he was tortured almost to death for the faith and, on the most common ancient account, died of it.

This biography asks how one man became both things. Three questions govern it. First, what can actually be established about the life—the martyr father, the boy catechist, the famous and disputed act of self-mutilation, the rupture with his bishop—when nearly everything rests on Eusebius of Caesarea, writing three generations later as Origen's professed defender? Second, what did Origen build—the Hexapla, the commentaries and homilies, *On First Principles*, *Against Celsus*—and in what condition has it reached us? Third, what exactly happened to his name after his death: what did the councils of the sixth century condemn, was it Origen himself or a later Origenism, and why have the last hundred years so largely reversed the verdict of the previous thirteen? On each question the sources disagree, and this study preserves the disagreement rather than harmonizing it.

The method is that of the whole series: earliest controlled evidence first. Origen's own surviving works are contemporary witness, but they are exegesis and apologetic, not memoir, and several of the most important survive only in Latin translations whose maker admits to smoothing them. Eusebius's sixth book is the biographical spine, and it is advocacy. Gregory Thaumaturgus's farewell panegyric is the one near-contemporary outside voice, and it is praise. Jerome, Photius, and the conciliar acts are later still, each with its own purpose. Each class of evidence is kept visible as the account proceeds, and the terminal appendix states the conventions, chronology, and limits that govern every page.

2 Alexandria: A Church Between Library and Tribunal

Origen's city was the intellectual capital of the Greek world. Roman Alexandria kept the institutions of the Ptolemies—the scholarly community descended from the Museum, the book trade, the grammarians and philosophers—and added the largest Jewish diaspora community of antiquity, which had produced in Philo a full-scale allegorical philosophy of the Septuagint a century and a half before Origen was born. Christianity there has no recorded founding; the later tradition of Mark's mission is not documented in the period itself. When the Alexandrian church emerges into datable history at the end of the second century, it already possesses the two features that would shape Origen's whole life: learned catechesis and intermittent, lethal persecution.

The learned catechesis is embodied in the figures Eusebius sets before Origen: Pantaenus, a converted Stoic teacher, and Clement, the author of the *Stromateis*, whom later tradition (Eusebius, and after him Photius) made successive heads of a "catechetical school" in which Origen was Clement's pupil and successor. How institutional this school really was before Origen—an endowed office, a private philosophical circle, or simply a succession of respected teachers—cannot now be determined, and modern scholarship treats Eusebius's tidy succession with caution. What is certain is that in Alexandria, uniquely, Christian instruction could look like a school of philosophy, with a curriculum, a literature, and pagan auditors.

Nearly everything biographical in this study rests on Eusebius of Caesarea, *Church History*, book 6, written about seventy to eighty years after Origen's death by an editor of his library, co-author of a six-book *Defense of Origen*, and open partisan. Eusebius worked from a collection of more than one hundred of Origen's letters and from the reports of "persons still living who were acquainted with him" (*Church History* 6.2.1)—real evidence, much of it now lost—but his narrative is a defense, not a neutral record. This study cites him constantly and trusts him selectively, marking at each point what depends on him alone.

The persecution came under Septimius Severus. In what Eusebius dates as “the tenth year of the reign of Severus”—202/203—with Laetus governing Egypt and Demetrius newly bishop of Alexandria, “the flame of persecution had been kindled greatly, and multitudes had gained the crown of martyrdom” (*Church History* 6.2.2–3). Among the pupils of the catechetical circle, martyrs would soon include Plutarch, the first convert of Origen’s own teaching (*Church History* 6.3.2, 6.4). Whether this local storm reflected a general imperial edict against conversion, as a later and unreliable source asserts, is disputed; for Alexandria the fact of executions is not. It was in this persecution that Origen’s story properly begins, with his father’s arrest.

3 A Martyr’s Son

Origen was born about 185—the date is inferred, not recorded—probably in Alexandria, to a Christian father whom Eusebius names Leonides and later tradition calls a teacher of letters. The father gave his son a double formation that explains almost everything that followed: “besides giving him the usual liberal education,” Leonides “drilled him in sacred studies, requiring him to learn and recite every day”; and the boy, “not satisfied with learning what was simple and obvious in the sacred words, sought for something more,” so that “he puzzled his father with inquiries for the true meaning of the inspired Scriptures.” The father “rebuked him seemingly to his face, telling him not to search beyond his age, or further than the manifest meaning”—but privately “rejoiced greatly and thanked God... that he had deemed him worthy to be the father of such a child,” and, in the one unforgettable domestic image the tradition preserves, would stand by the sleeping boy and “uncovered his breast as if the Divine Spirit were enshrined within it, and kissed it reverently” (*Church History* 6.2.7–11).

In the persecution of 202/203 Leonides was arrested. His son, “although yet a boy,” was seized by such “desire for martyrdom” that he tried to rush to the tribunal himself; his mother first begged him to pity her and then, when he would not be moved, “hid all his clothing, and thus compelled him to remain at home.” Unable to go, he wrote: he “sent to his father an encouraging letter on martyrdom, in which he exhorted him, saying, *Take heed not to change your mind on our account*” (*Church History* 6.2.3–6)—a sixteen-year-old urging his father to die rather than consider the seven children he would leave. Leonides “was beheaded while his son was still young” (*Church History* 6.1), and his property was confiscated, leaving Origen “with his mother and six younger brothers when he was not quite seventeen years old... in want of the necessities of life” (*Church History* 6.2.12–13).

The anecdotes are Eusebian, gathered from letters and surviving acquaintances a lifetime later, and they are told to edify. But the letter to Leonides was still quoted in the fourth century; Photius, reading the *Defense of Origen* five centuries later, found the same episode there, resting on Origen’s own testimony “in a letter” (*Bibliotheca*, codex 118); and Origen’s later writings—above all the *Exhortation to Martyrdom* he composed during the persecution of Maximin—breathe exactly this inherited absolutism about confession unto death. The martyr’s son is the best-attested layer of the biography.

His first rescue came from an awkward quarter. A wealthy Alexandrian woman took the destitute youth into her household—where her other protégé was “a famous heretic then in Alexandria,” an Antiochene named Paul, whose preaching drew crowds of both heretics and church members. Eusebius insists that Origen, “although a boy,” held “the rule of the Church” and “could never be induced to join with him in prayer” (*Church History* 6.2.13–14). The story serves Eusebius’s apologetic—his hero orthodox from childhood—but its very awkwardness (Origen fed by a heretic’s patroness) suggests a remembered fact rather than an invention. Origen then made himself independent in the family trade: he “devoted himself... to the study of literature” and earned his keep as a grammar teacher (*Church History* 6.2.15).

4 The Boy Catechist and His Martyr Pupils

With the persecution still burning, catechesis in Alexandria had collapsed: “there was no one at Alexandria to give instruction in the faith, as all were driven away by the threat of persecution.” Pagans began coming to the young grammar teacher “to hear the word of God”—the first, Plutarch, died a martyr; the second, his brother Heraclas, would one day be bishop of Alexandria (*Church History* 6.3.1–2). “He was in his eighteenth year when he took charge of the catechetical school” (*Church History* 6.3.3); Demetrius subsequently confirmed what danger had improvised, so that “the catechetical school had been entrusted to him alone by Demetrius, who presided over the church” (*Church History* 6.3.8).

The teaching was carried on at the edge of the tribunal. Origen attended the arrested “not only . . . while in bonds, and until their final condemnation,” but to the place of execution, where he “with great boldness saluted the martyrs with a kiss,” repeatedly escaping the mob himself; soldiers were posted around the house where he taught, and “he removed from house to house” as pupils kept coming (*Church History* 6.3.3–6, 6.4–5). Several of his catechumens—Plutarch, Serenus, Heraclides, Hero, a second Serenus, the catechumen Herais, and the celebrated Potamiaena—died in the persecution; Eusebius counts them as the school’s proper crown.

Having decided that “the teaching of grammatical science” was “inconsistent with training in divine subjects,” Origen gave up his school and his library together: “he disposed of whatever valuable books of ancient literature he possessed, being satisfied with receiving from the purchaser four oboli a day” (*Church History* 6.3.8–9). On that laborer’s pension he built the regime that made him famous: fasting, little sleep, and that on the floor; no second coat, no shoes “for a number of years”; years of abstention from wine; poverty pressed “to the very extreme,” to the point that friends were grieved and his health endangered (*Church History* 6.3.9–12). Eusebius’s summary became proverbial: “his manner of life was as his doctrine, and his doctrine as his life” (*Church History* 6.3.7). When the crowds grew beyond one man, he divided the school, keeping the advanced and entrusting beginners to Heraclas (*Church History* 6.15).

Two further formations belong to these Alexandrian years. He heard the lectures of Ammonius—so the pagan Porphyry, who despised the result, attests: Origen “having been a hearer of Ammonius, who had attained the greatest proficiency in philosophy of any in our day,” turned Greek learning to the service of “foreign fables,” “in his life conducting himself as a Christian and contrary to the laws, but in his opinions of material things and of the Deity being like a Greek” (Porphyry, *Against the Christians*, quoted in *Church History* 6.19.5–7). Whether this Ammonius is Ammonius Saccas, the shadowy teacher of Plotinus, is an old and unresolved question. And at some point “when Zephyrinus was bishop of Rome”—between about 198 and 217—“Adamantius, for this also was a name of Origen,” traveled to the capital, “desiring, as he himself somewhere says, to see the most ancient church of Rome,” and returned to his work (*Church History* 6.14.10–11). It is the first appearance in the record of the nickname—“man of adamant”—by which admirers would remember him.

5 The Report of Self-Mutilation

No episode of Origen’s life is better known, and none rests on a narrower evidentiary base, than the report that as a young man he castrated himself. The account is Eusebius’s, and it deserves to be read as he wrote it. While Origen was conducting catechetical instruction at Alexandria, “a deed was done by him which evidenced an immature and youthful mind, but at the same time gave the highest proof of faith and continence. For he took the words, *There are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake* [Matthew 19:12], in too literal and extreme a sense,” and, both “to fulfill the Saviour’s word” and to forestall slander—“for, although young, he met for the study of divine things with women as well as men”—“he carried out in action the word of the Saviour” (*Church History* 6.8.1). He hoped to keep it secret and could not. Bishop Demetrius, learning of it, at first “admired greatly the daring nature of the act,” exhorted him to courage, and “urged him the more to continue his work of catechetical instruction”; only years later, “seeing that he was prospering, and becoming great and distinguished among all men, the same Demetrius, overcome by human weakness, wrote of his deed as most foolish to the bishops throughout the world”—precisely when the bishops of Caesarea and Jerusalem had ordained Origen a presbyter (*Church History* 6.8.3–5).

The story therefore does double duty in Eusebius’s narrative: it certifies the young Origen’s terrifying seriousness, and it converts Demetrius’s later canonical case against him into hypocrisy—the bishop weaponizing a deed he had once admired, “having nothing else that he could say against him, save this deed of his boyhood” (*Church History* 6.8.5). A story so perfectly shaped to its teller’s polemical needs invites caution.

Modern scholarship is genuinely divided, and the division should be stated rather than resolved. Against historicity: the report is unparalleled in any earlier source; Epiphanius of Salamis, collecting anti-Origen material in the 370s, knew variant and inconsistent rumors and, as Mark Edwards notes in the current Stanford Encyclopedia survey, “was unable to verify the story” (*Panarion* 64.2); and Origen’s own mature exegesis of the very verse, in the fifteenth book of the *Commentary on Matthew* (15.1–5), treats the literal reading of “made themselves eunuchs” as a crude misunderstanding—an odd position, skeptics argue, for a man whose youth had enacted it, and the core of the case pressed by John A. McGuckin and others that the tale is hostile gossip Eusebius chose to neutralize by telling it sympathetically. For historicity: Eusebius is our best-informed ancient witness, worked from Origen’s letters and from people who knew him, and had every apologetic motive to omit an embarrassment he instead carefully

explains; self-castration was a real, if condemned, phenomenon in the early Church (the Council of Nicaea legislated against clergy who mutilated themselves); and a youthful act later repented is fully compatible with the mature exegesis—indeed the *Commentary* passage would then be Origen’s own verdict on his younger self.

The self-castration report has exactly one independent ancient source, Eusebius (*Church History* 6.8), writing about a century after the alleged act with strong motives bearing on how—though not obviously whether—he told it. Epiphanius’s inability to verify it and Origen’s own anti-literal exegesis of Matthew 19:12 ground serious modern doubt; the quality of Eusebius’s documentation grounds serious modern acceptance. This study reports the deed as an early, contested report, not as an established fact, and notes that the *Commentary on Matthew* passage was consulted here through the scholarly literature rather than inspected in a controlled translation. No medical or psychological conclusion is drawn either way.

What the report did in history is, by contrast, certain. From Demetrius’s circular letters onward, the mutilation—real or alleged—was part of every argument about Origen’s ordination; and from Epiphanius to the Enlightenment and beyond, it served by turns as proof of fanaticism, of heroic chastity, or of the dangers of allegory’s opposite, the letter taken flat. The irony was already visible to the ancients: the greatest enemy of crude literalism in the history of exegesis is remembered above all for one act of crude literalism he may never have committed.

6 Ambrose’s Workshop: Hexapla, Commentaries, First Principles

6.1 The patron and the production line

Around the second decade of the third century Origen acquired the two things every ancient scholar needed: a converted patron and a staff. Ambrose, a wealthy man whom Eusebius says Origen won from the Valentinian heresy, “employed innumerable incentives, not only exhorting him by word, but also furnishing abundant means”: “he dictated to more than seven amanuenses, who relieved each other at appointed times. And he employed no fewer copyists, besides girls who were skilled in elegant writing,” all at Ambrose’s expense (*Church History* 6.18.1, 6.23.1–2). Origen’s output is unintelligible without this apparatus: it was a publishing operation, and Ambrose kept it running, and kept its author pressed to produce, for the rest of both their lives. Jerome, cataloguing the works for Paula near the end of the fourth century, could compare only Varro, “because of the countless books which he wrote,” with “our Christian man of brass, or, rather, man of adamant—Origen, I mean” (Jerome, *Letter* 33.1–3); ancient counts of the writings ran into the thousands of titles once every homily, scholion, and letter was numbered.

6.2 The Hexapla

The foundation of everything was textual. “So earnest and assiduous was Origen’s research into the divine words that he learned the Hebrew language, and procured as his own the original Hebrew Scriptures which were in the hands of the Jews”—a step without precedent among Christian scholars. He then collected the rival Greek versions: “in addition to the well-known translations of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion, he discovered certain others which had been concealed from remote times”—one of them, Eusebius says, found “in a jar in Jericho in the time of Antoninus, the son of Severus”; in the Hexapla of the Psalms, “after the four prominent translations, he adds not only a fifth, but also a sixth and seventh.” “Having collected all of these, he divided them into sections, and placed them opposite each other, with the Hebrew text itself. He thus left us the copies of the so-called Hexapla”—the sixfold Bible, which later writers describe as Hebrew, Hebrew transliterated into Greek letters, Aquila, Symmachus, the Septuagint, and Theodotion—“He arranged also separately an edition of Aquila and Symmachus and Theodotion with the Septuagint, in the Tetrapla” (*Church History* 6.16; cf. Jerome, *On Illustrious Men* 54). The purpose was controlled comparison: to know, in argument with Jews and heretics, exactly what the Church’s Greek Bible shared with the Hebrew and where it differed. The gigantic original—by any estimate thousands of pages—was almost certainly never copied whole; it survived in the library of Caesarea, where Jerome consulted it, and perished with that library, leaving fragments, marginal collations, and the Syriac translation of one column.

6.3 Scripture's senses, and the school's method

On that textual base rose the exegesis, in three genres: scholia (brief notes), homilies (preached exposition—several hundred survive, almost all in Latin), and verse-by-verse commentaries, of which the greatest, on John and Matthew, ran to dozens of books. Its governing conviction was that Scripture is a single divine economy whose obvious sense opens onto deeper ones—as body opens onto soul and spirit—so that the interpreter's task is prayerful ascent, not mere philology, though never less than philology. The program is stated in his own advice to a departing student: “I wish to ask you to extract from the philosophy of the Greeks what may serve as a course of study or a preparation for Christianity,” as Israel took the gold of Egypt to build the sanctuary—“by spoiling the Egyptians,” the things of God's service are furnished; and then: “Do you then, my son, diligently apply yourself to the reading of the sacred Scriptures. . . knock at its locked door, and it will be opened to you” (*Letter to Gregory* 1–3). Philosophy is preparation; Scripture, read on one's knees, is the thing itself.

6.4 *On First Principles*

Before he left Alexandria Origen also wrote the most consequential and most disputed of his works: “He wrote also the books *De Principiis* before leaving Alexandria” (*Church History* 6.24.3)—*On First Principles*, the first Christian attempt at a systematic investigation of God, the rational creation, freedom, and Scripture. Its method is announced in the preface and is essential to any fair judgment of its author. The fixed points are what the Church teaches: “that alone is to be accepted as truth which differs in no respect from ecclesiastical and apostolic tradition,” the teaching “transmitted in orderly succession from the apostles, and remaining in the Churches to the present day.” But the apostles, Origen continues, deliberately left questions open—whether the soul is transmitted by generation or comes to the body from without “is not distinguished with sufficient clearness in the teaching of the Church”; of the devil and his angels “what they are, or how they exist, it has not explained with sufficient clearness”; “what existed before this world, or what will exist after it, has not become certainly known to the many” (*On First Principles*, preface 2–7). Into exactly those open spaces he sent his hypotheses: a first creation of rational spirits; their pre-mundane cooling and fall, diversely deep, into the diversity of the present order; the world as a just and remedial arrangement for their recovery; and the hope—argued from Paul—of an end like the beginning. “These subjects, indeed, are treated by us with great solicitude and caution, in the manner rather of an investigation and discussion, than in that of fixed and certain decision. . . We think, indeed, that the goodness of God, through His Christ, may recall all His creatures to one end, even His enemies being conquered and subdued” (*On First Principles* 1.6.1). “The end is always like the beginning” (1.6.2): the famous *apokatastasis*, the restoration of all things, is proposed there in precisely this exploratory register—which its author announced, and which much of posterity ignored in both directions, hardening the hypotheses into doctrines before condemning them.

On First Principles survives complete only in the Latin of Rufinus of Aquileia (398), who states his method openly: a predecessor translating Origen had “so smoothed and corrected them in his translation, that a Latin reader would meet with nothing which could appear discordant with our belief,” and Rufinus followed suit—“If, therefore, we have found anywhere in his writings, any statement opposed to that view, which elsewhere in his works he had himself piously laid down regarding the Trinity, we have either omitted it, as being corrupt, and not the composition of Origen, or we have brought it forward agreeably to the rule which we frequently find affirmed by himself” (Rufinus, preface to *On First Principles*). Substantial Greek survives only in excerpts, some transmitted by enemies. Every quotation of the work in this study is therefore a quotation of the Rufinian layer, and no reconstruction of Origen's exact Greek is claimed.

7 The Rupture with Alexandria

7.1 A layman in the pulpit

The quarrel that ended Origen's Alexandrian life began with a question of church order. When “a considerable war broke out in the city”—commonly identified with the disturbances under Caracalla about 215/216—Origen, “thinking that it would be unsafe for him to remain in Egypt,” withdrew to Palestine “and abode in Caesarea,” where “the bishops of the church in that country requested him to preach and expound the Scriptures publicly, although he had not yet been ordained as presbyter” (*Church History* 6.19.16). Demetrius protested that laymen do not preach before

bishops. Alexander of Jerusalem and Theoctistus of Caesarea answered him in a letter Eusebius preserves: the claim “that such a thing was never heard of before . . . is plainly untrue,” “for whenever persons able to instruct the brethren are found, they are exhorted by the holy bishops to preach to the people”—and they name precedents from three churches of Asia Minor (*Church History* 6.19.17–18). Demetrius summoned his catechist home “through members and deacons of the church,” and Origen went (*Church History* 6.19.19). The exchange displays the fault line a decade before the break: two Palestinian bishops who treated Origen as a charism to be used, and an Alexandrian bishop who treated him as a subordinate to be governed.

These same years brought imperial attention. While the court of Alexander Severus was at Antioch, the emperor’s mother Julia Mamaea, “a most pious woman, if there ever was one,” “sent for him with a military escort” and heard him expound “the glory of the Lord and of the excellence of the divine teaching” before he “hastened back to his accustomed work” (*Church History* 6.21.3–4).

7.2 Ordination, condemnation, departure

About 231 Origen was sent to Greece “on account of a pressing necessity in connection with ecclesiastical affairs, and went through Palestine, and was ordained as presbyter in Caesarea by the bishops of that country” (*Church History* 6.23.4). For Demetrius this was the breaking point: a foreign ordination of his own catechist, without his leave, and—as his letters now insisted—of a man allegedly self-mutilated and therefore, on one reading of church custom, irregular for orders. Eusebius, having told the mutilation story precisely to expose the bishop’s motives, declines to narrate the proceedings, saying only that “the matters that were agitated concerning him on this account, and the decisions on these matters by those who presided over the churches” would demand a separate treatise (*Church History* 6.23.4)—the treatise being, in effect, the lost second book of the *Defense of Origen*. Photius, who read that book in the ninth century, supplies the canonical detail: “A synod of bishops and some presbyters was summoned to condemn Origen,” which “decided that he must not remain in Alexandria or teach there, but that he should be allowed to retain his priesthood. But Demetrius and some Egyptian bishops. . . also deprived him of his sacred office” (*Bibliotheca*, codex 118) —two stages: banishment from Alexandria, then deposition from the presbyterate. Jerome, no friend of Origen’s doctrine by the time he wrote, adds the two facts that frame every later assessment: the sentence did not travel everywhere, and it was not about heresy. “He stands condemned by his bishop, Demetrius, only the bishops of Palestine, Arabia, Phenicia, and Achaia dissenting. Imperial Rome consents to his condemnation,” and this—Jerome insists—“not. . . because of the novelty or 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” (Jerome, *Letter* 33.5).

No acts, charges, or signatures of the Alexandrian proceedings survive. Everything descends from partisan summaries: Eusebius and Pamphilus defending Origen, Photius epitomizing them six centuries later, Jerome moralizing the affair as envy. Even the ordaining bishop’s name wobbles in transmission (Photius’s epitome names “Theotecnus” where Eusebius names Theoctistus). That Demetrius held proceedings, that Origen left Alexandria for good in 231/232, and that Palestine, Arabia, Phoenicia, and Achaia never accepted the sentence are secure; the legal theory, the votes, and the exact role of the mutilation charge are not. This study asserts no more.

“It was in the tenth year of the above-mentioned reign”—of Alexander Severus, 231/232—“that Origen removed from Alexandria to Caesarea, leaving the charge of the catechetical school in that city to Heraclas. Not long afterward Demetrius, bishop of the church of Alexandria, died, having held the office for forty-three full years, and Heraclas succeeded him” (*Church History* 6.26). The sentence outlived its author: Alexandria under Heraclas and his successor Dionysius—both Origen’s former pupils—never recalled the master. Origen was a presbyter of Caesarea for the rest of his life.

7.3 Caesarea: the second school

In Caesarea, under the protection of Theoctistus, Origen rebuilt everything: a school, a library—the collection Pamphilus would later curate and Eusebius inherit—and a preaching ministry, since the ex-catechist was now a presbyter expounding Scripture in the liturgy. The most vivid surviving picture of him anywhere comes from this school. Gregory—later called Thaumaturgus, “the wonder-worker,” apostle of Pontus—came to Caesarea about 233 intending to study Roman law, met Origen, and stayed five years; his farewell oration describes a pedagogy that began with logic, natural science, geometry, and astronomy, passed through the ethics of all the philosophical schools,

and ended in Scripture. “Like some spark lighting upon our inmost soul, love was kindled and burst into flame within us—a love at once to the Holy Word. . . and to this man, His friend and advocate” (*Oration and Panegyric Addressed to Origen* 6). “No subject of speech” was “forbidden”; “there was no matter of knowledge hidden or inaccessible to us, but we had it in our power to learn every kind of discourse, both foreign and Greek, both spiritual and political, both divine and human” (*Panegyric* 15). Leaving, Gregory said, felt like Adam’s exile: “I am like a second Adam and have begun to talk, outside of paradise” (*Panegyric* 16). Eusebius confirms the brothers Theodore (Gregory) and Athenodorus as the school’s most celebrated alumni, both afterwards bishops in Pontus (*Church History* 6.30). Panegyric is not a syllabus, and gratitude is not audit; but as evidence of what it felt like to be taught by Origen, nothing else in ancient Christian literature compares.

The Caesarean decades also made Origen the East’s consulting theologian. When Beryllus, bishop of Bostra in Arabia, taught that the Saviour had no distinct pre-existence, a synod called Origen in; he “went down at first for a conference with him to ascertain his real opinion,” then, “having persuaded him by argument, and convinced him by demonstration, he brought him back to the true doctrine” (*Church History* 6.33). When another Arabian party held that the soul dies with the body until the resurrection, Origen was summoned again, and again the error was renounced (*Church History* 6.37). The pattern is worth noticing against his later reputation: in his lifetime, Origen was the man synods called to *end* heresies, by persuasion rather than anathema.

8 The Old Preacher and *Against Celsus*

Persecution shadowed the Caesarean years as it had the Alexandrian. Under Maximin Thrax (235–238), who ordered “that only the rulers of the churches should be put to death, as responsible for the Gospel teaching,” Origen’s patron Ambrose and the Caesarean presbyter Protocletus were seized, and “thereupon Origen composed his work *On Martyrdom*,” the *Exhortation to Martyrdom*, dedicating it to them (*Church History* 6.28). The son of Leonides, now past fifty, wrote for his friends the treatise he had once, at sixteen, compressed into a single line to his father.

Age changed his practice in one respect Eusebius thought worth recording: “being, as they say, over sixty years old, and having gained great facility by his long practice,” Origen finally “permitted his public discourses to be taken down by stenographers, a thing which he had never before allowed” (*Church History* 6.36.1). Most of the surviving homilies—the largest body of Christian preaching before the fourth century—descend from this late permission. The preacher they show is far from the speculative metaphysician of controversy: a pastor working book by book through Scripture, impatient of long services and inattentive congregations, relentlessly moral and Christ-centered.

To the same last decade belongs the greatest ancient defense of Christianity. “He also at this time composed a work of eight books in answer to that entitled *True Discourse*, which had been written against us by Celsus the Epicurean” (*Church History* 6.36.2)—in fact a Platonist critic, writing about seventy years earlier, whose book survives only in the massive extracts Origen quotes in order to refute. Ambrose had sent the book and asked for the reply. Origen’s preface is a reluctant masterpiece: Jesus, “when false witness was borne against Him, remained silent,” and even now “continues silent before these things, and makes no audible answer, but places His defense in the lives of His genuine disciples, which are a pre-eminent testimony”; the book, its author warns, “has been composed not for those who are thorough believers, but for such as are either wholly unacquainted with the Christian faith, or for those who, as the apostle terms them, are weak in the faith” (*Against Celsus*, preface 1–6). What follows is the opposite of weak: point by point, from Celsus’s opening charge that Christians form “secret associations. . . in violation of the laws” (*Against Celsus* 1.1) to his mockery of a crucified God, Origen answers with a command of Greek philosophy, history, and text that no Christian writer had ever displayed and few since have matched. Eusebius adds that letters survived from Origen “to the Emperor Philip, and another to Severa his wife” (*Church History* 6.36.3): by the 240s the ruined catechist of Alexandria corresponded, at whatever distance of formality, with the imperial house.

The *Against Celsus* is also where Origen’s lifelong insistence on freedom does its most public work: against fate, against astral determinism, against Celsus’s aristocratic contempt for a faith of “uneducated” people, he argues that rational creatures are responsible, that providence teaches rather than compels, and that the gospel’s power to reform the simple is evidence for it, not against it. The book was finished within about two years of the empire-wide test of exactly those claims.

9 Decius: The Confessor's Death

In 249/250 the emperor Decius ordered, for the first time, an empire-wide act of sacrifice, enforced by certificate—a policy that struck at the whole Church rather than at individuals, and filled the prisons with those who refused. Origen's friend Alexander of Jerusalem, “after his honorable and illustrious confession at the tribunal of the governor,” as Eusebius records, “fell asleep in prison” (*Church History* 6.39.2–3). Origen himself, now in his mid-sixties, was arrested at last—the trial he had run toward at sixteen and written about all his life.

Eusebius's account, drawn from Origen's own subsequent letters, is specific: “how many and how great things came upon Origen in the persecution. . . and what and how many things he endured for the word of Christ, bonds and bodily tortures and torments under the iron collar and in the dungeon; and how for many days with his feet stretched four spaces in the stocks he bore patiently the threats of fire and whatever other things were inflicted by his enemies; and how his sufferings terminated, as his judge strove eagerly with all his might not to end his life; and what words he left after these things, full of comfort to those needing aid, a great many of his epistles show with truth and accuracy” (*Church History* 6.39.5). The detail that the judge deliberately kept him alive fits the Decian policy: the authorities wanted apostates, not martyrs, and a broken Origen would have been worth a hundred executions. He did not break. He survived his torturers' emperor: “When Decius had reigned not quite two years, he was slain with his children, and Gallus succeeded him. At this time Origen died, being sixty-nine years of age” (*Church History* 7.1)—that is, in 251–253, most commonly placed in 253 or 254 and connected, plausibly but without proof, with the effects of the torture.

Jerome adds the place: Origen “lived until the time of Gallus and Volusianus, that is, until his sixty-ninth year, and died at Tyre, in which city he also was buried” (*On Illustrious Men* 54). Why he was at Tyre no ancient source explains. And here the tradition itself splits, as Photius, who had read the *Defense of Origen*, candidly reports: “Pamphilus the martyr and many others. . . assert that he quitted this life by a glorious martyrdom at Caesarea during the cruel persecution of the Christians by the emperor Decius. Others say that he lived till the times of Gallus and Volusianus, and that he died at Tyre in the sixty-ninth year of his age and was buried there. This is the truer account, unless the letters supposed to have been written by him after the Decian persecution are spurious” (*Bibliotheca*, codex 118). The dilemma Photius states is real and has never been closed: either the post-Decian letters are genuine, and Origen died a confessor at Tyre about 253/254, or they are not, and Pamphilus's tradition of actual martyrdom at Caesarea in 250/251 stands. Nearly all ancient and modern authorities, following Eusebius, accept the letters and the Tyre account; this study does the same, while recording that the earliest tradition of all, in the mouth of Origen's most devoted ancient defender, made him simply a martyr.

No account of Origen's last days, death, or burial by an eyewitness survives; there is no controlled deathbed scene, no recorded final communion, and no contemporary description of a grave. Later ages supplied what was missing: medieval pilgrims were shown a tomb of Origen at Tyre—placed, in the era of the crusader cathedral, behind its high altar—and the tradition persisted for centuries; the church is ruined and no identifiable tomb survives. The tomb tradition is evidence of continued veneration at Tyre, not evidence of the third-century burial's location (see the tradition audit in the research records).

The manner of the end mattered immediately, and has mattered ever since, because it framed every argument about the man. He died in the peace of the Church—a tortured confessor, a presbyter (whatever Alexandria said) in good standing at Caesarea, mourned by the churches of Palestine and Phoenicia. Every controversy about him after 253 was conducted over the body, so to speak, of a confessor: the fact his defenders never tired of stating, and his condemners had to argue around.

10 The Long Posthumous Trial

10.1 Defenders and first accusers

For half a century after his death Origen's memory was largely a possession of his pupils. Dionysius of Alexandria, Gregory in Pontus, and above all the library and school of Caesarea carried the inheritance. There Pamphilus, a presbyter who “transcribed the greater part of the works of Origen with his own hand”—copies Jerome later saw and treasured (*On Illustrious Men* 75)—answered the first sustained attacks. Imprisoned in the persecution of 307–310, Pamphilus wrote, “in the company of Eusebius,” a *Defense of Origen* in five books, to which Eusebius added a sixth

after Pamphilus “having been deprived of life by the sword, was removed to God” (Photius, *Bibliotheca*, codex 118): a martyr defending a confessor. The book’s addressees were themselves confessors condemned to the mines. Only the first book survives, in a Latin translation by Rufinus; the whole was still readable in the ninth century, when Photius epitomized it. The other side had also found its voice: Methodius of Olympus attacked Origen’s doctrines of creation and the resurrection body around 300, and the pagan Porphyry’s taunt—a Christian in life, a Greek in thought—circulated in his book against the Christians.

Fourth-century theology then made Origen ubiquitous and suspect at once. Athanasius cited him for the eternity of the Son; the Cappadocians compiled an anthology of his exegesis, the *Philocalia*, to which we owe much of the surviving Greek of *On First Principles*; Didymus, Evagrius, and the monks of Nitria built ascetic theology on him. Precisely that monastic enthusiasm provoked the reaction.

10.2 The first Origenist controversy (c. 393–404)

Epiphanius of Salamis, cataloguing heresies in the 370s, had made Origen heresiarch of a long chapter (*Panarion* 64); in the 390s he carried the campaign to Palestine, demanding that John of Jerusalem and Jerome condemn Origen’s errors. Jerome—who had translated Origen’s homilies, written that “whereas in his other books Origen has surpassed all other writers, in commenting on the Song of Songs he has surpassed himself,” and mined the commentaries for his own—turned accuser. When Rufinus of Aquileia translated *On First Principles* in 398, remarking in his preface that he was following Jerome’s own earlier example (and method) of smoothing, war followed: Jerome produced a rival, deliberately sharp translation (now lost except in his letters’ excerpts), and the two old friends spent years in mutual apology and invective. Jerome’s defense of his career-long use of Origen fixed the durable Latin formula: “I have praised the commentator but not the theologian, the man of intellect but not the believer, the philosopher but not the apostle”; and his indictment fixed the durable list of errors—the pre-existence and fall of souls, the restoration in which, as he put it, “it will be the same for Gabriel as for the devil, for Paul as for Caiaphas, for virgins as for prostitutes” (Jerome, *Letter* 84.2, 84.7). In 400 a synod under Theophilus of Alexandria condemned Origenist teaching and expelled the Origenist monks; Pope Anastasius I associated Rome with the censure of the translated *Principles*. The quarrel’s collateral damage reached even Constantinople, where the deposed monks’ welcome by John Chrysostom became one count in his own destruction.

Everything condemned in the 390s was condemned out of a contested text. Rufinus openly normalized *On First Principles* toward orthodoxy; Jerome’s counter-translation existed to prove heterodoxy; hostile florilegia excerpted without context; and no complete Greek text was in independent circulation then or survives now. Which propositions stood in Origen’s autograph, in which wording, and with what degree of assertion, was already partly unknowable in 400. Any statement of the form “Origen taught X,” where X rests on *On First Principles* alone, inherits that uncertainty.

10.3 Justinian and the anathemas of 543

The second controversy was monastic and Palestinian. In the sixth century the “New Laura” party among the monks of the Judean desert professed a speculative system—pre-existent intellects, a Christ united to the one unfallen intellect, spherical resurrection bodies, the final abolition of difference—drawn from Evagrius as much as from Origen, and known to its enemies as Origenism. Complaints reached Justinian, who in 543 issued an edict-treatise against Origen with a set of anathemas which a standing synod at Constantinople under the patriarch Menas adopted, and which the five patriarchs, Pope Vigilius included, accepted. The ninth anathema condemns whoever says “that the punishment of demons and of impious men is only temporary, and will one day have an end, and that a restoration (*apokatastasis*) will take place of demons and of impious men”; and the series closes personally: “Anathema to Origen and to that Adamantius, who set forth these opinions together with his nefarious and execrable and wicked doctrine” (Anathemas of the Emperor Justinian Against Origen, 543). Whatever the Fifth Ecumenical Council did or did not do a decade later, this much is plain: in 543 the whole pentarchy, Rome included, subscribed a personal anathema against Origen by name. Its authority is that of an endorsed imperial edict and local synod—grave, but not that of an ecumenical council.

10.4 553: what the council did, and the open question

The Fifth Ecumenical Council, Constantinople II (5 May–2 June 553), was convoked for a different purpose entirely: the affair of the Three Chapters, Justinian's campaign against the Antiochene teachers Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret, and Ibas. Its acts, session by session, treat that question alone. Origen appears in the conciliar documents at two points, and the difference between them is the whole modern debate.

First: the eleventh of the council's fourteen capitula (anathemas) on the Three Chapters lists him among heretics long condemned: "If anyone does not anathematize Arius, Eunomius, Macedonius, Apollinaris, Nestorius, Eutyches and Origen, as well as their impious writings, as also all other heretics already condemned and anathematized by the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, and by the aforesaid four Holy Synods. . . : let him be anathema" (Constantinople II, anathema 11). The name stands in the received text and in the modern critical editions; an older scholarly argument that it was interpolated has been largely abandoned, though it is still occasionally revived. Origen is there condemned by name—but inside a list of the already-condemned, as a closed case cited, not a cause tried.

Second: a separate series of fifteen anathemas against Origen circulates with the conciliar documents, condemning "the fabulous pre-existence of souls" and "the monstrous restoration which follows from it" (anathema 1), the primordial unity of intellects, animated heavenly bodies, spherical resurrection bodies, a Christ crucified again for demons, and an end identical to the beginning (anathemas 2–15). These fifteen anathemas are not in the council's acts. Since Franz Diekamp's study of 1899, scholarship has generally concluded that they were adopted by the assembled bishops *before* the council's formal opening, at the emperor's direction, as a settlement of the Palestinian monastic crisis—so that, in the words of the standard English edition of the conciliar decrees, "these anathemas cannot be attributed to this council" (Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, introduction to Constantinople II). What they condemn, moreover, is recognizably the sixth-century Evagrian system, several of whose propositions (the pre-existent Christ-intellect, the sphere) correspond to nothing Origen is known to have written.

The resulting question—*was Origen himself condemned by an ecumenical council?*—has been argued for four centuries and is genuinely unresolved:

- The older Catholic critical position, classically stated in Ferdinand Prat's 1911 survey: "Were Origen and Origenism anathematized? Many learned writers believe so; an equal number deny that they were condemned; most modern authorities are either undecided or reply with reservations." On this view the council was convoked exclusively for the Three Chapters; the fifteen anathemas belong to a pre-conciliar session whose acts the popes who confirmed the council never mention; papal confirmation covered the Three Chapters acts alone; and "it is easy to understand how this extra-conciliary sentence was mistaken at a later period for a decree of the actual ecumenical council."
- The contrary position, argued in recent scholarship (notably by Richard Price in his edition of the acts), takes anathema 11 at its word: the name is genuine, the council knowingly ratified the existing condemnation of Origen, and the distinction between "the council proper" and the emperor's pre-conciliar process meant little to the sixth century, which promptly received the fifteen anathemas as conciliar. Later councils read 553 this way: the definition of Constantinople III (681) already describes "the Fifth holy Synod" as assembled "against Theodore of Mopsuestia, Origen, Didymus, and Evagrius" (Constantinople III, *Exposition of Faith*).

What is certain: Origen was anathematized by name by Justinian's synodically adopted edict of 543, with papal assent; his name stands among condemned heretics in anathema 11 of Constantinople II; and the fifteen anathemas of 553 target theses of sixth-century Origenism, were subscribed by the gathered bishops, and do not appear in the council's acts. What is disputed: whether anathema 11's list, or the pre-conciliar fifteen, constitute a personal ecumenical-conciliar condemnation of the third-century Origen and his actual teaching. This study affirms the certainties, reports both readings of the disputed point, and decides nothing the sources do not decide. No judgment is offered on Origen's eternal state, on the doctrinal correctness of the condemned propositions, or on the Church's authority to have issued the condemnations.

One further irony completes the trial. The condemnations of the sixth century destroyed most of Origen's Greek corpus—copying stopped, and "more may have perished after Origen was anathematized," as the current scholarly survey drily notes. The works that survived did so largely in the Latin of his defender Rufinus and his accuser Jerome—that is, in the versions produced by the first controversy—so that the man condemned partly for what could no longer be checked became permanently uncheckable because he was condemned.

11 Reception: Adamantius Among the Fathers

11.1 The ancient verdict

The shape of Origen's reception was fixed by the fifth century: the greatest of teachers, and the greatest of warnings. The nickname told the first half: "He is said to have been also called Adamantius," Photius reports, "because his arguments were linked together like chains of adamant" (*Bibliotheca*, codex 118)—Jerome's "man of adamant" who out-wrote Varro (*Letter* 33). Vincent of Lérins, in 434, told both halves in one chapter. Of the man: "From his school came forth doctors, priests, confessors, martyrs, without number"; "what Christian did not reverence him almost as a prophet; what philosopher as a master?" Of the temptation: who would not "rather adopt that saying, That he would rather be wrong with Origen, than be right with others"? And so, Vincent concludes, this Origen, "such and so great as he was," proved for the Church "not only a trial, but a great trial" (*Commonitorium* 17)—the same word he applied, among the Latins, to Tertullian. The parallel is exact and was drawn in antiquity: each language's supreme Christian intellect of the pre-Nicene age, and neither on the calendar.

Origen is not a saint. He has no feast in any Roman liturgical book, no recorded cult, no canonization, and—uniquely among figures of his rank in Christian memory—a conciliar anathema attached to his name, in whatever sense (see the preceding section). No commemoration of him, ancient or modern, Eastern or Western, was located in the searches conducted for this study; the medieval tomb tradition at Tyre attests fascination and respect, not liturgical veneration (bounded negative results; see the appendix). Yet he has never ceased to be treated as a Father in the working sense: the patristic collections print him, the manuals cite him, and the Church's own documents quote him—the *Catechism* twice cites *On Prayer* by name (CCC 2745, 2847). Citation, it should be stressed, is reception of particular formulations judged sound, not rehabilitation of a corpus and not a verdict on the man.

11.2 Survival by translation, recovery by accident

The sixth-century condemnations made Greek Origen a liability; copying withered. What survived did so by four routes: the Greek of *Against Celsus* and the *Philocalia* anthology, protected by their usefulness; the Latin homilies and commentaries of Rufinus and Jerome; quotation in friend and foe; and chance. Chance has been generous in the modern era. In 1941 wartime tunneling at Tura, near Cairo, uncovered papyri including previously unknown Greek works (among them the *Dialogue with Heraclides*, a transcript of Origen examining a bishop's theology before a synod—the consulting theologian caught, for once, verbatim). In 2012 Marina Molin Pradel identified in a twelfth-century Munich manuscript (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. graec. 314) twenty-nine anonymous Greek homilies on the Psalms as Origen's—the largest recovery of his Greek preaching ever made, confirmed by Lorenzo Perrone's critical edition (2015). The man burned by councils keeps returning by manuscript.

11.3 The modern rehabilitation

The twentieth century reversed the valence of the name. The patristic revival around the series *Sources chrétiennes*—founded in wartime Lyon by Henri de Lubac and Jean Daniélou, and stocked from the first with Origen's homilies—put the texts back in circulation. Daniélou's *Origène* (1948) and above all de Lubac's *Histoire et esprit* (1950) argued that Origen's "spiritual" exegesis was not arbitrary allegory but a coherent theology of Scripture's unity in Christ, and made him the fountainhead of the doctrine of the senses of Scripture that de Lubac traced through the Middle Ages. Hans Urs von Balthasar's anthology *Origenes: Geist und Feuer* (1938) had already called him the most important theologian between Paul and Augustine. Henri Crouzel's lifetime of studies, summed in his *Origène* (1985; English 1989), pressed the historical case made first by Pamphilus: that Origen proposed where later Origenism asserted, that he must be read as a man of the Church exploring open questions, and that the condemned system is not his. Current scholarship broadly accepts the distinction between Origen and sixth-century Origenism while continuing to debate how far the difference extends; the older English literature's "Origen the heretic" has largely given way to "Origen the first theologian."

The papal reception followed the scholars. Benedict XVI's two general audiences of 25 April and 2 May 2007 presented Origen as one of the decisive figures of Christian thought: a "true maestro" whose pupils could report that his life matched his doctrine; a man who fused theology with exegesis so that thinking about God and interpreting Scripture became one act, an "irreversible turning point"; the pioneer of the threefold reading of Scripture—letter, moral sense, spiritual mystery—and of the praying study of the Bible that became *lectio divina*; a teacher whose insistence that

knowledge of the Scriptures demands intimacy with Christ in prayer “concerns us all.” Benedict noted the ardent youth who longed to follow his father into martyrdom, the torture under Decius, and the death from its effects; he did not treat the anathemas, and a general audience neither could nor did reverse them. The juxtaposition is simply the present state of the question: a pope commending, to the whole Church, the spiritual doctrine of a man whose name stands in a conciliar list of heretics. The Church has not resolved that tension; neither does this study.

12 Conclusion: The Trial That Never Ends

Strip the story to what the evidence best supports, and it is still barely credible. A seventeen-year-old, orphaned by the executioner and stripped of his inheritance, taught himself into the chair of the most learned church in the world; sold his books to live on four obols a day; taught catechumens by day whom he then accompanied to their executions; learned Hebrew; built, with a patron’s fortune and a staff of stenographers, the first critical edition of the Bible and the first Christian library of systematic exegesis; wrote the first Christian systematic investigation of doctrine and the greatest ancient defense of the faith; formed bishops for half the East and talked straying ones back into the Church without a single anathema; was deposed by his own bishop on grounds his allies never accepted; was tortured with deliberate care under Decius and would not yield; and died, in the peace of the Church but on the wrong side of Alexandria’s sentence, at Tyre, at sixty-nine.

The rest of the story happened to his name, and it is the part this study has been most careful to state exactly. Origen was not tried in 553 and convicted of heresy in his person by the assembled ecumenical Church; nor is it true that he was never condemned. An imperial edict with synodal and papal assent anathematized him by name in 543; an ecumenical council a decade later listed him among heretics already condemned, while a set of anathemas drawn up around that council condemned, under his name, a system substantially built by men born three centuries after him, out of a book that survives mainly in a translation its translator admitted to correcting. Whether that amounts to “Origen anathematized by the Church” is a question on which learned and faithful writers have divided for four hundred years—“Many learned writers believe so; an equal number deny that they were condemned”—and the honest report is the divided one.

Perhaps the most exact epitaph is the one his own method supplies. Origen taught that the apostles had deliberately left questions open, and that the lover of wisdom honors God by exploring them “in the manner rather of an investigation and discussion, than in that of fixed and certain decision.” His gravest speculations were offered under that rule; posterity broke the rule in both directions, first hardening the hypotheses into a system, then condemning the system under his name. The Church kept what was certain—his prayer, his senses of Scripture, his defense of freedom, his witness under torture—and it says so in its Catechism; the questions he left open are, many of them, open still. The boy who wrote to his father, “Take heed not to change your mind on our account,” never changed his own: about the Scriptures, about freedom, about martyrdom, about the goodness of God. What the Church finally does with such a mind is, on the evidence of seventeen centuries, itself one of the questions left to be investigated.

A Scope, Chronology, and Evidence

A.1 Identity, names, and range

Subject: Origen of Alexandria, called Adamantius (“man of adamant”: Eusebius, *Church History* 6.14.10; Jerome, *Letter* 33; Photius, *Bibliotheca* 118). Whole-life range used in this study: born c. 185 (inferred from “not quite seventeen” at his father’s death in the persecution of 202/203 and “sixty-nine years of age” at death under Gallus; the two inferences do not perfectly cohere, allowing c. 184–186); died c. 253/254, probably at Tyre. Principal places: Alexandria (to 231/232); Caesarea Maritima in Palestine (from 231/232); with attested stays or visits at Rome, Arabia (including Bostra), Antioch, Athens and Greece, Cappadocia, and Tyre. No civil record, inscription, or contemporary archive attests any of it; the documentary base is literary.

A.2 Reader, question, and thesis boundary

Written for a serious general reader, student, or researcher who wants one coherent, evidence-controlled life. The governing questions are stated in the opening section. The organizing synthesis—that Origen’s achievement and his

condemnation must be held together, and that the question “was Origen anathematized?” admits only a divided answer—is historical, not ecclesiastical. This study does not adjudicate the self-mutilation report, the canonical validity of Demetrius’s proceedings or of the Caesarean ordination, the doctrinal merits of the condemned propositions, the authority of the 543 or 553 anathemas, or Origen’s sanctity or eternal state; it claims no theological or ecclesiastical review or approval.

A.3 Corpus and citation conventions

Origen’s works are cited by conventional English titles with the book, chapter, and section numbering of the Ante-Nicene Fathers translation, vol. 4 (Buffalo, 1885) for *On First Principles* (with Rufinus’s preface), *Against Celsus*, and the *Letter to Gregory*; quotations of Eusebius, Jerome’s *On Illustrious Men* and letters, and Vincent of Lérins follow the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, series 2; Gregory Thaumaturgus follows Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 6; Photius follows J. H. Freese’s 1920 translation; the conciliar texts follow H. Percival’s NPNF2 vol. 14 with N. Tanner’s edition for the editorial status of the fifteen anathemas. All quotations were checked against the online transcriptions identified in the References on 2026-07-24. *On First Principles* is quoted throughout in and as the Rufinian Latin layer (so marked in the text); no Greek retroversion is asserted. Works not independently inspected in this research (notably *Commentary on Matthew* 15 and Epiphanius, *Panarion* 64) are cited only through the named scholarship that reports them.

A.4 Evidence classes

Class	Meaning
A	Origen’s own surviving works and letters: contemporary, but exegesis, apologetic, and advocacy, not memoir; several survive only in announcedly corrected Latin translation, and each claim is limited by its transmission layer.
N	Near-contemporary external witness: Gregory Thaumaturgus’s farewell panegyric (praise by a grateful pupil); Porphyry’s hostile notice (preserved only by Eusebius).
E	Early received tradition: Eusebius (the biographical spine, written c. 70–80 years after Origen’s death by a partisan with documentary access), Pamphilus’s <i>Defense</i> (via Photius), Jerome, Rufinus, Vincent of Lérins.
L	Later tradition: Photius’s ninth-century epitomes, the Tyre tomb tradition, medieval and early-modern portraits.
M	Official ecclesial acts, limited to each act’s actual object: the 543 synodal anathemas, the 553 conciliar documents, Catechism citations, Benedict XVI’s 2007 audiences.
K	Named modern critical reconstruction (Diekamp, Prat, Crouzel, de Lubac, McGuckin, Edwards, Price, Perrone and others), used to its stated premises.
S	Source-grounded project synthesis, never attributed to a source.

A.5 Chronology

Dates below are claims with stated bases; regnal synchronisms are Eusebius’s unless noted. “Convention” marks customary dates this study does not assert as established.

Date	Event	Basis	Status
c. 184–186	Birth, probably at Alexandria	Inference from HE 6.2.12 with 6.2.2, and HE 7.1 (E)	Range only
202/203	Persecution at Alexandria; Leonides beheaded; property confiscated	“Tenth year of Severus” (HE 6.2.2; 6.1) (E)	Secure
c. 203	Origen, “in his eighteenth year,” takes over catechetical instruction; Demetrius confirms	HE 6.3 (E)	Secure as sequence; age from Eusebius

Date	Event	Basis	Status
c. 203–210s	Ascetic regime; pupil martyrs; sale of library; self-mutilation report placed here	HE 6.3–8 (E)	Report contested; see tradition audit
198–217	Visit to Rome under Zephyrinus	HE 6.14.10 (E)	Secure event; date range only
c. 215/216	Flight to Caesarea amid “a considerable war”; lay preaching; recall by Demetrius	HE 6.19.16–19 (E); Caracalla link (K)	Plausible
222–235	Audience with Julia Mamaea at Antioch	HE 6.21 (E); within Alexander Severus’s reign	Secure event; date range only
before 231/232	<i>On First Principles</i> , early commentaries, at Alexandria	HE 6.24 (E)	Secure as relative order
c. 231	Ordination at Caesarea en route to Greece	HE 6.23.4 (E)	Secure
231/232	Alexandrian proceedings (banishment; deposition); final removal to Caesarea; Heraclas succeeds; Demetrius dies	HE 6.26 (E); Photius, cod. 118 (E/L)	Proceedings secure; details unresolved
c. 233–238	Gregory (Thaumaturgus) studies at Caesarea; the <i>Panegyric</i> on his departure	Panegyric (N); HE 6.30 (E); five-year span is later report (K)	Plausible
235–238	Maximin’s persecution; <i>Exhortation to Martyrdom</i> for Ambrose and Protocletus	HE 6.28 (E)	Secure
c. 238–244	Beryllus of Bostra recalled from error; Arabian soul dispute settled	HE 6.33; 6.37 (E)	Secure as events; dates approximate
c. 246–249	Discourses taken by stenographers; <i>Against Celsus</i> ; letters to Philip and Severa	HE 6.36 (“over sixty”) (E)	Plausible–secure
250–251	Decian persecution: imprisonment, iron collar, stocks, threats of fire; judge avoids killing him	HE 6.39.5, from Origen’s letters (E/A)	Secure
c. 253/254	Death “being sixty-nine years of age,” under Gallus; at Tyre, and buried there	HE 7.1 (E); Jerome, <i>On Illustrious Men</i> 54 (E); Pamphilus’s martyrdom-at-Caesarea variant in Photius 118 (E/L)	Year approximate; place from Jerome; variant preserved
c. 307–310	Pamphilus and Eusebius, <i>Defense of Origen</i>	Photius 118 (L); Jerome 75 (E)	Secure
c. 374–377	Epiphanius’s dossier against Origen (<i>Panarion</i> 64)	Named scholarship (K)	Secure
393–404	First Origenist controversy: Rufinus’s translation (398), Jerome’s letters, Theophilus’s synod (400), Anastasius	Rufinus’s preface (E); Jerome, <i>Letter</i> 84 (E)	Secure
543	Justinian’s edict and anathemas adopted by the standing synod; patriarchal and papal assent	Percival’s text (M); Prat (K)	Secure
553	Constantinople II: anathema 11 lists Origen; fifteen anathemas subscribed around, not in, the council	Conciliar text (M); Tanner note, Diekamp via Prat, Price (K)	Facts secure; conciliar status disputed
1941, 2012	Tura papyri; Munich Psalm homilies identified	Named scholarship, BSB Cod. graec. 314 (K)	Secure
2007	Benedict XVI’s two catecheses on Origen	Vatican texts (M)	Secure

A.6 Method, limits, and negative results

Earliest controlled evidence governs; witnesses separated by centuries are never silently merged; where they conflict (the mutilation report, the death accounts, the status of the 553 anathemas), the conflict is stated and left open. Geographic and linguistic limits: the study reads English translations of Greek and Latin sources; no manuscript, papyrological, epigraphic, or archaeological research was undertaken; *On First Principles* is treated throughout as Rufinian Latin. Bounded negative results, from searches conducted 2026-07-24: no feast, cult, canonization, or

liturgical commemoration of Origen was located in any period or rite; no ancient account of his death by an eyewitness, and no surviving identifiable tomb, was located; no acts of the Alexandrian proceedings were located (none are extant). These are bounded, correctable search results, not proofs of absence. Mutable online sources (Vatican website, New Advent, CCEL, tertullian.org, papalencyclicals.net, the Stanford Encyclopedia) were used as checked on 2026-07-24.

A.7 Rights and review state

Project prose is original; quotations of ancient authors follow the public-domain Ante-Nicene Fathers (1885–1886) and Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers translations, Freese’s 1920 Photius, and Percival’s 1900 conciliar volume, as identified in the References; the 1911 Catholic Encyclopedia is public domain. Copyrighted modern texts (Tanner’s conciliar edition, the Stanford Encyclopedia entry, modern scholarship) are paraphrased or quoted only in brief attributed snippets within ordinary scholarly quotation; Vatican texts (Catechism, papal audiences) are paraphrased with citation. This publication has received internal editorial checking only: no independent specialist, theological, or ecclesiastical review, and no rights opinion, is claimed.

B References

All web sources were accessed and checked on 2026-07-24. Ancient-work citations in the text use conventional English titles with the numbering of the translations listed here.

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