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## ORIGEN AGAINST CELSUS.

It must be a welcome opportunity to all Christian teachers and preachers at least, and to all students of theology, if not to all Christians, to gain a closer vision of the first elaborate attack upon Christianity preserved to us, to which, as far as we know, any scholar and thinker of the pagan world condescended. We see in Tacitus (*Annals* 15, 44) and Pliny (*Epp.* 10, 96) with what haughty contempt such leaders of culture referred to the humble and despised sect, and with what consummate ignorance, we may add. This was during the reign of Trajan (98—117 A. D.). Under the Antonines a Greek philosopher, Celsus, published a special treatise against the Christians. The allusions to the distressful and troublous situation of the empire, when Celsus wrote, the great war on the Danubian frontier which Marcus Aurelius was compelled to undertake in 178, which he carried on in 179, and in which he died without bringing it to completion, in 180—this era best fits the allusion by Celsus. In 177 had occurred the terrible persecution at Lyons and elsewhere: Celsus intimates (*VIII*, 68) that the Christians are not sincerely loyal to the emperor; he says outright that, "if all [the subjects of the Roman empire] were to do the same as you [the typical Christian], nothing will prevent him [the emperor] from being left alone and desolate, and things on earth fall under the control of the most wicked and most savage barbarians [the Marcomanni], and no rumor left either of your own worship [the Christian] or of true philosophy." I do not share the view of many scholars, even of Origen himself in the earlier part of his treatise, that this

Celsus was the Epicurean Celsus, the personal friend of Lucian [Alexander *e pseudomantis*], a contemporary, it is true, of Marcus Aurelius. Our Celsus is too pronounced and thoroughgoing a Platonist to identify him with that Epicurean. Oil and water would blend or amalgamate much more readily than these two forms of philosophy. Celsus was long dead when Origen composed or published his *critique* of, or rejoinder to, the monograph of the pagan classic philosopher. Origen, I say, wrote in 246 A. D., under Emperor *Philippus Arabs*,<sup>1)</sup> when the Alexandrine scholar was more than sixty years old, and dedicated this important controversial work to his friend Ambrosius (whom once he had converted from Gnosticism), whose liberality had provided Origen with a strong staff of shorthand writers and of calligraphers to copy the work of the former. Some scholars place the date in 248. At all events, we are entitled to infer that the work of Celsus was very important and noted, that its attacks on Christianity needed at last an adequate answer, which, up to that time, it had not received from any Christian apologist, such as had been Minucius Felix, Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, or Tertullian.

## I.

Celsus presents his strictures and objections in a sequence of two parts specially planned. In the first and shorter one (I. II) the Platonist has a Jew speak and assume the Jewish point of view, the *animus* also of the Jew. In the second and greater part (Books III—VIII) *Celsus ipse loquitur*, where we see that the first part was a mere mask.

Celsus claimed that he had made a thorough study of his subject<sup>2)</sup> — a sweeping statement, which Origen refuses to accept, whether of prophets or gospels,<sup>3)</sup> and the “utterances of the apostles,” meaning, of course, the epistles.

Also, Celsus is bitter against the intellectual humility (I, 13) of the Christians, which Origen, however, confirms by

1) Euseb., *H. E.* VI, 36.

2) *Panta gar oida*, I, 12.

3) Especially the hidden sense of the parables therein contained.

citing 1 Cor. 3, 18, 19: "Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool that he may be wise," etc.

The impersonation of the Jewish position begins I, 28 (*prosopopoiēi*), like a declaiming pupil in a theatrical school, Origen says.

The virgin birth, the Jew begins, was a fiction. Jesus was born in a mere Jewish hamlet, of a poor woman, a native, earning her living by spinning for wages. Her husband, a carpenter, cast her out, when he proved her an adulteress. Wandering an outcast, she gave birth to Jesus in a dark corner. On account of his poverty Jesus hired himself out as a laborer in Egypt, where he became acquainted with certain *powers* of wizard's craft, on which the Egyptians vaunt themselves, and thence returned to Palestine, proud of his powers, and proclaimed himself a god on account of them. The real father of Jesus (I, 32) was a soldier by the name of *Panthera*, who had corrupted the maiden.

Next the incidents at the baptism, the dove and the voice from heaven, are treated with scorn (I, 41).<sup>4</sup> "If you, Jesus, say this, that every human being created in accordance with divine providence is a *son of God* [the Unitarian view also, I believe], wherein would you differ from another?" (I, 57.)

Further the Jew says that Chaldeans were said to have been stirred by Jesus about his nativity and came, intending to worship him when still an infant, as a divine being, "*proskynesontas auton eti nepion hos Theon*, (I, 58), and that they communicated this to Herod the Tetrarch, and that the latter sent and killed those born in the same time, believing that he had slain this one also with them, lest somehow, living further a proper span of time, he might become king." Later Jesus "attached to himself some ten or eleven men of evil repute (*epirretous*), publicans and boatmen of the worst character, and with these he ran away hither and thither, gaining his

4) Origen cites Isaiah 48, 16: "And now the Lord God and His Spirit hath sent Me."

living in a disgraceful fashion and with difficulty." (I, 62.) — "Why should you be carried away to Egypt when still an infant, lest you be slain? For it is not likely that a god has apprehensions about his death." (I, 66.)—"Angel's message? Could not the great God guard His own Son directly? What superhuman craft (like Perseus, Amphion, Aiakos, Minos) did you display?" (I, 67.) "As for the raising of dead, or curing of ailments, feeding of the thousands, with copious remnants, by a few loaves of bread, etc., related by your disciples, — why, the Egyptian jugglers and wandering wizards for a few obols in the market-places will create similar hallucinations in their spectators; but we will not at once call them sons of gods for that." (I, 68.) (His bodily wants and needs contradicted his divine character.) The feats of Jesus were those of a God-hated and wretched mountebank (*goëtos*). (I, 71.)

Many other deceivers (such as Jesus was) might appear to those willing to be deceived. (II, 8.) "How were we going to deem him divine who produced none of those things which he announced, and when we, having convicted him, and declared him guilty and demanded that he be punished, hiding and trying to abscond in the most disreputable way (*eponeidistotata*), he was caught and betrayed by the very men he dubbed disciples? And still being a god, it was not the thing for him to flee, nor to be pinioned and led away, least of all by those who [like Judas—E. G. S.] had shared his company and specifically partaken of everything, and had had him a teacher, [for him] being deemed Savior and Son and Messenger of the supreme God, to be forsaken and surrendered." (II, 9.)

"While I [the impersonated Jew] could say many things about what happened to Jesus, things both true and not resembling that which was written by the disciples of Jesus, I voluntarily omit it." (II, 13.) "The disciples invented it that he foreknew and foretold all that happened to him."<sup>5</sup> The Jew

5) Origen here, for rebuttal, cites Matt. 10, 18: "And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for My sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles."

further urges that, "if Jesus had foreknown his fate [of suffering and death], why he did not avoid it, but fell in with (*synepipten*) that which he foreknew?"<sup>6)</sup>

The Jew in Celsus next takes up Peter's denial of Christ. "If he really foretold both him who was to betray him and him who was to deny him, how would they not have been afraid of him as of a divine being (*hos Theon*), so that the one would not have betrayed him and the other not have denied him?" (II, 18.) Follows the logic of the Jews: "Either these things did not happen after they were foretold, for it is impossible [they should], or, since they happened, the having been foretold is proven a falsehood; for it is altogether impossible that those who had heard it in advance should still betray and deny him."<sup>7)</sup>

Next, why the lamentation in Gethsemane and the utterance of prayer as to the passing of the cup, if Jesus really willed all this himself? Here we may exemplify Origen's counter-critique; he urges that this very item emphasizes the truth-loving determination of those who composed the Gospels, when they could have kept silent about it, or passed it over in silence (*parasiopesai*). Besides, he says, Celsus exaggerated the terms used in the Gospel-narrative. (II, 24.)

Further, says the Jew of Celsus, the real Messiah was to prove himself a great prince and a universal sovereign over all the earth. (II, 29.) The Christians call Jesus the *Logos* of God, whereas he was merely a human being, most dishonorably arrested and tortured to death. (II, 31.) The Davidic genealogies of Jesus (Matthew and Luke) are treated with scorn; the poor carpenter's wife had no idea that she was of such aristocratic lineage. (II, 32.) Pilate suffered nothing for condemning Jesus. (II, 34.) Further the purple robe, the reed-scepter, and the crown of thorns are cited. (II, 34.) Why did not Jesus save

6) Origen aptly cites as a parallel St. Paul, who foresaw what was to come in Jerusalem, and still went there; also Socrates, who refused, when in prison, to heed Crito.

7) Such dialectic exegesis seems to be the work of *Celsus personally*, as Origen understands it.

himself in the catastrophe? Why does he not *now* at least display something divine and bring to justice those who are [now] insulting both himself and the Father? (II, 35.) Jesus could not endure thirst on the cross, which even ordinary culprits often endure. (II, 37.) We Jews, of course, do not consider him divine, nor do we agree with you Christians that he endured these things for the benefit of men, that we, too [say the Christians], may despise chastisement. (II, 38.) We do not admit that Jesus was without blemish (*anepileptos*). (II, 42.)

The miracles are treated as tricks of a magician. Why should the one be deemed son of God, and the traveling wizards and magicians merely jugglers and mountebanks? (II, 49.) What induced you to believe that he would rise again? (54.) Why shall we believe that the stories telling of the descent to the lower world of Orpheus, Protesilaos, Hercules, were mere myths, but consider the report or vision of a woman half-frantic<sup>8)</sup> as sound?<sup>9)</sup> (II, 55.) Jesus should have been seen by those who had dealt despitefully with him, and by Pilate, and, in a word, by *all*. (II, 63.) Why did he not vanish from the cross? (II, 69.) What god appearing among men is disbelieved? (II, 74.) Where is he now?—that we may see and believe. (II, 77.) “He, then, was a human being after all, and such a one as truth presents and reason demonstrates.” (II, 79.)

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I must content myself with this mere summary in this Jewish and minor part of Celsus's “True Word” or “Discourse,” the first (for us) elaborate polemic from the Gentile camp against the Christian faith. We cannot stop here merely to glance at the admirable and searching dissensions in rebuttal by Origen; they are strong in dialectic, in historical analysis, and, above all, in thorough command of Scriptural learning. But let us now go forward to that curious blending of philosophy and classical culture with the stubborn effort to maintain the ancestral polytheism, which we see asserted by Celsus him-

8) *Gyne paroistros* — Mary Magdalene.

9) Here the *critique* of David Strauss is anticipated.

self as his own thesis and as the attitude of the leaders in the Roman Empire.

As for Celsus, he really looks down upon both Christians and Jews with undisguised contempt, and has formed his own theory. He now speaks personally and directly. The Christians and Jews are both fools for believing in a Messiah, but disagreeing whether he already has come or is to come. (III, 1.) As the Jews seceded from the Egyptians, so the Christians seceded from the Jews. (5.) If all mankind should be willing to be Christians, the Jews would still form an exception. (9.) The Christians were united at first, but now are splitting up into many sects and factions.<sup>10)</sup> (10.) Celsus agrees, however, in one matter, *viz.*, in retributive justice to be dealt out to the wicked. (16.) Of the gross idolatry of Egypt the philosopher speaks with respect. He reminds us here of Plutarch (*De Iside et Osiri*): one must discover the hidden meanings and the *Eternal Ideas* concealed under the forms of these grosser cults (19; against all of which Origen cites 1 Cor. 2, 6—8).

Celsus, as other antagonists of Christianity before, in order to discredit the Christian conception of the human-divine in Christ, put forward parallels, as they thought they were, from Greek mythology: Hercules, Aesculapius, Dionysos, the Dioscuri. Many barbarians indeed and Greeks, Celsus claimed, admitted that they had actually seen Aesculapius.<sup>11)</sup> So the Getae worship Zamolxis, the Cilicians Mopsos, the Acarnanians Amphilochos, the Lebadaeans, Trophonios (34), as the Christians worship one who was captured and died. Celsus even goes so

10) Clearly the Gnostic sects and heresies are meant. The pagan world did not differentiate them from the plain Gospel-church. So Justin Martyr, who wrote his first *Apology* under Antoninus Pius, after having described the claims of Simon Magus and his disciple Menander, and referred to the doctrines of the famous Gnostic Marcion and to his teaching, then, going on, proceeds thus (*First Apology*, 26): *Pantes hoi apo touton hormomenoi, hos ephemen, Christianoi kalountai*; and Justin, disdaining any personal knowledge of *their* specific meetings and worship, calls attention to the important fact that the persecutions of the Roman government *did not extend to them*.

11) or his snake. Cf. Aristophanes's *Plutus*, or Lucian's *Alexander*.

far as to assert that the divine honors shown to Antinous, the drowned concubine of the Emperor Hadrian, especially in Egypt, are just as sound as those paid to Christ by the Christians. (36.)

Celsus further charges that the Christians positively bar wise and cultured people from their communion (which Origen denies), and, that they are willing and able to gain or persuade only the foolish and low-born and the stupid and the slaves and women-folk and children. (44.)<sup>12</sup> Celsus becomes bitter here; he intimates that Christian preaching is like the work of the mountebanks who gather the common folk there, but would never be admitted among cultured and thinking men, and then he sets forth how weavers, shoemakers, fullers ply their Christian propaganda with children. (55.)

To the mysteries and initiation of the Greeks were invited only those whose hands were clean and whose conscience pure. Not so the Christians. "Whoever, they say, is a sinner, whoever is simple, and, to speak plainly, whoever is a poor devil, him the kingdom of God will receive." (59.) "To say that God should have been sent for the sinners, but will not receive the just!" (62), while real conversion of the bad is impossible (65); and whenever Christians are crowded in argument, they resort to the omnipotence of God, so that God admits those who wail, and rejects the good. No sensible man is persuaded by the doctrine. (73.) The Christians say to the ignorant and foolish: "Flee from the physicians! See to it that none of you ever take hold of knowledge!" (75.) Christian teaching is as though a drunken man were to come among the drunken and then abuse the sober as though *they* were drunk (76), or as though the Christian teacher were like a man with ailing and defective eyesight, who finds fault with the keen-eyed among whom he came, treating them as blear-eyed. (77.) In a word, the Christians seduce bad men with windy hopes. (77.)

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12) In rejoinder, Origen insists on a proper understanding of 1 Cor. 1, 18, and what St. Paul really had in mind there.

IV. In this book we must make some election. I fear I cannot enumerate all the data. Celsus rejects the doctrine of Christ's descent from God. Does not God *know* what happens among men? Or has He an itch for display like the newly rich, and must He resort to incarnation to test the believers and the unbelievers? Would not this be a very mortal ambition? Why did God conceive this plan only after so long a time? (7.) It is incompatible with a proper conception of God to say that He will descend and destroy the world with fire. God cannot undergo such a change [from His bliss] as this would involve. (14.) Further on Celsus returns to his favorite theme, *viz.*, his unmeasured contempt for Christians and Jews both, comparing them to bats, ants, frogs in some corner of a morass, holding a general political meeting, disputing as to who were the greater sinners, claiming special revelation and God's particular care, as elect, to the end that they may dwell with Him forever, while He will destroy the wicked with fire. (23.) The story of Adam and Eve is a myth for old women. Celsus then goes over much of Genesis from Paradise to Goshen and beyond. Perhaps he had scholars like Philo in mind, or others, when he referred to the anthropopathic traits like anger, hatred, etc., ascribed to Jehovah in the texts of the Old Testament: *Kai Ioudaion kai Christianon hoi epieikesteroi taut' allegorou-sin.* (48.) Presently Celsus reveals himself as a consistent Platonist: "God [the good God of Plato's *Ideal World*] made nothing mortal" — He made the soul, but not the body. (52.) We may compare Plato's *Timaeus* 69, C. D. Evil is not from God, but bound up with matter.<sup>13)</sup> As for repentance and spiritual betterment of mankind, Celsus sets it down as an axiom that the quantity of good and evil in the world always remains approximately the same (69); he denies that creation is for man (76), claims that brute creatures are better provided for by Nature than man is;<sup>14)</sup> urges man's helplessness in primitive times; denies the sovereignty of man over Nature (78. 79); to one looking down from heaven men would not appear much

13) Similarly the greater number of the Gnostics.

14) Cf. on this Plato's *Protagoras*, 320 D—321 B.

different from bees and ants, which have all the social virtues of man. (81—85.) With all his superior philosophy Celsus believes in mantic birds, or “birds of the gods.” Storks, in fact, are more devoted to filial duty than men. (98.) Man is by no means the apex and purpose of the universe (as Genesis has it). Incidentally, Celsus also denies the Stoic theory of cosmic cycles of destruction and creation. (99.)

V. We now reach the *vinculum* which still prevailed between philosophy and polytheism, or nature-worship. Why do not the Jews worship the heavenly bodies? Are not they the sources of all our material blessings? Here Celsus is almost eloquent: as though one could conceive *the whole as being God,*<sup>15</sup> *but his parts not as divine!*—These forces, then, which so clearly and splendidly make utterance to all men, through which rain and heat and clouds and thunder come to men, and lightning and crops and the young, through which God revealed Himself,—why not worship these? (6.)

There was considerable repetition in the original treatise. Celsus again (14) attacks the Christian belief in the Judgment: He then goes on to argue as follows: All nations have their own institutions and customs, and so, too, their own religions; it is proper that this be so. So the Jews, too. Why, then, did the Christians forsake the Jews? (35.) Moreover, we see how old Deism really is: As for the supreme deity, names were immaterial: whether Zeus or Zen, or Adonai, or Sabaoth, or Ammon. Circumcision does not render the Jews any holier, as vegetarianism does not endow the Pythagoreans with any particular degree of saintliness.

He further on enlarges on the many sects among the Christians, and we see clearly (as in Clement of Alexandria, too) that pagan observers considered all Gnostics simply as Christians. Again he says once more that the worshipers of Antinous in Egypt are better than many Christian sects (63), which latter bitterly calumniated one another (he really meant the Gnostics and the orthodox Christians).

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15) So near are pantheism and polytheism together, as Ulrici very properly observed in his article on “Pantheismus” in Herzog.

VI. Celsus goes on to say that all the highest truths (about God and religion) were much better set down among the Greeks, without any revelation and without any Son of God. He cites a passage (of very moderate pertinency) from Plato's Seventh Epistle (spurious) as saying that the insight into the First Good was gained within the inner circle of those who were admitted to personal contact with that sage. Now, Plato did not claim any divine revelation or sonship of God for himself, while the Christians say: "Believe if you wish to be saved, or go away!" (11.) Celsus even asserts that Christ, in warning against the spiritual danger of riches and speaking of the ear of the needle,<sup>16)</sup> had borrowed this idea from Plato, who said:<sup>17)</sup> "For a man who is good in a distinguished degree to be rich also in a distinguished degree is impossible." The Platonist Celsus then enlarges on the descent of souls to earth, the bloody rites of the Mithras-cult, and its symbolism. (22.) In a long *excursus* (24—39) he deals with the Ophite Gnostics and their *Diagramma*, as though they were genuine Christians.<sup>18)</sup> Further on Satan is set off against certain legends of Greek mythology, the struggles of Kronos with Ophioneus, the Titans and Gigantes battling with Zeus, or Typhon and Horos opposed to Osiris in Egyptian myths.<sup>19)</sup> (42. 599.) Again Celsus returns to the theme of Creation, the treatment of which by Moses he calls naive (*euethike*). (49.) As to this, indeed, he confesses himself an agnostic (53), and then takes up the theories of the

16) Matt. 19, 24; Mark 10, 25; Luke 18, 25.

17) *Leges* V, 12, 743 a.

18) The Ophites were called so from *ophis*, the serpent of Genesis. I quote from Neander, *Hist. of the Christian Religion and Church*, transl. by Torrey, 6th Am. ed., 1853, Vol. 1, p. 444, note 4: "The serpent, a type of the *zoogonos sophia*,—the winding shape of the entrails presents the form of a serpent,—a symbol of that wisdom of nature, that soul of the world, which winds in concealment through all the different grades and orders of natural life. . . . We perceive how the pantheistic principle shines here more clearly through the surface."

19) We see the firmly established habit of the later pagan classical world to preserve their oldest literature and legends by allegorical interpretation, and also to yield to a syncretism which endeavored to fuse the paganism of other lands with the polytheism of Greece and Rome.

Marcionite Gnostics on this matter, who separated the Creator-God from the Good God.

This brings Celsus to the greatest of all his themes: "From Him are all things." "God is not attainable by human reason"; "He is not namable" (this is true in a way, Origen says); "He has not experienced any modification of essence attainable by human terms" (65); "how, then," says an imaginary interlocutor in Celsus, "shall I understand God, and how shall I learn the way that leads to Him, and how do you point Him out to me? For now certainly you cast darkness before my eyes, and I see nothing clearly." (66.) From these (necessarily vague and indefinite) theses of his own, from this confession of the essential impotence of man to comprehend and define God, Celsus returns to, and resumes, his task of overthrowing Christianity. He claims that Christ, in calling God Spirit (John 4, 24), did not differ from the Stoics and their permeating spirit. (71.) How could a Son of God, endowed with a mortal body, be immortal? (72.) If God could send a spirit, why did He for His messenger need incarnation through a woman's womb? Could He not create a full-fledged man offhand, and not forbear "injecting His own spirit into such a polluted thing" (*kai me to idion pneuma eis tosouton miasma embalein*)? "This would not [now] be the object of unbelief, if he had been at once begotten from above" (*ei anothen euthys esparto*). (73.) There were, after all, two sons of God, one of the Creator-God and the other of Marcion's god. Celsus's scorn and bitterness go so far that he compares these to two fighting quails. (74.) Christ's physical presence, too, should properly have been of surpassing majesty and beauty. Perhaps, Origen suggests, Celsus had heard of Is. 53, 2. 3: "He hath no form nor comeliness. . . . He is despised and rejected of men: a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," etc., for conceiving Jesus so meanly. (76.)—How could the omniscient God fail to know that He was to send His Son to evil and sinful men, who ultimately were to chastise Him? <sup>20)</sup>

20) Celsus regularly uses the term *kolazein*, as though it had been, in a measure, justified—the Jewish point of view, it would seem. (81.)

VII. Celsus now takes up prophets and prophecy. Christians rely on prophecy. (2), but at the same time they despise the work done in the past by the oracles of Delphi, Dodona, Klaros, Branchidai, etc., especially in the work of sending out colonies. Celsus advances a psychological and naturalistic way<sup>21)</sup> as to how they fill themselves gradually with certain conceits or hallucination. "It is a thing ready at hand and customary for them to say, 'I am God, or a son of God, or a divine spirit. And I have arrived; for presently the universe is destroyed, and you, men, on account of your acts of wrongdoing, are done for. But I wish to save; and you will see me again returning with heavenly power. Blessed is he who has worshiped me now; but upon all the others I shall cast eternal fire, both upon cities and lands; and men who know not their own penalties shall in vain change their opinions and shall groan; but those who believe in me I shall preserve throughout eternity.'" Clearly we have here a caricatured echo of the Gospels by a proud pagan reader thereof, with an abundance of attestation of St. Paul's ever memorable phrase: *Moria tois Hellenis*, "and to the Greeks foolishness." And I do not believe that the modern deist or agnostic would even desire to make much change in the pronouncement of Celsus to adopt it as his own. (9.)—

Celsus speaks with undisguised scorn of Christ's suffering and death and the prophecy thereof: that it was necessary that God should die, or live the life of a slave (*douleuein*), since it was prophesied, in order that after his death it might be believed that he was god. Prophesied or not, says Celsus, the point is, were these happenings *intrinsically* worthy of a divine being? Of course they were not. One is almost tempted to say that the proud and scornful words above were Celsus's own reply to Luke 24, 25—27.

As to the Christian hope of eternal happiness, Celsus cites for his own side the Elysian fields and the Isles of the Blessed, quoting from Homer and from Plato's *Phaedo*, 109 A. B; 28.

21) Somewhat in the later Renan's manner.

As for the Christian doctrine of resurrection, that was due to the fact that the Christians had heard something of the shifting of souls into other bodies (*metempsychosis*), which they had misunderstood. (32.)

And now our Platonist draws from his quiver what he certainly considered one of his finest arrows: How will men perceive God? What can one learn without sense-perception? That, the Platonist Celsus says, is a gross carnal question. (36.) A cowardly and body-loving race you Christians are indeed! You must learn to see with the eyes of the soul! Then only will you see God. Of course, you should not heed those who are wooing the idols, *but you must not blaspheme the gods that are demonstrated [as such], as though they were mere idols, while you revere Him who is more wretched than the idols, and is merely a corpse, and seek a father like unto Him.* (36.)

After again referring to the Ophites as though they were Christians (40), Celsus remands the believers in Jesus to inspired poets, to sages and philosophers, and particularly, of course, to Plato, citing the oft-quoted passage in Plato's *Timaeus* (28, c): "To find the Maker and Father of this universe is a task, and having found, to state it to everybody is impossible." Celsus takes this as his text for a brief exegetical discourse: "You see how seers, too, seek the way to truth; and Plato knew that for all men to proceed in this way was impossible. But since on this account it has been devised by wise men how we might get some conception of the Unnamable and First One, a conception making Him manifest either by synthesis with the other things, or by analysis from them, or by analogy, wishing to teach that which otherwise is unspeakable, I should wonder if you shall be able to follow, being utterly bound up in the flesh and espying nothing pure." (42.)

Wishing further to illumine the benighted Christians, Celsus continues to cite from *his* gospel, Plato (*Rep.* VI, 507 to 509), which I must summarize. The real essence of things and so knowledge and truth can only be gained by intelligence,

whereas the senses deal only with the passing mutations and recurrent phenomena of material things. What the sun is to the physical eye and to all the life of the material world reached by the eye, "that, in the intelligible world, is That One who is neither mind nor the act of intelligence, nor knowledge, but is to the mind the cause of perception and to intelligence the cause of its existence, on his account, and to knowledge the cause of understanding on his account, and for all intelligible things and for Truth itself and for Essence itself the cause of their being, being beyond all, being perceptible by some unspeakable power."<sup>22)</sup>

After thus quoting the text of his great master, Celsus turns to the Christians: "There is the truth and the real revelation for you, the spirit issuing from God: if you are incompetent to seize upon these things, then hold your tongues, and cover up your stolidity, and do not say that those who see are blind, and those who run are lame, when you yourselves are absolutely paralyzed as to your souls and truncated as to your extremities, and living in the body, *i. e.*, in the carcass." What intellectual pride have we here!

Celsus urges the Christians to accept some new Christ, if not Hercules or Aesculapius, why not Orpheus, or Anaxarchos (far famed for his heroic death), or the famous Stoic Epictetus of Nicopolis,<sup>23)</sup> whose patience Celsus extols above that of Jesus, "your God." You put spurious stuff into the Sibylline collections, and him who had the most ill-spoken life (*bio epirrhetotato*) and the most pitiable death you make a god. (53.) Why not take Jonas or Daniel?

Celsus himself regrets the worship of the idols—none but a fool would so hold them.<sup>24)</sup> He says it over and over that the

22) The ecstasy of the Neoplatonists, such as Plotinus in the third century.

23) See my article on "Stoicism and Christianity," *Biblical Review*, N. Y., July, 1917. E. G. S.

24) But compare the testimony of Pausanias, the Periegete, the contemporary of Celsus. See my article, "Under the Antonines," *Biblical Review*, April, 1918.

Christians worship a corpse. And as a consistent Platonist he repeats: all inferior cosmic or physical powers hold from the greatest God; hence, *through these undergods* the great supreme God is revered. (68.) Thus Platonism and polytheism are deftly fused.

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VIII. "The Christians tear themselves from the rest of mankind; they erect a wall between themselves and those who worship the undergods of tradition." (2.) "The assertion of monotheism is seditious; it implies that the Christians set up a counter-god over against the general God (of the Platonists). But as a matter of fact the Christians *are* no genuine monotheists; for they excessively worship (*hyperthreskenousin*) this one who appeared recently, and still they hold that they do not go wrong about God, if His servant, too, shall be made an object of service (*therapeutesetai*)." (12.) Celsus calls Christ "the very one who is for them the ringleader of their rebellion (*tes staseos archegetes*); and they dubbed this one Son of God, not because they revere God very much, but because they extol this one very much." (14.) Celsus now cites from a Gnostic publication concerning the two gods, and the injunction not to serve two masters. (15.) The characteristic avoidance of setting up altars and cult-figures and temples is maintained by the Christians because they see in this avoidance a watchword or symbol "*of their secret and forbidden association.*" (17.) (*We have here a veritable historical record that Christianity was then, under the Antonines, not a RELIGIO LICITA, as Judaism was.*) "Why do the Christians not share in the sacrificial feasts of their Gentile fellow-citizens? One must pray to the *daimones*," says our Neoplatonist, "in order that they may be gracious" (*hina eumeneis osi*). For the *daimones*, too, belong to God. The Pythagorean, of course [to whom the eating of meat was forbidden by his philosophical creed], may abstain. "Do not the Christians realize that they are *always* guests (*synestioi*) of the *daimones* (undergods); that is to say, whenever they eat bread and drink wine or water, breathe air, then they are

the beneficiaries of certain undergods, to whom these provinces are assigned." (28.) "As for you Christians, either get out of life altogether, or give first-fruits and prayers to the undergods, to whom terrestrial things are allotted." (33.) "Now we must court these physical powers, as we would court Roman or Parthian officials, who can injure us if treated with insolence." (35.) "When the professing Christian is banished from land and sea, and you are put in prison and crucified, why does not your 'Son of God' come to the aid of the sufferer? You Christians scorn the cult-figures; you would not dare so to treat Dionysos or Hercules in person! Those who punished your God [on Golgotha] suffered nothing for it in all the rest of their lives. But what novel experience came to him who believed himself to be not a human wizard (*goes*), but Son of God? Did he, then, who sent him permit all this, *viz.*, his cruel punishment, and also, incidentally, the destruction of his message? And all this time the Father paid no attention to him. Perhaps he willed it so, as you say; hence the extraordinary insolence which the Son underwent (*perihybrizeto*)."

"But the pagan deities," Celsus continues,<sup>25</sup> "resent insolence; they cause the scorner to flee and hide himself, or have him taken and put to death." (41.) One must rate highly the inspired work of oracles, the work of the *haruspices*, or the appearance of ghosts. What benefits have not oracles conveyed [Celsus again repeats himself], as in the founding of colonies! (45.) Eternal punishment? Why, you will find that, too, in the mystic rites (Eleusinian, Orphic, etc.). You threaten them; they threaten you. (48.)

As for the resurrection of the body, the Platonist Celsus speaks with glowing scorn of this attachment to the material body, and incidentally gives vent to his intellectual contempt of the Christians. "For these are they who also in the other respects are boorish and vile (*agroikoi kai akathartoi*), and without reason are sharing the disease of the rebellious sect

25) Cf. the story of Pentheus at Thebes.

(*te stasei synnosountes*). As for them, they are nothing. I will talk with those who hope that they will have an eternal life with God. *They are right in this* that those who have lived well will be happy, but the 'unrighteous will be altogether afflicted with *eternal evils.*" Plato, for most evil-doers, had set them periodic or limited penalties. The body *per se* is really a penalty.

"As for the Christians, they ought to vanish from the earth, or have no offspring, if they disapprove of pagan worship. Or let them share to the full in all civic duties, perform the local sacrifices." In other words, we have that characteristic combination of Platonism with a practical belief in the undergods, that they can injure, and can prophesy (60), a blending of philosophy and polytheism which more and more came to dominate the latter and last stages of classic paganism — the dusk of the gods, as Servius and Macrobius exhibit it. The soul must always be intent upon God (*tetastho pros ton Theon*). (63.)

Celsus seems to respect the consistency of martyrs. (66.) But if any one bid you bless the Sun or Athena with a beautiful hymn, in this (doing this) you will seem the more to revere the great God; for piety traversing all things becomes more perfect.

Be loyal to the emperor! If all were to do what you do, he would be forlorn, and the world would fall under the sway of the barbarians. (68.) What has your God done for the Jews, who have no clod of their own, nor altar? And as for you, you are skulking from persecution! (69.)

Now follows, almost at the very conclusion of this polemic, a very curious utterance of Celsus. He intimates that, if the emperor should become a Christian and then be captured by the barbarians, and if this process should repeat itself over and over again, civilization would come to an end. Help the emperor! Even hold governmental office! Do this for the sake of preserving the laws and piety. (75.)

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(To be concluded.)