

Origen

By E.J. Waggoner

Fathers of the Catholic Church (1888), chapter 13

This brief analysis of Origen helps to show how quickly the early church apostatized from the foundation of the plain teachings of the Bible, and why in the Reformation, God led His people back to the pure streams of His holy word.

There is no one of the Christian Fathers who is more highly commended than the subject of this sketch; and it can be said with truth that there is none other whose writings have had so blighting an influence.

This is not because he was a vicious man, for there is little doubt but that, although misguided and fanatical in many things, and tinctured with heathen speculative philosophy, he was personally an upright man. But he was the father of spiritualistic exposition of Scripture, and by this, and also by teaching the Platonic philosophy to his many followers, he did incalculable injury to the church.

Origen was born at Alexandria about 185 or 186 A.D. On this point there is quite general agreement. He was an indefatigable worker, and produced more books than any other of the so-called Fathers:

Origen was a most prolific author; and, if all his works were still extant, they would be far more voluminous than those of any other of the Fathers. But most of his writings have been lost; and, in not a few instances, those which remain have reached us either in a very mutilated form, or in a garbled Latin version. (Killen, *Ancient Church*, period 2, sec. 2, chap. 1, paragraph 22)

It would have been a blessing to the world if they had all been lost, or, better still, if they had never been written, for there is not a heresy that has ever existed in the church, nor a false form of religion, that was not taught by this metaphysical dreamer:

By proclaiming the reconciliation of science with the Christian faith, of the highest culture with the gospel, Origen did more than any other man to win the Old World to the Christian religion. (Professor Harnack, *Encyclopedia Britannica*)

But this was fatal to the purity of the church. The “science” which he attempted to reconcile with the Christian religion, was heathen philosophy. Of course he could show a harmony only by misrepresenting and perverting the Christian religion, bringing it nearly down to a level with that heathen philosophy. This made it easy for great numbers of the heathen to come into the church, since they did not have to give up much, nor make much change in their belief. And this in turn contributed immensely to the corruption of the church.

And so instead of winning the Old World to the Christian religion, he lowered the Christian religion to the standard of the Old World. This conclusion is warranted by the following:

Gradually the friends of philosophy and literature acquired the ascendancy. To this issue Origen contributed very much; for having early imbibed the principles of the new Platonism, he inauspiciously applied them to theology, and earnestly recommended them to the numerous youth who attended on his instructions. And the greater the influence of this man, which quickly spread over the whole Christian world, the more readily was his method of explaining the sacred doctrines propagated. (Mosheim, *Ecclesiastical History*, book 1, cent. 3, part 2, chap. 1, sec. 5)

Following is the estimate placed upon Origen’s teaching:

He enthroned a metaphysical theology above the supernatural revelation, and then took the role of a qualified interpreter of that revelation; thus, by his wild style of allegorizing, muddling the clearest teachings, and leaving the reader in utter bewilderment. (Rev. Wm. Hogue, D. D., *The Watchman* (Boston), December 16, 1886)

The reader shall have a chance to verify every word of this. In order, however, to obtain a better idea of the baleful effect

of the teaching of Origen, it is necessary to know something of “the New Platonism” to which he was so ardently devoted.

The following is probably as concise an account of this mixture of heathen philosophy and Christian theology as we can find:

Near the close of this century [the second], a new philosophical sect suddenly started up, which in a short time prevailed over a large part of the Roman Empire, and not only nearly swallowed up the other sects, but likewise did immense injury to Christianity. Egypt was its birthplace, and particularly Alexandria, which for a long time had been the seat of literature and every science. Its followers chose to be called Platonics. Yet they did not follow Plato implicitly, but collected from all systems whatever seemed to coincide with their own views. And the ground of their preference for the name of Platonics, was, that they conceived Plato had explained more correctly than all others, that most important branch of philosophy which treats of God and supersensible things.

That controversial spirit in philosophy, which obliges everyone to swear allegiance to the dogmas of his master, was disapproved by the more wise. Hence among the lovers of truth, and the men of moderation, a new class of philosophers had grown up in Egypt, who avoided altercation and a sectarian spirit, and who professed simply to follow truth, gathering up whatever was accordant with it in all the philosophic schools. They assumed therefore the name of Eclectics. But notwithstanding these philosophers were really the partisans of no sect, yet it appears from a variety of testimonies, that they much preferred Plato, and embraced most of his dogmas concerning God, the human soul, and the universe.

This philosophy was adopted by such of the learned at Alexandria, as wished to be accounted Christians, and yet to retain the name, the garb, and the rank of philosophers. In particular, all those who in this century presided in the schools of the Christians at Alexandria (Athenagoras, Pantænus, and Clemens Alexandrinus), are said to have ap-

proved of it. These men were persuaded that true philosophy, the great and most salutary gift of God, lay in scattered fragments among all the sects of philosophers; and therefore that it was the duty of every wise man, and especially of a Christian teacher, to collect those fragments from all quarters, and to use them for the defense of religion and the confutation of impiety. Yet this selection of opinions did not prevent their regarding Plato as wiser than all others, and as having advanced sentiments concerning God, the soul, and supersensible things, more accordant with the principles of Christianity than any other.

This eclectic mode of philosophizing was changed near the close of the century, when Ammonius Saccas with great applause, opened a school at Alexandria, and laid the foundation of that sect which is called the New Platonic. This man was born and educated a Christian, and perhaps made pretensions to Christianity all his life. Being possessed of great fecundity of genius as well as eloquence, he undertook to bring all systems of philosophy and religion into harmony; or, in other words, to teach a philosophy, by which all philosophers, and the men of all religions, the Christian not excepted, might unite together and have fellowship. And here especially, lies the difference between this new sect, and the eclectic philosophy which had before flourished in Egypt.

For the eclectics held that there was a mixture of good and bad, true and false, in all the systems; and therefore they selected out of all, what appeared to them consonant with reason, and rejected the rest. But Ammonius held that all sects professed one and the same system of truth, with only some difference in the mode of stating it, and some minute difference in their conceptions; so that by means of suitable explanations, they might with little difficulty be brought into one body.

The grand object of Ammonius, to bring all sects and religions into harmony, required him to do much violence to the sentiments and opinions of all parties, philosophers, priests, and Christians; and particularly, by means of allegorical interpretations, to remove very many impediments out of his way. The manner in which he prosecuted his object, appears in the writings of his disciples and adherents; which have

come down to us in great abundance. To make the arduous work more easy, he assumed that philosophy was first produced and nurtured among the people of the East; that it was inculcated among the Egyptians by Hermes, and thence passed to the Greeks; that it was a little obscured and deformed by the disputatious Greeks; but still by Plato, the best interpreter of the principles of Hermes and of the ancient oriental sages, it was preserved for the most part entire and unsullied; that the religions received by the various nations of the world were not inconsistent with this most ancient philosophy.

To these assumptions he added the common doctrines of the Egyptians (among whom he was born and educated), concerning the universe and the deity, as constituting one great whole (Pantheism); concerning the eternity of the world, the nature of the soul, providence, the government of this world by demons, and other received doctrines, all of which he considered as true and not to be called in question. . . . In the next place, with these Egyptian notions he united the philosophy of Plato, which he accomplished with little difficulty, by distorting some of the principles of Plato, and by putting a false construction on his language. Finally, the dogmas of the other sects he construed, as far as was possible, by means of art, ingenuity, and the aid of allegories, into apparent coincidence with these Egyptian and Platonic principles.

To this Egyptiaco-Platonic philosophy, the ingenious and fanatical man joined a system of moral discipline apparently of high sanctity and austerity. He permitted the common people, indeed, to live according to the laws of their country and the dictates of nature; but he directed the wise to elevate, by contemplation, their souls, which were the offspring of God, above all earthly things;...so that they might in the present life, attain to communion with the supreme Being, and might ascend after death, active and unencumbered, to the universal parent, and be forever united with him.

And, being born and educated among Christians, Ammonius was accustomed to give elegance and dignity to these precepts by using forms of expression borrowed from the sacred Scriptures; and hence these forms of expression occur abundantly in the writings of his followers. To this austere

discipline, he superadded the art of so purging and improving the imaginative faculty, as to make it capable of seeing the demons, and of performing many wonderful things by their assistance. His followers called this art Theurgy.

That the prevailing religions, and particularly the Christian, might not appear irreconcilable with his system, Ammonius first turned the whole history of the pagan gods into allegory, and maintained that those whom the vulgar and the priest honored with the title of gods, were only the ministers of God, to whom some homage might and should be paid, yet such as would not derogate from the superior homage due to the supreme God; and in the next place he admitted that Christ was an extraordinary man, the friend of God, and an admirable Theurge. He denied that Christ aimed wholly to suppress the worship of the demons, those ministers of divine providence; that, on the contrary, he only sought to wipe away the stains, contracted by the ancient religions; and that his disciples had corrupted and vitiated the system of their master. (Mosheim, *Ecclesiastical History*, book 1, cent. 2, part 2, chap. 1, sec. 4-11)

This medley formed the basis of Origen's theology. It will be seen at once that Neo-Platonism was nothing else but Spiritualism in its broadest sense. It could not be anything else, since the ancient heathen philosophers were all Spiritualists, if anything.

It is a fact that the principles of ancient heathenism and modern Spiritualism are identical. The priest and priestesses of the ancient oracles were Spiritualist mediums, clairvoyants they would be called nowadays. The Neo-Platonism was refined Spiritualism, bearing the same relation to heathen Spiritualism that the so-called "Christian Spiritualism" of today does to the gross utterances of Spiritualists a few years ago.

To Origen belongs the unsavory honor of bringing this Spiritualism into the church. When the "true inwardness" of Neo-Platonism is fully realized, and it is understood that it constituted Origen's religion, the reader will wonder how Origen could ever be regarded as a Christian. It was only because

he lived in a time when almost anything was allowed to pass as Christianity, if it would only “draw” the masses.

Following his account of Neo-Platonism, Mosheim says:

This new species of philosophy, imprudently adopted by Origen and other Christians, did immense harm to Christianity. For it led the teachers of it to involve in philosophic obscurity many parts of our religion, which were in themselves plain and easy to be understood; and to add to the precepts of the Saviour not a few things, of which not a word can be found in the holy Scriptures.

It also produced that gloomy set of men called mystics; whose system, if divested of its Platonic notions respecting the origin and nature of the soul, will be a lifeless and senseless corpse.

It laid a foundation, too, for that indolent mode of life, which was afterwards adopted by many, and particularly by numerous tribes of monks; and it recommended to Christians various foolish and useless rites, suited only to nourish superstition, no small part of which we see religiously observed by many even to the present day.

And finally, it alienated the minds of many in the following centuries, from Christianity itself, and produced a heterogeneous species of religion, consisting of Christian and Platonic principles combined. (Mosheim, *Ecclesiastical History*, book 1, cent. 2, part 2, chap. 1, sec. 12)

How those who know these things can ever quote the writings of Origen with approval, or can regard his advocacy even of a good cause as any help to it, is one of the mysteries of human nature which we shall not attempt to explain.

The following testimony is not needed to show Origen’s heathen proclivities, but the reader will find that it will throw much light on the condition of the church in the second and third centuries, and will help to show how the great apostasy was brought about:

The spirit of philosophizing, however, so far from experiencing any decline or abatement, continued to increase and

diffuse itself more and more, particularly towards the close of this century, when a new sect sprung up at Alexandria under the title of "The Modern Platonists." The founder of the sect was Ammonius Saccas, a man of a subtle, penetrating genius, but prone to deviate, in many things, from right reason, and too much inclined to indulge in ridiculous flights of imagination.

In addition to a multitude of others who flocked to this man for instruction, his lectures were constantly attended by a great number of Christians, who were inflamed with an eager desire after knowledge, and of whom two, namely, Origen and Heraclas, became afterwards very distinguished characters, the former succeeding to the presidency of the school, the latter to that of the church of Alexandria.

By the Christian disciples of Ammonius, and more particularly by Origen, who in the succeeding century attained to a degree of eminence scarcely credible, the doctrines which they had derived from their master were sedulously instilled into the minds of the youth with whose education they were intrusted, and by the efforts of these again, who were subsequently, for the most part, called to the ministry, the love of philosophy became pretty generally diffused throughout a considerable portion of the church. (Mosheim, *Ecclesiastical Commentaries*, cent. 2, sec. 27)

In the next section, Mosheim says of this new philosophy, of which Origen was so enthusiastic a disciple:

This great design of bringing about a union of all sects and religions, the offspring of a mind certainly not destitute of genius, but distracted by fanaticism, and scarcely at all under the dominion of reason, required, in order to its execution, not only that the most strained and unprincipled interpretations should be given to ancient sentiments, maxims, documents, and narratives, but also that the assistance of frauds and fallacies should be called in; hence we find the works which the disciples of Ammonius left behind them abounding in things of this kind; so much so indeed, that it is impossible for them ever to be viewed in any other light than as deplorable monuments of wisdom run mad.

In the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Professor Harnack says of Plotinus, a prominent teacher of the new philosophy:

A rigid monotheism appeared to Plotinus a miserable conception. He gave a meaning to the myths of the popular religions, and he had something to say even for magic, soothsaying, and prayer. In support of image-worship he advanced arguments which were afterwards adopted by the Christian image worshippers.

Archdeacon Farrar, who says of Origen that “it would be impossible to speak in any terms but those of the highest admiration and respect” of him, gives the following testimony concerning him:

In many passages he speaks disparagingly of the literal truth of the Scripture narratives. This constitutes his retrogressive and disastrous originality. He constantly uses allegory where his own principles give him no excuse for doing so. He had so completely deadened in his own mind the feeling of historic truth, that he allegorizes not only such narratives as that of the creation, but even the law, the histories, and the prophets. The acceptance of the simple narrative becomes too commonplace for him; he compares it to the transgression of eating raw the Paschal lamb. (*History of Interpretation*, pp. 197, 198)

And on page 201 of the same book he says that the foundations of his exegetic system are based upon the sand. This is literally true, in the light of our Saviour’s words in *Matthew* 7:26,27. Therefore we say of Origen that if the appellation “Father” be given him, it must be interpreted to mean that he was the father of false doctrine in the Christian church.

Speaking of the rise of monkery, Schaff shows to some extent how Catholicism is indebted to Origen for that abomination. He says:

The Alexandrian Fathers first furnished a theoretical basis for this asceticism in the distinction, suggested even by the Pastor Hermae, of a lower and a higher morality; a distinction, which, like that introduced at the same period by Ter-

tullian, of mortal and venial sins, gave rise to many practical errors, and favored both moral laxity and ascetic extravagance...Origen goes still further, and propounds quite distinctly the Catholic doctrine of works of supererogation, works not enjoined indeed in the gospel, yet recommended, which were supposed to establish a peculiar merit and secure a higher degree of blessedness. (*History of Church*, period 2, sec. 94)

In support of the statement that Origen was the father of false and pernicious doctrines in the church, we quote again from Mosheim:

The same Origen, unquestionably, stands at the head of the interpreters of the Bible in this century. But with pain it must be added, he was first among those who have found in the Scriptures a secure retreat for all errors and idle fancies.

As this most ingenious man could see no feasible method of vindicating all that is said in the Scriptures, against the cavils of the heretics and the enemies of Christianity, provided he interpreted the language of the Bible literally, he concluded that he must expound the sacred volume in the way in which the Platonists were accustomed to explain the history of their gods.

He therefore taught, that the words, in many parts of the Bible, convey no meaning at all; and in some places, where he acknowledged there was some meaning in the words, he maintained that under the things there expressed, there was contained a hidden and concealed sense, which was much to be preferred to the literal meaning of the words. And this hidden sense it is that he searches after in his commentaries, ingeniously indeed, but perversely, and generally to the entire neglect and contempt of the literal meaning. (Mosheim, *Ecclesiastical History*, book 1, cent. 3, part 2, chap. 3, sec. 5)

In note 7 to the above paragraph Mosheim says:

Origen perversely turned a large part of biblical history into moral fables, and many of the laws into allegories...But we must not forget his attachment to that system of philosophy which he embraced. This philosophy could not be reconciled with the Scriptures, except by a resort to allegories; and

therefore the Scriptures must be interpreted allegorically, that they might not contradict his philosophy.

Let the reader stop a while to consider the last two paragraphs, and then let him decide whether or not Origen is entitled in the slightest degree to the appellation, "Christian Father." He...

"found in the Scriptures a sure retreat for all error and idle fancies."

He...

"perversely turned a large part of the biblical history into moral fables,"

...and knew no way of combating heresy except by denying the Scriptures, and thus introducing worse heresies. And...

"he stands at the head of the interpreters"

...in the third century. The reader can easily judge from this of the standard of interpretation in those days, and of the state of the church which "enjoyed" such labors.

Bingham mentions the following false doctrines which Origen transmitted to the Catholic Church:

Origen reckons up seven ways, whereby Christians may obtain remission of sins, whereof five are apparently private actions of private men.

The first is baptism, whereby men are baptized for the remission of sins.

The second is the suffering of martyrdom.

The third is alms-deeds; for our Saviour says, Give alms, and behold all things are clean unto you.

The fourth is, forgiving the sins of our brethren; for our Lord and Saviour says, "If ye from your heart forgive your brethren their trespasses, your Father will forgive your trespasses."

The fifth is, when one converts a sinner from the error of his ways.

The sixth is, the abundance of charity, as our Lord says,

“Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, because she loved much.”

The seventh is, the hard and laborious way of penance, when a man waters his couch with his tears, and his tears are his bread day and night, and he is not ashamed to declare his sin to the priest of the Lord, and seek a cure. (Bingham, *Antiquities*, book 19, chap. 3)

It passes all comprehension how, in the face of all this testimony, which is perfectly familiar to every scholar, Professor Worman can say, as he does in *McClintock and Strong's Encyclopedia*,

Origen may well be pronounced one of the ablest and worthiest of the church Fathers—indeed, one of the greatest moral prodigies of the human race.

It is difficult to retain any respect whatever for the judgment of a man who can indulge in such gush over Origen. And the matter is so much the worse because, in the very same article in which the above language occurs, Professor Worman brings the identical charges against Origen, which are made in the quotations from Mosheim, Farrar, and Schaff.

Such lavish and unmerited praise is an indication that Origen's influence is by no means dead, and that the reviving interest in his writings, and in patristic literature in general, augurs ill for the future condition of the Christian church.

Origen's writings were largely instrumental in bringing about the great apostasy which resulted in the establishment of the papacy; and if they are taken as the guide of the theologian today, they must necessarily result in another similar apostasy.

The Reformation was a protest against the speculative dogmas of the schoolmen, and a movement toward relying on the Bible as the only guide in matters of faith and practice; and just in proportion as the Fathers are esteemed, the Bible will be neglected, and the work of the Reformation undone.

Like all the so-called Christian Fathers, Origen was so intensely “liberal” that he could without scruple advocate exactly opposite views of the same subject; but this characteristic is not so apparent in his writings as they now exist, for Rufinus, the friend of Origen, states in his prologue to “Origen de Principiis” that he consented to translate the work only on the condition that he should,

Follow as far as possible the rule observed by my predecessors, and especially by that distinguished man whom I have mentioned above, who, after translating into Latin more than seventy of those treatises of Origen which are styled Homilies, and a considerable number also of his writings on the apostles, in which a good many stumbling-blocks are found in the original Greek, so smoothed and corrected them in his translation, that a Latin reader would meet with nothing which could appear discordant with our belief.

His example, therefore, we follow, to the best of our ability; if not with equal power of eloquence, yet at least with the same strictness of rule, taking care not to reproduce those expressions occurring in the works of Origen which are inconsistent with and opposed to each other.

The cause of these variations we have explained more freely in the “Apologeticus,” which Pamphilus wrote in defense of the works of Origen, where we added a brief tract, in which we showed, I think, by unmistakable proofs, that his books had been corrupted in numerous places by heretics and malevolent persons....For he there discusses those subjects with respect to which philosophers, after spending all their lives upon them, have been unable to discover anything.

The last sentence is very naively expressed. The reader of Origen’s works will be likely to conclude that Origen has not met with better success than the philosophers did, in discussing things upon which no one has been able to discover anything.

With one more testimony concerning Origen’s heresies, we will proceed to a closer examination of them:

This learned writer cannot be trusted as an interpreter of the inspired oracles. Like the Jewish cabalists, of whom Philo, whose works he had diligently studied, is a remarkable specimen, he neglects the literal sense of the word, and betakes himself to mystical expositions. In this way the divine record may be made to support any crotchet which happens to please the fancy of the commentator. Origen may, in fact, be regarded as the father of Christian mysticism; and, in after ages, to a certain class of visionaries, especially amongst the monks, his writings long continued to present peculiar attractions.

On doctrinal points his statements are not always consistent, so that it is extremely difficult to form anything like a correct idea of his theological sentiments....In his attempts to reconcile the gospel and his philosophy, he miserably compromised some of the most important truths of Scripture.

The fall of man seems to be not infrequently repudiated in his religious system; and yet, occasionally, it is distinctly recognized. He maintained the pre-existence of human souls; he held that the stars are animated beings; he taught that all men shall ultimately attain happiness; and he believed that the devils themselves shall eventually be saved. (Killen, *Ancient Church*, period 2, sec. 2, chap. 1, paragraphs 23, 24)

We should not expect these statement to be believed if they were made by prejudiced persons; but they all come from those who often quote the Fathers in support of some theory or custom. But that nothing has been exaggerated concerning Origen, will now appear, as he is permitted to testify for himself.

The first thing to claim our attention shall be Origen's views of the Sabbath, which are, in brief, as follows:

There are countless multitudes of believers who, although unable to unfold methodically and clearly the results of their spiritual understanding, are nevertheless most firmly persuaded that neither ought circumcision to be understood literally, nor the rest of the Sabbath, nor the pouring out of the blood of an animal, nor that answers were given by God to Moses on these points. (*De Principiis*, book 2, chap. 7)

This shows that Origen was so far from teaching the observance of Sunday, that he did not believe in any literal Sabbath. This was in keeping with his method of allegorizing everything.

Writing to the heathen philosopher Celsus, concerning the pagan festivals, Origen says:

If it be objected to us on this subject that we ourselves are accustomed to observe certain days, as for example the Lord's day, the Preparation, the Passover, or Pentecost, I have to answer, that to the perfect Christian, who is ever in his thoughts, words, and deeds serving his natural Lord, God the Word, all his days are the Lord's, and he is always keeping the Lord's day.

He also who is unceasingly preparing himself for the true life, and abstaining from the pleasures of this life which lead astray so many,—who is not indulging the lust of the flesh, but “keeping under his body, and bringing it into subjection,”—such a one is always keeping Preparation day. (*Against Celsus*, book 8, chap. 22)

This passage is generally quoted as evidence in favor of Sunday-keeping. It is scarcely necessary at this point to remind the reader that it is of very little consequence to us what the church did in the third century, since it was then pretty well paganized.

But there is nothing in favor of Sunday in the above extract. He speaks of the Lord's day without telling whether he means the first or seventh day; but from the connection it is quite evident that he means the seventh day of the week, the true Lord's day.

The sixth day of the week was universally known as “the preparation,” and moreover the term occurs in connection with Passover and Pentecost. But whether he has reference to the seventh day or the first, he makes it plain that he did not believe in a literal observance of it. So his testimony concerning Sunday is a negative quantity.

In this connection it will be well to hear what he has to say of the Scriptures as a whole. In his discourse about the fundamental principles he says:

Nor even do the law and the commandments wholly convey what is agreeable to reason. For who that has understanding will suppose that the first, and second, and third day, and the evening and the morning, existed without a sun, and moon, and stars? and the first day was, as it were, also without a sky? And who is so foolish as to suppose that God, after the manner of a husbandman, planted a paradise in Eden, towards the east, and placed in it a tree of life, visible and palpable, so that one tasting of the fruit by the bodily teeth obtained life? and again, that one was a partaker of good and evil by masticating what was taken from the tree?

And if God is said to walk in the paradise in the evening, and Adam to hide himself under a tree, I do not suppose that anyone doubts that these things figuratively indicate certain mysteries, the history having taken place in appearance, and not literally....And what need is there to say more, since those who are not altogether blind can collect countless instances of a similar kind recorded as having occurred, but which did not literally take place?

Nay, the gospels themselves are filled with the same kind of narratives; e. g., the devil leading Jesus up into a high mountain, in order to show him from thence the kingdoms of the whole world, and the glory of them. For who is there among those who do not read such accounts carelessly, that would not condemn those who think that with the eye of the body—which requires a lofty height in order that the parts lying (immediately) under and adjacent may be seen—the kingdoms of the Persians, and Scythians, and Indians, and Parthians, were beheld, and the manner in which their princes are glorified among men?

And the attentive reader may notice in the gospels innumerable other passages like these, so that he will be convinced that in the histories that are literally recorded, circumstances that did not occur are inserted. (*De Principiis*, book 4, chap. 1, sec. 16)

David and the apostles spoke because they believed (*Psalm* 116:10; *2 Corinthians* 4:13). Origen's claim to note as a biblical expositor seems to be on the ground that he did not believe. Surely he could not be expected to make Bible Christians of his followers, when he starts out with the statement that much of the historical record in the Bible is a fabrication, and that the law of God itself is repugnant to reason. What more could an Ingersoll or a Paine say? Every infidel will admit that there are some true things in the Bible.

Therefore, if we take Origen's own statements, if we rank him as an expositor of Scripture alongside of the noted modern infidels, we shall be giving him all the credit he deserves.

When you hear professed ministers of the gospel making light of the record in the first chapters of *Genesis*, and making a parade of the "new light" that has dawned upon this century, remember that they are simply adopting the views of the semi-pagan Origen. Not only does he deny the truth of the Old Testament records, but of the gospel narrative as well. In the section preceding the one just quoted, he says:

But since, if the usefulness of the legislation, and the sequence and beauty of the history, were universally evident of itself, we should not believe that any other thing could be understood in the Scriptures save what was obvious, the word of God has arranged that certain stumbling-blocks, as it were, and offenses, and impossibilities, should be introduced into the midst of the law, and the history, in order that we may not, through being drawn away in all directions by the merely attractive nature of the language, either altogether fall away from the (true) doctrines, as learning nothing worthy of God, or, by not departing from the letter, come to the knowledge of nothing more divine.

And this also we must know, that the principal aim being to announce the "spiritual" connection in those things that are done, and that ought to be done, where the Word found that things done according to the history could be adapted to these mystical senses, he made use of them, concealing from

the multitude the deeper meaning; but where, in the narrative of the development of supersensual things, there did not follow the performance of those certain events, which was already indicated by the mystical meaning, the Scripture interwove in the history (the account of) some event that did not take place, sometimes what could not have happened; sometimes what could, but did not.

And sometimes a few words are interpolated which are not true in their literal acceptation, and sometimes a larger number. And a similar practice also is to be noticed with regard to the legislation, in which is often to be found what is useful in itself, and appropriate to the times of the legislation; and sometimes also what does not appear to be of utility; and at other times impossibilities are recorded for the sake of the more skillful and inquisitive, in order that they may give themselves to the toil of investigating what is written, and thus attain to a becoming conviction of the manner in which a meaning worthy of God must be sought out in such subjects. (*De Principiis*, book 4, chap. 1, sec. 15)

That is, impossibilities and untruths are recorded in the Bible, in order to stimulate the student to closer investigation. But if the student were once convinced that such is the case, he would cease to be a student, at least of the Bible, and would turn away from it in disgust. The whole tenor of Origen's teaching is in the direction of infidelity. And his infidelity is of the worst type, because it is put forth under cover of the name of Christianity.

The following paragraph exhibits not only his unbelief of the simple statements of Scripture, but also his fanciful method of interpretation:

But as there are certain passages of Scripture which do not at all contain the "corporeal" sense, as we shall show in the following (paragraphs), there are also places where we must seek only for the "soul," as it were, and "spirit" of Scripture.

And perhaps on this account the water-vessels containing two or three firkins apiece are said to lie for the purification

of the Jews, as we read in the gospel according to John: the expression darkly intimating, with respect to those who (are called) by the apostle “Jews” secretly, that they are purified by the word of Scripture, receiving sometimes two firkins, i.e., so to speak, the “psychical” and “spiritual” sense; and sometimes three firkins, since some have, in addition to those already mentioned, also the “corporeal” sense, which is capable of (producing) edification. And six water-vessels are reasonably (appropriate) to those who are purified in the world, which was made in six days—the perfect number. (*De Principiis*, book 4, chap. 1, sec. 12)

Comment on the above is unnecessary. Much more of a similar nature might be given directly on the subject of the Scriptures as a whole, but the same spirit will be noticed in what follows in regard to special points of the Scripture.

In *De Principiis* (book 1, chap. 7, sec. 2, 3) Origen makes the following theologico-philosophical deliverance:

In the first place, then, let us see what reason itself can discover respecting sun, moon, and stars,—whether the opinion, entertained by some, of their unchangeableness be correct,—and let the declarations of holy Scripture, as far as possible, be first adduced. For Job appears to assert that not only may the stars be subject to sin, but even that they are actually not clean from the contagion of it. The following are his words: “The stars also are not clean in thy sight.”

Nor is this to be understood of the splendor of their physical substance, as if one were to say, for example, of a garment, that it is not clean; for if such were the meaning, then the accusation of a want of cleanness in the splendor of their bodily substance would imply an injurious reflection upon their Creator. For if they are able, through their own diligent efforts, either to acquire for themselves a body of greater brightness, or through their sloth to make the one they have less pure, how should they incur censure for being stars that are not clean, if they receive no praise because they are so?

But to arrive at a clearer understanding on these matters, we ought first to inquire after this point, whether it is allowable to suppose that they are living and rational beings; then,

in the next place, whether their souls came into existence at the same time with their bodies, or seem to be anterior to them; and also whether, after the end of the world, we are to understand that they are to be released from their bodies; and whether, as we cease to live, so they also will cease from illuminating the world. Although this inquiry may seem to be somewhat bold, yet, as we are incited by the desire of ascertaining the truth as far as possible, there seems no absurdity in attempting an investigation of the subject agreeably to the grace of the Holy Spirit.

We think, then, that they may be designated as living beings, for this reason, that they are said to receive commandments from God, which is ordinarily the case only with rational beings. "I have given a commandment to all the stars," says the Lord. What, now, are these commandments? Those, namely, that each star, in its order and course, should bestow upon the world the amount of splendor which has been intrusted to it. For those which are called "planets" move in orbits of one kind, and those which are termed *aplaneiz* are different.

Now it manifestly follows from this, that neither can the movement of that body take place without a soul, nor can living things be at any time without motion. And seeing that the stars move with such order and regularity, that their movements never appear to be at any time subject to derangement, would it not be the height of folly to say that so orderly an observance of method and plan could be carried out or accomplished by irrational beings?

It cannot be said that there is in this anything wicked, except that it leaves the overruling, upholding power of God out of the question altogether. Not so much, however, can be said of what follows:

But whether any of these orders who act under the government of the devil, and obey his wicked commands, will in a future world be converted to righteousness because of their possessing the faculty of freedom of will, or whether persistent and inveterate wickedness may be changed by the power of habit into nature, is a result which you yourself, reader, may approve of, if neither in these present worlds which are

seen and temporal, nor in those which are unseen and are eternal, that portion is to differ wholly from the final unity and fitness of things.

But in the meantime, both in those temporal worlds which are seen, as well as in those eternal worlds which are invisible, all those beings are arranged, according to a regular plan, in the order and degree of their merits; so that some of them in the first, others in the second, some even in the last times, after having undergone heavier and severer punishments, endured for a lengthened period, and for many ages, so to speak, improved by this stern method of training, and restored at first by the instruction of the angels, and subsequently by the powers of a higher grade, and thus advancing through each stage to a better condition, reach even to that which is invisible and eternal, having traveled through, by a kind of training, every single office of the heavenly powers.

From which, I think, this will appear to follow as an inference, that every rational nature may, in passing from one order to another, go through each to all, and advance from all to each, while made the subject of various degrees of proficiency and failure according to its own actions and endeavors, put forth in the enjoyment of its power of freedom of will. (*De Principiis*, chap. 6, sec. 3)

The apostle Jude says “the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation,” have been “reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the Judgment of the great day” (*Jude* 6); but Origen teaches that they will ultimately be restored to the favor of God.

The Bible teaches that souls are purified by faith in Christ, and obedience to the truth through the Spirit; but Origen teaches that souls will be purged from sin by punishment. In the above extract we have the Roman Catholic purgatory as clearly set forth as it could possibly be; the only difference between Origen and other Catholics is that they provide an eternal hell for certain incorrigible ones, while Origen teaches the final restoration not only of all men but of demons also.

In the following the reader will find a combination of Uni-

versalism, Roman Catholicism, and Spiritualism:

I think, therefore, that all the saints who depart from this life will remain in some place situated on the earth, which holy Scripture calls paradise, as in some place of instruction, and, so to speak, class-room or school of souls, in which they are to be instructed regarding all the things which they had seen on earth, and are to receive also some information respecting things that are to follow in the future, as even when in this life they had obtained in some degree indications of future events, although "through a glass darkly," all of which are revealed more clearly and distinctly to the saints in their proper time and place.

If anyone indeed be pure in heart, and holy in mind, and more practiced in perception, he will, by making more rapid progress, quickly ascend to a place in the air, and reach the kingdom of Heaven, through those mansions, so to speak, in the various places which the Greeks have termed spheres, i.e., globes, but which holy Scripture has called heavens; in each of which he will first see clearly what is done there, and in the second place, will discover the reason why things are so done: and thus he will in order pass through all gradations, following Him who hath passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, who said, "I will that where I am, these may be also." (*De Principiis*, book 2, chap. 11, sec. 6)

And the following is doctrine eminently adapted to satisfy every hardened sinner:

We find in the prophet Isaiah, that the fire with which each one is punished is described as his own; for he says, "Walk in the light of your own fire, and the flame which ye have kindled." By these words it seems to be indicated that every sinner kindles for himself the flame of his own fire, and is not plunged into some fire which has been already kindled by another, or was in existence before himself. Of this fire the fuel and food are our sins, which are called by the apostle Paul "wood, and hay, and stubble"...When the soul has gathered together a multitude of evil works, and an abundance of sins against itself, at a suitable time all that assembly of evil boils up to punishment, and is set on fire to chastisements;

when the mind itself, or conscience, receiving by divine power into the memory all those things of which it had stamped on itself certain signs and forms at the moment of sinning, will see a kind of history, as it were, of all the foul, and shameful, and unholy deeds which it has done, exposed before its eyes: then is the conscience itself harassed, and, pierced by its own goads, becomes an accuser and a witness against itself. (*Ibid.*, chap. 10, sec. 4)

Here we have purgatory indeed, but it is a spiritual purgatory. The sinner is to be purified by fire, but the fire is to be simply his own sins. Stripped of the mass of verbiage, Origen's teaching is simply to the effect that all the punishment men will ever receive for their sins will be the knowledge of those sins,—the remorse of conscience constitutes the fire, and this remorse will eventually purge them from sin.

In short, his teaching is that men will be freed from their sins simply by thinking about them. This, of course, leaves no room for salvation through faith in Christ; it leaves Christ entirely out of the question, and therefore Origen was not a Christian teacher.

Page after page might be filled with matter of the same sort as that already given, but to what profit would it be? If any are enamored of Origen's style, they can procure his writings and surfeit themselves.

But what has been quoted about him and from him should be sufficient to convince any candid person that Origen's dreamy, fanciful, mystical, skeptical, and spiritualistic rantings could never have any other than a blighting influence upon the church.