

CELSUS AND THE OLD TESTAMENT*

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I. INTRODUCTION

IT IS due to the faithful labors of Origen that one of the strongest of the early assaults upon the Scriptures and the Christian religion has been preserved.¹ In the apologetic writing *Contra Celsum* an attempt was made to meet and to refute the criticism of the Scriptures and of Christianity which had been advanced by an antagonist of the name of Celsus.² To the accomplishment of this task Origen devoted eight books, and the resultant work constitutes a milestone in the history of Christian apologetics.³

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¹ Lives of Origen may be found in the standard church histories. Cf. also Eugène de Faye: *Origène, Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre, Sa Pensée*. A fairly full bibliography on Origen is given by E. Preuschen in his article "Origenes" in the Herzog-Hauck *Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, XIV.

² This is the avowed purpose of Origen, as repeatedly stated both in the preface and body of *Contra Celsum*. Cf., e. g., *Praef.* 3, 4, 6; 2:1; 3:1; 4:1; 5:1; 6:1; 7:1; 8:1. The text of *Contra Celsum* has been edited by Koetschau in *Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte, Origenes Werke*, I and II. This edition has been used in the present thesis. Cf. also *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. Migne, XI. An English translation appears in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, IV.

³ The character of *Contra Celsum*, particularly considered as an apologetic, has been largely praised and rightly so. For example, J. Patrick gives to his work *The Apology of Origen in Reply to Celsus* the sub-title

Origen was induced to enter upon his labors by the efforts of one Ambrose, who, according to Eusebius, was one of his converts.⁴ It was Ambrose who sent Celsus' treatise to Origen and who urged him to undertake a reply.⁵ At first, however, he did not wish to engage in such an enterprise. The best refutation of the false charges of Celsus, he thought, was to be found in silence.⁶ Such a policy would be in accord with the example which Christ had set. At the same time, he did not wish to appear reluctant to attempt the task and so acceded to the requests of his friend.

In seeking to answer Celsus, Origen proposed to reply to each argument which his opponent had advanced.⁷ At first, it seemed the course of wisdom merely to indicate the principal objections and then to work up the discussion into a systematic treatment (*σωματοποιῆσαι*). However, circumstances dictated a change of procedure, and the extant work constitutes the apologetic as it was actually carried out.

An examination of the method which was finally adopted will naturally lead to the question whether Origen has faithfully preserved the words and arguments of his opponent. To this question various answers have been given, yet on

A Chapter in the History of Apologetics. A. B. Bruce in his *Apologetics; or, Christianity Defensively Stated*, pp. 9-16, devotes a special section to *Contra Celsum*. E. J. Goodspeed (*A History of Early Christian Literature*, Chicago, 1942, p. 249) speaks of Origen's work as "the peak of early Christian apologetic", and E. O. James (*In the Fulness of Time*, London, 1935, pp. 124, 125) says, "... his defence of Christianity against the pagan Celsus is one of the most profound apologies for the Faith in ancient times". Lardner (*Works*, Vol. 7, London, 1838,) says "... that Origen's eight books against Celsus are an invaluable treasure".

⁴ Eusebius: *Ecclesiastical History*, VI:18. For the Greek text see *Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte, Eusebius*, II2, 556. Cf. also Migne, XX, 559. An English translation may be found in Lawlor and Oulton (*Eusebius, The Ecclesiastical History*, I, 191) in which there appears a brief sketch of the life of Ambrose (II, 213). A brief account of Ambrose's life is also given by Mosheim: *Origenes Vorsteher der Christlichen Schule zu Alexandrien und Aeltestens Acht Bücher von der Wahrheit der Christlichen Religion wider den Weltweisen Celsus*, Hamburg, 1745.

⁵ *Contra Celsum, Praef.* 1, 3. From this point on it should be noted that references will be to *Contra Celsum* unless otherwise indicated.

⁶ *Praef.* 1, 2.

⁷ *Praef.* 3.

the whole the opinion seems to be fairly widely held that Celsus has indeed been faithfully and accurately represented. In fact, not a few have considered it possible to reconstruct this ancient polemic upon the basis of the fragments which appear in Origen's book.⁸

It is a strange fact that, although Celsus' writing, which he called the *True Discourse*, constitutes an unusually powerful attack upon the Scriptures and the Christian religion, practically nothing is known about its author.⁹ His name

⁸ Possibly the most noteworthy of such attempts is that of Theodor Keim: *Celsus' Wahres Wort. Aelteste Streitschrift antiker Weltanschauung gegen das Christenthum vom Jahr 178 N. Chr.*, Zürich, 1873. Keim analyzes the *True Discourse* into an introduction and four main parts. Less pretentious analyses have been attempted by others who have sought to indicate the continuity of Celsus' arguments. Mention may be made of E. Pélagaud: *Étude sur Celse et la première escarmouche entre la Philosophie antique et le Christianisme naissant*, Lyon, 1878, p. 249 ff.; W. J. Binde-mann: "Ueber Celsus und seine Schrift gegen die Christen" in *Zeitschrift für die historische Theologie*, Leipzig, 1842, 2. Heft, pp. 58-146; Patrick: *op. cit.*; B. Aubé: *Histoire des Persécutions de l'Église*.

Origen himself claims to have preserved most of his opponent's work (3:1).

Cf. also 1:41; 5:1; 2:20. It should be noted, however, that Origen candidly admits that there have been some omissions. For example, when Celsus repeats a charge, Origen answers it but once. *Cf.*, e. g., 2:5 and 2:32; 6:39.

Historians generally have agreed with this position of Origen. Renan, for example, believes it possible to reconstruct the *True Discourse* "avec les citations et les analyses qu'en a données Origène" (*Marc-Aurèle et la Fin du Monde Antique*, p. 352). Tzschirner (*Der Fall des Heidenthums*, I, 324) says, "... so hat sich doch in der Widerlegungsschrift des Origenes so viel und zwar meist mit des Verfassers eigenen Worten ausgedrückt erhalten, dass man nicht nur ihren Inhalt und Zweck, sondern auch ihren Ton und ihre Farbe hinreichend erkennen und beurtheilen kann". Worthy of note also is the statement of Keim (*op. cit.*, p. 199), "Um so mehr aber muss man ihm für eine zweite Leistung dankbar sein, nämlich dafür, dass er die Schrift des Celsus besonders auf den Punkten ganz wörtlich erhalten hat, wo Celsus selbst seinen Plan und seine Gliederung verräth". It would not be difficult to multiply such quotations.

⁹ In the *Contra Celsum* the title of Celsus' work is given usually as ἀληθῆς λόγος, which may be translated *True Word* or *True Discourse*. Pélagaud translates the title *Le Livre de Vérité*, Keim as *Wahres Wort*. Kellner (*Hellenismus und Christenthum oder die geistige Reaktion des antiken Heidenthums gegen das Christenthum*, Köln, 1866, p. 26) translates the title as *Das Wort der Wahrheit*. Tzschirner (*op. cit.*, p. 324) gives

was Celsus (ὁ Κέλσος), and that is one of the few definite things that can be said about him.

Origen himself was not sure about the identity of his opponent. He had heard that there were two men of this name, who were Epicureans, the first of whom lived at the time of Nero, and the other, whom Origen considered himself to be refuting, at the time of Hadrian and later.¹⁰ He

wahrheitliebende Rede. Keim's interpretation of this title appears to be too strong and not borne out by the contents of the *True Discourse* itself, when he says (*op. cit.*, p. 190), "... bekennt er als seine Absicht in erster Linie nicht irgend welcher feindseliger Schnürung gegen das Christenthum, sondern Objektivität, imparteiische Untersuchung, Herstellung des richtigen Thatbestandes, wie er denn auch gelegentlich gegen den Verdacht der Ausspionierung protestiert (1, 12) oder sich betont, er wolle nicht unbillig sein, er gebe nur die Wahrheit (3, 59)". Baur (*The Church History of the First Three Centuries*, translated from the German by the Rev. Allan Menzies, London, 1879, II, 141) seems to be on safer ground in his interpretation, "he (*i. e.*, Celsus) doubtless meant to indicate the love of truth which had induced him to enter upon this refutation of Christianity". Mosheim (*op. cit.*, p. 7) says that Claudius Caponnier interpreted the word λόγος as *Geschichte*, but he himself says that Celsus is writing not a history but "eine heftige und spitzige Strafrede". *Cf.* also B. J. Kidd (*A History of the Church to A. D. 461*, I, 117) who renders, *The True Account*.

¹⁰ 1:8. The name itself was not particularly rare. Pélagaud has discovered at least twelve occurrences in Roman history (*op. cit.*, p. 152). *Cf.* Aubé (*op. cit.*, p. 165), "Origène ne sait pas bien quel est ce Celse, de quel pays il est, ni a quelle école philosophique il appartient". Also, E. Stein: *De Celso Platonico Philonis Alexandrini Imitatore in Eos*, xxxiv, Paris, 1932-33 and *Alltestamentliche Bibelkritik in der späthellenistischen Literatur*, Lwow, 1935. Stein holds that Celsus was a Platonic philosopher of Alexandria who had been acquainted with Philo's writings and who took over Philo's criticisms while rejecting his allegorical interpretations. This position may possibly be correct, but it cannot be definitely proven. As Stein shows, there are certain resemblances in the language of the two writers, but Celsus and Philo differed in their purpose and aim. Celsus was a critic of the Bible who sought to show that its teachings were foolishness. Philo, however, was not, strictly speaking, such a critic. Rather, he was a defender of and a believer in the Bible. What Philo criticized was not the Bible itself nor its teachings but rather what he believed to be a false interpretation of the Bible and its teaching, namely, the method of literal interpretation. In presenting an allegorical exposition Philo was really defending the Bible by setting forth what he believed to be its true teaching. Hence, it does not seem to be correct to say, for example, as does Stein (*Alltestamentliche Bibelkritik*, p. 15), "Sowohl Philo als

does not, therefore, positively state that Celsus lived at the time of Hadrian, but merely that he has heard that such was the case. This opinion seems to be modified at a later point, when he asserts the possibility that his Celsus may possess the same name as the Epicurean. The reason for this apparent shift in position is that at this point Celsus appeared to be speaking as a Platonist rather than as an Epicurean. Origen also admits the possibilities that Celsus may be concealing his Epicurean views or that he may have substituted better opinions for them. Such lack of assurance, however, makes it manifest that he is none too well informed as to the identity of the one whose arguments he is seeking to refute.

Again, some uncertainty appears when Origen indicates

Celsus beanstanden diesen Bericht, nach dem die Welt in der Zeit geschaffen wurde". This may apply to Celsus, but not to Philo. Philo criticized what he believed to be a false interpretation of the Mosaic account. Cf. *Philo, with an English Translation* by F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker (The Loeb Classical Library I, pp. 146, 148), *Legum Allegoria: εὐηθες πᾶν τὸ οἶσθαι ἐξ ἡμέραις ἢ καθόλου χρόνῳ γεγόναι τὸν κόσμον. βούλεται οὖν τὰ τε θνητὰ γένη καὶ πάλιν αὐτὰ ἀφθαρτα κατὰ τοῦς οἰκείους ἐπιδείξει συστάνα ἀριθμούς, τὰ μὲν θνητὰ ὡς ἔφη παραμετρῶν ἑξάδι, τὰ δὲ μακάρια καὶ εὐδαίμονα ἑβδομάδι.* Note Philo's use of the word βούλεται. Origen himself was of the opinion that Celsus had not read Philo's writings (4:51). Keim considers Celsus to have been a Roman (*op. cit.*, p. 275): "Den Celsus geradezu als Gebürtsrömer zu betrachten, ist durch den Namen, den Wohnort, den Patriotismus und durch die Anzeichen einer Benützung lateinischer Literatur empfohlen, andererseits durch die Vorliebe des Mannes für die Hellenen, welche er den Römern ausdrücklich voranstellt, durchaus nicht ausgeschlossen". So also Pélagaud: *op. cit.*, p. 167. Renan thinks that the book was written at Rome (*op. cit.*, p. 361).

According to Pélagaud (*op. cit.*, p. 166) it was thought by Jachmann that Celsus lived in Persia. The remarks of Achille Coen are to the point: "... e neppure ci fermeremo a disputare se Celso fu un greco, o un romano, sebbene ci sembri che alle ragioni abbastanza ingegnose esposte dal Pélagaud per provare che Celso era romano potrebbero opporsi argomenti non meno validi i quali condurrebbero all' altra conclusione; queste ed altre simiglianti quistioni sono state il tema di discussioni interminabili e minuziose fra i critici, i quali non sono ancora riesciti a porsi d'accordo rispetto ad esse". Cf. "Il Piu Antico Libro Pagano di Polemica Religiosa Contro Il Cristianesimo" in *Rassegna Settimanale di Politica, Scienze, Lettere ed Arti*, Roma, 1880, No. 120, 279. Cf. S. Zeitlin (*Josephus on Jesus*, p. 82) who expresses uncertainty as to whether such a person as Celsus had actually lived.

that he is not sure whether his Celsus is the one who composed two other books against Christians.¹¹ The exact force of this passage is not as clear as could be desired, and its meaning has been the subject of some discussion.¹² Appar-

¹¹ 4:36. εἴ γε οὗτός ἐστι καὶ ὁ κατὰ Χριστιανῶν ἄλλα δύο βιβλία συντάξας, τάχα ἡμῖν φιλονεικῶν οὓς μὴ ἐφρόνει ἐνθέους ὠνόμασεν.

¹² Neander (*Allgemeine Geschichte der christlichen Religion und Kirche*, I, 202) believes that the phrase ἄλλα δύο βιβλία refers to the work which Origen attempted to refute. Could the Epicurean Celsus, who had written books in which his Epicureanism was not concealed, also be the one who had written two other books (*The True Discourse*) against Christians? This, according to Neander, was the point at issue. Baur (*op. cit.*, II, p. 142 n.) suggests that if the reference is actually to the *True Discourse*, why should the work be spoken of as ἄλλα δύο βιβλία? Neander merely says that Celsus had written a work in two books, entitled the *True Doctrine*, but he does not enlarge upon this analysis. Aubé (*op. cit.*, p. 168) thinks that the reference is to two books other than the *True Discourse* which Celsus composed against Christians. But the passage is difficult, and Origen's meaning is not clear by any means. The words merely constitute a further indication of the uncertainty which prevailed in Origen's own mind.

But cf. Fenger (*De Celso, Christianorum adversario, Epicureo*, 1828) who appears to think that Origen's testimony is clear and should be trusted. He concludes (p. 107) "... usquedum plura et fortiora proponantur argumenta contra sententiam Origenis, longe probabilius esse testimonio ejus confidere, quam idem rejicere". Origen's language is as follows (1:8): εὐρίσκειται μὲν γὰρ ἐξ ἄλλων συγγραμμάτων Ἐπικούρειος ὢν ἐνταῦθα δὲ διὰ τὸ δοκεῖν εὐλογώτερον κατηγορεῖν τοῦ λόγου μὴ ὁμολογῶν τὰ Ἐπικούρου προσποιεῖται κρείττον τι τοῦ γηῖνου εἶναι ἐν ἀνθρώπῳ σύγγραφες θεοῦ καὶ φησιν κ.τ.λ.

In these words, therefore, while Origen does admit that Celsus was an Epicurean, he nevertheless believed that his opponent had concealed his true convictions. In 1:10 and 1:21 Celsus is apparently identified as an Epicurean. Cf. also 1:32; 3:22, 35, 80; 4:4, 54; 5:3. In 8:15 Origen admits that he cannot discover from what sect Celsus has taken certain opinions, but he also acknowledged that Celsus himself may have made up these opinions. In any case, the passage is evidence of Origen's candor. It does not necessarily prove the wide erudition of Celsus, as Pélagaud (*op. cit.*, p. 391) thinks. Cf. also 5:62-64.

Mosheim (*op. cit.*) discusses the question of Celsus' philosophical position in his *Vorrede* (*op. cit.*, pp. 40 ff.). Mosheim gives an excellent summary of Celsus' doctrine of God and the world. "Er spricht zwar in seinem ganzen Buche von der Welt eben so, wie Plato in seinem so genannten Timaeus." The comment of Frid. Adolph Philippi should be noted (*De Celsi, Adversarii Christianorum, Philosophandi Genere*, Berlin, 1836, p. 27): "Huic Origenis de adversario suo iudicio (i. e. that Celsus

ently a man by the name of Celsus had composed two books against Christians and Origen did not know whether their author was his present opponent or not. We do not intend to enter upon an exegesis of the passage. Suffice it at this point to say that in these words there is to be found additional evidence of the fact that Origen knew little about the identity of Celsus.

According to Eusebius, Origen composed his eight treatises against Celsus during the reign of Philip the Arabian at a time when he was said to be over sixty years of age.¹³ It is

was a disguised Epicurean) inter veteres nemo contradixit, recentioribus temporibus Baronius, Spencerus, Ionsius, Basnagius, Valesius, Dodwellus, Fabricius, Buddeus, omnes fere viri docti ante Moshemium, qui modo accuratius rem tractarunt, assensi sunt. Moshemius primus ausus est hanc Origenis sententiam funditus subvertere. Wesselingium (*i. e.* Peter Wesseling, *Liber Probabilium*, cap. 23, as given by Bindemann: *op. cit.*, p. 68) qui in Probabilibus, quamvis paulo ante Moshemium, tamen non tam multis et firmis usus argumentis et dubitantius contradixit, jure nostro hic praeterimus."

Probably the most learned defence of the position that Celsus was an Epicurean is to be found in Fenger: *op. cit.*; Philippi (*op. cit.*) also adopts this position in the main, although disagreeing with Fenger's method of procedure. He says (p. 112), "Sed Fengeri libro illa certe laud vindicanda est, quod recto in universum sensu ductus, quamvis non rectis maximam partem argumentis nixus, primus certissima suasionem Moshemio contradixerit, qui auctoritate sua speciosisque rationibus doctorum virorum hac de re iudicia aliquantum turbasse videtur". Kellner is possibly the latest to write in defence of this position (*op. cit.*, pp. 26 ff.): "Er war von Haus aus Epikuräischer Philosoph". Lardner speaks of Celsus (*op. cit.*, p. 264) as "this learned Epicurean". Mosheim (*op. cit.*, p. 30) discusses a work of Dodwell in which Dodwell taught that Celsus was an Epicurean in the school but not when he was outside the classroom. In the *True Discourse*, therefore, he was not speaking as an Epicurean. The following passages are those which are sometimes considered as evidences of Epicureanism: 2:41, 42, 60; 3:35, 80; 4:75, 86. Cf. Pélagaud's discussion of Fenger's position (*op. cit.*, pp. 219 ff.). Cf. also Kayser (*La philosophie de Celse et ses rapports avec le christianisme*, Strasbourg, 1844, p. 29) who says, "Le philosophe avec lequel je le comparerai de préférence, c'est Plutarque". Denis (*Du Discours de Celse contre les Chrétiens intitulé Le Discours Véritable*, p. 451) says, "Il s'y montre de Plutarque, qu'un épicurien décidé, à la façon de Lucien". The real reason why all such attempts to classify Celsus are not satisfactory is that the data given by Origen are too meagre.

¹³ *Op. cit.*, VI:36:1, 2. Cf. A. Harnack: *Die Chronologie der altchristlichen Literatur bis Eusebius*, II, 35 ff.

generally thought that Philip reigned from 244 to 249.¹⁴ Hence, it would seem that an approximate date, at least, might be found for *Contra Celsum*. Apparently Origen wrote before the outbreak of the Decian persecution in 249, for he makes no reference to persecution and inclines to believe that there is no immediate danger of such.¹⁵ Hence, the work was probably not composed later than 248 or early in the year 249. At the same time, since we are to understand Eusebius as in all likelihood meaning that Origen was over sixty years of age at the time, it would seem that the earliest date is 246. Quite possibly the time of composition, therefore, was 248–249, although this cannot be positively asserted.¹⁶

Celsus himself probably wrote his *True Discourse* sometime during the latter half of the second century. Quite possibly the date was, as some assert, 177 or 178, but this can by no means be proven.¹⁷ At any rate, his powerful attack upon Christianity saw the light of day at least some seventy years before Origen took up his pen in reply.

¹⁴ Cf. *The Cambridge Ancient History*, Vol. XII, pp. 87–95 for a survey of Philip's reign.

¹⁵ 3:15.

¹⁶ This date has found fairly widespread acceptance. Cf. *e. g.*, De Faye: *op. cit.*, p. 162; Pélagaud: *op. cit.*, p. 190; Koetschau: *op. cit.*, p. xxii; Lardner (*op. cit.*, p. 211) suggests either 246 or 249; Keim: *op. cit.*, p. 263.

¹⁷ I do not understand how De Faye (*op. cit.*, I, 141) can write, "En ce qui concerne la date du *Discours véritable*, l'unanimité s'est faite parmi les critiques. Celse l'a composé entre les années 178 et 180". The following do not place the date between 178 and 180: Denis (*op. cit.*, p. 452) places the date in the first year of Antoninus Pius; Kayser (*op. cit.*, p. 3) says that the date cannot be earlier than 150; Kellner (*op. cit.*, p. 25) places the date at about 150. So also Tollinton; Guericke: *Manual of Church History*, translated by W. G. T. Shedd, p. 100. Goodspeed (*op. cit.*, p. 138) gives 150 (on p. 57, however, he gives 177–178); Turner (*Studies in Early Church History*, p. 17) says, "... we do not know when he wrote". Coen (*op. cit.*, p. 280) places the date between 175 and 180. Lardner (*op. cit.*, p. 211) gives 176; Stein (*Alttestamentliche Bibelkritik*, p. 10) gives 180. Gwatkin (*Early Church History, to A. D. 313*, I, 183) sets the date at about 178 and gives a useful note on the subject. Krüger (*History of Early Christian Literature*, translated by Rev. Charles R. Gillett, New York, 1897, p. 198) gives 177–180 A. D. The following place the writing during the reign of Marcus Aurelius: Bindemann: *op. cit.*, p. 61; Neander: *op. cit.*, pp. 201 ff.; Tzschirner: *op. cit.*, p. 325; Bruce (*op. cit.*, p. 9) gives the "latter half" of the second century.

II. CELSUS' CRITICISM OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

The first group of criticisms of the Old Testament which Celsus offered concerned Judaism. He found fault with Judaism not only as to its religion, but also with respect to its origin, history and religious institutions.

THE ORIGIN OF JUDAISM

Apparently out of a desire to point out that Judaism was the system of doctrine upon which Christianity depended, he maintained that the origin of the Jews was barbarous.¹⁸ His purpose thus was not necessarily to cast any discredit at this point upon the Jews, nor did he desire even to reproach Christianity because of such dependence. He admitted that Christianity could discover such doctrines for itself, but credited the Greeks with greater ability in dealing with the discoveries of barbarous nations.¹⁹

What was this alleged barbaric origin of Judaism? It consisted apparently in the view that the Jews were descended from the Egyptians.²⁰ In 3:7 Origen seems to quote the exact words of Celsus, "... the Hebrews, being Egyptians, took their origin (*i. e.*, as a separate nation) from (the time of) the rebellion".²¹ If we may trust Origen, his opponent held the view that the Jews despised the Egyptian customs of worship and so revolted and abandoned the land.²² In another passage Celsus actually spoke of the Jews as fugitives from Egypt.²³ Apparently, upon leaving Egypt, they conceived a hatred of their mother tongue. It would seem that Celsus inferred that they then adopted the Hebrew language.²⁴

In reply Origen accused his opponent of having been bewitched, as it were, by the traditions of the Egyptians and,

¹⁸ *Contra Celsum*, 1:2. ἐξῆς βάρβαρον φησιν ἄνωθεν εἶναι τὸ δόγμα, δηλονότι τὸν Ιουδαϊσμόν, οὗ Χριστιανισμὸς ἤρτηται.

¹⁹ 1:2.

²⁰ 3:5.

²¹ 3:7. Ἀιγυπτίους ὄντας ἀπὸ στάσεως τὴν ἀρχὴν εἰληφέναι τοὺς Ἑβραίους κ.τ.λ.

²² 3:5.

²³ 4:31.

²⁴ 3:6.

consequently, of having accepted their statements as true.²⁵ This action shows, according to Origen, that Celsus had not investigated the facts in an impartial spirit.²⁶ Celsus does not realize, so the argument continues, how impossible it would be for so many rebellious Egyptians to become a great nation and immediately to adopt a new language. Furthermore, asks Origen, why should this new language be Hebrew, rather than Syrian or Phoenician? Since Hebrew was the language of the ancestors of those who left Egypt, and since the Hebrew letters which Moses employed in writing the Pentateuch differed from the letters of the Egyptians, reason would seem to oppose the position that those who came out from Egypt were originally Egyptian.²⁷

Again, continues Origen, if those who left Egypt were Egyptians, we should have expected their names to be Egyptian. The names, however, are Hebrew, whence it is clear that the Egyptian account, which asserts that these were Egyptians who went forth with Moses from Egypt, is false.²⁸

In thus attributing the commencement of the Hebrew nation to a revolt, Celsus was seeking to show that a revolt was also the origin of Christianity.²⁹ The Jews suffered from the Christians the same treatment that they themselves had once inflicted upon the Egyptians. Hence, the origin of both Judaism and Christianity was due to the same cause, namely, rebellion against the state.³⁰

It must be borne in mind that in thus passing strictures upon the Jews Celsus was not primarily concerned with the treatment of the events of the Exodus from Egypt as such, but rather with an attack upon Christianity. He was seeking to establish the point that Christianity found its origin in a revolt. Only secondarily, therefore, did he concern himself with the Exodus.³¹

Upon the basis of these meagre fragments which Origen has seen fit to preserve must be based one's conclusions as to

²⁵ 3:6.

²⁶ 3:6.

²⁷ 3:6. ²⁸ 3:8.

²⁹ 3:8.

³⁰ 3:5.

³¹ This argument is developed in 3:5-8.

what was Celsus' attitude toward the book of Exodus. The fragments preserved are indeed few, but there seems to be little reason for assuming that Origen has at this point willfully misrepresented his opponent.

What Celsus says concerning the Exodus from Egypt does not imply that he had ever read our book of Exodus. All that he says might have been learned by word of mouth. Hence, for example, when he asserts the Egyptian origin of the Jews, he is simply misinformed. He did not arrive at this conclusion by a careful study of the book of Exodus and a rejection of the statements to be found therein. Rather, he spoke merely upon the basis of whatever information may have come to him. I find it very difficult to agree with Keim that Celsus actually knew our book of Exodus.³² Much nearer to the truth seems to be the position of Pélagaud, who says merely that Celsus may have known it.³³ These statements concerning the origin of the Jews reveal Celsus as not having exercised at this point true scholarly caution. It must therefore be concluded that there is no evidence to indicate that he had ever read the book of Exodus and that his pronouncements concerning the origin of the Jews are of no historical value whatsoever.³⁴

There is one further statement concerning the origin of the Jews in which Origen apparently quotes the exact words of Celsus.³⁵ This utterance is to the effect that the Jews

³² *Op. cit.*, p. 223. "Vom alten Testament kennt er hauptsächlich das erste und zweite Buch Mose." So also De Faye (*op. cit.*, I, 143), "Il a étudié la Genèse et l'Exode".

³³ *Op. cit.*, p. 424, "... peut-être l'Exode et d'autres livres de l'Ancien Testament."

³⁴ In *Contra Apionem*, II:28 (The Loeb Classical Library, *Josephus*, I, p. 302) Josephus says concerning Apion *καὶ τί γε δεῖ θαυμάζειν εἰ περὶ τῶν ἡμετέρων ψευδεῖται προγόνων, λέγων αὐτοὺς εἶναι τὸ γένος Ἀιγυπτίους*. This Egyptian tradition, which is reflected by Apion, was probably the basis of Celsus' statements. This does not mean that Celsus was necessarily acquainted with Apion's works; probably he came into contact with the tradition through word of mouth, and in his accusations against the origin of the Jewish nation was merely dependent upon "hearsay" evidence. At this point as elsewhere when treating of the Jewish nation and the Old Testament Celsus does not appear to possess very accurate knowledge of that which he is endeavoring to refute.

³⁵ 4:33.

sought to trace their origin to the first race of jugglers and deceivers. Origen believes that Celsus was endeavoring here to assail the book of Genesis but that he had probably spoken obscurely on purpose.³⁶ Celsus does not seem to be attacking the actual facts of Jewish history so much as he is slandering the Jews. When he spoke of the patriarchs as jugglers and deceivers and when he spoke of ambiguous and dark sayings which the Jews misinterpreted he was guilty, whether intentionally or not, of misrepresentation. Origen seems to be aware of this and feels that Celsus has not distinctly set forth the facts, for fear of being unable to answer the arguments which might be founded upon them.³⁷

It would seem that Origen's estimate of his opponent's procedure is at this point correct. For Celsus elsewhere shows that he does possess a certain amount of correct information of particular features of patriarchal history as that history is recorded in the book of Genesis.³⁸ Celsus' main concern here seems to be rather to slander the Jews, and it appears that he is willing to sacrifice what he knows to be the truth in order to accomplish this.³⁹ It is such procedure

³⁶ The entire argument is developed in 4:33-35.

³⁷ 4:33.

³⁸ *Cf. e. g.*, 4:43, 44, 45, 46. However, it seems that whatever information Celsus did receive, he did not acquire by means of a careful study of Genesis. Mosheim (*op. cit.*, p. 697) remarks regarding Celsus' treatment of the Creation, "Der Heide greift die Geschichte der Schöpfung, die uns Moses erzählet, sehr ungeschickt an. Man kann bey nahe schweren, dass er sie nicht gelesen; zum wenigstens, dass er sie nicht erwäget habe". The language of Celsus does not seem to bear out the following statement of Patrick (*op. cit.*, p. 86): "He shows a detailed knowledge of the Book of Genesis from the first chapter to the last, and from his minute and verbal criticism of the Mosaic cosmogony it is plain that he has read the Septuagint". The references which Patrick cites to support his first proposition are the following. Gen. 1, 2 with C. C. 1:19; 4:23; 5:50, 51, 59; 6:29, 47, 50, 51, 60, 61, 63; 7:62; Gen. 3 with C. C. 6:28, 42; 4:36; Gen. 7, 8 with C. C. 1:19; 4:21, 41; Gen. 11 with C. C. 4:1; Gen. 17, 27 with C. C. 4:32; Gen. 30, 31, 36 with C. C. 4:44; Gen. 19 with C. C. 4:45; Gen. 27, 34, 37 with C. C. 4:46; Gen. 40, 41, 47 with C. C. 4:47. However, a careful study of these passages does not seem to bear out Patrick's contention. Some of these references will be discussed later in this article.

³⁹ An endeavor will later be made to show to what extent Celsus may have been acquainted with patriarchal history.

as this that leads one to agree with Neander when he says that in Celsus we find ". . . wit and acuteness, without earnest purpose or depth of research".⁴⁰

THE JEWISH NATION AND ITS HISTORY

Not only does the origin of Judaism come under the sharp censure of the author of the *True Discourse*, but its history is likewise subject to his criticism.

Celsus holds a very low opinion of the Jews as a nation.⁴¹ Apparently in his work he enumerates the nations from which certain doctrines have come, but he does not include the Jews, stamping their history as false.⁴² According to Origen, he is unwilling to call the Jews a learned nation as he does the Egyptians and certain other peoples of antiquity.⁴³ It is unfortunate that Celsus' own discussion of this subject is not given and that we are dependent solely upon Origen, for we do not have statements from Celsus' own mouth as to why he has not placed the Jews among the learned nations of antiquity.

Again, Celsus has omitted the name of Moses from a list of great men who have benefited humanity and has assigned to Linus a foremost place. This is indeed strange. If Origen has correctly represented Celsus' action, it would then seem that in this instance Celsus has not shown himself to be impartial. Origen accuses his opponent of partiality and of not making these statements from a love of truth, but from a spirit of hatred, with the object of casting aspersion upon the origin of Christianity.⁴⁴ He appeals to the reader to consider whether or not it is due to "open malevolence" that Celsus has thus excluded Moses from his catalog of learned men.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ *Op. cit.*, I, 163. So also J. R. Mozley (*A Dictionary of Christian Biography*, I, 435): "In vital insight Celsus was deficient. As an opponent of Christianity the chief characteristic of Celsus is a strong, narrow, intolerant common sense".

⁴¹ 5:50. ⁴² 1:14.

⁴³ Origen's discussion of Celsus' argument is found in 1:14-16.

⁴⁴ 3:16.

⁴⁵ Elsewhere also Celsus appears to have a low view of the importance of Moses. In 1:21 he says that Moses learned his doctrine from wise men

Origen himself was of course biased, and it is possible that his condemnation of Celsus at this point was too strong. Nevertheless, if he is correct in reporting that Celsus has refused to recognize the Jews as an honored and ancient nation and that he has excluded the name of Moses from a list of human benefactors in which appear such names as Linus, Orphaeus and Musaeus, then surely Celsus is guilty, at least, of faulty judgment, and in this instance does not exhibit that breadth of knowledge with which he is sometimes credited.⁴⁶

Disparagement of the Jewish nation is also positively expressed by Celsus when he speaks of the Jews as "fugitives from Egypt, who had never done anything remarkable and were never held in repute or account".⁴⁷ Origen ventures the suggestion that his opponent speaks of the Jews as not being held in account or repute because the Greeks have not recorded any principal event of their history. He then proceeds to mention some of the distinguishing characteristics of the Jewish nation and so to indicate the fallacy of Celsus' assertion.⁴⁸

CRITICISM OF THE JEWISH RELIGION

The Jewish religion also became the object of Celsus' attacks.⁴⁹ Particularly did he oppose the doctrine of monotheism. The view that there is one god, he thought, was the product of the minds of herdsmen and shepherds which were deluded by vulgar deceits.⁵⁰ These deluded shepherds who

and so obtained a reputation of divinity (*ὄνομα δαιμόνιον*). Again in 4:31 he accuses Moses of perverting (*παραφθείροντα*) the story of the sons of Aloeus.

⁴⁶ *E. g.*, De Faye (*op. cit.*, I, 143): "De toutes les religions de l'époque, ce sont le judaïsme et le christianisme qui ont principalement fixé son attention. Il a voulu les connaître à fond". But Celsus does not appear to have possessed a profound knowledge of Judaism nor did he have a sympathetic understanding of Christianity.

⁴⁷ 4:31.

⁴⁸ Origen's argument is developed in 4:31, 32.

⁴⁹ Since the religion of Judaism was based upon the Old Testament, Celsus' strictures upon the Jewish religion in reality amount to an assault upon the Scriptures.

⁵⁰ 1:23.

followed Moses concluded that there was but one god, and that this god was named the Highest, or Adonai, or the Heavenly or Sabaoth. To Celsus, it mattered not how God be called, whether by the name of Zeus, or by a name that was current among the Indians or Egyptians.⁵¹ Apparently, the author of the *True Discourse* was under the impression that the god whom the Jews worshipped was heaven itself. He appears surprised that they worship heaven and angels but not heaven's most venerable parts, such as the sun and the moon. For "if the whole is God, then certainly its parts should be divine also",⁵²

From these passages it becomes clear that Celsus did not understand the monotheism of the Old Testament or even of the Jews of his time. This misunderstanding was due not merely to the fact that his mind was imbued with Platonic philosophy but also because he was not well acquainted with the Old Testament doctrine. This is the opinion of Origen who speaks of his opponent as being confused. Such a judgment is probably correct. Celsus' failure to state correctly the position which he is attempting to refute is not due to deceit or to lack of ability, but to lack of understanding. Certainly, no matter how strongly one may oppose a viewpoint, he should be able to state that viewpoint accurately. Celsus did not do that, and his criticism of the Old Testament doctrine of monotheism, therefore, must be regarded as an almost valueless contribution to the subject.

He further exhibits a lack of understanding of Jewish religion by the assertion that the Jews worship angels and practice sorcery.⁵³ In the face of such pronouncements it is difficult to believe that he had had first-hand acquaintance with the Jewish religion or that he had read the Pentateuch with care.

It is interesting to notice the reaction of Celsus to the

⁵¹ 1:24.

⁵² 1:25.

⁵³ 1:26, 5:6. Cf. G. F. Moore (*Judaism*, I, 401-413): "... they (*i. e.*, angels) were not objects of veneration, much less of adoration; and in orthodox Judaism they were not intermediaries between man and God" (p. 411).

Mosaic account of creation. "Furthermore," he says, "their cosmogony is very silly."⁵⁴ Likewise the narrative concerning the creation of man is declared to be "very silly".⁵⁵ Origen does not directly reply to this charge other than by referring the reader to his commentary on Genesis and by asserting that he believes his opponent to have no evidence capable of overthrowing the statement that man was made in the image of God.

It is difficult to ascertain a proper evaluation of Celsus' statement. Probably, however, we may find in the words "very silly" the reaction of Platonism to the doctrine of absolute creation. This doctrine is a conception which could not possibly be congenial to Platonic thought. The Genesis doctrine of absolute creation and the Platonic conception of the world are really deadly enemies.⁵⁶ They cannot exist side by side. One or the other must give way. The doctrine of absolute creation presents man as a creature and consequently derives the entirety of life's meaning from the Creator. Platonism on the other hand teaches that man exists in his own right; it does not in any true sense of the word look upon man as a creature.⁵⁷ Celsus speaks therefore, at this point, as a Platonist. To him the Mosaic cosmogony is very silly.

At the same time, as Origen complains, he makes no effort to criticize the doctrine intelligently. It is not even apparent that he has grasped the implications of the doctrine, for this is surely the vital point at which he should have struck, if he

⁵⁴ 6:49. Cf. also 4:36.

⁵⁵ 6:49.

⁵⁶ This thought has been developed in a mimeographed syllabus by C. Van Til (*Apologetics*, Philadelphia, 1941).

⁵⁷ Discussions of Plato and his teachings may be found in Cornford: *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*; Ritter: *The Essence of Plato's Philosophy*, translated by Adam Altes, New York, 1933; Taylor: *Plato, The Man and His Work*; More: *The Religion of Plato*. Expositions of the doctrine of absolute creation may be found in St. Thomas Aquinas: *Summa Theologica*, Paris, 1880, I, 510-562; H. Bavinck: *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, Kampen, 1928, II, 370-403. The doctrine is discussed from the point of view of the dialectical theology by Barth (*Die Kirchliche Dogmatik*, München, 1932, II, 404-410).

would overthrow the religious teaching of the Old Testament. Yet he dismisses this important point without serious comment.

He himself is inclined to agree with those who hold that the world is uncreated.⁵⁸ His argument is not as clear as could be desired. Apparently it is to the effect that the flood which is supposed to have taken place in the time of Deucalion is comparatively modern and that from eternity there have been many conflagrations and many floods; hence, things have existed as they are from eternity. But he does not attempt to defend his position, if it really be his, by means of philosophical argument. Origen intimates that his opponent is animated merely by a secret desire to discredit the Genesis account of creation. However, this is not necessarily the case. Rather, it appears that, being under the influence of Platonic philosophy and being well read in Platonism, Celsus more or less naturally assumed the eternity of the world without in any very critical fashion having examined the reasons for such belief.

Celsus seems not to have had a wide acquaintance with the institutions of the Jewish religion. He refers to circumcision and asserts that it was of Egyptian origin.⁵⁹ He was, we believe, mistaken in asserting that the Jews derived this practice from Egypt, but he was not mistaken in declaring that the Egyptians did practise circumcision. In his reply, Origen mistakenly declares that according to Moses, Abraham was the first of men to practise this rite. A careful reading of the Genesis passage, however, will show that such is not its actual import.⁶⁰

In another passage, however, Origen endeavors to point out that the reason for circumcision among the Jews is not the same as the reason for its practice among the Egyptians and hence it is not to be thought of as the same circumcision.⁶¹

⁵⁸ 1:19. Cf., however, 6:52: ἐγὼ δὲ περὶ μὲν γενέσεως κόσμου καὶ φθορᾶς, ἢ ὡς ἀγένητος καὶ ἄφθαρτος, ἢ ὡς γενήτος μὲν ἄφθαρτος δὲ, ἢ ὡς τὸ ἐμπαλιῶν, οὐδὲν περὶ τοῦδε νυνὶ λέγω.

⁵⁹ 1:22.

⁶⁰ Genesis 17:10 ff.

⁶¹ 5:47, 48.

CELSUS AND BIBLICAL ANTHROPOMORPHISM

Celsus takes particular exception to the anthropomorphism of the Old Testament and gives evidence of not understanding anthropomorphic language.⁶² The language of Scripture regarding God, Origen maintains, is adapted to an anthropomorphic point of view. This fact Celsus does not perceive. Hence, he ridicules the passages where words of anger are addressed to the ungodly or threatenings are directed against sinners. Origen's reply consists in a simple exposition of the purpose of anthropomorphic language in which he compares it to the language which a judicious parent would use in dealing with a child. Again, in another passage Celsus objects to the statement that "God repents"⁶³ and that "God rests".⁶⁴

According to Celsus man was fashioned by the hand of God and inflated by breath being blown into him.⁶⁵ Origen points out that in Genesis no mention of the "hands" of God is made and accuses Celsus of not understanding the meaning of the Divine inbreathing as recorded in Genesis. He likewise speaks of those who do not understand anthropomorphic language as thinking that Christians attribute to God a form such as man possesses.⁶⁶

This criticism of Origen seems to apply to Celsus in his interpretation of the Biblical statement, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness".⁶⁷ These words he takes to

⁶² 4:71, 72. Cf. De Faye (*op. cit.*, I, 151): "Enfin ce que le platonicien Celse ne peut souffrir, ce sont les anthropomorphismes de l'Ancien Testament. On représente Dieu avec des bras et des mains; on parle de sa colère, de sa vengeance. C'est un langage inadmissible lorsqu'on croit au Dieu de Platon".

⁶³ 6:58.

⁶⁴ 6:61. Cf. also 6:62 where Celsus refers to the mouth of God. οὐδὲ στόμα αὐτῷ ἐστὶν οὐδὲ φωνή.

⁶⁵ 4:37. ἀγγέλασθαι ὅτι συνέθεσαν ἄνθρωπον ὑπὸ χειρῶν θεοῦ πλασσομένου (καὶ ἐμφυσώμενον), ἵνα τὸ ἐμφυσώμενον κ.τ.λ. The context shows that the force of Celsus' argument implies the insertion of καὶ ἐμφυσώμενον after πλασσομένου. Cf. also 4:36 and Koetschau: *op. cit.*, I, 308; Migne: *op. cit.*, XI, 1085.

⁶⁶ 4:37.

⁶⁷ Genesis 1:26.

mean that mankind resembles God.⁶⁸ In refuting this assertion Origen maintains that there is a difference between creation “in the image of God” and creation “after His likeness”, and that a man was originally created only in the “image of God”. In thus arguing he exhibits poor exegesis. For the words *image* and *likeness* appear to have practically the same meaning. At any rate he does not appear successfully to have refuted his opponent in this instance.⁶⁹

In a long quotation Origen sets forth the view of Celsus as to the manner in which the Jews received their information about the creation of man, the Divine inbreathing, the creation of woman, the serpent and the fall.⁷⁰ Because of its length the quotation is valuable as an example of Celsus’ method in stating an argument. Celsus seems to think that the Jewish accounts are more recent than those composed by Hesiod and others, but Origen is quick to point out the chronological error of his opponent, and ironically refers to this “well informed and learned Celsus”.⁷¹

A general criticism of the first chapter of Genesis is found in the statement that “God rested on the seventh day”, where Celsus compares God to a very bad workman, who stands in need of rest.⁷² Origen accuses his opponent of assuming that the expression “he rested” (*ἀνεπαύσατο*) is equivalent in meaning to “he ceased” (*κατέπαυσεν*).⁷³ This

⁶⁸ 4:30.

⁶⁹ It is not perfectly clear what Origen means by insisting that we are created “in the image” of God but not “after His likeness”.

⁷⁰ 4:36. Ἰουδαῖοι ἐν γωνίᾳ που τῆς Παλαιστίνης συγκύψαντες, παντελῶς ἀπαίδευτοι καὶ οὐ προακηκοότες πάλαι ταῦτα Ἡσιόδῳ καὶ ἄλλοις μυρίοις ἀνδράσιν ἐνθέοις ὑμνημένα, συνέθεσαν ἀπιθανώτατα, ἄνθρωπῶν τινα ὑπὸ χειρῶν θεοῦ πλασσομένον τε καὶ ἐμφυσώμενον καὶ γύναιον ἐκ τῆς πλευρᾶς καὶ παραγγέλματα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ὄφιν τούτοις ἀντιπράσσοντα καὶ περιγινόμενον τῶν θεοῦ προσταγμάτων τὸν ὄφιν, μῦθόν τινα ὡς γραυσὶ διηγούμενοι καὶ ποιῶντες ἀνοσιώτατα τὸν θεόν, εἰθὺς ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς ἀσθενοῦντα καὶ μήδ’ ἐν’ ἄνθρωπον, ὃν αὐτὸς ἔπλασε, πείσαι δυνάμενον.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* ⁷² 6:61.

⁷³ The LXX of Genesis 2:2 reads καὶ κατέπαυσεν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ ἔβδόμῃ ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν ἔργων αὐτοῦ ὧν ἐποίησεν. It would appear that if Celsus had read the Septuagint, he did not read it with care. More likely, however, he received this information by word of mouth and did not study the Septuagint to ascertain what its actual meaning was.

assertion he attributes to a misunderstanding of the text, assuming that Celsus knows nothing of the Sabbath and of God’s rest, which he himself thinks lasts for the duration of the world. To the author of the *True Discourse*, however, it does not seem to be fitting that God should thus feel fatigue.⁷⁴ Involved in this criticism, therefore, may be discerned the influence of that Platonic philosophy which cannot comprehend anthropomorphism. Involved in it also is a misunderstanding of, or a lack of acquaintance with, the exact statement of Scripture upon the subject. If Celsus was familiar with the Septuagint, his interpretation of it was, as Origen points out, faulty.

CELSUS’ CRITICISM OF INDIVIDUAL BIBLICAL STATEMENTS

One penetrating criticism of Genesis which has been uttered many a time since the days of Celsus concerns the distribution of the work of creation over certain days, before such days actually came into existence.⁷⁵ Origen’s reply to this charge is by no means satisfactory, when judged in the light of the requirements of a grammatico-historical exegesis. He asserts that he has already spoken of the matter in the foregoing pages as well as in his notes upon Genesis, where he takes to task those who take the words of Genesis in their apparent signification and, apparently to cast light upon his own interpretation, quotes Genesis 2:4.⁷⁶ It must be confessed that from the standpoint of scientific interpretation, Celsus’ exposition of the six days of creation is to be preferred to that of Origen.

⁷⁴ 6:61. οὐ θέμις τὸν πρῶτον θεὸν κάμνειν οὔτε χειρουργεῖν οὔτε κελεύειν. This is given by Origen as a direct quotation of Celsus. What is meant by the “first” God is not perfectly clear, although possibly the reference is to God as the Creator as distinguished from the Logos. There may be in this phrase a reference to trinitarian teaching which Celsus had heard in the mouths of Christians, and which he had completely misunderstood. By his use of κάμνειν (to be weary due to long continued work), whether intentionally or not, Celsus does not accurately represent the κατέπαυσεν of Genesis 2:2. This would seem to constitute further evidence that he was not acquainted with the LXX. Likewise, the use of χειρουργεῖν and κελεύειν is not a correct representation of what the Scripture actually teaches.

⁷⁵ 6:60.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

Apparently Celsus also ridicules the Scripture statements regarding the deep sleep of Adam and the creation of woman, although he does not quote the language of the Bible in so doing.⁷⁷ He likewise rejects the account of the serpent, and, according to Origen, purposely omits mention of the garden of Eden.⁷⁸ This serpent, Celsus argues in another place, opposed the commandments of God and gained a victory over them.⁷⁹ The force of the Genesis account of the entrance of sin into the world, however, does not seem at all to be clear to Celsus. Indeed, it is questionable whether he had ever read the narrative, for, although he does speak of the serpent as having gained a victory over God's commandments, it would seem that he is under the impression that Christians believe that God has Himself created evil.⁸⁰

The account of the deluge and of the ark is also subjected to his criticism.⁸¹ He does not make explicit reference to the Scripture narrative as such, but introduces his discussion by presenting a quotation in which the Jewish position is given.⁸² This account of the deluge, therefore, is, according to Celsus, a falsified version of the story of Deucalion. The raven of Genesis is called a crow by him. What is truly remarkable in the criticism is that Celsus, as Origen indicates, makes no mention of the exact size of the ark and of the supposed difficulty of its containing all the animals, but merely speaks

⁷⁷ 4:38.

⁷⁸ 4:39. ἐπεὶ δὲ καὶ τὰ περὶ τὸν ὄφιν ὡς ἀντιπράσσοντα τοῖς τοῦ θεοῦ πρὸς τὸν ἀνθρώπον παραγγέλμασιν ὁ Κέλσος κωμωδεῖ, μῦθόν τινα παραπλήσιον τοῖς παραδιδόμενοις ταῖς γρασὶν ὑπολαβῶν εἶναι τὸν λόγον. It will be noted that this is not a direct quotation of Celsus and that at this point we are entirely dependent upon Origen. Origen's refutation consists in chiding Celsus for not adopting an allegorical interpretation (καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ τούτοις εἰρημένα, δυνάμενα αὐτόθεν κινήσαι τὸν εὐμενῶς ἐντυγχάνοντα, ὅτι πάντα ταῦτα οὐκ ἀσέμνως τροπολογεῖται). To support his argument Origen mentions the statement about Eros in Plato's *Symposium* and maintains that Plato is here teaching in the guise of a myth. Because of his allegorical exegesis, Origen's argument is not very cogent.

⁷⁹ 4:36.

⁸⁰ 6:53. εἰ δὲ (αὐτοῦ) ταῦτ' ἔστιν ἔργα, πῶς μὲν κακὰ ὁ θεὸς ἐποίει. The exact force of κακὰ is not entirely clear, as Origen himself notes.

⁸¹ 4:41, 42.

⁸² 4:41.

of it as "monstrous". Indeed, the indefinite manner in which the criticism is introduced seems to indicate that Celsus was not acquainted with the dimensions of the ark, else he would not have passed over the objection that the ark was not large enough to hold all the animals which it was supposed to contain.⁸³

It is not perfectly clear what was Celsus' reaction to the account of the Tower of Babel. Apparently he believed that Moses, in writing about the tower and the confusion of tongues, had perverted the story of the sons of Alocus.⁸⁴ It would seem, too, that he believed that the event took place like the flood for the purpose of purifying the earth. This interpretation puzzled Origen, who did not see how there could be such a purificatory process unless, possibly, it were to consist in the confusion of tongues itself.

The account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is compared by Celsus to the story of Phaeton. But Origen replies that to impartial hearers Moses appears to be older than Homer, whom he believes to be the first to mention the story of the sons of Alocus.⁸⁵ And those who relate the story of Phaeton are even more recent than Homer. All these statements, thinks Origen, result from one blunder, "his not considering the greater antiquity of Moses".⁸⁶

Celsus also directs his shafts against the patriarchal narratives. The account of the begetting of children, which according to the author of *Contra Celsum* refers to the history of Abraham and Sarah, is "altogether monstrous and

⁸³ Origen's reply to Celsus concerning the size of the ark is indeed surprising. The cubits of the length and breadth were contracted (*συναγομένης*), he says, so that the thirty cubits in height terminated in a summit which was one cubit square. The measurements are capable of being taken in the meaning (*τῷ δυνάμει λέγεσθαι τὰ μέτρα*) that the length was nine myriads of cubits in the base, and two thousand five hundred in breadth. It is not at all clear upon what ground Origen could make statements such as these. Apparently in this instance we have an example of that flight of fancy of which he was at times capable. In the entire discussion of the ark and the deluge neither Celsus nor Origen is very impressive in his reasoning.

⁸⁴ 4:21.

⁸⁵ Cf. *Odyssey*, 11:305.

⁸⁶ 4:21.

untimely".⁸⁷ He also objects to the "conspiracies of the brothers", by which Origen thinks he means either the plotting of Cain against Abel or that of Esau against Jacob. He also speaks of a father's sorrow, by which his opponent understands him to refer to the sorrow of Isaac over the absence of Jacob and possibly also to that of Jacob over Joseph's having been sold into Egypt. Again he mentions the "crafty actions of mothers" by which Origen supposes that he refers to the conduct of Rebekah. Furthermore, the great apologist accuses Celsus of ridiculing Jacob's acquisition of property while living with Laban, which is attributed to his not understanding the reference of the words "And those which had no spots were Laban's, and those which were spotted were Jacob's".⁸⁸ Again, Celsus asserts that "God presented his (*i. e.*, Jacob's) sons with asses, and sheep and camels" to which Origen replies by interpreting the passage allegorically.⁸⁹

Origen likewise takes strong exception to the charge of his opponent that "God gave wells also to the righteous".⁹⁰ The righteous, he replies, do not construct cisterns but dig wells, receiving in a figurative sense the command, "Drink waters from your own vessels, and from your own wells of fresh water".⁹¹ This narrative about the wells, he reasons, is in order to present to view more important truths. He then proceeds to indicate, by an appeal to the wells which in his own day were shown at Ascalon, that wells actually were constructed in the land of the Philistines, as related by Genesis. The exact nature of Celsus' objections to the story of the wells, due to the meagre amount of information which has been given by his opponent, is, therefore, not perfectly clear.

The story of Lot is thought by Celsus to be worse than the

⁸⁷ 4:43.

⁸⁸ Origen's quotation is based upon the LXX of Genesis 30:42. *ἐγένετο δὲ τὰ ἄσημα τοῦ Λαβάν, τὰ δὲ ἐπίσημα τοῦ Ἰακώβ.* Origen substitutes *καὶ ἦν* for *ἐγένετο δέ*. Apparently, Celsus' failure to see the proper reference of these words lay, according to his opponent, in his not understanding them as having an allegorical (*τυπικῶς*) interpretation.

⁸⁹ 4:43.

⁹⁰ 4:44.

⁹¹ Cf. Proverbs 5:15-17.

crimes of Thyestes.⁹² But, according to Origen, this narrative may have a figurative meaning. Furthermore, by an appeal to the teachings of the Stoics, he seeks to indicate that the act itself, if performed with a worthy intention, is not necessarily reprehensible. Again, Celsus is reported as sneering at Esau's hatred of Jacob and as not clearly stating the story of Simeon and Levi. Celsus then refers evidently to the Joseph story by means of such phrases as "brothers selling one another", "a brother sold" and "a father deceived".⁹³

Several references to events narrated in the book of Exodus are also made, but it is not perfectly clear why Celsus mentions these.⁹⁴ One statement in particular is striking. Concerning Joseph it is said, "By whom (Joseph namely) the illustrious and divine nation of the Jews, after growing up in Egypt to be a multitude of people, was commanded to sojourn somewhere beyond the limits of the kingdom, and to pasture their flocks in districts of no repute".⁹⁵ This passage stands in strange contrast to other assertions of Celsus regarding the Jews in Egypt.⁹⁶ Origen also notes that his opponent refers to the exodus as a flight, charging him with not having remembered what was written in the book of Exodus concerning the departure from Egypt.

In reality the Scripture is also attacked when Celsus assails the view that all things were made for man.⁹⁷ Rather, so his argument proceeds, did they come into existence as well for the sake of the irrational animals. Even if one should grant that thunders and rains are the works of God, which Celsus himself refuses to do, it cannot be maintained that these are of more benefit to man than to plants and trees, herbs and thorns.⁹⁸ Nor can it be held that plants and trees grow for the sake of man more than for the beasts. Again, man must struggle and labor while the animals have all things without

⁹² 4:45.

⁹³ *E. g.* 3:5, 7; 4:31.

⁹⁴ 4:46, 47.

⁹⁵ 4:47. Translation of the Rev. Frederick Crombie in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, IV.

⁹⁶ *E. g.* 3:5, 6, 7.

⁹⁷ 4:74.

⁹⁸ 4:75.

either ploughing or sowing.⁹⁹ Nor do sun and night serve man more than they do the ants and flies.¹⁰⁰ If one say that we are lords of the animal creation because we hunt animals and live upon their flesh, it should be replied that we were created rather for them because they hunt and devour us.¹⁰¹ We even need the help of nets and weapons and the assistance of other persons and of dogs when engaged in the chase, but the animals have their own weapons. Before cities were built and arts were invented men were generally caught and devoured by beasts, but wild beasts were seldom caught by men.¹⁰² At first man actually was subjected by God to the wild beasts.¹⁰³

It might appear, Celsus continues, that because men build cities and have governments they are superior to animals, but even ants and bees do the same.¹⁰⁴ Nor can man boast because he possesses the power of sorcery, for even in this respect serpents and eagles are his superiors.¹⁰⁵ Some animals even can grasp the idea of God as men have, for what is more divine than the power of foreknowing and predicting future events?¹⁰⁶ Men really acquire this art from other animals and especially from birds, for it would seem that they are in closer relationship to God and more beloved by him.¹⁰⁷ No animals look upon an oath as more sacred than do the elephants, nor do any show greater devotion to divine things.¹⁰⁸ The stork also, because of its filial affection, is more pious than man, and the phoenix is known also for its filial love.¹⁰⁹

Such are the arguments which Celsus adduces to arrive at the conclusion that all things were not made primarily for man. In thus reasoning he shows himself to be a child of his time and a believer in what appears to the modern man as unfounded superstition. Nor does Origen at this point rise much above him, but follows his argument step by step in

⁹⁹ 4:76.¹⁰⁰ 4:77.¹⁰¹ 4:78.¹⁰² 4:79.¹⁰³ 4:80.¹⁰⁴ 4:81. The argument continues through 4:85.¹⁰⁵ 4:86.¹⁰⁶ 4:88.¹⁰⁷ 4:88.¹⁰⁸ 4:88.¹⁰⁹ 4:98.

an effort to vindicate the Scriptural teaching that man is the crown of God's creation.¹¹⁰

Prophecy and the Messianic hope are likewise subjected to Celsus' criticism. Christians value the words of Jewish prophecies which are like those practised in Phoenicia and Palestine, he asserts, but they reject the Grecian oracles.¹¹¹ The essence of this criticism, therefore, so far as it concerns the Old Testament, is that the prophecies of the Bible are upon a level with those which are uttered elsewhere. There are many forms of prophecy, asserts Celsus, and many can assume the gestures of inspired persons.¹¹² He then proceeds to characterize prophecy as he knows it, and what he is describing may possibly apply to prophecy as he had seen it in Phoenicia but it does not begin to do justice to the phenomenon presented in the Bible. Apparently, Celsus believed that in the prophetic writings God was represented as doing that which was bad, shameful and impure. He does not give specific instances, however, "but contents himself with loudly asserting the false charge that these things are to be found in Scripture."¹¹³ Nor, he continues, is there any Messianic hope, for "no God or son of a god either came or will come down (to earth)".¹¹⁴

It is instructive to note that Celsus objects to an allegorical interpretation of the Mosaic narrative.¹¹⁵ To him allegorical and tropical interpretation seem to be a refuge for the more modest of the Jewish and Christian writers, because they are ashamed of those things.¹¹⁶ These allegorical interpretations, however, are more shameful than the fables which they allegorize. Such is his objection, and by this last statement Origen thinks that Celsus has reference to the works of Philo and that he has never read them.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁰ Origen does, apparently, express doubt as to the truth of the story of the Phoenix, yet throughout the discussion he appears not to have risen above the then prevailing scientific view.¹¹¹ 7:3.¹¹² 7:9.¹¹³ 7:12. Translation by the Rev. Frederick Crombie in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, IV.¹¹⁴ 5:2.¹¹⁵ 1:17.¹¹⁶ 4:48.¹¹⁷ 4:51.

CELSUS AND THE MOSAIC AUTHORSHIP OF THE
PENTATEUCH

One further subject remains to be discussed, namely, what was the attitude of Celsus toward the question of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch? It has been asserted that he actually denied such authorship.¹¹⁸ While discussing Genesis, he does as a matter of fact actually employ the plural in the following sentence, "So they endeavored to construct genealogies".¹¹⁹ Again, Origen, in criticizing his opponent for accusing Moses of having corrupted the story of Deucalion, says, "Unless, indeed, he does not think the writing is the work of Moses, but of several persons".¹²⁰

It is very questionable, however, whether Celsus by his use of the plural in the above mentioned instance intended to indicate a plurality of authors of the Pentateuch. It would seem to be more likely that he was merely indulging in a contemptuous reference to the Jews.¹²¹ When, therefore, he says "they sought to construct genealogies", he merely means that this was a Jewish undertaking and not that there were actually several authors of the genealogies.

Two arguments primarily seem to support this interpretation. In the first place, if Origen had really been under the impression that Celsus denied the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, he would certainly have engaged in controversy with him upon this point, for Origen himself firmly believed that Moses did write the Pentateuch.¹²² His entire apologetic

¹¹⁸ Most recently by R. H. Pfeiffer (*Introduction to the Old Testament*, 1941, p. 135): "Celsus not only denied the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch but questioned its literary unity".

¹¹⁹ 4:33. ὡς ἄρα ἐπεχείρησαν γενεαλογεῖν αὐτοὺς κ.τ.λ.

¹²⁰ 4:42. εἰ μὴ ἄρα οὐδὲ Μωϋσέως οἶεται εἶναι τὴν γραφὴν, ἀλλὰ τινῶν πλειόνων· τοιοῦτον γὰρ δηλοῖ τὸ παραχαράττοντες καὶ ῥαδιουργοῦντες τὸν Δευκαλίωνα, καὶ τοῦτο· οὐ γὰρ οἶμαι προσεδόκησαν ὅτι ταῦτ' εἰς φῶς πρόεισι.

¹²¹ Cf. Gray: *Old Testament Criticism, Its Rise and Progress*, pp. 19-20.

¹²² Cf. such statements of Origen as the following: "Moses in his five books", "Mosaic account of creation", "writings of Moses", "law of Moses", "the first book of Moses, which is entitled Genesis", "the book of Moses entitled Numbers", "the Exodus of Moses", "the Mosaic writings". The following passages are pertinent: 1:4, 14, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21,

gives evidence of the fact that he was convinced that it was his duty to refute whatever of serious error appeared in the writings of his opponent, and therefore, had he discovered Celsus denying a matter which would have been of such great importance, it is difficult to believe that he would have kept silence.¹²³

Secondly, an examination of other passages makes it clear that Celsus as a matter of fact did not deny the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. Indeed, he even appears to affirm such authorship. Moses wrote the account of the tower, he thinks, and perverted the story of the sons of Alocus.¹²⁴ In one instance he refers to the "Mosaic narrative" as representing God in a state of weakness.¹²⁵ Moses and the prophets, he says again, have left to us our books.¹²⁶ On this point he and Origen seem to have had no quarrel. Throughout the entire work the discussion in every relevant place is carried on upon the assumption that Moses did write the Pentateuch. There is really nothing to indicate that Celsus questioned this point at all.

III. THE IMPORTANCE OF CELSUS AND HIS WORK

It must be obvious, even to the most cursory reader of *Contra Celsum*, that the one whom Origen was seeking to refute, was indeed a gifted and learned man. The storehouse of his knowledge seems indeed to have been vast, and the skill with which he drew upon that storehouse for assistance in his argument was indeed remarkable. Skillful also was the ability with which he was able to detect weak points in the position which he was attacking.¹²⁷

22, 26, 44, 49, 53, 57, 59, 60; 2:1, 2, 3, 4, 9, 53, 54, 55, 74; 3:2, 5, 6, 8, 12, 73; 4:12, 21, 33, 36, 40, 42, 50, 51, 55, 93, 95; 5:1, 29, 44, 60; 6:7, 21, 23, 28, 36, 43, 49, 50, 51, 70; 7:7, 18, 26, 28, 31, 34, 39, 59; 8:5, 29.

¹²³ Cf. *Praef.* 3.

¹²⁴ 6:21.

¹²⁵ 4:40. ὁ Μωϋσέως λόγος.

¹²⁶ 6:50.

¹²⁷ Cf. e. g. De Faye (*op. cit.*, p. 158) and the relevant discussions in Keim; Pélagaud; Baur: *Vorlesungen über die christliche Dogmengeschichte*, I, 297 ff.; Seeberg: *Dogmengeschichte*, I, 332-334; Bardenhewer: *Patrologie*, p. 130.

It is the extensive range of his knowledge and erudition that compels astonishment.¹²⁸ Indeed, it seems to have been almost encyclopaedic. Mention is made of many of the Greek philosophers and writers.¹²⁹ Celsus seems to have been acquainted with the religions and customs of many lands, so much so, indeed, that he almost appears as one of the first exponents of the study of comparative religions.¹³⁰ So great was his knowledge of sects and cults that even Origen could learn from him.¹³¹ Mosheim has gone so far as to believe that Celsus was at one time an adherent of one of these sects but that later he apostatized therefrom.¹³² About the erudition of Celsus, there seems to be little doubt. Despite the superficiality and childishness of some of his criticisms, despite his hollowness and ridicule, it must be confessed that he was truly a man of genuine learning.¹³³

What, then, was the object which this learned antagonist of Christianity was endeavoring to accomplish? What were the causes which led him to marshal such a wide array of arguments to his support in the composition of the *True Discourse*? To these questions various answers have been given. According to some, Celsus looked upon Christianity as a social peril and opposed it as such. His arguments against its doctrines, therefore, were more or less secondary.¹³⁴ Yet another answer is that he did not fear that Christianity would destroy paganism. The Christians, however, were disobedient to the laws, and consequently were deserving of attack. Hence, his main purpose was to attack Christianity.¹³⁵ Again, it has been held that the *True Discourse* was written

¹²⁸ Pélagaud (*op. cit.*, p. 386) has discussed the question thoroughly.

¹²⁹ *E. g.*, Hesiod, 4:6; Euripides 2:34; Herodotus 1:5; Homer 1:36; Plato 4:54; Pythagoras 5:41; Heraclitus 5:14; Empedocles 8:53. (References are to *Contra Celsum*).

¹³⁰ *Cf.* Keim: *op. cit.*, p. 219; Coen: *op. cit.*, p. 281.

¹³¹ Renan (*op. cit.*, p. 353) refers to 5:62; 6:24, 27, 30, 38.

¹³² Mosheim: *op. cit.*, p. 33.

¹³³ *Cf. e. g.* Buhl (*op. cit.*, p. 18): "... Celse nous montre dans son écrit une connaissance assez étendue du côté extérieur du christianisme, de ses sources, de son histoire".

¹³⁴ Pélagaud: *op. cit.*, pp. 453 f.

¹³⁵ Buhl: *op. cit.*, p. 22.

to shame Christians into giving up their religion and to convert them.¹³⁶

It does seem apparent that Celsus was concerned about the growth of the Christian religion.¹³⁷ This he does not explicitly admit, but he advances the charge that Christians meet in secret and so are acting contrary to law.¹³⁸ He accuses them of proselytizing those who are easy to influence.¹³⁹ Indeed, the very fact of his writing in such detail is sufficient evidence that he faced a powerful movement which he believed must be checked.

Whether or not, however, it can be definitely proven that he was alarmed over the growth of Christianity, this much at least can be positively affirmed; he was determined, as much as in him lay, to refute the claims of the Christian religion.¹⁴⁰ Despite the ridicule, mockery, derision and even sarcasm with which he sometimes advanced his arguments, we may note that he plunged into his task with seriousness.¹⁴¹ This, then, was his grand purpose, the refutation of Christianity.¹⁴² He was not primarily concerned to persecute Christians nor to attack his enemy in one respect over above another. Nor, it would seem, was his principal desire to oppose Christianity as a political rather than as a religious force. Nor, indeed, might the reverse even be said to be correct. It was that phenomenon which Celsus knew as Christianity—Christianity together with all its implications—

¹³⁶ Duchesne: *op. cit.*, p. 147.

¹³⁷ Tollinton: *op. cit.*, p. 85. *Cf.* 2:45; 3:9, 10, 12, 73 and 5:59.

¹³⁸ 1:13. De Faye (*op. cit.*, I, 155) says, "Il est à remarquer que s'il critique les livres des chrétiens et leurs doctrines, il ne s'attaque pas à leur moeurs". But if Celsus criticizes secret meetings of Christians, is this not an attack upon what he believes to be their customs?

¹³⁹ *E. g.* 3:49-54.

¹⁴⁰ This is apparent from the fact that Celsus attacks Christianity in such a variety of manners.

¹⁴¹ *Cf.* Baur (*op. cit.*, p. 168): "In spite of all the mockery and derision with which he treated Christianity, Celsus took up with all seriousness the task of refuting it, and as a Platonist did what he could to maintain the heathen view of the world against the opposite Christian view".

¹⁴² While this object is not explicitly stated as such in the *True Discourse* yet the very existence of such a writing shows that such was Celsus' aim.

which must be refuted. Hence, in the work which Origen has left we behold a life and death struggle between the Graeco-Roman paganism and the nascent Christian Faith. If Christianity could survive this attack, its future might well seem to be insured.¹⁴³

The assault of Celsus upon Christianity was unlike any previous attack or opposition of which we have knowledge. It was not written to meet the needs of some local situation or of a passing moment.¹⁴⁴ It did not concentrate upon one particular phase of the new religion nor did it merely deny this or that individual doctrine. Rather, it struck at the center as well as at the periphery. He assailed the Christian doctrines of God and salvation and also presented the opinion that Christians met in secret and that they were divided into numberless sects. Herein lies the importance of the *True Discourse*. It represents the old order standing in opposition to the new. It is not so much Celsus the philosopher who speaks but rather Celsus the man, the citizen of the ancient Graeco-Roman world, the representative of an existence which sees itself in peril.¹⁴⁵ To serve him in his attempt to refute the Christian religion he calls upon philosophy — any philosophy, it would seem, which would serve his purpose — but he calls upon other aids also, ridicule, recollections of various customs, knowledge derived from different sources.¹⁴⁶

In this fact, it may be said, lies the explanation why Celsus also attacked the Old Testament. Just as he did not approach Christianity dispassionately in order to make a calm, scientific investigation of it, but rather to refute it, so also he drew near to the Old Testament in the same spirit. It is because he was fully aware of the dependence of Christianity upon the Old Testament that he would criticize it. If the foundation could be destroyed, then surely the superstructure itself would fall to the ground.¹⁴⁷ Hence, if Judaism and the

¹⁴³ Cf. Patrick (*op. cit.*, p. 109): "It was the first onset of pagan thought, and also its most powerful; if the Gospel of Christ were not overthrown by such an attack, its victory was assured".

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Krüger: *op. cit.*, p. 196.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. also Kidd: *A History of the Church to A. D. 461*, I, 412.

¹⁴⁶ It is also for this reason that the exact nature of Celsus' philosophical position is somewhat obscure.

¹⁴⁷ 1:2. Cf. also 3:6, 8.

Scriptures can be refuted, the task of refuting Christianity becomes that much simpler.

The criticisms of the Old Testament which appear in the *True Discourse* are, it may be concluded, not based upon patient research and investigation. They represent, rather, the products of a prejudiced mind.¹⁴⁸ They are colored by the philosophy of Celsus and in this light they must be judged. Scientific Biblical criticism is not to be discovered in the discussions of Origen's opponent as they are preserved for us in *Contra Celsum*.

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¹⁴⁸ Cf. Mackinnon: *From Christ to Constantine*, p. 491; James Orr: *Neglected Factors in the Study of the Early Progress of Christianity*, p. 59.