

12. Against Celsus by Origen (c 250)

Origen (about 185-254) was born of Xn parents in Egypt (probably Alexandria) and grew up learning a great deal in both the Scriptures and philosophy. He was the most celebrated student in the catechetical school of Alexandria, led by Clement. In the persecution under Septimius Severus in 202, his father Leonidas was martyred. In 203, after Clement had been driven from the city, Origen reconstituted the school and led it until 215, when he traveled to Caesarea in Palestine. He returned to Alexandria and taught until 230, when he made a journey to Greece and Palestine. In Palestine, friendly bishops persuaded him to be ordained, probably that he might be free to preach. Bishop Demetrius of Alexandria resented this intrusion and banished Origen from Alexandria. From 231 until his death he remained in Caesarea, where he taught and wrote his greatest works. In 250 the emperor Decian decreed that all persons in Palestine must offer sacrifice before the imperial overseers. Origen was captured and tortured, though not put to death. About 65 at this time, Origen never recovered from his injuries and died a few years later in Tyre.

According to Williston Walker, Origen's De Principiis was "the first great systematic presentation of Xy" and his Against Celsus "in reply to the ablest criticism of Xy that heathenism had produced . . . was the keenest and most convincing defense of the Xn faith that the ancient world brought forth."

The pagan Platonist Celsus wrote his attack on Xy, The True Account, in about 176. At the request of his patron Ambrose, Origen produced a response to Celsus in eight long books, making extensive use of Scripture.

Book one responds to charges that Xns formed secret societies which engaged in magical and barbarous practices. Origen then presents Jesus as the Messiah, confirmed by the OT prophecies and the Virgin Birth, in order to answer the imaginary Jewish opponent whom Celsus introduced in his work.

The second book shows how the Jews' rejection of Christ, His death and resurrection, were fulfillments of OT prophecy.

The third book argues that Xns understand the OT prophets better than the Jews. Though Xns are divided into various groups, they agree in their basic understanding.

The fourth book centers on the incarnation. Origen explains the gracious plan of God, and attempts to show that the incarnation was necessary to our low condition.

The fifth book discusses the worship of the heavenly bodies, the resurrection of the body, tradition, the names of God, and activities of the angels.

The sixth book points out that Xy is not confined to the uneducated and irrational (as Celsus charged), but that many of the leaders of the church were educated men. He then goes on to discuss the problem of evil and Satan, showing that the NT solves this problem.