



## On First Principles

*Origen* , *Henri de Lubac* (introduction) , *George William Butterworth* (editor/translator) , *Rufinus* (preface) ,  
*William Babcock* (translator) , *Paul Koetschau* (editor)

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**On First Principles** Origen , Henri de Lubac (introduction) , George William Butterworth (editor/translator) , Rufinus (preface) , William Babcock (translator) , Paul Koetschau (editor)

s/t: Being Koetschau's Text of the De Principiis Translated into English Together with an Introduction & Notes

The Father

Christ

The Holy Spirit

Loss or falling away

Rational natures

The end or consummation

Things corporeal & incorporeal

The angels

The world & the creatures in it

The perpetuity of bodily nature

The beginning of the world & its causes

That there is one God of the law & the prophets, & that the God of the old & new covenants is the same

The just & the good

The incarnation of the Saviour

That it was the same Spirit who was in Moses & the rest of the prophets & in the holy apostles

The soul

The world & the movements of rational creatures both good & evil & the causes of these movements

Resurrection & punishment

The promises

Free will

How the devil & the opposing powers are, according to the Scriptures, at war with the human race

The threefold wisdom

Whether the statement made by some is true, that each individual has two souls

That the world is originated & subject to decay, since it took its beginning in time

The end

The inspiration of divine Scripture

How divine Scripture should be read & interpreted

The principle underlying the obscurities in divine Scripture & its impossible or unreasonable character in places, if taken literally

Summary of doctrine concerning the Father, the Son & the Holy Spirit

### On First Principles Details

Date : Published 1973 by Peter Smith Publisher Inc. (Gloucester, MA) (first published 215)

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Author : Origen , Henri de Lubac (introduction) , George William Butterworth (editor/translator) , Rufinus (preface) , William Babcock (translator) , Paul Koetschau (editor)

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## From Reader Review On First Principles for online ebook

### Dwight Davis says

Rating clarification:

5 stars for Origen's thought

3 stars for the edition I read.

Average=4 stars

Having only learned of Origen second hand through lectures, it's fascinating to actually delve into his work. Always characterized as somewhere between misguidedly wrong to a heretic in lectures I've heard, Origen is remarkably orthodox here. What we have in this work is (possibly) the first Christian systematic theology. Origen deals with almost all major doctrines and is always interesting. I was shocked to see how advanced he was in his trinitarian thought, writing well before any conciliar codification and articulating basically (with some significant differences) what would come to be orthodoxy. It made me wonder how much was original in Origen and how much was added by Rufinus in his later Latin translation.

Not helpful was the English translation, which could have used a good editor. Sometimes words were left out (i.e. the text reads "a kind breath" instead of "a kind of breath," a significant change in meaning), random punctuation errors like periods in the middle of sentences, and, perhaps most egregiously, the decision to run side by side translations of the Latin text and Greek text in certain parts of the book, the least user friendly choice I've seen in a book meant not just for an academic audience.

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### Tyson Guthrie says

A work that is essential to Christianity, even if it is determined by many that it is essentially not Christian.

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### Erik Graff says

I read this at Union Theological Seminary in New York during the first semester of 1975/76 alongside Cyril Richardson's "Early Christianity" course. It was, as I recall, the last term Richardson taught before his death.

Clement and Origen, both connected to the catechetical school of Alexandria during the late second and early third centuries, were the most congenial Christian theologians of that era. Both project a philosophical depth and liberality of spirit entirely lacking in such a near-contemporary as Irenaeus. One gets a sense of persons devoted more to seeking truth and wisdom than to exercising control from their writings.

Of the two and based on their extant writings, Origen is the greater intellect and this text may be most representative of his learning. The orientation is neo-Platonic, which, alongside a healthy dose of commonsense, provides him with a conceptual framework to interpret Christian literature. He is, notably, reliant upon allegorical interpretations of "revealed" scripture when their immediately apparent sense amounts to nonsense.

My favorite portion of this book was the part in which he apologetically addressed the accusation of atheism commonly made against his coreligionists. Rather than making any ontologically monotheistic claim against the polytheists, Origen simply states something along the lines of "we believe in one god so that our souls

may become one". This may be viewed as a sort of henotheism, but it is certainly more psychologically sophisticated than such claims as appear in the Hebrew scriptures.

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## Wyatt Houtz says

I read the schaff edition

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## Ned says

### Beware syncretism

Some keen insights, some grave errors. Origen did his best to meld the philosophies of his day with the authority of scripture, with not always pleasing results. This is a cautionary tale for the modern bible student. "Scripture and" environmentalism; evolution; sexual identity, etc., is sure to lead one astray from truth.

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## Tim Newcomb says

Historical context is critical to the study of Origen. He lived in a chaotic time in Alexandria where persecution of Christians was severe. His father was killed for his faith. He was given a Hellenistic education and was well versed in Platonism and a range of other religious traditions. His name Origen means "child of Horus" for instance. His early life and education was chaotic and he had no Orthodox teacher to explain the teachings of the apostles to him, as far as history records. It was amazing he was as orthodox as he was, given the vacuum he educated himself in.

Throughout On First Principles, his logic is confusing and contradictory at points. He writes about the legitimacy of Platonic Transmigration and then abruptly changes topics as he seems to realize that Plato's view on the nature of the soul contradicts Christ's. He doesn't return to the subject or try to reconcile those two understandings. In regard to the heresies he is know for (Universalism and modified Marcionism), he at times explicitly condemns those views. And then he strays into them, and then contradicts himself again. I cannot consider him a heretic because when you look at all his works, he himself did not have a clear stance on those two topics. It seems to shift chapter to chapter. His theology is half-baked, and On First Principles provides a showcase of this.

Factual and historical inaccuracies are scattered throughout his writing. Misunderstandings of the Torah, Nevi'im and Ketuvim abound. For instance, he thought that some of the animals mentioned in the Old Testament (types of antelope native to the near east) were mythical animals. This was not a fault of his logic, but of his library. He did not have the contextual resources necessary to dig as deep as he did into theological and exegetical topics.

Before reading primary-source information on Origen, I thought he was impious, heretical or dense from what I knew of him, and after I ended with the view that he was a pious man in an intellectually anarchic environment without theological support making sense of the gospel to the best of his ability. He has a place among the fathers, but needs to be read with a critical eye. Understanding Origen is critical to a more nuanced understanding of 2nd century Christianity where Platonism, paganism and ancient Mediterranean cults came intellectually toe-to-toe with the teachings of the Apostles. In this politically violent anarchic

environment, the transmission of Orthodoxy from the original 12 was uneven and messy at points. Origen is one of those points.

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### **Matt says**

Fascinating

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### **Ryan says**

A good introduction to Origen's Theology.

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### **Andy says**

Tough to read, interesting how the fragments are pasted together from different sources. Difficult to discover Origen's beliefs for sure.

Was my favorite Xn, not so much these days because of his apparent reliance on Reason and some strange ideas on merits and demerits, non-creation? of souls and distaste for the body(saw it as a moderate punishment for those souls. He's too hierarchical for me.

Nonetheless, He was intelligent, creative and outspoken and one of the first brave heretics of the Church(followed by Luther later) He was a Church-man though, too, which is cool.

I also appreciate his use of Scripture in his arguments and his gift for languages. It's a tragedy that we don't have most of what he wrote.

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### **Josh Cheng says**

This book is considered to be the first systematic theology produced by the church. Its organization made for an easier reading experience, as Origen was less concerned with countering his opponents' specific points as he is with establishing his viewpoints on a bunch of issues.

Origen was a church father and when reading this book you can tell that he loves God. Yet his theology contains elements that now would seem completely out of place in (Western) Christianity: universalism, reincarnation, an infinite procession of worlds, and an emphasis on merit being the explanation for all events, good and evil. These elements are not introduced arbitrarily, however; Origen believes them to be the best explanation for theological problems like the problem of evil, and his allegorical view of scripture gives him the flexibility to find "spiritual meanings" of key verses to support his arguments. Still, he holds a high view of scripture in a certain sense, and he takes care to support all his ideas both with philosophy and with

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scripture.

These unorthodox ideas made this book very interesting. Actually, I am sure many Christians still go down similar lines of thinking today, and it is interesting how the logic remains the same. I personally didn't get much in the way of spiritual nourishment from this book because of the craziness, but I enjoyed it nonetheless.

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### **Amy Hughes says**

On First Principles (Peri Archon) is the first "systematic" theology in Christian history but do not expect it to read like a modern textbook. Origen applies his expansive and speculative mind to Scripture and the faith for the sake of the church with an easy aplomb and conciseness that is quite a feat. His work is both linear and cyclical; he weaves a narrative together, but continually loops back to fill in gaps and build upon the framework. He is unafraid yet reverent in his groundbreaking work on the Trinity and Christology, both of which will be foundational for the solidification of the doctrine of the church. On First Principles is meant to be a service for the church, to deal with hard questions, sort out rampant errors, and play with concepts that would lead to deeper exploration of the scriptures and of humanity's relationship with God.

It's worth the extra effort it takes to get on the same page with Origen as far as context. Reading this work (for the second time) was incredibly rewarding and has helped jolt and shape my theological imagination.

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### **Jana Light says**

This is one of the earliest systematic theologies of the Christian faith, and was quite illuminating for its historical context. Methodologically, Origen attempts to find a match between reason and biblical exegesis, but being more philosophically-minded I found some of his dependence upon biblical passages to "prove" his claims unconvincing.

In particular, Origen is inconsistent in his presentation of hell - at times seeming to defend universalism, at others seeming to defend the existence of hell (though the nature of Origen's hell isn't quite certain - annihilation? endless torment? dull nothingness? not clear).

I was pleasantly surprised that in Part IV Origen argues for an interpretation of the Bible that is not wholly literal. This feels progressive in today's literalist Christian climate, and it was refreshing to read what I think is an accurate understanding of the context, audience, and purpose behind some of the biblical passages.

Overall, On First Principles is worth reading for its historical significance and context within the trajectory of Christian thought, even though the arguments therein are not always internally consistent.

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### **verbava says**

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