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## OLD TRUTHS FOR A NEW AGE.\*

### I.

*Heb. 13, 8:* "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever."

IN CHRIST, OUR ETERNAL HIGH PRIEST, DEARLY BELOVED FRIENDS:—

A deluge of wrath and terror has swept over the earth these last four years and has left in its wake a terrible mass of wreckage and ruin. Thrones and dynasties have been toppled over, and the very foundations of society shattered. Confusion, anguish, and despair have taken possession of vast numbers of souls. We now see fulfilled the prophecy of Christ regarding the latter days: "Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth." As a result, the cry for reconstruction is heard all over the world, reconstruction of all the things and institutions that determine man's relations to his fellow-men and the relations of nations towards nations. More significant still, reconstruction is called for in the relation of man towards his Maker. The religions of the past, Christianity included, we are told, have utterly failed to achieve their purpose and their promise, and are now things of the past. A new religion is needed.

Thus is the gauntlet thrown down to all who are determined to cling to the old Christ and His Gospel. The charge and the challenge must be met. Are we prepared to do so? We are. And our answer to both, the charge and the challenge, is made in the words of our text:—

*"JESUS CHRIST THE SAME YESTERDAY, AND TO-DAY, AND FOREVER."*

Calmly and boldly we declare the old Christ and the old Gospel of Christ efficient and sufficient for the true purposes of religion and the high and glorious purpose of God's Church on earth until the end of time.

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\* A series of addresses delivered during the first week in Lent at the Lutheran Noonday Services at the American Theater, St. Louis, Mo.

# ORIGEN AGAINST CELSUS.

## II.

The main aim of this monograph is to present the polemics of this earlier Neoplatonist against the essentials of the Christian Gospel as directly and concisely as possible, a document of that spirit and of those times. I have, as intimated above, a very high opinion of the counter-critique and apology of the most learned of the Greek patristic writers. But we cannot write a book here. Still it would be a pity not to gather some precious sheaves in a field rarely cultivated by the average theological reader, of data, utterances, matters, which illustrate the life of the Church about 250 A. D., and present her doctrine, as well as some conceptions perhaps more personally held by Origen of Alexandria. These data cannot always be woven into a larger unit of presentation, and many must stand by themselves.

Celsus admitted (I, 27) that there were "some men of good character and capable and of good understanding" among the Christians; but most of them, he claimed, were plain folk and uncultured. "We of the Church," Origen says, "hold the Decalog a divine injunction." (II, 6.) We see also how Origen

conceives *ecclesia* (*ekkklesia*): as "the commonwealth of God," a spiritual one, set over against the civic and the political one in which it finds itself. We are told that the Christians carefully test all neophytes, individually and specifically, and insist, as a preliminary of actual introduction, on spotless moral conduct. (III, 51.) The Christians mourn for the excommunicated as for dead. (*Ibid.*) Sermons before the church seem to be meant by "the discourses addressed to the general gathering" (*en tois pros to koinon dialogois*). (III, 52.) The aim and work of the Christian Church is summed up as the endeavor "by means of the remedial art derived from the *Logos* (John 1) to treat [as being spiritually ailing] every rational being, and bring it into close relations (*oikeiosai*) with God, who created all things." (III, 54.) Often women were converted through the church from wantonness (*akolasia*) and from the mania for spectacles, dancing, and superstition. (III, 56.) "We call men to live really in the sight of God." (III, 57.)

Origen's reference to Peter's famous confession of our Lord's Sonship of God is clearly so made (VI, 77) that it is the *confession* on which the Church of Christ is built, and ever will be built, not the sacerdotal person of Peter, as the founder of a hierarchical dynasty, let alone any chain of successors. In saying: "We who are of the Church whose name is taken from Christ alone," he distinguishes the orthodox Church from Gnostic sects. (VIII, 26.) Sundays, Easter (*Pascha*), Pentecost, and days of "preparation" in the Christian year are mentioned. (VIII, 22.) The Eucharist is referred to as "eating of the flesh of the Word." (*Ibid.*) In Christian burial the body is honored as having been the instrument (*organon*) of the rational soul. (VIII, 30.) No language as yet is canonic in divine service or prayer; God understands them all. Nor is there a trace as yet of any intercession of saints. (VIII, 37.) "We do not swear by the Fortune of an emperor as [we do] not by any other being reputed a god." (VIII, 65.)—Pagan religion Origen repeatedly calls "the godless polytheism." (I, 1; III, 73.)

As to Origen's specific personality, with all his wonderful Biblical erudition and the admirable skill with which he cites it, there are some Platonic elements in him, and in his attempt to comprehend God, the soul, the world, though not nearly as much as in his preceptor, Clement. On the other hand, by his very work of making rejoinder to the Platonist Celsus, is he driven to assert and differentiate the Christian position. "We [Christians] state that human nature is not sufficing in any manner whatsoever to seek God and find Him clearly, if not aided by Him who is sought for." (VII, 42.) He also quotes in his critique of Celsus Matt. 11, 27: "No man knoweth the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him," and that the recognition of God comes to the soul through some divine grace (*theia tini chariti*). (VII, 44.) While there is before Origen's mind the famous passage in Plato's *Phaedrus* (247, a—c), he goes on to say that the soul of the Christian has learned to seek from Jesus nothing small, *i. e.*, nothing pertaining to the domain of the sensuous (*aistheton*), "but only the great and truly divine things, all those things which, when given by God, contribute to make the journey to the bliss with Him [attained] through His Son, who is the Word of God." (VII, 44, *fin.*)

In casting a broad view over the Mediterranean world and the Church, Origen speaks particularly of the moral regeneration accomplished by the Gospel, the devotion and courage of martyrdom, and the speed with which the Christian doctrine and profession had spread, and this in spite of emperors and proconsuls. (I, 27.) Elsewhere, after referring to the beneficent wonderworkers of Greek mythology, whose achievements gained them divine honors with the Hellenes: "But we ourselves say that the achievement of Jesus is that which the entire inhabited earth of mankind holds, where there are sojourning the churches of God [established] through Jesus, [churches constituted of men] who have changed [reformed] out of innumerable evils" (or forms of moral depravity). (I, 67.) Neither Celsus nor the followers of Simon Magus "have been able to

perceive how Jesus, as the good husbandman [Jas. 5, 7], has been able to sow the seed in the greater part of the Hellenic and the non-Hellenic world, and fill it with doctrines which change the soul from all evil, and lead it up to the Creator of the universe." (V, 62.) One sees Plato in the hands mainly of scholars only (*philologon*), whereas the works of Epictetus are admired by those who have an inclination for, and perceive from them, moral betterment.

As for persecutions, Celsus himself (I, 8) in his day had expressed, as we saw, high admiration for the consistency of martyrs, their death, as Origen (I, 26) intimates, being, as a rule, due to the fact that they refused to forswear or deny Jesus. Origen claims divine grace or power for this (I, 26), which deists like Gibbon do not believe.

As to the persistent charges made against the Christians (cf. Minucius Felix) of shocking immoralities practised by them in their nocturnal assemblies,<sup>26)</sup> Origen says that the Jews were mainly responsible therefor. He states that "at the beginning of the teaching of Christianity they [the Jews] scattered evil reputation upon the discourse," viz., as to slaughtering an infant, and committing indiscriminate debauchery in darkness, "which evil reputation curiously long ago took possession of every one, persuading strangers to the Word that such are the Christians." (VI, 27; cf. VI, 40.)

We have no space here merely to enumerate the data abounding in this treatise which show how familiar Origen was with all the schools of Greek philosophy, and how ably he asserted the Christian theology as over against them all. He discerns the pantheism of the Stoic system and of Platonists (V, 7), and charges the schools with consummate impotence because of their failing to remove idolatry from the Hellenic world (V, 43).

As regards the Scriptures, we must content ourselves with citations just sufficient to enable us to perceive his own position

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26) Cf. my study, "Stoicism and Christianity," *Biblical Review*, July, 1917.

and convictions. He says (I, 44) that it was the same divine Spirit who taught Moses his older history, beginning with Creation, down to Abraham, and also taught the writers of the Gospels. The latter writers he characterizes elsewhere as follows: "We trust also the purpose of those who wrote the Gospels, recognizing the care and conscientiousness revealed in their writings, and having nothing spurious, and haphazard (*kybeutikon*), and invented, and cunning," nothing like the sophistry of the Greeks or the rhetoric in the courts. Christ, he believes, availed Himself of just such plain and unsophisticated men as teachers of his doctrine "that there might be no room for any suspicion of plausible quibbles." (III, 39.) But it is essential that one should actually follow Christ to have one's spiritual eyes opened to the loftiness of the Gospel. (VI, 77.) There is indeed a Mount of Transfiguration even now for the Christian believer. (*Ibid.*) Of John's Gospel, as over against the others, he speaks with strong feeling, and expounds John 21, 25: "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written." Origen takes this as meaning not the number of the books, but the grandeur of the subject-matter.<sup>27)</sup>

As for Origen's itch for hidden or subtle meanings, for what we may call a kind of esoteric exegesis, it is a trait recorded in all books about the earlier Christian Church. At the same time, clearness (*sapheneia*), he says, is the great aim to be gained by the expounder. He seeks those "who are able to follow the elucidation of the passages with hidden meanings (*ton ainigmaton*), and those things stated with concealment (*met' epikrypseos*) in the Law and the Prophets and the

27) This verse, John 21, 25, is not in the Sinaiticus  $\aleph^*$ . But this attestation by Origen antedates the Sinaiticus at least a full century. In Dr. Westcott's *General Survey of the History of the Canon of the New Testament* (seventh edition, London, 1896), in his Index II, "A Synopsis of the Historical Evidence for the Books of the New Testament," under "Gospel of St. John," the name of Origen is not met with.

Gospels." (III, 74.) The expression, "the purpose of God's Word" (*to boulema tou theiou logou*), is very common with him. The grave danger of discovering allegory overmuch I need not urge upon the readers of this monograph. Little doubt that the Jewish philosopher Philo (fl. 40 A. D.), as he, through his exegetical method, influences Clement of Alexandria, so, too, the latter's pupil Origen. Not only did the latter carry this principle of allegory to incredible excess, but, following Philo, claimed Plato to be a pupil of Moses (cf. our treatise of Origen, VI, 7; on the literal and higher sense, VII, 20). Plato derived certain things from Isaiah. (VII, 30; cf. VII, 59.)

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A further observation: The pagan world of critics calmly identified the Gnostics under the Antonines, and when Irenaeus was bishop of Lyons, with the Christians, whose great struggle then was (as we see in Irenaeus, in Clement of Alexandria, in Tertullian) to separate them from the Church, to deny them (whatever their claim of "higher insight," or *gnosis*) the right to assume or hold the name of the Founder of the Church.

As we observed above, Justin Martyr said (I. Apol., 26) that all "starting from these [Gnostic leaders and founders] are called Christians." So did Celsus take them. Docetism<sup>28</sup>) is alluded to as heretical, but not so differentiated by Celsus. (II, 16; IV, 18.) Marcion and Valentinus rewrote and recast the Gospel, not the orthodox Christians. (II, 27.) Celsus seemed to know that there were certain sects denying that the coming of Jesus was foretold by the prophets, *e. g.*, Marcion. (IV, 2.) Apelles, an acquaintance of Marcion, and founder of a sect, called all Jewish scriptures myth. (V, 54.) The *Diagramma* of the Ophites, as we saw, was treated by Celsus as a Christian work. (VI, 24—39; VII, 40 sqq.) Celsus really misunderstood some Gnostic sects (in VI, 51). Further he quotes the severe attack on the Jewish Creator as an attitude of the Chris-

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28) The doctrine that our Lord's body and bodily life, sufferings, death, were only phantasmal, a doctrine wide-spread in Asia in St. John's last years and the subsequent generation. See letters of Ignatius, *passim*.

tian Church, without knowing this to be the specific speculation of the heresiarch Marcion (VI, 53), and refers to the two gods of the latter (VI, 74), attacking as Christian a doctrine which the Christian Church disavowed.

Again Celsus took as Christians those who denied that Christ was the Son of the Creator God, a position held by Marcion and many other Gnostics. (VIII, 14.) Emanations of Valentinus are referred to. (VI, 35.) All these Gnostics, Origen comprehends in the summary designation of *hoi heterodoxoi*. (VI, 53.)

I have reserved for my conclusion what is really the greatest topic in my second part, *viz.*, the *Christology* of Origen. Whence has "the ignoble Jesus" (as Celsus called him) gotten the power to shake (*seisai*) the entire inhabited earth of mankind? (I, 27.) "*Is it not wonderful that He overcame and was able by His glory to rise above all the factors of ignominy, and above all the men who at any time in history became famous? What is the fame of them all, individually or collectively, compared with His glory? And how did He persuade? Not as an autocrat, or as a robber chief training his followers against mankind, nor as a rich man giving gratuities to those who approach Him, . . . but as teacher of the doctrine concerning the universal God, and of the worship directed towards Him and (teacher) of every form of right living, who is able to bring into close relation (*oikeiosai*) with the universal God those who lived in accordance with Him.*" "Why has not His crucifixion smothered or extinguished His fame? Why, indeed (if He deceived His disciples before His death), did not that death induce His disciples to abandon the deception, and to condemn Him who had deceived them?"<sup>29)</sup> (I, 30.)

Why did the disciples, if they had not seen Him risen from the dead, nor were convinced that He was something more divine,<sup>30)</sup> in addition to this that they did not fear to suffer

29) This entire passage belongs, if I may say so, or should belong, to the Christian Apologetics of all time.

30) than any merely human being.



the same things their Teacher did, and boldly confront the danger, leave their native places to teach, in conformity with the will of Jesus, the doctrine entrusted to them by Him? It must have been a mighty force of persuasion that made them do it, when there was no material inducement, no worldly motive whatsoever that could come into play then. Not only did they present to the Jews that He was the Messiah promised by the prophets of old, but they also proclaimed to the pagan world that He who a short time before had been crucified had *voluntarily* (*hekon*) taken upon Himself this death in behalf of the entire race of mankind. (I, 31.)

Always did Jesus check His own reputation or the spread thereof; His service and work was a commentary on John 5, 31: "If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true." It was through His works that He wished to reveal Himself as the Messiah rather than by His discourse. (I, 48.) Christ ate fish after His resurrection. (John 21, 13; Orig. I, 70.) Law and Gospel were connected in Christ. (II, 4.) Origen further on (with John's Gospel) calls Jesus *ho Logos Theos kai hyios Theou ton holon*, who revealed Himself as the power of God through His miracles. (II, 9.) The aim of His first advent was not to judge men, but miraculously to spread His Word. (II, 38.) *The apostles (not Peter alone) were, as it were, the foundations laid down of the edifice of Christianity.* (III, 28.) On Christ the Mediator: He stands midway between created things and eternity, conveys to us the benefactions from the Father, and like a high priest (*tropon archiereos*, Heb. 3, 1; IV, 14—16) presents our prayers to Him. (II, 34.) Following John's Gospel, Origen says: "We are convinced that He was from the beginning God and Son of God, and He is the Word itself and Wisdom itself and Truth itself." (John 1, 1; Luke 11, 49. II, 81.) He "emptied Himself" (*ekenosen heauton*, Phil. 2, 7). Origen adds the gloss: *etapeinosen*, humiliated Himself; why? "In order that He could be comprehended by mankind." (II, 15.)

"The Son of God was not only with His disciples [in

Palestine], but is always with His disciples." Origen here cites Matt. 28, 20:

Of the manner in which Origen's theses were often evoked by, or arranged as a rejoinder to, ancient philosophy, I would like to furnish an example. The Stoic god (really Pantheism) had (as that sect claimed) exactly the same virtue or excellence as man,—and Celsus treated that dogma with respect,—how vastly more rational, Origen claimed (VI, 48), was the Christian doctrine of the intimate attachment or union of the personal Word with the Father, or the Perfect One, Christ being the "First-born of all creation" (Col. 1, 15).

As for the humility and suffering of Christ, Celsus had said in his polemic (VII, 14) that it was a matter of complete indifference whether the prophets had prophesied it or not. Origen insists that the human part of Jesus suffered and died, not He who called Himself Life, Truth, the Door, the living Bread that came down from heaven. He connects the destruction of Jerusalem with our Lord's predictions and with Golgotha.

Celsus never read the rejoinder of Origen. But the generation of Celsus will always be with us, and the Christian will ever be called upon to defend the faith once delivered to the saints.

NOTE. — How could the Gnostics escape persecution? I owe the answer to a suggestion of Gieseler. The Gnostics could, in a way, truthfully say: "We do not believe in the Crucified One"; they virtually, all of them, were Docetists, and claimed that the real Christ was spiritual only, His bodily phenomena, and so His suffering and death were a mere appearance or sham. And this explains the passage in Justin Martyr (I. Apol. 26), quoted in this monograph: *Hoti me diokontai mede phoneuontai hyph' hymon, ka'n dia ta dogmata, epistametha* ("That they are not pursued nor put to death [as the genuine Christians are] by you, even on account of their doctrines, we know").

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