

Celsus:
A Fierce Foe of Christianity, Who Argued for the Superiority of Hellenic Culture

By: Michael D. Anderson

A Thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

Auburn University Montgomery

In partial fulfillment of the

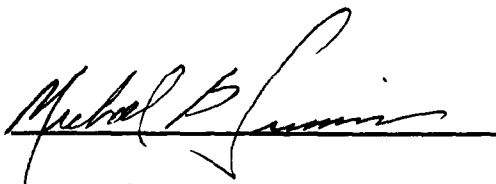
Requirements for the

Degree of Master of Liberal Arts

Montgomery, Alabama

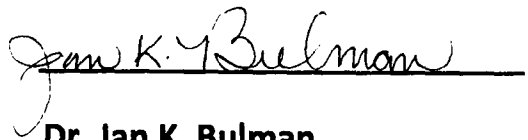
10 May 2013

Approved by:



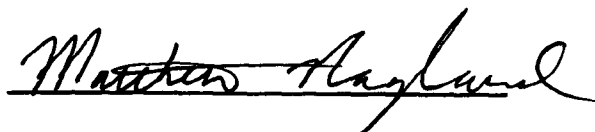
Dr. Michael B. Simmons

Thesis Director



Dr. Jan K. Bulman

Second Reader



Dr. Matthew Ragland

Associate Provost

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the writing of this master's thesis, I am very grateful for and wish to acknowledge the mentorship, encouragement, and the many helpful suggestions from my advisors, Dr. Michael Simmons and Dr. Jan Bulman, of the History Department, School of Liberal Arts, Auburn University Montgomery, who were the first and second readers of this thesis. Without them, without their guidance, it would not have been possible for me to accomplish this task.

I am most grateful for the encouragement of my wife, Mary, who gave me enthusiastic support and the freedom to pursue a Master of Liberal Arts in History degree at Auburn University Montgomery at this late date in my life. I wish to thank my daughter, Rachel K. Anderson, for her encouragement and technical help and advice as I did research on this paper, and for the other papers required in my coursework.

Lastly, I wish to acknowledge Dr. Hines Hall of Auburn University, who taught me Modern European History while I was at Auburn in the Spring Quarter of 1969, and who both encouraged and inspired me to continue my studies in History with a view to obtaining an advanced degree.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter I “Do We Have an Accurate Account of <i>The True Doctrine</i> ”	10
Chapter II “What Motivated Celsus to Write his <i>The True Doctrine</i> , And what was his Identity?”	13
Chapter III “Pagan Religious and Philosophical Background”	17
Chapter IV “Selective Aspects of the Secular Roman-Hellenic Background (AD 150-200)”	56
Chapter V “Celsus Attacks Christianity for its Social Exclusivity”	75
Chapter VI “Celsus uses Religious Judaism as a Tool against Christianity”	79
Chapter VII “Celsus uses a Jew to Argue His Case”	82
Chapter VIII “Celsus’ General and Specific Objections to Christianity”	92
Chapter IX “Celsus Uses Philosophy to Attack and Belittle Christianity”	101
Chapter X “Christians are Rebels against Rome and the Emperor”	122
Conclusion	124
Endnotes	136
Bibliography	150

Introduction

While we do not have hard data through the third century AD¹, during the first and second century AD the numbers of Christians were growing throughout the Roman Empire, and some models even suggest that Christians could have grown to number as many as “6 million”² by the early fourth century, c. 300. By the later part of the 170s, the growth of Christianity had attracted the attention and alarmed the sensibilities of the Greek pagan philosopher Celsus, who noted of the Christians that, “When they were beginning they were few,” but by his time they had “spread to become a multitude,”³ something he could not bear. As a result, Celsus wrote a blistering attack against Christianity and the Christians, entitled *The True Doctrine*. Since Celsus’ work has perished and is lost to us the contents of Celsus’ treatise and all of our knowledge of Celsus comes solely from the response of Origen in his book, the *Contra Celsum (Against Celsus)*, which Origen wrote about AD 248. However, so significant is Celsus’ polemic attack upon Christianity that Origen’s response is “the culmination of the whole apologetic movement of the second and third centuries.”⁴ Chadwick describes the significance of Origen’s answer by saying that “in the history of the intellectual struggle between the old and the new religion the *contra Celsum* is of the first importance, comparable only with Augustine’s *City of God*.”⁵ Pick states that this “treatise must always hold its place as the great apologetic work of Christian antiquity.”⁶ Origen was more than sixty years old when he wrote the *Contra Celsum*, which he wrote at the request of his friend and patron, Ambrose.⁷ Origen was certainly a match for his opponent intellectually, and, in comparing the two, Chadwick notes that “For whereas

to Celsus writing about seventy years earlier the majority of Christians seemed to be stupid and uneducated fools, if they were not knaves, with Origen Christians and pagans met intellectually on equal terms.”⁸

Christianity’s early growth in the Roman Empire at times experienced opposition in the form of violent persecution, with some Christians tortured and martyred for the faith. Hargis notes that “The late 170s was a time of crisis for Christianity; the last half of the decade had seen the most violent of the persecutions of the second century.”⁹

While Christianity was far from being publically accepted as a religious entity within the empire, “It was transforming itself from a state of relative isolation to a level of social and intellectual integration with pagan culture.”¹⁰ A high conversion rate, not just alone among the poor and the poorly educated, but beginning to include some of those from the upper classes of society, was breaking down the barriers between Christianity and the greater culture. Although persecution continued in varying degrees over the next hundred years, we now know that in the third century and thereafter Christianity grew into a major religious force. It is within this context that Celsus launched the first important literary attack upon Christianity, and it appears that Celsus was the first pagan philosopher known to have done so. As Hargis states “The *True Doctrine* was the first serious literary attack on Christianity; while several pagan authors of the second century had mentioned the Christians, Celsus’ work was the first systematic treatise written against them.”¹¹ For Celsus, Christianity was intolerable and his “goal, like that of the crowd, was the elimination of Christianity altogether.”¹²

For this master's thesis, I will adopt as my method of inquiry a socio-historical and literary approach, since I do not have a working knowledge of the original languages (Greek and Latin). I will show in this paper that in his book Celsus fiercely attacked Christianity, arguing for the superiority of Hellenic culture, by (1) arguing against and condemning Christian social exclusivity, involving (a) the secrecy of Christian worship, (b) the failure of Christians to attend public events, and (c) the undermining of pagan homes; (2) the use of Judaism as a weapon against the Christians, through (a) guilt by association, and (b) engendering a hostile reaction against their mutual hostility towards idolatry; (3) the use of a Jewish literary figure to (a) argue with and against Jesus that he is not the Jewish Messiah, and (b) to argue against Jews who have converted to Christianity; and (4) by using many doctrines from the philosophical schools (e.g., Platonism, Stoicism, Epicureanism, etc.) to vigorously attack, ridicule and make to seem foolish the various beliefs and tenants of Christianity, and to undermine Christian claims of exclusivity.¹³ That Celsus was an unrelenting critic who ridiculed and scorned Christianity should be apparent once we have finished examining his work.

In the *Contra Celsum* Origen says that he refutes each particular point or attack made by Celsus. However, we cannot be sure that Origen always addresses each point in the order presented by Celsus in his work, particularly as to the points raised in Book 1, paragraphs 1-27 of Origen's reply. Origen does assure us (after paragraph 40 of Book 1) that in the future he will refute each of Celsus' objections, without regard to the natural order of sequence of subjects, but in "the order of the objections written in his book."¹⁴ Working with the text as presented by Origen has its challenges. Dulles notes that,

“Following no clear outline of his own, Origen allows the order and emphasis to be chiefly dictated by Celsus’ diatribe. Once Celsus’ work was lost, Origen’s reply became hard to follow.”¹⁵ As presented by Origen there is some repetition of points and it is not at all easy to organize Celsus’ arguments, as many of them do not fit neatly into one compartment and Celsus employs an argument at one point and then at another, and some may be approached for analysis in several different ways. It has been noted that, “The mass of details, indeed, is often tedious.”¹⁶ With this in mind, I present the following outline in an effort to set out the arrangement of Celsus’ main points.¹⁷ However, in this paper I will not exhaustively discuss all of the detailed points and arguments made by Celsus in his book, *The True Doctrine*.

I Christian social exclusivity, involving (a) the secrecy of Christian worship, (b) the failure of Christians to attend public events, and (c) the undermining of pagan homes/culture, is seditious and undermines the public good (Book I, 1-27).

- A. Christians meet in secret and their organizations are illegal (I, 1; VIII, 17);
- B. Their teachings are not new, are barbarous, arbitrary (I, 2-5));
- C. Their power rests upon magic (I, 6); and
- D. Christians demand irrational beliefs (I, 9).

II Religious Judaism is associated with Christianity to establish a common guilt by association.

- A. Judaism and, by extension, Christianity must be condemned for their separation from the true doctrine of many of the nations, e.g., their hostility to idolatry (I, 14-22); and
- B. Christianity has no right to exist because it is “new” and a breakaway religion emanating from Judaism and in rebellion to it (I, 26-27).

III A Jewish literary figure argues Celsus’ case (Book I, 28-71; Book II, 1-73).

- A. Celsus’ Jew argues that Jesus is not the Jewish Messiah.
 - 1. Jesus is not divinely born (I, 28-39);
 - 2. Jesus was not acknowledged by God (I, 41-58);
 - 3. Jesus’ deeds do not prove him to be the Son of God, etc. (I, 61-68); and
 - 4. Jesus’ body was not like the body of a god (I, 69-71).
- B. Celsus’ Jew argues with Jews that have converted to Christianity (Book II, 1-73).
 - 1. Jesus is not the Messiah, as his life proves (II, 5-13);
 - 2. Prophecies of Jesus were made up by his disciples after his death (II, 13-27);
 - 3. The Jewish prophecies do not fit Jesus (II, 28-32);
 - 4. Jesus did not prove that he is Messiah, nor win true believers (II, 33-46);
 - 5. The reasons for following Jesus are of no account, have no truth (II, 47-49, 54-73);
 - 6. Christians are refuted by their own writings (II, 74-75); and
 - 7. Jesus admitted the weakness of his cause (II, 76-79).

IV Celsus makes objections to the fundamentals of Christian doctrine (Books III-V).

A. General objections:

1. Christianity abandons Jewish doctrine, is rebellious and leads to division (III, 1-14);
2. Christian doctrine is not new or important (III, 16-43);
3. Christianity is only for the ignorant and for wicked sinners, not for the wise and good (III, 44-55, 59-71); and
4. Christian teachers seduce and deceive (III, 72-81).

B. Special objections:

1. The belief in a descent of God, or by a Son of God, is wrong (IV, 2-3, 8, 3-11, 79);
2. God does not change for the worse and come in contact with matter (IV, 14-18);
3. The descent of God doctrine is untrustworthy and based on nonsensical stories (IV, 31-53);
4. The Christian notion of the order of nature is false because God does not create mortal beings (IV, 52-61), evil is fixed in quantity, does not increase or vary (IV, 62-73), God did not make all things for man and there is no individual providence (IV, 73-99), and the Christian angels are in fact daemons (V, 2).

C. Neither Christians nor Jews are worthy of preference by God.

1. Not the Jews because their worship is deficient, they have wrong doctrines and pay no homage to the sun, moon and stars (V, 6-14), and they live apart

from others according to their laws and consider themselves better than other nations (V, 25-34, 41); and

2. Not the Christians because they left Judaism (V, 33, 51), they contradict themselves (V, 52-54), and they have varied notions of God (V, 59-65).

V Christianity both borrows from and adulterates Greek philosophy.

- A. The Christian teaching that human wisdom is foolishness comes from philosophy (Socrates, Heraclites), but it is used to attract the ignorant (VI, 12-14);
- B. The Platonic view that the chief good is knowable only by a few contradicts the Christian view of faith (VI, 3-11);
- C. Christian conceptions of humility, etc., are taken from Plato (VI, 15-16);
- D. The Christian doctrine of the kingdom of God is wrong because :
 1. Christians misunderstand Plato's super-celestial God;
 2. The concept of 7 heavens comes from the Persians or the Cabeiri (VI, 23-34);
 3. Christian concepts of the soul and its fate ascending to God come from Mithraism (VI, 23-34); and
 4. Christianity associates sorcery and magic (VI, 39-40).
- E. The concept of the devil is a misunderstanding (VI, 42-46);
- F. The Christian concept of the creation of the world is foolish (VI, 47-65);
- G. The Christian concept of God's manifestation on earth is already found from the Stoics, but it is unbelievable, impossible and ludicrous (VI, 66-81);

H. Jewish-Christian prophecies are foolish, contradictory and must be disbelieved (VII, 2-18);

I. Eschatological doctrines of Christianity are false, because :

1. God cannot be seen after death, as he has no body (VII, 27-34);

2. The Christian's "better earth" misunderstands Plato's "pure earth" (VII, 28-31); and

3. The Christian resurrection of the body concept misunderstands metempsychosis (V, 49; VII, 32; VIII, 49 & 53).

J. Christian conceptions of patiently bearing suffering and dying, as to Jesus, come from Plato's *Crito* (VII, 58).

VI Celsus defends the Greco-Roman religion and the religion of the state (imperial cult).

A. Christians are rebellious subjects who have no right to reject the pagan cult (VII, 62; VIII, 49);

B. Christians should worship the images of the gods (VII, 62, 66-67);

C. Demons (daemons) should be worshiped by Christians (VII, 2, 11-16, 68; VIII, 49);

D. Christians must sacrifice and take part in pagan feasts, because the pagan gods/daemons are powerful (VIII, 17-37, 38-49);

E. If everyone did as the Christians do there would be chaos, no law, no peace, and legitimate authority would be abandoned (VIII, 68); and

F. The worship of Caesar, must not be neglected (VIII, 63-71), for rulers are instruments of the daemons and of God, and they must be obeyed to avoid punishment.

VII In conclusion, Celsus appeals for Christians to help the emperor, to participate in the affairs of state, to fight for the emperor as soldiers, and to accept and hold public office, in order to preserve the state, the laws and piety (religion) (VIII, 73-75).

With this outline in mind, we now begin our first chapter of this thesis.

Chapter I

Do We Have An Accurate Account of *The True Doctrine*?

Since Celsus' *The True Doctrine* has only survived in the account given by Origen, one may ask whether we have a true and accurate rendering of his work. Origen wrote the *Contra Celsum* in response to the request of his friend and patron, Ambrose, to "write an answer to Celsus' false accusations in his book against the Christians and the faith of the churches."¹⁸ Origen wrote his reply about 248¹⁹, and he tells us that Celsus "has already been dead a long time."²⁰ Origen does not seem to know much of his adversary except by what appears in Celsus' book. Origen claims to "reply to each particular point in Celsus' book,"²¹ and it is apparent from the beginning that he is quoting portions of Celsus' book as he makes his reply, point by point.²² For example, Origen will say, e.g., "On the point in question, the next thing which he says in his book is this:"²³, and, "He next speaks as follows:"²⁴, and, "This is what he says!", and, "Let us look at the next passage which runs as follows:"²⁵. Origen explains as he begins Book V that he does so without a desire to "talk a great deal," but for the purpose in "so far as possible not to leave any of his statements unexamined, and especially where he might seem to some people to have brought clever charges against us or the Jews."²⁶ Although Origen comments at one point that Celsus is repeating himself, he says "But lest we should seem to leave out intentionally some passage of his book as though we were incapable of refuting him, even if we will be repeating ourselves, as Celsus provokes us to do this, let us give an abbreviated discussion as well as we can."²⁷ It seems that for emphasis

Origen claims to quote Celsus' actual words in several places.²⁸ However, it may be that not every "quotation" gives the actual wording of each phrase, and may reflect a paraphrase. Ferguson notes that "Celsus' sole work, *True Doctrine*, has survived only in quotations and paraphrases of it found in Origen's *Against Celsus*," but he also states that this work "faithfully reproduces about ninety per cent of the *True Doctrine*, most of it in direct quotations."²⁹ Chadwick observes, "Origen's method of quoting his opponent sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph, has ensured that a substantial part of the work is preserved in its original wording."³⁰ However, Chadwick also notes that, "there are several places where Origen's words convey the impression of providing what can scarcely be more than a bare summary of Celsus' words," and "Occasionally an indication is given when Origen refers back to previous remarks made by Celsus which in fact he has not quoted before at all (IV, 79, 97)."³¹ Hoffman notes that "It is now widely recognized that Origen abbreviates and omits passages of his opponent's book with some regularity (cites omitted)."³² However, Hoffman goes on to state that "a majority of scholars would put the percentage of Celsus' work accessible through Origen's response at around 70 percent (cites omitted)."³³

Chadwick has concluded that the probability of the date of Celsus' work is "the period 177-80."³⁴ Chadwick describes Celsus as "Roughly contemporary with Irenaeus."³⁵ Another scholar, Hargis, suggests a date of "about 200 CE, plus or minus a decade"³⁶ for the writing of *The True Doctrine*. Given this dating of the book, it is remarkable that other pagan philosophers and writers of the time have not disputed the accuracy of Origen's quotations. It is reasonable to agree with Chadwick, Hoffman and Ferguson,

supra, that we have a substantial part of the work preserved in its original wording, even up to seventy to ninety per cent of Celsus' work, and, of course, all of the important parts. Chadwick notes that Origen will occasionally say that he does not again address some portion of Celsus' argument, which shows that he has "omitted or abbreviated matter."³⁷ However, if Origen has already addressed some of these portions at an earlier point, although it may well be that some of these portions are missing, left out, it would be unnecessary to quote them again.

Chapter II

What Motivated Celsus to Write his *The True Doctrine*, and what was his Identity?

As to Celsus' identity and his motivation for writing his book, Chadwick states, "there is a strong case for thinking that Celsus had read some Christian apologetic writing, and that he may well have been provoked by Justin [Martyr]." ³⁸ The Justin referred to lived about the middle of the second century in Rome. Chadwick observes that regarding the place from which Celsus wrote that Celsus was very well informed about the Gnostic sects, many of whom flourished in Rome, and he states that "It is an attractive conjecture that Celsus wrote in Rome," but other "considerations may suggest Alexandria as his home." ³⁹ Ferguson has also noted that:

Celsus was well informed, having obtained his information both from contact with Christians and from studying their writings. At the very least, he had read widely in Genesis, Matthew and Luke, and to some extent in I Corinthians. . . .

Celsus had considerable knowledge of several Gnostic and Marcionite sects and is the only source for the existence of some of them. ⁴⁰

Ferguson describes Celsus as a "Middle Platonist and author of the most comprehensive polemic against Christianity extant from the second century." ⁴¹ Hoffman remarks "Celsus' discourse shows him to be an eclectic philosopher – a dabbler in

various schools of thought, including Platonism and Stoicism, and a student of history and the religious customs of many nations.”⁴² Droge explains:

Celsus was a religious and social conservative who believed that the interests of a multicultural empire would best be served if the various subject peoples worshipped according to their own traditions, so long as they were willing to subscribe to a myth that all such worship was offered ultimately to the Supreme God, or intellect, who oversaw the security and destiny of the empire.⁴³

Celsus’ possible protagonist, Justin Martyr, had studied much philosophy in depth, but he converted to Christianity and about 151, soon after moving to Rome, he wrote an *Apology* for Christianity addressed to the Roman Emperor Antoninus Pius. There followed a *Second Apology*, and Justin’s *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, probably written about 160.⁴⁴ According to Justin Martyr, Plato had achieved his profound insights in part because he and other Greek “sages had before them the mysterious allegories of the Pentateuch, which provided them with obscure hints at the truth.”⁴⁵ If Celsus lived in Rome, he must have known of Justin’s writings. However, Droge remarks that, “Celsus will have nothing of Justin’s claim that Greek philosophy derived from Moses.”⁴⁶

Celsus has concluded, at the beginning, that the Jewish (from which Christianity sprang) “doctrine was originally barbarian,”⁴⁷ that is, not Greek in origin, and Chadwick states (if we are concluding that Celsus was Greek) “That in the eyes of a Greek is something to be placed on the debit side for a start.”⁴⁸ As his foundation, Celsus believed that only one true doctrine has always existed, writing, “There is an ancient

doctrine which has existed from the beginning, which has always been maintained by the wisest nations and cities and wise men.”⁴⁹ This ancient doctrine encompassed the worship of many gods, but “In the theology of the hellenistic age it had become possible to harmonize a continued acceptance of the old polytheism with a kind of monotheism.”⁵⁰ As Chadwick explains, Stoic concepts postulated that the one supreme God manifested itself in different forms in nature, as in water, air, earth, and fire. The Platonists from the late fourth century B.C. thought of the numerous gods as intermediaries between the one supreme God and man, and these lesser gods were termed daemons. The local deities of each nation were looked upon as subordinate administrators of this one supreme God, and thus in these terms monotheism and polytheism were not mutually exclusive.

The philosophers of the day rationalized the cult worship of the various and numerous deities or gods as worship offered to the one supreme God. Chadwick states that by the second century AD it was a widespread notion that the local deities were actually God’s “provincial governors and administrators.”⁵¹ For Celsus “His criterion of religious truth was adherence to ancestral customs.”⁵² Chadwick observes that, “Celsus understood the supreme god called Zeus to preside over a pantheon of lesser deities who guarded individual tribes or nations.”⁵³ For Celsus this ancient tradition, this true doctrine, was at first misunderstood and then perverted by both the Jews and the Christians. Celsus entitles his book *The True Doctrine*, which has a Platonic ring to it, and Chadwick states that Celsus’ philosophy “is that of Middle Platonism,”⁵⁴ but that he is “an eclectic Platonist.”⁵⁵ Chadwick observes, “The criticism of Christianity by the

Platonist Celsus . . . is much more than a negative statement that Christianity is vulgar and its doctrine of a divine intervention in history incompatible with Platonic axioms. Celsus also felt it necessary to provide a theological justification of polytheistic practice.”⁵⁶ As Hoffman explains, “The whole of Celsus’ treatise must be viewed with his overriding purpose -- the defense of tradition and authority –in mind.”⁵⁷

Chapter III

The Pagan Religious and Philosophical Background.

To understand Celsus and his attacks upon Christianity, it is helpful to survey the Hellenistic era and the Greek-Roman religious and philosophical background just prior to his time. The culture of the Roman Empire was, largely, predominately Hellenistic or Greek. Nash notes that, "While Rome achieved military and political supremacy throughout the Mediterranean world, it adopted the culture of the Hellenistic world that preceded its rise to power. Thus, while political control of the Mediterranean world belonged to Rome, the culture continued to be Hellenistic."⁵⁸ The Roman conquests had the effect that, "More than ever before the peoples and the nations of the Mediterranean world were united . . . by a common law, a common language (koine Greek), and an increasingly common culture."⁵⁹ Nash states that, "The Hellenistic world contained an almost endless variety of combinations of religion and philosophy," and "There was nothing to prevent an especially religious person from worshipping any number of gods that belonged to an equally large number of religions."⁶⁰ According to MacMullen, "The standard Roman city . . . would need room for temples to the Capitoline Triad (Jupiter, Juno and Minerva), plus Mercury, Isis and Serapis, Apollo, Liber Pater, Hercules, Mars, Venus, Vulcan, and Ceres," and he states that many more gods were worshipped in other Roman cities, such as Philippi in Macedonia (to the number of two dozen or more deities), and that "the coins of Nicomedia, farther east, advertise more than forty that receive worship in that city."⁶¹

However, Turcan observes that:

For the Romans, religion was not a belief, a feeling or, *a fortiori*, a mystique: it was purely utilitarian practice. Romans lived in obsessive fear of hazards, the occult powers that threatened or hampered human actions, whether as regards subsistence, the daily toil necessary for survival, or the war that must be waged against neighbors to safeguard present or future harvests.⁶²

Nevertheless, it was fundamental to the Romans that as to the gods “Nothing can be done without them, without their agreement and support,”⁶³ and therefore the Romans felt they must always maintain the peace of the gods. Chadwick notes that pagans, both the half-educated and the well or highly educated, “participated in the traditional cultic acts on the principle that these rites were received ways of keeping the unseen powers friendly, and in any event one could hardly be too careful.”⁶⁴ Many educated and enlightened pagans felt that the ancient myths of the gods were unedifying and that pagan cult was sodden in superstition and black magic. However, it was hard to overcome the inertia of social habit. The old polytheism existed in the fabric of society and to challenge it would sound dangerously like revolution, a loosening of the bonds of their customs. There were no sharp frontiers between the various pagan cults, and even a loyal worshipper of Isis could delve into initiation into the mysteries of Attis or Mithras, but all would take part in the imperial cult, as a patriotic act.

According to Rayner, “Roman policy treated religion as an affair of state. Any religion was permitted, provided that it did not seem to encourage activities subversive to the

state, and provided that it extended to other religious bodies the same tolerance that it received from the State authorities.”⁶⁵ Religion in Mediterranean antiquity was largely “cult” and explained as “those rituals and offerings whereby ancients enacted their respect for and devotion to the deity, and thereby solicited heaven’s will.”⁶⁶ Some in the ancient communities even worshiped a single god as a supreme, or high, god, but they did not doubt that many other gods existed. Many lesser divine gods, cosmic and terrestrial, filled the gaps between the high god and human beings.⁶⁷ The ancient gods were local but they were dual also. They attached to particular places, whether natural or manmade, such as a grove or mountain, or a temple or an altar. They were dual in that they came to be associated with a particular people, so that the cult of a particular god reflected an ethnic identity, something that identified a certain group or people. To be pious meant to honor one’s gods according to ancient beliefs, but one had the freedom to choose to honor other gods outside of the beliefs the person had grown up with or inherited. Impiety, on the other hand, risked provoking divine anger, which the god(s) could make manifest in many dangerous ways, such as: drought, earthquake, floods, or invading armies. When the gods were happy, and pleased with the due cultic practice, the region, or the city, prospered. In the ancient Roman Hellenic world the cities were themselves religious institutions. The citizens and residents displayed their respect for the patron god of their city through public and communal rituals, such as blood sacrifices, processions, dancing, singing hymns, and even in athletic contests, all held or done in the god’s honor. The gods received honors at ceremonies that opened

any Roman city council meeting, the convening of law courts and by the opening of just about any cultural event.

Starting with Greek culture, we may begin with the twelve great Olympic gods, each with their own separate functions.⁶⁸ When the Romans came to know Greek culture, they identified their own gods with the Greek pantheon, using an identity of function to associate the names. Zeus (Greek) is identified with Jupiter (Latin; hereafter the Latin name appears in parentheses), and he was regarded as the father of other gods and of men, an all-powerful being who resided on or in Olympus (at first thought to be a Greek mountain, later as in the heavens), and he is noted as a philanderer. Hera (Juno) was both the jealous wife and the sister of Zeus. Poseidon (Neptune) was the brother of Zeus and the lord of the sea. Athena (Minerva) was a virgin, goddess of wisdom, war and the patron of artisans. Apollo (Phoebus) is the son of Zeus and Leto, and he was the god of music and poetry, and the sun god and the god of prophecy. Artemis (Diana) is the twin sister of Apollo, a hunter and a moon goddess; at Ephesus, she was equated with a local fertility goddess. Aphrodite (Venus) is the daughter of Zeus and Dione, a beautiful and seductive goddess of love. Ares (Mars) is the son of Zeus and Hera, the god of war. Hephaestus (Vulcan) was the lame son of Zeus and Hera, but a skilled smith and patron of the ironworkers. Hermes (Mercury) is the son of Zeus and Maia, the messenger of the gods and the guide of the dead to the underworld; he is also a craft god and the patron of businesspersons and orators. Demeter (Ceres) was the sister of Zeus and the goddess of fertility and agriculture. Hestia (Vesta), another sister of Zeus, was the goddess of the hearth. To the great twelve we add Pluto (Dio), brother of Zeus

and Poseidon, lord of the underworld (Hades), and Dionysus (Bacchus), son of Zeus and the mortal Semele, and god of wine. Two other gods were originally just men: Heracles (Hercules), son of Zeus and the mortal Alcmene, who did heroic labors for humankind, and Asclepius (Aesculapius), son of Apollo and the mortal Coronis, a skilled physician reputed to have brought a dead man back to life. These major Greek gods were anthropomorphic. Their statues were of beautiful and idealized types, with some of these depictions known throughout the Graeco-Roman world. The gods were subject to various human frailties, such as lust, jealousy, petty vendettas, and the desire for power, but they had superhuman abilities, beauty or stature.

The gods formed something of a divine society, living with Zeus on Mount Olympus.⁶⁹ The gods lived either on the top of a high mountain named Olympus or else in the sky above it, said to be located in the north of Greece. The gods were ageless and deathless, with no physical restrictions. They were amoral and did things that humans should not do. The gods could do some things for you, if you knew how to address them, but not all things. However, the gods could not alter one's fate (moira), one's lot in life. When needed, the gods were the protector of the moral order; for instance, if someone took a god's name in vain, it was perjury, an insult to that god. The culture, morally, operated on a sense of shame for the doing of some act that just was "not done" and the standard was that of public opinion, not a legal code of conduct. Sacrifices were offered to the gods to make a wished for thing occur, or to make something else go away. At one's death, a proper burial was necessary, for without one

the deceased's soul would permanently wander about in some shadow of existence, always ill at ease, in a state of unrest.

For the Greeks and Romans, each house had its own small shrines and regular prayers and sacrifices, which was in addition to those observances required in the city or by the family's clan.⁷⁰ Much of the religious activity revolved around the agrarian cycle, to honor the deities who gave fertility to the crops and herds. The Greeks and the Romans believed that if one took part in the ceremonies the gods would not let them down. City festivals and sacrifices to the gods were both religious and patriotic. All public meetings of the people would include purifications, sacrifices and prayer. According to Whittaker, "Within this rich and varied mythology were a whole host of minor gods . . . worshipped in special localities."⁷¹ These included the "powers of nature, venerated by all primitive peoples, whom the Greeks personified by giving individual names to rivers and various nymphs, of streams (naiads), of mountains (Oreads), of trees (Dryads), of the sea (Nereids)."⁷² Whittaker states, "The educated Greek had grown up with these stories, which he knew from Homer, from the rich storehouse of Greek poetry, and from the role of the gods in Greek drama."⁷³ Whittaker relates that:

The Greek countryman had his rustic festivals, but his life was bound up with his . . . city and its civic religious celebrations. The numbers of temples would vary according to the wealth and size of the city, but each of the larger cities usually had its own special cult of its patron god or goddess, who was supposed to

protect it and regard it with particular favor, e.g., Athena at Athens, and Artemis at Ephesus.⁷⁴

When the individual sacrifices were offered publically, and after the due portion was dedicated, given to the temple, the individuals often celebrated “by eating what was left over, ‘meat offered to idols’.”⁷⁵ For the Romans,

A whole host of minor godlings presided over every act of daily life. . . . In the early days of Rome the household gods were part of the family. . . . A prayer was offered to Vesta as goddess of the hearth, mainstay of the family, before the chief meal of the day, and a little cake was thrown into the fire. Vesta . . . also presided over the State hearth, and had her temple in Rome, where the Vestal Virgins tended the sacred flame, symbolic of the well-being of Rome, which must never be allowed to go out. Other family gods were the Lares, deified spirits of dead ancestors, or according to another theory, gods of the farmland.⁷⁶

In public worship, “Jupiter, with his temple on the Capitol, was the greatest of the gods and the special protector of Rome. He was often linked with Juno and Minerva.”⁷⁷

The Greeks thought the countryside full of supernatural powers, with demons inhabiting all types of things found in nature, such as stones, rivers, mountains, trees and forests.⁷⁸ Female nymphs resided in trees, caves, rivers or the sea. In the wilder areas of the country dwelt the demons, half-human and half-animal in appearance. For the Roman, *lares* were watchful and protective spirits of a family and its household, but *lares* were also worshipped on the roads at crossroads as protectors of travelers going

through the countryside. For the Romans, the gods of the home, road and field gained more favor with the masses than the great Capitoline gods in Rome did.

Ferguson states that pagan "Religion was closely interwoven with society in the Greco-Roman world. It was official and part of the civil order."⁷⁹ Each city had its own patron deity or deities and sacrifice and prayer went on at the meetings of the city assembly or council. Temples were built with public funds and taxes levied to support certain cults. Thus, human life was involved in religion in all aspects. Those who respected and practiced this civic cult, or religion, were called "pious" (*eusebeia*). The local sanctuary, with its treasures, temples, priesthood and festivals, would attract visitors and was both a testimony to the past and a source of pride for the present. Krautheimer explains that by 50-150 AD, both in imperial Rome and in the empire, religion had split into two spheres.⁸⁰ One sphere involved the public worship of the gods that historically guaranteed the welfare of the empire- e.g., Jupiter, the invincible Sun, and or the Emperor's divine mystery- and this was a civic duty performed according to state ritual. However, generally this worship was only required of those officials in this sphere or of those who were under the scrutiny of Roman officialdom. One's personal spiritual needs were another sphere, satisfied by divinities of one's personal choice. They could be either native gods, tribal gods, or a savior god, and the latter were frequently of oriental origin. The savior cults, whether centered on Mithras, Isis, or the Great Mother, or another deity, guaranteed salvation after death to the initiated, which were composed of small, select and segregated groups in which the members might forget social distinctions. No conflicts need arise between the two spheres as long as the

cult of the emperor and the worship of the other cults were not mutually exclusive, or more cynically, as long as the mandatory worship of officialdom could be avoided, and for the poor this was not actually so difficult.

An important cult, the imperial cult of the ruler, was introduced to the Romans through the effects of Alexander the Great.⁸¹ The Romans adopted and adapted this concept, encouraging a view that the emperors ruled and protected the empire as heaven's special agent on earth. As Whittaker notes:

Sovereigns recognized the value of having their dynasty legitimized and their edicts sanctioned, if they could be thought to exercise some superhuman power. They did not demand deification, but they accepted such titles as *Soter*, Deliverer; *Euergetes*, *Eumenes*, Kindly. *Epiphanes*, Illustrious has an additional undertone of 'divinity made manifest'.⁸²

The imperial cult served to bind the empire's cities together, both politically and culturally. For a city, establishing the imperial cult could bring honor and patronage, favors, from the emperor, and to offer a sacrifice to the emperor was an offering for the well-being of the empire. The evidence for observing the imperial cult is very great.⁸³ In almost all urban centers of the empire, there was some sort of ruler worship. Worship of the emperors was the only religion in the Roman Empire encouraged by a province-wide organization, with a direct encouragement by a central administration, and, by 180 A.D., it formed a major part of the religious activity of many pagans. The imperial cult helped those who lived under a system of Roman military authority explain their lives,

their station in life, as if some part of a divine plan. It was felt that if the emperor were a god, then it was surely “right” to obey him, and if he were arbitrary, then that was the nature of divine actions. The cult consisted of sacrifices conducted by a special priesthood addressed to the emperor(s), whose statues resided in temples like other gods. It was also quite common in the worship of other gods to entreat their aid on behalf of the emperor. In addition, according to Whittaker, “The average citizen would . . . as an individual show his respect by some conventional gesture such as offering a pinch of incense or kissing his hand as he passed by the altar. He also might enhance the sanctity of an oath by swearing by the *genius* (the attendant spirit) of the emperor.”⁸⁴

Regarding the emperor’s influence, Potter tells us:

His physical presence was invoked throughout these lands by countless temples, innumerable milestones marking the roads that bound the empire together, by monuments at the mouths of harbors, and at public events of all sorts. When news came of a missive from the emperor, those assembled in public places were supposed to listen, with heads bowed as his words were read out.⁸⁵

In general, the gods of Graeco-Roman paganism appeared in human anthropomorphic forms, but the Egyptian cults were exceptional in the use of animal shapes, while the Syrian cults employed the use of special stones.⁸⁶ Polytheists knew that each nation or ethnic group had its own distinctive gods, and each group worshipped their gods to win their favor in all their undertakings. The gods were thought to intervene in human affairs and, in some very general way, it was thought

that they might punish the doing of evil. However, there was no notion of any one system of morality, and it was felt that the gods' main desire was to receive worship.

Despite the many pagan gods, the:

Social and economic conditions in the Graeco-Roman world as a whole, emigration, deportation, wars leading to captivity and enslavement, had led men to venerate Fortune, 'Lady Luck', a goddess with no mythology. On a higher plane she could be seen almost as Fate. . . . More often she was viewed as blind, capricious, more often malignant than beneficent.⁸⁷

Pagans looked to divination as a means to foresee and overcome the twists of fate and fortune. Both the individual and the state looked for omens, important to both the state and the individual as a sign of what was to come. The Romans used a college of augurs to interpret the signs, and they maintained professional diviners (*harauspices*) who would inspect the victim's entrails to interpret the divine will. Dreams and visions could be ominous portends of the future and handbooks for the interpretation of dreams were available. Some believed that a god could use dreams to communicate with a person and that a god of healing could appear in a dream and heal a sick person sleeping in their temple.

Regarding still other means of foreseeing the future, Whittaker states "Oracles were another means of probing into the future."⁸⁸ In Greece, at the oracle of Apollo at Delphi, a Delphic prophetess would in frenzy utter unintelligible sayings, which the priests interpreted. For Rome, the Sibylline books were highly important as a collection of

oracles, preserved in the temple of Jupiter on the Capitol, consulted in times of emergency to discover the means of placating and pleasing the gods. Astronomy had discovered fixed rules that governed the movement of the stars and planets and from this astrology came forth as a source of foreknowledge. Horoscopes related the movements of the planets to human activities to predict or to warn; everything operated under the domination of the stars. However, Whittaker notes:

Astrology, if man's fate is determined by the stars from birth to death, logically leads to a bleak and pessimistic determinism. In practice, means were found to circumvent Fate by prayers, according to due formulas, amulets (hundreds of which have been found in graves) and charms and incantations, for which there is abundant evidence in Egyptian magical papyri.⁸⁹

During the later Hellenistic era, after Rome took control of the Mediterranean, under these circumstances, "Many turned for reassurance to the Mystery religions."⁹⁰ Life in the ancient world under Rome was lived with a background of blindly accepted beliefs combined with religious pomp and show conducted at public expense, and designed or conducted to preserve for the State the right relationship with the gods. In such a system, where an individual's destiny either was at the mercy of a capricious god or even malignant Fortune, or ruled by the stars, many could feel afraid and unable to feel at ease. During the first and second century, wars, famines, plagues and other upheavals had caused many to move, to relocate, with the loss of their former local gods, and now they had new ones to consider. Merchants, artisans, soldiers, and slaves found

themselves in new surroundings. Men sought greater, more powerful, gods, and this led to a growing popularity of the mystery religions. Whittaker observes that there was a “need for a more personal relationship with the divinity to relieve their loneliness and to comfort their fears. This could be sought in the Mystery religions. The moment of initiation could bring ever-memorable exaltation.”⁹¹

Many of these mystery religions were also associated with the traditional civic cult, such as that of Eleusis near Athens.⁹² To receive initiation into a mystery religion was an individual choice, an expression of a personal religion. Many mystery religions were native to Greece, but they also developed and were prominent in the Middle East. Middle Eastern cults (gods) also adopted mystery initiations as they entered the Greek world, Greek culture. In general, the mystery religions reflected a “secret” cult or ritual and the uninitiated could not take part. The mystery religions are termed such “because of their use of secret ceremonies that were thought to bring their initiates such benefits as ‘salvation’.”⁹³ By these rites, the selected individuals came into a special relationship with the god and received assurance of certain benefits, such as the special protection of the divinity.

The mystery religions employed a knowledge that was “mysterious”; it was “a secret, esoteric knowledge, attainable only by the initiated and never revealed to those outside the circle of the religion.”⁹⁴ Several cults stressed the role of this special knowledge in achieving redemption, but in general, the term referred not so much to the cognizance of a set of truths as to a “higher” knowledge associated with their secret ceremonies. A

basic element of each mystery religion was a myth in which the deity either returned to life after a death experience or triumphed over his enemies. Important to each myth was the theme of redemption from all things earthly, or temporal. The mysteries had little use for doctrine or correct belief. Their main appeal was to the emotional state of their followers, and to obtain the required state they employed processions, plays, acts of purification, fasting and esoteric liturgies. The immediate goal was for a mystical experience that led the initiate to feel that he had achieved a union with the god and some kind of a redemption or salvation experience, and immortality. The initiation made possible communion with the deity, and an eventual triumph over death.

Nash observes that "Religion assumed two fundamentally different forms in the Greek world: the Olympian religion and the Greek mystery religions."⁹⁵, and he indicates, "Generally speaking, the Olympian religion had little effect on the life of the typical Greek farmer or tradesman."⁹⁶ In contrast to the Olympian gods, the mystery religions had more of a universal appeal, with "more stress on the spiritual well-being of the individual."⁹⁷ According to Ferguson, "The original Greek mysteries were rooted in the soil and related to the cycle of nature."⁹⁸ Regarding these older Greek mysteries, Nash notes that these "mysteries revolved around Demeter (goddess of the soil and of farming) and Dionysus (god of the vine and of wine)."⁹⁹ The annual vegetation cycle, prominent in the cult of Demeter, appears again in the later mysteries, where

Spring's annual triumph over the death of winter came to symbolize the human hope for victory over death. Only by participating in the nature of the god could

human immortality be fulfilled as expressed each spring in the rebirth of nature.

The search for this immortality was directed not toward the gods on Olympus, but towards the gods or goddesses, who, like Demeter, were thought to have conquered death.¹⁰⁰

Several stages of initiation might be involved, such as with the mysteries of Demeter, known as the Eleusinian Mysteries. After certain preliminary rites of purification were accomplished, there followed the “lesser” mysteries, which took place near Athens during February. In September, the Great Mysteries occurred at Eleusis, about 14 miles from Athens, and from these rites the name derived. After a full year of probation, the Eleusinian initiate could gain admission to the highest level, with the right to view the secrets of a sacred ark. The Eleusinian mysteries “were universal during Roman times in being open to all who could come to Eleusis, afford the initiation, and meet the standards of purity.”¹⁰¹ Whittaker notes that, “many came from many lands to be initiated. Augustus was an initiate and set a precedent followed by his successors, including the philosopher Marcus Aurelius (Emperor 161-80).”¹⁰²

The mysteries of Greek origin that spread widely during the Hellenistic-Roman times were the Dionysiac mysteries.¹⁰³ They were widespread in Asia Minor and in the Greek islands, and in Italy and Egypt. Dionysus was the son of Zeus by the mortal Semele, known as Bacchus (Latin) to the Romans. After death, there was the promise of a happy after life, but neither Dionysus nor the initiates rose from the dead. It seems that anxiety over life after death did not exist, replaced by a depiction of life in the other

world as a Dionysian revel (involving dances, banquets, drinking wine, masquerades, and the like). Dionysus was associated “both with the natural cycle of vegetation and with certain animals thought to embody him. The purpose of the Dionysian rites was to bring the initiate into union with the ‘god of life’, who was thought to be master over death.”¹⁰⁴

The Dionysiac cult evolved into what became the Orphic religion, sort of a reformation.¹⁰⁵ According to legend, Orpheus was a singer who charmed the Queen of Hades by playing the lyre. The Maenads, female worshippers of Dionysus, dismembered Orpheus. The Orphics, however, introduced a sacred literature of hymns and prayers that interpreted the rites, and they eliminated the orgiastic elements. This religion described a personal plan of salvation that used purifications and sacraments, as well as mystic ceremonies. Orphics taught a radical body-soul dualism and a belief in reincarnation. To them human nature involved a constant struggle between good and evil, residing in the soul and the body. In their view, every person had the duty of seeking to release his soul from the corrupting influence of the body. The Orphics believed the soul could achieve greater degrees of purity by successive reincarnations, and it appears that a number of Orphic beliefs reappear in Plato’s philosophy.

While the Greek mystery cults were important, “The three most important mystery religions of the Hellenistic age were the cults of Isis, Cybele and Mithra.”¹⁰⁶ The Isis cult began in Egypt, where she was the goddess of heaven, the earth, the sea, and the unseen world below. The cult of Isis became a mystery religion during the Hellenistic era

after Ptolemy the First came to power in Egypt, and certain changes occurred, including the making of a new god, Serapis, as a replacement for Osiris, husband to Isis. This cult gradually made its way to Rome, and it demonstrated an impressive ritual and gave a hope of immortality to its followers. Often seen as a sun god in the cult's mystery stage, Ferguson states that, "Serapis was a savior god, delivering from danger and healing the sick. In this he took over certain features of the cult of Asclepius."¹⁰⁷

Outside of Egypt, Ferguson states that, "The worship of a fertility goddess was widespread from very early times in the eastern Mediterranean."¹⁰⁸ Greeks identified the Phoenician Astarte with Aphrodite, but she was essentially the same as the Syrian Atargatis and the Phrygian Cybele. The supreme Phoenician god was *Baal Shamin* ("Lord of Heaven") and local pantheons included Astarte, *Baal Shamin* and a youthful god (such as Adonis) to make a family triad. Each Syrian city had its Baal ("lord" or "master") and a consort. Baal was associated with the sun during the empire, and his consort with the moon. A Baal, the Jupiter of Doliche in Commagene, became popular with the Roman armies and it went all over the empire with them. In the Roman world, however, the best known of the Syrian goddesses was Atargatis of Hierapolis. Ferguson notes, "The great goddesses of the Near East -Astarte, Cybele, and Atargatis- were characterized as goddesses of nature, fertility, and motherhood and as rulers of animals."¹⁰⁹

The cult of Cybele and Attis originates in Phrygia, but a Hellenized Cybele assimilated to become the "Mother of the Gods", and in the Latin west this goddess became the "Great Mother" (*Magna Mater*).¹¹⁰ Cybele's youthful consort was Attis, at first a mortal,

but later seen as a vegetation god who then assimilated into another god, and later was assimilated into Mithras. This cult was the first mystery religion received into Rome, about 204 B.C., and was the first eastern cult officially accepted there, which occurred after a crisis, Hannibal's invasion, required a consultation with the Sibylline Books of oracles. The myth of Attis and Cybele takes several forms, but in one form, it involved Cybele's desire for and being bound to Attis by a chaste passion, broken by Attis. In revenge Cybele killed a nymph, Sangaritis, whom Attis had become infatuated with, whereupon Attis castrated himself and died (under a pine tree), and thus castration became a rite or practice of Cybele's priests. This castration occurred by self-mutilation, and "these followers of Cybele became 'Galli' or eunuch-priests of the cult. From her beginnings as a Nature-goddess, Cybele eventually came to be viewed as the Mother of all gods and the mistress of life."¹¹¹ In some versions of the myth, Attis returned to life as an evergreen (or pine) tree. Some early worshippers of Cybele believed an annual spring festival and rehearsal of the Attic myth guaranteed a good crop, but eventually this practice becomes a way for the worshippers to share in Attis' immortality. Each spring the followers of Cybele engaged in acts of fasting and flagellation, and, to become priests to the "Great Mother" the more fanatical followers castrated themselves, in emulation of Attis.

Next, we discuss the cult of Mithra. Nash states that, "Mithraism was easily the most significant of all the mystery religions."¹¹² It began in Iran, where Mithra appears first as the twin brother of the Zoroastrian god Ahura Mazda. It appears that Roman soldiers learned of Mithra while stationed in what are now parts of Iraq and Iran, and soldier

converts helped spread this religion all over the empire. Mithraism had a basic myth, which, in part had Mithra slaying a bull, which was the foundation of life for the human race. Mithraism did involve a dualism of two ultimate principles, one good (light) and the other evil (darkness). The universe is the battleground for the struggle between these principles and human beings must choose a side, with Mithra regarded as a powerful mediator helping humans facing attack from demon forces. Mithraism employed astrology, as the seven known planets and the dozen signs of the Zodiac appeared frequently in the cult, with each planet thought to control a different day of the week. In Mithraism, the human soul fell from heaven through seven layers of reality, each associated with a planet. Each descent from one planet to another, down to earth, brought more defects, associated with the body. Man's existence on earth is a time of testing. If the soul passes the tests reunion with the good god is more likely, but failure results in an unending suffering with all that is evil, with the forces of evil. Mithra judged the good and evil effects of each human's trials, but Mithra was a savior who helped his followers fight against evil. After death, followers believed that Mithra took the souls of the true disciples through the seven planets to their final blessed destination. Mithraism promoted an ethical life and purity as an ideal. Nash states that, "The Romans knew Mithra as *Sol Invictus*."¹¹³ Ferguson observes that in general, "Mithraism, like other eastern cults, had no general organization, tolerated other gods, and allowed regional variations."¹¹⁴

Another religious movement known to Celsus that related to special or mysterious beliefs was Gnosticism. Nash states that the Gnostics alleged they were privy to "a

special type of revealed knowledge without which human beings could not attain salvation.”¹¹⁵ Gnosticism is a term, which refers to a wide variety of religious views and movements that became influential during the first several centuries after Christ, which blended philosophical ideas from Platonism and Stoicism with religious ideas from Jewish, Babylonian, Egyptian, and other Middle Eastern sources. In the narrow sense, Gnosticism appears as a Christian heresy, but it is fundamentally un-Christian. In Syria, a Gnosticism, heavily influenced by Zoroastrianism, under Meander at Antioch emphasized a sharp distinction, a dualism, between a god of light and a god or evil power of darkness. Another different Gnostic school developed in Egypt under Basilides and Valentinus, dated about the middle of the second century AD. A third school developed under Marcion, who added a third god, the Demiurge, to the good and evil deities of the dualists. This Demiurge created the world. In Marcion’s view, the Gnostics knew a higher deliverance from the power of evil and from the Demiurge, by means of a special, secret knowledge obtained by them from the good god. For Marcion, the Old Testament derived from the inferior Demiurge, Christ only appeared to have a real physical body (Docetism), and of the apostles, only Paul had true authority. Later Gnostic systems dropped all pretense of being Christian in nature. In discussing how to define Gnosticism, however, Nash makes the point that “it should be applied exclusively to the fully developed Gnostic systems that extant evidence indicates existed after AD 100.”¹¹⁶

One Gnostic belief centered on a redeemer myth in which there was a heavenly preexistence of human souls prior to coming into this world.¹¹⁷ Each human soul fell from the heavenly world of light, resulting in imprisonment in a body, but the good god

sent to earth a Gnostic redeemer who, through the imparting of secret knowledge, made possible the return of the souls to their former state; this redeemer then returned to the heavenly world of light. Gnostics reflected a fundamental dualism, such as in the conflict between two worlds (light and darkness) and the two parts of humans (good soul in a bad body). Matter is inherently bad or evil, thus a good god must oppose it and it is simply impossible that he created it. Either a second, inferior, god, akin to Plato's Demiurge, or evil demons created the world. For salvation, humans must obtain a special knowledge (gnosis), which they cannot attain themselves; rather, it comes as a divine gift. Human souls are seen as sparks of the heavenly divine light, sparks that are trapped in matter, and the basic question is how for them to be delivered from the bad matter and returned to the world of good light. Gnostics also believed in a host of intermediary higher-level beings inhabiting the regions between men and god, with spheres governed by demons or lords through which the souls had to pass in their return to god. In second century Gnosticism, Jesus is merely one of these higher-level intermediary beings (an aeon) who came to earth to redeem man, but not to suffer and die. The Gnostic Jesus was a revealer of the secret gnosis, not a savior. Moreover, Jesus did not appear as a man with a real human body (Docetism); given that matter was evil, it was unthinkable that Christ was incarnate. Thus, Christ only appeared to have a body, he never became a man, and it was thus impossible for him to have died.

Turning now to philosophy, Ferguson states that, "The religion of many in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, especially among the educated, was philosophy," and for them, "It was a way of life."¹¹⁸ Communities of believers formed around the various

schools of philosophy, led by a revered master and his teachings. The various schools espoused a particular worldview and offered practical, ethical guidance for one's life; philosophers and poets provided a conscience for the times. Ethics was a principal concern and the aim was to teach people how to live, a common goal of each school. Virtue was teachable, and reasoning the means for obtaining it. The virtuous life meant a separation from the concerns of this life, self-sufficiency from external circumstances. Philosophers sought for people to turn away from self-indulgence, luxury, and from superstition to a life of freedom with discipline and sometimes self-contemplation. To make a living some philosophers worked for a wealthy patron, others gave lectures at public locations, some taught in formal schools, and the state supported some out of funds from the empire.

Ferguson states that the "Ancient writers traced all of the Hellenistic philosophical schools back to Socrates."¹¹⁹ Socrates emphasized the practical problems of daily life as being the main problems or concerns of humans. His mission was to ask questions, and his basic premise was that if you know what is right that you will do it. In his view, wrongdoing was the product of wrong thinking and or wrong information. He was responsible for philosophy being concerned with personal religion and the conscience. Socrates' method of teaching was to ask questions but then never to give a direct answer; Socrates could steer the conversation in such a way that the person could give a better answer to himself. Plato was a pupil of Socrates and he and his pupil, Aristotle, claimed a succession of thought from him, as did other schools.

Ferguson states that, "Plato was the greatest of Socrates' pupils and has had a major influence on Western intellectual history."¹²⁰ After Socrates' death (about 399 BC), Plato left Athens and traveled for twelve years. Upon his return, he taught, setting up a school known as the Academy. Plato used a dialogue form of writing as nearest to Socrates' method, involving the use of conversation to drive at the truth, using questions and answers. Plato taught the last forty years of his life, with his thought evolving over several periods. Plato's "effort to arrive at concepts led to a rather complicated theory of 'ideas' (*idea*) or 'forms' (*eidos*)."¹²¹ Plato presented the thought that the real world is "pure form." For Plato ideas are neither physical, nor mental, they are outside space and time. Ideas are real but the physical world is only a poor imitation of these ideas; the idea is independent of its appearance, as observed in space and time. The things seen or visualized in our physical world are actually imperfect imitations of the form or idea. All forms of ideas exist in one ultimate ideal, which Plato calls the ideal of the Good; the Good for Plato was a "form", not a god. Plato did not have a personal god; rather, he worships an impersonal principle of perfection. Plato does have a concept of a "World Soul", which is not the Supreme Being, but this concept approximates the Biblical "living God." Plato also points to a First Principle, which is an absolute, unchanging and true Being, and to a divine principle of order in the cosmos.

Ferguson notes that it was Plato's view that, "The human has two distinct realities: the body is the vehicle of the invisible soul. Only the soul can comprehend ideas, so it belongs to the realm of ideas."¹²² The relation of the soul to the body is similar to the relation of an idea to the worldly material manifestation. Plato's soul was immortal,

having both preexistence and a continuing post existence. For Plato the home of the soul was not earth but the sphere of the planets. Prior to the soul's incarnation the soul saw and learned ideas before it came to dwell in a body. Knowledge in the world is recollection. Ideas come to us independently of experience, and experience reminds us of knowledge. Knowledge is innate and a teacher helps draw knowledge out of a person. The soul divides into three parts: (1) the intellectual or rational; (2) the vibrant or spiritual; and (3) the desirous or appetitive. For Plato, ethics relates to these parts, with various virtues, such as wisdom, relating to the intellect, courage to the spirited part, and self-control as a virtue related to the soul's appetitive part. If the intellectual or rational part is in full control, and if all is in harmony and balance with the other parts, then the person will reflect the virtue of justice. In later developments, justice, self-control, courage and wisdom constitute the natural virtues, and these took on prominence in the Hellenistic Age.

In a further discussion of Plato, Nash states that Plato's "theory of knowledge is a form of *rationalism*: human knowledge is attainable only by reason."¹²³ Plato believed in absolute and unchanging standards that precluded relativism, so that, for example, beauty, goodness and truth had absolutes of perfection. Plato argued for the existence of an immaterial world that existed independently of the material world we inhabit, but he thought that a divine purpose and intelligence was at work in the universe. Human beings took part in two different worlds, one being the physical world we experience through our senses, the other being a world of immaterial and eternal essences we contact through our minds. This latter ideal world (a world of forms) was for Plato more

real than the physical world, as all things that exist in the physical world are but poor copies of their arch types, the Forms, in the immaterial world. A Form was an eternal, unchangeable and universal essence. A Form was not something that merely existed in one's mind; rather, these "form" essences existed objectively, and would exist if no human being were thinking of them. These forms existed before there were any human minds. Plato appears to teach that one Form, the Good, is more important than the others are, and this is so because the Good is the ultimate end of human life. The highest goal man is capable of attaining is knowledge of the Good, for without the knowledge of the Good all other knowledge is of no value. Knowledge of the Good was required for the world to be intelligible and for the human mind to be intelligent and attain knowledge of any of the other Forms. Plato posits that if the Form of the Good did not exist in a prior existence, nothing else would exist, including the other Forms, suggesting the existence of a supreme god. However, Nash states that, "It is impossible to say whether Plato himself thought of this highest form, the Good, as his God."¹²⁴ Regarding the creation of the world, Plato ascribed this as the work of a Demiurge (a divine artisan) who fashioned the world from preexisting matter, based on the patterns found in the Forms. In his *Symposium*, Plato also mentioned the existence of intermediary beings (which could be viewed as gods), between the world and God.

Further discussing Plato's theory of knowledge, Nash states that "for Plato there are two distinct kinds of reality: the world of particular things and the world of the Forms."¹²⁵ For someone to have real knowledge (as opposed to opinion, belief or theory), the object of that knowledge must be unchangeable. Only the Forms are

unchanging. All things existing in the physical world were or are always undergoing change. Thus, for Plato our senses could never give us that unchangeable knowledge; we can only attain knowledge of the Forms through reasoning, the function of our minds. Sense experience gives only opinion, not knowledge. The body and its senses are less important than the soul, according to Plato. The soul was both immaterial and immortal. The body was sort of a prison house for the soul, and a hindrance as the soul sought to progress towards truth and virtue. The essence of the person, the real person, is the soul, and death delivered the soul from the hindrance of the body, making possible (at least for the philosopher) the achievement of the goals of truth and virtue.

Aristotle (384-322 BC), whose school is the Peripatetic school, was a student of Plato and a tutor to Alexander the Great. Ferguson states that, "Aristotle saw himself, at least initially, as a true successor of Plato."¹²⁶ However, Nash observes that, "The school of Aristotle (the Peripatetic school) was less interested in philosophical speculation than in more specialized scientific studies."¹²⁷ Aristotle's philosophy is a development of what Plato began, but he rejected significant aspects of Plato's dualism. Aristotle did not accept a separate existence of the Forms (a doctrine of two separate worlds), although he continued to believe that Forms, or universals, did exist. For Aristotle, the Forms existed in this earthly world as part of the particular things making up the world. Aristotle's primary reality was the earthly world, not Plato's ideal world, and this encouraged the development of scientific thinking. Anything that had being had substance, composed of two factors, Form and Matter. Matter is what the substance is composed of, and Form was a set of essential properties that made it the kind of thing it

was and Aristotle's Form was an unchanging essence. However, in contrast to Plato's Form, Aristotle's Form is an essential part of the substance in which it occurs. Aristotle likewise rejected Plato's theory of knowledge. For Aristotle the Forms were not in another world, where they could be apprehended only through reason, but they were part of particular things and could be apprehended through our senses. Aristotle distinguished between the soul and the mind; he felt that the mind had both a passive intellect (that received information from the senses) and an active intellect that thinks to perform the crucial function of abstraction that isolates the Form of the thing that it has sensed. Aristotle referred to this active intellect as both separable and immortal. This active intellect was later interpreted by Plotinus (c. 205-270), as "a cosmic principle of intelligence to which every human intellect is related."¹²⁸ At death, the individual intellects were absorbed back into the cosmic mind (*nous*), which is eternal and impersonal. Regarding the soul's connection with the body, Aristotle did not see them as radically different substances, but more as a holistic unit; both body and soul were vital aspects of a human being, with the soul having three levels, or aspects: a vegetative, a sensitive, and a rational. Human beings had a capacity for knowledge that was the function of the rational part of the soul. Aristotle did believe that there was a supreme being, an ultimate god, and he saw him as uncaused and as unchanging, who was the ultimate cause of everything else that exists, but he (it) was a pure Form, unmixed with any matter.

A philosophy of skepticism developed, which involved a process of examining a matter, but without necessarily coming to any conclusion or judgment about this

matter, which then called for a suspension of judgment on the matter. To be dogmatic was to express an opinion or view after examining a matter. According to Ferguson, it was the skeptics' view that, "all the other schools were dogmatic, and this was the chief philosophical illness needing a cure."¹²⁹ Two principal arguments used by the skeptics were (1) "nothing is more than the other", meaning that to any argument there was an equal counter argument, and (2) "all is equal", meaning that to any argument there was an equal counter argument. An early skeptic, Pyrrho, looked for the purpose of life but failed to find it, and he gave up the search, suspending judgment. For Pyrrho, therefore, there was nothing to get excited about; his life was one of apathy, and he did not have strong opinions about anything. As skepticism was always negative in tone, it was not influential most of the time, and never became an effective school.

Cynicism as philosophical thought was not a formal school, as it was open to whoever adopted the name of a cynic.¹³⁰ Cynics deliberately acted against the norms of society; they rejected pleasure and even sought dishonor in their quest for virtue. They sought to dispel the illusions of others, in order to help them attain "clarity of mind". They acted against societal conventions and manners, exposing themselves to scorn by using violent, abusive, and shocking language, by wearing filthy garments, by feigning madness, by begging, and by performing acts of nature in public (such as sex). Some cynics thought that whatever is "natural" is decent, even if it were embarrassing if done in public. Cynics deliberately tried to free themselves from luxuries, reject pleasure, and attain a certain hardness, apathy and freedom. The Cynics rejected the claim that fate affected one's life, as they believed that a life of virtue was obtainable by moral effort;

the ideal of the truly wise man was possible. Cynics were bold, frank in their speech, as they felt a freedom and compulsion to speak the truth, which, however, could include reviling others with insolent invective. Cynic philosophers wandered the countryside and they were a common feature of the early empire. They adopted a distinctive appearance, consisting of a walking stick, woolen cloak, beggar's bag, and a long beard. It was normal to see them in the cities of the Roman world, talking or preaching from street corners, marketplaces, wherever people would gather. Cynics stressed a radical individualism and their moral superiority over the evil masses of humanity. Any shameful actions they committed, they rationalized, were committed to benefit the public, as they shamed the public more than they shamed the cynic. The goal was to live a life of virtue. Cynics renounced possessions, practiced self-affliction and wore a philosopher's cloak, but they did exert some influence in the giving of practical guidance in the affairs of life.

According to Ferguson, "The two principal philosophical schools of the Hellenistic Age were the Stoics and the Epicureans (cf. Acts 17:18)."¹³¹ For the Stoics nothing was immaterial. The world, gods, and words were all material, and even emotions were material if they had a physical manifestation. For Stoics the divine reality was in everything, so it was pantheistic. There are two kinds of matter, a grosser matter and a finer matter, called breath, or spirit. The finer matter is a special matter, which holds everything together and has various names: *logos* (reason), breath (*pneuma*), providence (*pronoia*), and Zeus (fire). Stoics thought that humans consisted of the grosser or heavier matter of the body with the finer, lighter matter of the soul. The soul

stretched throughout the body and its leading part, the mind, was in the head. The universe was like a giant living body, with its own leading part (mind). All parts of the universe connect to each other, so what happens in one place affects what happens in other places. The universe is rational; everything is directed towards a good goal, and even evil exists for a good purpose.

Of the Stoics, Ferguson states:

The Stoics sought to find their physical theories in the ancient mythology and in so doing promoted the allegorical method of interpretation. . . . Mythology was seen as a crude expression of truth, presented on the level of the people of the time. . . . In particular this approach served to account for immoral actions by the gods in the myths.¹³²

In this way, the myths were justified, for the gods did not actually do the things attributed to them, but these were mere descriptions of natural events. Although the common people might continue to believe these myths, or stories, the philosopher knew their true meaning. The early Stoics reasoned that the physical world went through a period of stability, followed by a conflagration in which fire consumed the world and then the world reconstituted itself, with the cycle continuously repeated. Fire turned into air, air became water, water became earth, and everything went back again to what it had been. As the world is perfect, when the world goes through a conflagration and is reconstituted, when this occurs everything must recur in exactly the same way. Nash tells us that: “then the world would begin anew and duplicate exactly

the same course of events of the previous cycle. Each event would happen again in exactly the same order; . . . The Stoics coupled this with a doctrine of eternal recurrence: the history of the world will repeat itself an infinite number of times.”¹³³ According to Nash, later Stoics rejected “the older Stoic belief in a universal conflagration. This view had probably been totally abandoned by the beginnings of the Christian era.”¹³⁴ There was no idea in Stoicism that the soul survived the conflagration, and was personally immortal, though later Stoic thought indicated that the individual soul became part of the World Soul and would reappear in this new world. The Stoic believed a certain truth or knowledge because it was so compelling, i.e., it was a perception that lays hold of one. The human soul was a thinking mechanism to the Stoic, but there was no room in the Stoic system for a desirous or emotive aspect of the soul; human beings were rational.

Ferguson notes that, “For the Stoics the goal or end of life is being happy, but this consists in living in accord with virtue, which is living in accord with nature (Strobaeus 6e=2.77).”¹³⁵ Virtue, perfection, is to live in accord with rational nature and make perfect, wise decisions. In their view, this is the best of all possible worlds and nature is the perfect environment, into which all are born. The virtuous person lives in accord with reason (*logos*), and all people should live in accord with the *logos* that runs throughout the world, everywhere. Since nature provides the perfect environment, to live in accord with nature means to live reasonably, and to make right judgments. One either can or cannot make virtuous, righteous judgments, and is either wise or foolish. However, one wrong judgment was as bad as any other was, and the wise person

became just an ideal, an ideal that no one could achieve. Supported by the Stoic's cyclical theory, the Stoics had a belief that everything was leading towards the best, and a theory of providence that everything was determined in advance, which was also supported by the Stoic cyclical theory.

According to Nash, "On the whole, cultured people during the first century A.D. were influenced more by Stoicism than by any other philosophical movement."¹³⁶ Nash relates that the Stoics were "pantheists, believing that the ultimate stuff of the universe is divine and that God has no personality. They thought that God and the world were related like soul and body: God is the soul of the world, and the world is the body of God."¹³⁷ The Stoic god was impersonal and incapable of love or providential acts. For them a divine but impersonal reason (the Logos) was imminent in everything. What man knows as reason is but a divine spark of the cosmic Reason. The Stoics denied the possibility of free will or chance, as everything that happens is determined, occurs by necessity. For the Stoics, only virtue is inherently good and only vice inherently evil. To find what is good and evil we must turn away from whatever happens of necessity and look within. The wise man makes the effort to distinguish the few things he can affect (his attitude) from the many things that are determined and over which he has no control. Things like storms, earthquakes and diseases are part of the determined course of nature. A personal virtue or vice is reflected in our attitudes, which is the way that we react to the things that happen to us. The wise and good person will be apathetic, as he or she will realize they can do nothing to avoid what has come their way (fate). The Stoic accepted his fate and lived according to nature to accept the will of the Stoic's

impersonal god. As a later Stoic, Epictetus, put it, we are all actors in a play and our task is to play as best we can whatever role God gives us. Central is the notion of apathy, for it is the goal of the virtuous person to rid himself of all passion and all emotion from his life, so that he comes to the point that nothing troubles him. However, Ferguson notes “Stoicism’s apathy basically denied the emotional side of human experience. . . . Self respect, not love, was Stoicism’s driving force. For Stoicism, as for all Greek philosophy before Neoplatonism, the goal of humanity is self-liberation, and this goal is attainable.”¹³⁸

Epicureanism was a philosophical school based on the teachings of Epicurus, of Athens. According to Ferguson, he was “the most controversial figure in ancient philosophy, with bitter enemies as well as devoted followers. His disciples formed a close-knit group, living on Epicurus’ property a life of austere contentment withdrawn from the world.”¹³⁹ Epicurus was “more of a personality in the ancient world than any other philosopher with the exception of Socrates.”¹⁴⁰ Epicurus was a materialist for whom the whole of nature consisted of matter and space. Matter is divisible down to the atom (here he draws from Democritus for his physical theory). Atoms and space constitute the whole universe, which is infinite and unbounded. The physical world comes from atoms that operate according to law; there was no creation, as the world is eternal and atoms, though they may be changed, are indestructible. For Epicurus this meant that there was no need for religion, though he did believe in the gods, who were also material, made of refined material atoms. Although the gods had material bodies, they were immortal, since their bodies never dissolved. These gods lived outside this

world and never interfered in either the world of nature or the affairs of men, and thus there was no providence. The gods simply did not bother with humans, and there was no place for prayer or the answer to prayer in Epicurus' system. The ancients regarded the Epicureans as atheists because they did not believe the gods acted through providence to help men. They did not participate in the public cults, although, ironically, Epicurus encouraged his followers to engage in the sacrifices and to do acts of homage to the gods. For Epicurus there was no need to worry about a future life. Although he recognized a body and a soul, and that they exist together in life, at death, the soul disintegrated. Thus, there was nothing to fear in death, as life was simply over, and no future punishment was possible.

Ferguson notes that, "For Epicurus sense perception is the basis of all reason. Sensation is immediate confrontation, hence it is infallible."¹⁴¹ Reason built upon sense experiences, and all mental operations are accumulated experiences. The goal of life was for tranquility, happiness, and pleasure, but this did not mean self-indulgence. It was human nature to seek pleasure and avoid pain, since all pleasure was good and all pain was bad. The pleasures sought related to the equilibrium of the soul, and tranquility (the absence of agitation) was the highest good. There was peace of mind as there was no divine intervention and no pain in death, as the soul did not survive to feel anything. According to Epicurus the basic pleasure is friendship, which replaces ambition and other desires, and which allowed Epicureans to live aloof from the world. The main points can be summarized as "Nothing to fear in God; Nothing to feel in Death; Good [pleasure] can be attained; Evil [pain] can be endured."¹⁴²

A minor school of philosophy during the Hellenistic-Roman times was eclecticism, and Ferguson states that, "it posits that at bottom all philosophy is in agreement."¹⁴³ This meant that one could select elements from different philosophical schools to make your own system of thought, or put them together into some new combination to make something new. Some of the representatives of the different schools learned from each other. There were common elements, especially in ethical thought, of the various schools. A process of amalgamation, carried out in a systematic way, produced Middle Platonism, and later Neoplatonism. Philo of Alexandria is one example of someone who belongs to the broad group of Middle Platonists, but he is really an eclectic because he drew his principles from both Platonism and Stoicism as he wrote an apologetic for Judaism. Another example of an eclectic is Cicero (106- 43 BC), and of him Ferguson observes that, "Although his philosophical affiliation was with the Academy (Plato), he drew much from the other schools, especially the Stoics."¹⁴⁴

For our period, a group known as the Neopythagoreans revived interest in the early Greek Pythagorus (6th century B.C.). Ferguson states that Pythagorus "is associated with four ideas of importance for the history of philosophy and religion."¹⁴⁵ Pythagorus discovered the numerical ratios of the principal intervals in the musical scale, and from this, he determined that *number* relates to the structure of the universe, that the universe obeys mathematical laws. He taught the theory of transmigration, the passing of the soul at the body's death into another body, which may have been of some use for Plato as he distinguished body and soul. Pythagorus formed a close group of disciples, a fellowship, and he gave them a distinctive way of life, with an ascetic discipline,

including purifications to improve the soul and a vegetarian diet. The Neophythagoreans continued these interests, but they contributed the concept of a chain of beings (intermediary demons) between a transcendent God and humanity. They also seem to be the main philosophical source for the view that the material world was bad. They dabbled in the occult and with magic, they were vegetarians and they viewed philosophy as religious. Their life style became an ideal representation of what a holy, wise man was, and, Ferguson notes, the “Christian lives of saints who were not martyrs (e.g., Althanasius, *Life of Antony*) follow the pattern of Phythagorus.”¹⁴⁶ Nash observes that the Neophythagoreans “are often indistinguishable from Middle Platonism, and this has resulted in some thinkers being placed in both schools.”¹⁴⁷ Nash goes on to say that, “The major historical significance of this movement appears to lie in its development of a divine hierarchy composed of an unknowable first God at the top, then a second God (the Demiurge), and finally the world.”¹⁴⁸

Middle Platonism (1st century BC to 2d century AD) was “Platonism influenced by Stoic ethics, Aristotlelian logic and Neophythagorean metaphysics, religion and number symbolism.”¹⁴⁹ The Middle Platonists combined, or identified, Aristotle’s Supreme Mind with Plato’s Good, and this became the first principle of the world of Forms. The Platonic ideas (or Forms) became the thoughts in, of, the divine mind. The Supreme Mind (God) is transcendent, and is reachable only through intermediary powers. A World Soul animates the universe, and individual souls are immortal. Ferguson explains that from Plato’s *Timaeus* the Middle Platonists found certain principles, including “the Demiurge or the Maker of all things; preexistent matter, out of which the world is made;

and the ideas as the patterns by which things are made. The World Soul is intermediate between the intelligible and the sensible worlds.”¹⁵⁰ Contemplation may bring a few brief flashes of knowledge, but direct knowledge of the transcendent Mind (God) was not possible. For Middle Platonists the goal of life as happiness was to be like God as far as possible, but Nash points out that their emphasis on the transcendence of god “led to a belief in God’s essential ineffability, or unknowability.”¹⁵¹ Nash states:

Middle Platonism was primarily not an abstract philosophical system but a system of theology and a religion. . . . They developed a theology that attempted to synthesize what Plato and Aristotle had taught about God and the universe. Locating the Forms in the mind of God, they merged Plato’s Forms, Plato’s Good and Aristotle’s divine mind into one system.¹⁵²

Plutarch (circa AD 50-120) was a Middle Platonist; he was a priest at Delphi, after spending time in Athens, Egypt and Italy. Ferguson states that,

For Plutarch, the crown of philosophy is to form true and worthy conceptions of God and to give him pious worship. . . . He reconciled the spiritualized view of the unity of God with the popular polytheism by seeing the traditional gods as subordinates and by interpreting mythology as a poetic expression of truth for a more primitive age.¹⁵³

Regarding Plutarch, Ferguson notes that, “His works *On The Decline of Oracles*, *The Oracles at Delphi*, and *On the Demon Socrates* are major sources for the doctrine of demons.”¹⁵⁴ As we have already noted, Celsus is a Middle Platonist.

The Greek and Roman religious and philosophical culture of Celsus' day, then, was a culture that instinctively believed that there were many gods and that the good pleasure, the peace, of these gods had to be maintained, at all costs. If the intellectuals, the highly educated, and the philosophers of the day thought the overall pagan cult was unedifying and or superstitious, they nevertheless felt bound to it by social habit, ancient tradition, and by their developing belief in a one supreme god, unknowable except through philosophy, a god who was over all of the other gods. Of course, at that time it was highly important for everyone to take part in the imperial cult, as a patriotic act. There was the general belief that when the gods were happy that the region or city or the empire they oversaw would prosper. On the other hand, if the gods were not happy, pleased, due to a lack of respect or because they had not received the honor they deserved, then the belief was that the offending party must be found and dealt with and overcome, if necessary, in order to restore the good pleasure of the offended god(s). To face any important event or occurrence, especially a calamity (war, famine, or pestilence, the plague), the good will, the pleasure, of the god(s) had to occur. However, many pagans saw themselves, despite the many pagan gods, as without an anchor, and they venerated good fortune, "Lady Luck", and looked for ways to overcome their "Fate", by the interpretation of signs, dreams and visions. Some went to oracles to interpret or probe into the future, and some employed astrology and horoscopes to predict or warn of the future. Mystery religions developed and grew in importance as many pagans sought a personal relationship with a divinity, with a stress on some sort of after life after death and for the spiritual well-being of the worshipper. Next, we will

examine selective aspects of the secular Roman-Hellenistic cultural background of Celsus' day, and briefly explore the general attitudes of pagan society towards Christians and Christianity.

Chapter IV

Selective Aspects of the Secular Roman-Hellenic Cultural Background (150-200 AD)

The Roman Empire circa 150-200 AD extended easterly from Britain through northern Gaul (France) along the Rhine and Danube Rivers into and through southern Europe to the Black Sea. Thence the empire extended across the Black Sea to Asia Minor (Turkey) and to the upper reaches of the Euphrates River (Iraq), thence south and west to include Syria (Palestine), then southwesterly to upper Egypt, and then westerly along the north rim of Africa. From there the empire crossed the Mediterranean at Gibraltar into Spain and went north into Spain and then into Gaul. From about 500 to 146 BC, Rome had expanded its influence, and by 30 BC Rome ruled the Mediterranean world as its empire, having supplanted the Greeks. The Greek influence, known as the Hellenistic Age, had dominated the eastern portion of this area circa 330 to 30 BC, from Alexander the Great to Augustus Caesar, when the empire began. The Roman influence, while expansive during the first two centuries of the Roman empire, preserved the Hellenistic culture in the near east. During our period, "The climax of Roman Administration came in the second century A.D. Thereafter the Roman world was plagued with internal economic problems and external pressure from barbarian peoples on the frontiers, bringing on a severe crisis in the third century."¹⁵⁵

In the Near East, the Roman conquests brought security, peace and roads, but it did not bring a new Latin culture, as Rome made no effort to Latinize the east, and Greek remained the dominant language.¹⁵⁶ Rome took over the political conquests of

Alexander the Great west of the Euphrates, and with it came the cultural legacy of the Greeks. The Greek culture remained and prevailed as the dominant culture in the eastern Mediterranean. While Roman arms and Rome's political administration went east, Greek culture moved west and came to dominate there as well, even in Rome. Educated men spoke both Latin and Greek from the second century BC onward, and both Latin and Greek were the important languages of the empire. However, Greek was "the principal language of commerce throughout the Roman world," and "throughout the east Greek was the official language, the language of communication between those of different races, and the language of settlers in the Greek cities."¹⁵⁷ This form of Greek "had developed from Attic Greek into the so-called *Koine* (common or everyday) Greek of the Hellenistic age."¹⁵⁸

In terms of education, Ferguson tells us that in classical antiquity schools were small and private, taught by a single teacher paid by his pupils, or their parents.¹⁵⁹ Some cities had education endowed by the wealthy, or their rulers. The school year ran from October to June, the classroom was usually in a shop in the town center, and children began school at age seven. Primary education covered reading, writing and some simple math. Teaching emphasized memorization and copying. Children from the upper classes went on to secondary education at about the age of eleven or twelve, studying the classics under a grammarian, emphasizing the liberal arts (grammar, rhetoric, dialectic, geometry, arithmetic, astronomy and music). Recitations and exercises taught spelling, grammar, correct usage, and rules of composition. The more fortunate citizen aristocrats could hope for advanced education at age eighteen involving rhetoric,

philosophy, physical education and training for public life. One could enter a profession by training under a professional, such as a doctor, lawyer or philosopher, learning the field from him, and by the further pursuit of rhetorical education, and note that speech was the queen of studies. Elementary schools were widespread and literacy rates were high, higher than at any period prior to modern times. Jewish education was similar to Roman-Greek education, but emphasized their religion. Instead of studying Homer and the Greek dramatics, the Jews studied their scriptures and the oral tradition of the scribes. Most Jewish boys continued their education to age 13, so there was a higher degree of learning among a larger percentage of Jews than among the other peoples of the ancient world. According to Ferguson, for the population as a whole, "A significant minority of the population was literate."¹⁶⁰ The top layer of society was quite well educated, learned, and there was another large group, although still a minority, who had functional literacy. Published books were common in the major cities but the books (scrolls) were read aloud, not silently. Kings and rulers established libraries, and the greatest of these in the ancient world was at Alexandria.

Mediterranean cities were centered around a marketplace (*agora* or *forum*), a large open rectangular area, surrounded by a covered porch (*stoa*), which had shops and offices.¹⁶¹ The marketplace typically contained public monuments and statuary and it was the center for ideas and conversation, as well as for business and economic activities. During this period, the cities and the provinces of Asia and Africa had generally prospered under the Roman peace, more so than other regions, and these areas advanced Roman interests, including the Roman imperial cult. Aiding the general

prosperity was the fact that trade in luxury items flourished under the empire. Roman traders reached as far east as India, Ceylon and China. Antioch and Alexandria were the great commercial centers of the Roman east, within the Roman world. However, not everyone prospered. Although the wealthy gave liberally to public works and responded to various needs in time of crisis, wages to the common people, the workers, the poor, were too low, inadequate, for them to prosper. As Ferguson observes, "Public benefactions memorialized the name of the giver in a way that high wages did not."¹⁶²

The Roman Empire was a collection of cities and, at this time, it reflected a degree of urban civilization in the west to a greater extent than at any time up to the modern age.¹⁶³ Outside of Rome, in terms of privilege, at the top were the city colonies of Roman citizens, which typically included large numbers of military veterans. These cities, or towns, frequently had a full or partial exemption from Roman taxation and they included Philippi, Corinth, Lystra and Troas. Each of these cities was a little Rome, a Rome away from home.

Rome governed, administered, the various regions of its empire through provinces.¹⁶⁴ If the army was unnecessary, the Roman senate administered peaceful provinces through a procounsul. Former magistrates of Rome became procounsuls, chosen by lot, but the emperor could manipulate this process in various ways. Imperial provinces, those administered by the emperor as procounsul, were the military provinces where the legions (the army) were stationed, such as on the frontier regions of the empire (e.g., Syria). Procurators or prefects administered smaller, troublesome, provinces (such

as Judea), and they normally commanded only auxiliary troops, and not legions of the army. The Pontius Pilate of the Bible was a *prefect (praefectus)* governor of Judea. Egypt was a special matter, treated as the personal property of the emperor and governed by a *prefect*. Accordingly, the prefect of Egypt was specially empowered to command a legionary force of the army. Egypt became highly important to Rome for its food supply, for its wealth, and for its strategic location for the defense of Rome, which helps explain these special considerations.

Roman military power not only created the empire, it was an important cultural factor.¹⁶⁵ The army safeguarded the empire, giving it peace, thus making possible social and cultural developments across the empire. The army observed its own religious ceremonies and was significant in the spread of various eastern cults or religions to the west. Roman legions were composed of citizen soldiers, originally all Italian, but increasingly non-Italian as citizenship was extended into the provinces. The army was largely a volunteer force of professional soldiers. The core of the army was the legion, consisting of a “heavy” force of heavily armed foot soldiers, or infantrymen; the number of legions was about thirty in the mid-second century.¹⁶⁶ The nominal strength of a legion was about 6,000 men, divided into ten cohorts of six centuries (100 foot soldiers to each century). A legion was commanded by a legate (normally of senatorial rank), but the most important tactical officers were the centurions, each of whom commanded a century. While not at war, the soldiers performed many civic functions, especially in construction and maintenance (e.g., roads). *Auxilia*, who originated as special troops such as cavalry, archers and slingers, supported the legions in about equal numbers.

Normally they came from the native populations of the provinces, where they mostly served, but some of these units went elsewhere. The practice of granting citizenship on discharge (after 25 years of service) and the transfer of troops did much to mix diverse peoples of the empire, and spread their cultures. Within Roman society, military service did make possible a certain upward mobility.

The Roman army celebrated religious festivals and the imperial cult, all over the empire and at all times.¹⁶⁷ Southern states of these army holiday observances that “the most detailed evidence that has come down to us derives from the *Feriale Duranum*, the calendar of events concerning one unit, *cohors XX Palmyrenorum* at Dura-Europos in Syria in the early third century AD.”¹⁶⁸ The ceremonies and festivals set out in this calendar likely applied to all Roman military units everywhere, and the Roman army must have published similar calendars from the beginning of the empire. This calendar stresses the importance of the observance of the official state festivals, but the worship of local gods also occurred. These official state festivals would include the annual sacrifices and ceremonies to honor the chief gods, especially Jupiter, Juno and Minerva on 3 January. It was customary to sacrifice a cow to Minerva, a cow to Juno and an ox to Jupiter. On 19 March a festival honored Minerva, called the *Quinquatria*, and a festival honored Vesta on 9 June. The birthday of Rome was celebrated on 21 April, which focused everyone on the emperor and the ruling city, the ruling emperor’s birthday was always celebrated, and certain deified emperors, which included such emperors as Julius Caesar (12 July) and Marcus Aurelius (26 April), were honored.

The conduct of the Roman army was not universally popular. The soldiers, many of them, often supplemented their pay by stealing from the civilians.¹⁶⁹ Soldiers were the agents of a violent repression. Soldiers served throughout the empire on detached duty supplementing local police forces, and engaging in many activities in support of their units. They served on the governor's staff, stood guard at various posts away from their base, collected taxes, and protected grain shipments. They arrested criminals, beat up peasants, stole from them, and took license with women. While on the march they tended to take things that did not belong to them, and they compelled the citizenry to carry their equipment. "The parable of the second mile involves the practice, inherited from Hellenistic armies, of soldiers compelling civilians to carry their gear for them."¹⁷⁰ Potter reports that, "The brutality of soldiers to civilians was an extension of the brutality inherent in military life. Discipline was harsh, flogging a routine camp punishment."¹⁷¹ The impression, the view, of the army was that of "an institution that lived by rules unto itself."¹⁷²

Roman society included, at the top, an aristocracy, composed of the senatorial and equestrian orders.¹⁷³ The senatorial families (limited to 600 by Augustus) had a minimum property qualification of 250,000 denarii to gain entry, but actual membership in the senate was obtained by service in one of the principal magistracies of Rome (as quaestor, praetor, or consul). While the senate actually played only a small role in the government of the empire, it was important for its role in providing the chief civilian and military administrators. The equestrian order was composed of knights (*equites*), whose property qualification was somewhat less, 100,000 denarii. Besides being born into this

order, one could advance to this rank through the attainment of wealth or through promotion in the army. Outside Rome, an aristocracy known as the decurions, the members of the municipal senates dominated the cities. The decurions had to be wealthy, as they were called upon to pay for public buildings (temples, baths, theatres, etc.), and provide food in times of emergency, as well as public entertainment.

Plebeians were Roman citizens, but of lower rank. Non-citizens included freedmen (former slaves) and slaves, as slavery was a basic element of ancient society. Estimates indicate that one in five residents of Rome was a slave. Slaves had no legal rights, as mere private property was their status, subject to the absolute power of the owner.

The Roman Empire's agricultural economy heavily involved the raising of sheep and the cultivation of the olive, various grains, and the vine.¹⁷⁴ During this time, Egypt and Africa were increasingly important and relied upon to provide the food supply to the city of Rome. Hammond observes that, "The delay of the corn fleet by storm occasionally caused riots at Rome which might even result in the fall of ministers."¹⁷⁵ Regarding industry, this part of the economy "never really developed beyond a household economy, that is, one based on either the small producer-shopkeeper in towns or the artisan-laborer on large estates."¹⁷⁶ There was no large industry in the ancient world of the Roman Empire, as the major impediment was the lack of technologies that would enable mass production. At that time, the normal condition of ancient industry resulted in the "local production of the ordinary, simple necessities of life and trade (occurred) only in luxuries or those manufactured goods or raw materials which were restricted in production to certain areas."¹⁷⁷ Evans states that in the Roman empire, "Given the

prohibitive costs of land transport, every community and district without direct access to the sea was necessarily dependent upon its own food resources,"¹⁷⁸ with the result that the majority of the people "worked on the land and derived their sustenance directly from it."¹⁷⁹ However, the majority of the population of the empire suffered "a precarious hand-to-mouth existence," and this majority suffered from the inadequacy of Roman land transport for large, bulky items and the inability to generate consistent surpluses to produce "self-sufficiency."¹⁸⁰ Regarding wheat, Evans states that, "The annual yield of wheat in particular, always a staple item in the Roman diet . . . acutely affected every segment of the Roman community."¹⁸¹ As earlier alluded to, one huge difficulty was "the fact that the city of Rome had grown in population far beyond the possibility of nourishment from the neighboring areas of Italy and that she had to draw her grain, oil, and even wine from overseas: from Sicily, Egypt, Africa and Spain."¹⁸²

Despite the reputation of the Roman roads, "Overland trade in antiquity, by wagon, beast, or packman, was expensive and therefore profitable only for goods of small bulk and high value. Even sea trade, suitable for shipments in quantity, was slow and unreliable."¹⁸³ There also was a general perception of danger associated with travel beyond the cities and towns, as "The traveler by ship expected the disasters of sea storms and pirates, the traveler by land attacks by bandits. In the mid-first century, St. Paul specified bandits as a common danger to be faced on land and sea."¹⁸⁴ Regarding the fear of bandits on land, Shaw states that, "Insecurity of this type, endemic to the countryside, is to be found not only in Italy and Judaea of the first century; it was ubiquitous, though in varying degrees of intensity, in the empire in all periods of its

existence.”¹⁸⁵ Grant notes that banditry, “was rampant on the border between Macedonia and Thrace”¹⁸⁶ in 175-176 AD.

While food shortages were always possible in any given year, epidemics such as the plague were a specter and could be ruinous. Reliable and exact information concerning the causes of the plagues and the extent of their devastating effects upon the population is difficult to ascertain, but it is accepted that great epidemics occurred during the reigns of Marcus Aurelius and of Commodus, his successor (about 165-166 and 189 AD). After discussing the lack of reliable historical data, Gilliam nevertheless states that, “it is quite clear that there was a great and destructive epidemic under Marcus Aurelius. It seems probable, though by no means certain, that it caused more deaths than any other epidemic during the Empire before the middle of the third century.”¹⁸⁷ A sociologist, Starke, observes:

In 165, during the reign of Marcus Aurelius, a devastating epidemic swept through the Roman Empire. Some medical historians suspect that it was the first appearance of smallpox in the West (Zinsser [1934] 1960). But whatever the actual disease, it was lethal. During the fifteen year duration of the epidemic, from a quarter to a third of the empire’s population died from it, including Marcus Aurelius himself, in 180 in Vienna (cites omitted).¹⁸⁸

According to Boatwright, et al.:

More than a fifth of the inhabitants of Alexandria are said to have perished, other cities were decimated, and military camps were particularly hard hit. . . .

Even rural areas were afflicted, so that suffering was then exacerbated by ensuing famines. . . . Given the rudimentary understanding of germs and disease, this plague must have been terrifying as well as devastating.¹⁸⁹

Gilliam does report that Dio Cassius mentioned that during Commodus' reign (around 189), "two thousand persons died in Rome in a single day," of the plague, which occurred "often."¹⁹⁰ Durant reports that the effects of the loss of life caused by the plague "were endless. Many localities were so despoiled of population that they reverted to jungle or desert; food production fell, transport was disorganized, floods destroyed great quantities of grain, and famine succeeded plague," and, as a result, "men yielded to a bewildered pessimism, flocked to soothsayers and oracles, loaded the altars with incense and sacrifice, and sought consolation where alone it was offered them--in the new religions of personal immortality and heavenly peace."¹⁹¹ The plague "may have contributed to increasing tensions between Christians and the polytheistic majority, which had already led to mob violence against Christians at Smyrna (modern Izmir, Turkey) during the 150s."¹⁹² According to Potter, the population of the Roman empire was "somewhere in the vicinity of 64 million people by the time of Marcus Aurelius."¹⁹³ He describes the effects of the so-called Antonine plague as a "series of epidemics that raged from 165 into the mid-180s and killed off some 10 per cent of the empire's population," but he comments that the Antonine plague was "not the only indication that life was harsh and short in the Roman world."¹⁹⁴ Grant states that, "Corpses were piled on carts, and whole districts and regions were depopulated. The Roman revenues from taxes and imperial estates were much diminished, and some have

suggested, although others will not have it, that the plague contributed more than any other factor to the decline of the empire.”¹⁹⁵ Clearly the results of the plague were a lack of manpower in the diminished population, with vacant lands, estates, and even small villages.

Another specter which haunted the general population was the fear of war, whether from internal revolt or from outside forces. Although there had been some trouble in Britain and Gaul prior to the reign of Marcus Aurelius (161-180 AD), Rome’s focus had been upon its main rival to the east.¹⁹⁶ The frontier between Rome and the Parthian Empire was the River Euphrates and in 162, just as Aurelius began his reign, a major war began in the east. In 163, Roman legions invaded and subdued Armenia, but a second Parthian war followed in 164-65. Roman troops destroyed various Parthian cities in Babylonia and in 166 penetrated across the Tigris River into Media. Grant reports that, “After campaigns by Avidius Cassius northern Mesopotamia was made a Roman protectorate (165-6).”¹⁹⁷ With peace negotiated, it appears that Roman troops returning from the east brought the plague back with them to Italy and the western portions of the empire, apparently from Seleucia on the Tigris River.

As soon as the Parthian frontier appeared secure, another critical emergency developed on the Pannonia frontier to the north, about 166 AD.¹⁹⁸ Various Germanic tribes pushed south across the River Danube in a collusive effort that was unprecedented. Grant states that in 166-67, when the invasions began, “Appalling damage was done, and Carnuntum was one of a number of fortresses which were burnt

to the ground, vast numbers of the population were taken prisoner, and something like 20,000 soldiers were killed. Roman generals were killed in battle.”¹⁹⁹ According to Grant, “It was the worst crisis to which the empire had ever been subjected . . . it was the first occasion on which the Romans had been forced to confront a mass migration of tribesmen determined to settle on their territory. Eutropis was indeed right to see this Marcommanic War as the most terrible of all wars.”²⁰⁰ Grant notes “Marcus Aurelius was faced with this emergency on top of the eastern wars and the plague. The situation was compounded by the lack of a capital reserve . . . [and] in addition floods had destroyed great quantities of grain at home.”²⁰¹ As a result, Grant observes that Aurelius took “exceptional measures to recruit the necessary troops . . . [as] the Roman army was losing many deserters to the Marcommani and Quadi. He mobilized even slaves . . . as well as ‘brigands’ . . . There had not been such active recruiting since the time of Hannibal.”²⁰² With difficulty, Rome recruited two new legions, but the military campaigns included two serious disasters that occurred about 170 A.D. The German tribes penetrated deep into the empire, and even crossed the Alps into Italy, and they overran the Balkans, reaching down to within a short distance from Athens. After a long series of campaigns, Aurelius repulsed the invaders, but, in the process, the empire fell into almost desperate financial straits.

These various German tribes were finally defeated, with peace restored along the northern frontier about 174. However, as soon as this occurred a new war broke out in 174-175, this time an internal revolt to the east. Michael Grant reports that, “Its leader was Avidius Cassius, who, after a series of military victories had been promoted to

exercise control over all of Rome's eastern provinces, about 166."²⁰³ In 172, as legate in Syria, this same Cassius had quelled an internal revolt in Egypt.²⁰⁴ This revolt by Avidius Cassius quickly ended, but Marcus felt the need to travel to the east. Robert Grant states that, "A few months after the revolt of Avidius Cassius ended the emperor and his family went on a tour, during 175-176, of the eastern empire. This tour included the areas of Cappadocia and Palestine and Egypt,"²⁰⁵ and he was "accompanied by a strong force of troops."²⁰⁶ Peace did not last long, as more external threats arose. In 180, "Marcus died at Sirmium on the Danube because the northern border wars . . . had flared up again in 178, necessitating his presence with the army."²⁰⁷ Fear of war in the north was nearly constant, as "War continued to flare up in the Balkans for the next several years, resulting in major Roman victories in 185 and 188/9."²⁰⁸ According to Michael Grant, "Aurelius had been compelled to spend almost the whole of his reign with his armies in active service. . . . The harsh spirit of these wars is sharply reflected in the reliefs of the Column of Marcus Aurelius at Rome."²⁰⁹ Its sculptors "tell a tale of humanity and pathos. . . . This is a world of fear and horror."²¹⁰

What was the attitude of the Roman Empire and its citizens, and of Emperor Marcus Aurelius towards the Christians of this time? In general, pagans knew that, due to their beliefs, Christians were "unable in conscience to eat meat that had been offered in sacrifice to idols and then sold in the market. They were withdrawn from society, meeting apart, often in secret, and did not attend public shows and gladiatorial combats provided for the entertainment of the populace."²¹¹ Humphries states Christians did not "participate in the public sacrificial rituals that were central to Graeco-Roman religious

practice. Hence the test of sacrifice during periods of persecution. From the early second century, Roman and municipal officials were aware that devout Christians could not perform this ritual, so it could usefully be deployed as a way of ensnaring them.”²¹² Chadwick relates that, “the Christians worshipped in secret for fear of arrest. Publicity was dangerous . . . The earliest churches were simply private houses, gradually converted inside as the congregation grew.”²¹³ Christians did not participate in the worship of the pagan gods or in the imperial cult. However, “To refuse to participate in the pagan emperor-cult was a political as well as a religious act, and could easily be construed as dangerous disaffection.”²¹⁴ To reject an opportunity to sacrifice to the gods meant that Christians “could neither eat the sacrificed meat nor participate in the public feasting that sometimes accompanied pagan rites,” interpreted as an “ostentatious exclusion from some central aspects of life in ancient communities,” and this behavior in turn “could be construed as subverting the basic social order.”²¹⁵ As for the general population, “The mob was always ready to believe that catastrophes like floods or bad harvests or barbarian invasions were a sign of the gods’ displeasure at their neglect under the influence of Christian ‘atheism’.”²¹⁶ In pagan eyes “in the second century Christianity was widely suspected of secret vice, was normally reserved towards military service in the Roman army, and was conspicuous for its disrespect towards any religious attitudes that could only be defended as ancestral practice.”²¹⁷ To be a Christian was and “Christianity remained a capital offense”²¹⁸ in the second century, and as we shall see Christians were martyred.

If we begin in the east, during most of the second century the violent treatment of Christians in Asia Minor, the Middle East, and in particular provinces of Asia, was the worst in the whole empire.²¹⁹ The killing of Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, about the middle of the second century reflected a wide and fierce movement against Christians there. The martyrdom of Polycarp and of other Christians in Asia at this time was the result of the demands of mobs, who accused them of 'atheism'. Brutally burned at the stake on February 22, 156 A D was Polycarp, after he confessed to being a Christian in the stadium of Smyrna. After noting that the stadium multitude had demanded his execution, Benko explains that

Polycarp's case brings to surface the real accusation [against the Christians]: He was an overthrower of the gods, and he encouraged many people not to sacrifice or to worship the gods. This, then, is the real reason why he was executed: the multitude assumed that by professing to being a Christian he had confessed to luring the people away from their ancient gods, thus upsetting the prevailing social order.²²⁰

As the empire faced new perils, Keresztes states that, "About 161-168 the emperor, Marcus Aurelius, (probably in 164) issued an edict prescribing sacrifices to the gods, throughout the Empire. This occurred during the times of the Parthian war and the plagues that occurred at about the end of this war."²²¹ For the non-Christian, the plague "was to be averted by the universal propitiation of the angry gods. The natural instinct of non-Christian mobs was to turn against the Christians, whose absence from the

fervent supplications naturally made the atmosphere even more hostile to the Christians.”²²² Michael Grant notes that “Justin [Martyr] was condemned in Rome in c. 165 (or 167) by the city prefect . . . and executed with six of his disciples.”²²³ Grant concludes that, “At all events, the Christians did not fare well during the reign of Aurelius,” and he states, “The most decisive event took place . . . in Gaul, probably in c. 177 . . . when 48 Christians from Lugdunum and Vienna were put to death.”²²⁴ Grant relates that there was not “a substantial or powerful Christian community in Gaul at the time. The relatively few who existed were turned upon by a population which was distressed by the troubles that beset themselves and the empire, and wanted someone to blame.”²²⁵ A similar massacre took place at Carthage in 180, “when six Christians, some of them natives of the area, were tried by the procounsul and beheaded.”²²⁶

Aurelius was aware of the controversy concerning the Christians in Gaul and he effectively ordered their execution. Robert M. Grant states, “No specific charges were involved, for Christians were members of a group despised by society. When the [Roman] legate wrote Marcus Aurelius for instructions, he was told that Roman citizens were to be released if they recanted, executed if they did not. The noncitizens were to be killed by wild animals, strangled, or burned.”²²⁷ Thus, “The martyrdoms in Gaul show that by 177 or 178 relations with Christians had worsened.”²²⁸

Despite this background, certain Christian apologists sought to influence the emperor, including Melito, bishop of Sardis, who attempted to see him when Marcus went through Smyrna while on his tour of the east, during the summer of 176. Melito’s

efforts do not seem to have had much effect, though he expressed, “a firm loyalty to the emperor.”²²⁹ From Asia, Marcus went on to Athens, where, in the early autumn of 176, he “established endowed chairs for philosophers, to be chosen by Herodes (Atticus), and rhetoricians,” and he was “initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries.”²³⁰ Schoedel observes that, “In a time dominated by plague and war the philosophical emperor resorted to all the traditional state rites in his effort to placate the gods and to preserve the empire from destruction.”²³¹ Schoedel then explains that, “All the evidence then, points to a lively confidence in the part of the emperor in the efficacy of the traditional religion of Rome and the more venerable cults of the empire.”²³² Describing the attitude of Marcus as anti-Christian, Michael Grant states that:

what he objected to was the taste of these increasingly numerous dissidents for spectacular martyrdoms, which seemed to him playing to the gallery, and doing so for a cause which conflicted with universal Roman unity. . . . Marcus Aurelius, with his keen belief in the individual’s duty to the state, cannot have welcomed the Christian lack of concern for the worldly life.²³³

As for pagan beliefs in general, Michael Grant notes that, “As for religion, it was at this time, one might say, that paganism was reaching its climax, and it was embodied in Aurelius who in 172-3 proclaimed RELIG (*io*) AVG (*usti*) on his coinage,”²³⁴ and he states that Christians “were made the scapegoats for military, economic and natural disasters.”²³⁵ Chadwick states that, despite this hostile environment, “By the end of the second century Christianity was penetrating the upper classes of society, and more than

one highly placed personage might wake up to find his wife embarrassing him by disappearing to nocturnal vigils and prayers,” and, he notes that Marcia “the concubine of the emperor Commodus (180-92), was a Christian, and was able to gain for the church in Rome a considerable measure of relief.”²³⁶

The Greek and Roman secular culture of Celsus’ day, then, existed in an empire whose culture was under great stress as it faced the uncertainties of life and especially the calamities of war, famine, and disease. The majority toiled in manual labor in a hard existence to make ends meet, mostly in agricultural pursuits. In general, the empire was not able to generate sufficient surpluses of food to be self-sufficient, and, in any given year, local crop failures would cause local famines. The pagan majority viewed Christians with grave suspicion in any time of calamity, and pagan mobs might turn on Christians and do violence to them for their failure to take part in the pagan cult practices to placate the gods. As a result, most Christians of Celsus’ day worshipped in secret to avoid suspicion and arrest. However, although it was doing so in a very hostile environment, Christianity was growing in numbers and influence, and this growth and influence was a threat which Celsus felt the need to address in his book.

Chapter V

Celsus Attacks Christianity for Its Social Exclusivity

Celsus' book, *The True Doctrine*, takes the premise that there is an ancient doctrine which has existed from the beginning of time, "which has always been maintained by the wisest nations and cities and wise men."²³⁷ Celsus maintained, "Moses heard of this doctrine which was current among the wise nations and distinguished men and acquired a name for divine power."²³⁸ Part of this doctrine, as Origen observes, is "to offer the due rites of worship in this life . . . as when in accordance with the popular customs one renders the sacrifices to each of the supposed gods in every city."²³⁹ This doctrine's main premise is that while there is one supreme God, there are many other gods, sons of God, and daemons, who rule together with the supreme God. The worship of the supreme God is "offered through his subordinates, the local deities."²⁴⁰ A defense of polytheistic practice asserts that the local deities are "God's provincial administrators and governors,"²⁴¹ and this is what Celsus does. At one point, he states:

The different parts of the earth were allotted to different overseers, and are governed in this way by having been divided between certain authorities. . . . The practices done by each nation are right when they are done in the way that pleases the overseers; and it is impious to abandon the customs which have existed in each locality from the beginning.²⁴²

In contrast, Christians do not follow these ancient doctrines and, according to Celsus, "Christians perform their rites and teach their doctrines in secret," and "they do this

with good reason to escape the death penalty that hangs over them.”²⁴³ Celsus notes, “societies which are public are allowed by law, but secret societies are illegal.”²⁴⁴ Celsus thus raises the issue of Christian social exclusivity. One of Celsus’ comments is that Christians “avoid setting up altars and images and temples,” which is a “sure token of an obscure and secret society.”²⁴⁵

Hargis observes that “Celsus’ complaint against ‘secret associations’ implies that Christians were a group of subversives that were a threat to societal order.”²⁴⁶ At this time, Christians worshipped in private homes and they did not attend the festivals or sacrifice to the pagan gods. Celsus complains of Christians that, “They cannot bear to see temples and altars and images.”²⁴⁷ In contrast, Celsus asserts, “God is surely common to all men. He is both good and in need of nothing, and without envy. What, then, prevents people particularly devoted to them from partaking of the public feasts?”²⁴⁸ Here Celsus makes “a direct attack upon Christian exclusivism, implying that the supreme deity could not be the possession of a single group, or even of a single nation.”²⁴⁹ In other words, God was common to everyone, whether pagan, Christian, or Jew. Regarding the Christian refusal to eat meats offered to idols and to take part in the sacrifices made at the public feasts, Celsus states “If these idols are nothing, why is it terrible to take part in the high festival? And if they are daemons of some sort, obviously these too belong to God, and we ought to believe them and sacrifice to them according to the laws, and pray to them that they may be kindly disposed.”²⁵⁰ For Celsus, it was also true that the worship of an idol was tantamount to the worship of a daemon, which ultimately honored the supreme God, and, since this was true, Christians were wrong to

avoid this activity. Therefore, Christians were acting unreasonably by separating themselves socially and religiously from the pagan culture. Celsus took the view that God has no needs, and he does not envy and has no emotion. God, then, has a divine impassibility, is not capable of emotion, and nothing matters to him emotionally. If this is true, then, the worship of daemons cannot be offensive to God.

Celsus attacked Christian social exclusivity because Christian efforts to win converts were affecting pagan homes and the structure of the Roman family. Celsus' scorn and ridicule of Christian efforts to win converts, as well as his apprehensions, are apparent when he states:

In private houses also we see wool-workers, cobblers, laundry-workers, and the most illiterate and bucolic yokels, who would not dare to say anything at all in front of their elders and more intelligent masters. But whenever they get hold of children in private and some stupid women with them, they let out some astounding statements as, for example, that they must not pay any attention to their father and school-teachers, but must obey them; they say that these talk nonsense and have no understanding, and that in reality they neither know nor are able to do anything good, but are taken up with mere empty chatter. . . . And if just as they are speaking they see one of the school-teachers coming, or some intelligent person, or even the father himself, the more cautious of them flee in all directions; but the more reckless urge the children on to rebel. . . . But, if they like, they should leave father and their schoolmasters, and go along with the

women and little children who are their playfellows to the wooldresser's shop, or to the cobbler's or the washerwoman's shop, that they may learn perfection. And by saying this they persuade them.²⁵¹

For Celsus Christians were "rebels against that most ancient of social structures, the family."²⁵² Under Roman norms, the structure of the Roman family was such that "The father possessed absolute authority in the home, and an invitation to despise the father and rebel against his authority would have been viewed as a serious breach of social norms."²⁵³ By witnessing to and converting children, women, slaves, and other members of the household, Christians were both breaking up families and excluding themselves from the Roman and Greek society family norm.

Chapter VI

Celsus Uses Religious Judaism as A Tool against Christianity

Early in his attack on Christianity Celsus links Christianity to religious Judaism in an effort to bring scorn upon it through a common guilt by association. At the time Celsus wrote it was well known that Christianity had a Jewish origin, for the two religious groups shared a belief in one God, both groups observed the Jewish scripture, and both groups refused to recognize the validity of pagan polytheism. Of Christians and Christianity Celsus states, “they themselves originated from Judaism and they cannot name any other source for their teacher and chorus-leader. Nevertheless they rebelled against the Jews.”²⁵⁴ Origen describes Celsus as disparaging and “laughing at the race of Jews and Christians,” and comparing them both to “a cluster of bats or ants coming out of a nest, or frogs holding council round a marsh, or worms assembling in some filthy corner, disagreeing with one another about which of them are the worst sinners.”²⁵⁵ Celsus claims that both groups “say: ‘God shows and proclaims everything beforehand, and He has even deserted the whole world and the motion of the heavens, and disregarded the vast earth to give attention to us alone; and He sends messengers to us alone and never stops sending them and seeking that we may be with Him for ever.’”²⁵⁶ In derision, Celsus states, “these assertions would be more tolerable coming from worms and frogs than from Jews and Christians disagreeing with one another.”²⁵⁷

In reference to the Christian gospel or doctrine, which Origen explains as based upon Judaism, with which Christianity is linked, Celsus writes, “the doctrine was originally

barbarian.”²⁵⁸ In doing this Celsus attempts to establish guilt by association. Hargis observes that Celsus hopes “to demonstrate by association that Christianity is as ‘barbaric’ as Judaism. Like parent, so to speak, like child.”²⁵⁹ Celsus then quickly comments that, “the Greeks are better able to judge the value of what the barbarians have discovered, and to establish the doctrines and put them into practice by virtue.”²⁶⁰ By commenting that Greeks are better able to judge barbarian doctrines, “Celsus places the construct of the ‘civilized’ Greeks in the rhetorical position of power, thus appropriating the cultural authority to evaluate both Christianity and Judaism.”²⁶¹

Celsus ridicules both groups together, asserting, “Christians and Jews quarrel with one another very foolishly,” saying “our wrangle with one another about Christ is no different from that called in the proverb a fight about the shadow of an ass.”²⁶² According to Celsus, “the Jews were Egyptians by race and left Egypt after revolting against the Egyptian community and despising the religious customs of Egypt.”²⁶³ Celsus derisively states, “The goatherds and shepherds who followed Moses as their leader were deluded by clumsy deceits into thinking that there was only one God,” and “without any rational cause these goatherds and shepherds abandoned the worship of many gods.”²⁶⁴ Celsus states that the Jews “are addicted to sorcery of which Moses was their teacher.”²⁶⁵

In a similar fashion, Celsus describes Jewish Christians as foolish and rebellious, as he says that, “deluded by Jesus, they have left the law of their fathers, and have been quite ludicrously deceived, and have deserted to another name and another life.”²⁶⁶ Celsus

asserted that Jesus' doctrine was "vulgar" and that it was "successful only among the uneducated because of its vulgarity and utter illiteracy."²⁶⁷ Thus the Jews have suffered because "what they did to the Egyptians they suffered in turn though those who followed Jesus and believed him to be the Christ; in both instances a revolt against the community led to the introduction of new ideas."²⁶⁸ Feldman notes that these charges of rebellion and of introducing new ideas were dangerous to Christians because "if the Christians were guilty of apostasy and sedition, they were a danger to the Roman state."²⁶⁹ Hargis comments that "According to Celsus, Jews and Christians shared the same group characteristics and therefore deserved to be condemned together whether with respect to their origins or in the present."²⁷⁰ From reading Origen's account, it is manifest that Celsus does not give any credit to the Jews for being "a very wise nation,"²⁷¹ and it is his strategy "to represent the Jews as a contemptible people with questionable origins and an irrational religion in order to attack the Christians, their spiritual offspring."²⁷² Celsus castigates and belittles the Jews, saying, "The Jews were runaway slaves who escaped from Egypt; they never did anything important, nor have they ever been of any significance or prominence whatever," as "nothing about their history is to be found among the Greeks."²⁷³

Chapter VII

Celsus Uses a Jew to Argue His Case

After some opening remarks, Celsus introduces an imaginary Jew to argue some aspects of his case. Celsus' Jew immediately attacks Jesus' divinity and his character, by stating, "he fabricated the story of his birth from a virgin," maintaining that in fact "he came from a Jewish village and from a poor country woman who earned her living by spinning."²⁷⁴ Celsus derides Jesus' mother and Jesus, saying, "she was driven out by her husband, who was a carpenter by trade, as she was convicted of adultery," and because Jesus "was poor he hired himself out as a workman in Egypt, and there tried his hand at certain magical powers on which the Egyptians pride themselves; he returned full of conceit because of these powers, and on account of them gave himself the title of God."²⁷⁵ Celsus reports that Jesus' actual father was a "certain soldier named Panthera."²⁷⁶ All of this demonstrates Celsus' view that Jesus was not divinely born, that he was a fraud, and it follows that Jesus could not possibly be the true Jewish Messiah. That Celsus claimed to know the truth about Jesus' life is apparent when he states, through his Jew, that "Although I could say much about what happened to Jesus which is true, and nothing like the account which has been written by the disciples of Jesus, I leave that out intentionally."²⁷⁷

Through his Jew, Celsus does demonstrate that he is somewhat familiar with the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life. For example, Celsus knows of Herod's attempt to kill him shortly after Jesus' birth, as he relates that Herod "sent men to kill those born just at

that time, thinking that he would destroy him also with them, lest somehow, after he had lived for the time sufficient for him to grow up, he should become king.”²⁷⁸ Celsus’ Jew knew that his mother and Joseph had taken Jesus to Egypt to escape great danger, as he states that:

Why also when you were still an infant did you have to be taken to Egypt lest you should be murdered? It is not likely that a god would be afraid of death. But an angel came from heaven, commanding you and your family to escape, lest by being left behind you should die. And could not the great God, who had already sent two angels on your account, guard you, His own son, at that very place?²⁷⁹

In another example, regarding Jesus’ apostles, Celsus ridicules them and Jesus, stating, “Jesus collected round him ten or eleven infamous men, the most wicked tax collectors and sailors, and with these fled hither and thither, collecting a means of livelihood in a disgraceful and importunate way.”²⁸⁰ Celsus’ scorn for the abilities of Jesus’ disciples is clear when he states that they “had not even a primary education.”²⁸¹

Celsus was familiar that Jesus had been in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, and he ridicules Jesus’ ministry there, saying, through his Jew, “but as for you, what have you done in word or deed that is fine or wonderful? You showed nothing to us, although they challenged you in the temple to produce some obvious token that you were the son of God.”²⁸² Earlier Celsus had stated that, “it was by magic that he was able to do the miracles which he appeared to have done,”²⁸³ and not by any divine power.

Regarding Jesus’ arrest, before his crucifixion, Celsus questions Jesus’ true status by

having his Jew state “And yet, if he was God he could not run away nor be led away under arrest, and least of all could he, who was regarded as Saviour, and Son of the greatest God, and an angel, be deserted and betrayed by his associates who had privately shared everything with him as their teacher.”²⁸⁴ Celsus asserts that Jesus’ disciples wrote false accounts of his life, saying, “Although you lied you were not able to conceal plausibly your fictitious tales.”²⁸⁵ He says that some later believers still lie, as they “as though from a drinking bout, go so far as to oppose themselves and alter the original text of the gospel three or four or several times over, and they change its character to enable them to deny difficulties in face of criticism.”²⁸⁶ The disciples are further scorned by Celsus when his Jew states that, “When those who were living with him at the time, who heard him speak and were taught by him, saw that he was being punished and was dying, they did not die with him, or for his sake, nor were they persuaded to despise punishment. But they even denied that they were disciples.”²⁸⁷

Celsus’ Jew argues that God did not acknowledge Jesus, as he claimed. Regarding Jesus’ baptism by John, the appearing of a dove and God’s voice from heaven, Celsus’ Jew asks, “What trustworthy witness saw this apparition, or who heard a voice from heaven adopting you as son of God? There is no proof except for your word and the evidence which you may produce of one of the men who were punished with you.”²⁸⁸

Celsus scoffs at the prophecies in the Jewish scriptures foretelling Jesus’ appearance, saying, “Why should you be the subject of these prophecies rather than the thousands of others who lived after the prophecy was uttered?”²⁸⁹ Celsus’ Jew states that Jesus’ deeds do not establish his claims because Jesus did not become a king, but went about

begging, as a poor person, saying “why then when you had grown up did you not become king, but, though son of God, go about begging so disgracefully, cowering from fear, and wandering up and down in destitution?”²⁹⁰ Obviously, a king, a son of God, would not have “fled hither and thither with your disciples.”²⁹¹ If for the sake of argument Celsus acknowledges that Jesus really did do miracles, he put them in the category of “the works of sorcerers who profess to do wonderful miracles, and the accomplishments of those who are taught by the Egyptians . . . Since these men do these wonders, ought we to think them sons of God? Or ought we to say that they are the practices of evil men possessed by an evil daemon?”²⁹²

Celsus’ Jew further belittles Jesus and argues that Jesus’ body was not the body of a god, saying, “a god would not have had a body such as yours.”²⁹³ Celsus explains that if a:

divine spirit was in a body, it must certainly have differed from other bodies in size or beauty or strength or voice or striking appearance or power of persuasion. For it is impossible that a body . . . more divine than the rest should be no different from any other. Yet Jesus’ body was no different from any other, but, as they say, was little and ugly and undistinguished.²⁹⁴

For Celsus “the body of a god would also not eat such food,” nor does it “use a voice of that kind, nor that method of persuasion.”²⁹⁵ For Celsus this is true because “God is good and beautiful and happy, and exists in the most beautiful state. If then He comes down to men, He must undergo change, a change from good to bad, from beautiful to

shameful, from happiness to misfortune, and from what is best to what is most wicked.”²⁹⁶ Celsus says that it is the “the nature of an immortal being to remain the same without alteration. Accordingly, God could not be capable of undergoing this change.”²⁹⁷ If God were to make those who seek him think that he changes, he would lead “them astray and tell lies.”²⁹⁸ Celsus explains that, “I would prefer to teach about the order of nature and say that God made nothing mortal. Whatever beings are immortal are works of God, and mortal beings are made by them.”²⁹⁹ Celsus even goes so far as to say, “there will be no difference between the body of a bat or a worm or a frog or a man. For they are made of the same matter, and are equally liable to corruption,”³⁰⁰ and “No product of matter is immortal.”³⁰¹ Rather, “the single nature of all bodies passes through changes into many forms and returns again to what it was.”³⁰² Further, Celsus reasons that, “since the Son is a spirit derived from God who was born in a human body, even the Son of God himself would not be immortal.”³⁰³ This is manifestly true because Jesus’ body would have been “defiled by the nature of the body,” and “God would not have received back the spirit which he gave after it had been defiled by the nature of the body.”³⁰⁴ For Celsus, if Jesus as “God eats the flesh of sheep or drinks vinegar or gall, what else is he doing but eating filth?”³⁰⁵ and demonstrating that he is both mortal and lacking divine qualities.

In Book II Celsus’ Jew argues with Jews who have converted to Christianity. He begins by saying “What was wrong with you that you left the law of our fathers?”³⁰⁶ Although Celsus’ Jew says, “Jesus kept all the Jewish customs,” he remarks “Jesus told great lies.”³⁰⁷ To prove that Jesus was not the Jewish Messiah, Celsus’ Jew states:

How could we regard him as God when in other matters . . . he did not manifest anything which he professed to do, and when we had convicted him, condemned him and decided that he should be punished, was caught hiding himself and escaping most disgracefully, and indeed was betrayed by those whom he called disciples?³⁰⁸

For Celsus the betrayal of Jesus indicates that he was unworthy, because “No good general who led many thousands was ever betrayed,”³⁰⁹ which also proves he could not be the messiah. Celsus’ Jew says the disciples told lies when they “invented the statement that Jesus foreknew and foretold all that happened to him”³¹⁰ and “the disciples recorded such things about Jesus to excuse the events of his life.”³¹¹ Celsus asks, “What trustworthy evidence is there that he made these predictions?”, and he questions Jesus’ immortality by saying “How can a dead man be immortal?”³¹² Celsus’ Jew argues that Jesus “led his own disciples and prophets with whom he used to eat and drink so far astray that they became impious and wicked,”³¹³ and they betrayed him because he really was not a god, since “one who had eaten a banquet with a god would not have become a conspirator against him.”³¹⁴

Of the disciples, Celsus’ Jew states, “Although you lied, you were not able to conceal plausibly your fictitious tales.”³¹⁵ He states that “some believers, as though from a drinking bout, go so far as to oppose themselves and alter the original text of the gospel three or four or several times over, and they change its character to enable them to deny difficulties in face of criticism.”³¹⁶ In this manner, Celsus argues that the

prophecies concerning Jesus found in the gospel accounts are lies made up by his disciples after his death. Likewise Celsus' Jew takes to task Christians who used the Jewish scriptures "for quoting prophets who proclaimed beforehand the facts of Jesus' life," arguing that these "prophecies could be applied to thousands of others far more plausibly than Jesus."³¹⁷ Celsus' Jew points out that, "The prophets say that the one who will come will be a great prince, lord of the whole earth and of all nations and armies,"³¹⁸ but he says of Jesus, "they did not proclaim a pestilent fellow like him."³¹⁹ Therefore, these prophecies do not fit Jesus. Celsus mocks Jesus' ancestry when he states of his mother, Mary, that, "The carpenter's wife would not have been ignorant of it had she had such a distinguished ancestry,"³²⁰ or if she knew that Jesus' ancestry claimed that he "was descended from the first man and from the kings of the Jews."³²¹ Since Jesus "was arrested most disgracefully and crucified," the disciples could not and did not "bring forward as evidence a pure and holy Logos."³²²

Celsus Jew also argues that Jesus himself did not prove that he was the Messiah, nor did he win true believers. Celsus mockingly asks "what fine action did Jesus do like a god?"³²³ In relation to Jesus' arrest and his suffering at his trial, Celsus comments about "Those who mocked him and put a purple robe round him and the crown of thorns and the reed in his hand," but then he asks, "Why, if not before, does he not at any rate now show forth something divine, and deliver himself from this shame, and take his revenge on those who insult both him and his Father?"³²⁴ Celsus questions Jesus' divinity by asking why "as long as he lived he convinced nobody, not even his own disciples, and was punished and endured such shame?"³²⁵ According to Celsus, Jesus "did not show

himself to be pure from all evils,”³²⁶ and “Jesus was also not free from blame.”³²⁷ Of Jesus’ disciples, Celsus comments that they “did not die with him, or for his sake, nor were they persuaded to despise punishments. But they even denied that they were disciples.”³²⁸ Celsus finds it “utterly ludicrous that when he was alive himself he convinced nobody; but now that he is dead, those who wish to do so convince multitudes?”³²⁹

Celsus mocks and ridicules Jesus’ followers by saying that the reasons that they give for following Jesus have no truth in them and are of no account. Celsus’ Jew is used to state that the Christians accepted Jesus as savior because “his punishment was meant to destroy the father of evil,” but to this he retorts “What then? Have not many others also been punished and that no less disgracefully?”³³⁰ Celsus is aware that Christians regarded Jesus “as Son of God for this reason, because he healed the lame and the blind. He raised the dead also, so you say.”³³¹ However, Celsus’ Jew claims that Jesus “admitted that these works were not produced by any divine nature, but were signs of certain cheats and wicked men.”³³²

Of Jesus’ reported rising from the dead, Celsus’ Jew attributes these reports to sorcery and hysteria, saying “But we must examine this question whether anyone who really died ever rose again with the same body. . . . While he was alive he did not help himself, but after death he rose again and showed the marks of his punishment and how his hands had been pierced.”³³³ Furthermore, Celsus mocks Jesus by saying “But if he

really was so great he ought, in order to display his divinity, to have disappeared suddenly from the cross.”³³⁴ Going on, he says:

But who saw this? A hysterical female, as you say, and perhaps some other one of those who were deluded by the same sorcery, who either dreamt in a certain state of mind and through wishful thinking had a hallucination due to some mistaken notion . . . and so by this cock-and-bull story to provide a chance for other beggars.”³³⁵

Celsus accuses Jesus of producing after his death “only a mental impression of the wounds he received on the cross, and did not really appear wounded in this way.”³³⁶

Celsus’ Jew then argues that because Jesus did not, after he “arose”, appear “to the very men who treated him despitefully and to the man who condemned him and to everyone everywhere,”³³⁷ this proves that he had no divine power, because he did not show it to these antagonists. Rather, Celsus says of Jesus “when he would establish a strong faith after rising from the dead, he appeared secretly to just one woman and to those of his own confraternity.”³³⁸

Celsus’ Jew further argues that Christians are refuted by their own writings, saying “However, these objections come from your own writings, and we need no other witness; for you provide your own refutation.”³³⁹ Origen dismisses this statement as merely being “his opinion,”³⁴⁰ but Celsus continues his mockery, saying “What God that comes among men is disbelieved, and that when he appears to those who were waiting for him? Or why ever is he not recognized by people who had been long expecting

him?"³⁴¹ Celsus' Jew argues that Jesus admitted the weakness of his cause, in that "he utters threats and empty abuse whenever he says, Woe unto you, and, I declare unto you. For in these words he openly admits his inability to carry conviction, which no god, nor even a sensible man, would fail to do."³⁴² Celsus wants to know "Where is he then, that we may see and believe?"³⁴³ Celsus concludes by asserting, "However, he was a mere man, and of such character as the truth itself makes obvious and as reason shows."³⁴⁴

Chapter VIII

Celsus' General and Special Objections to Christianity

Celsus has many objections to Christianity and the fundamentals of Christian doctrine, some general in nature, while others are more specific. Celsus saw in Christianity's relationship to Judaism "a revolt against the community [that] led to the introduction of new ideas."³⁴⁵ Further, after experiencing growth, the Christians drew apart for "They are divided and rent asunder, and each wants to have his own party."³⁴⁶ Celsus explains that "they are divided again by becoming too numerous, and condemn one another; they only have one thing still in common . . . the name."³⁴⁷ Celsus sees Christians as rebellious against the *status quo*, as he speaks of "their unity in revolt, and the advantage which it brings and in the fear of outsiders," but he sees this as "factors which strengthen their faith."³⁴⁸ Celsus believes that Christians "combine misunderstandings of the ancient tradition"³⁴⁹ with some truth. He asserts that Christians "drive away every intelligent man from arguing about this faith, and invite only the stupid and low-class folk,"³⁵⁰ and are "able to convince only the foolish, dishonourable and stupid, and only slaves, women, and little children."³⁵¹ Celsus derides Christians sharing their faith, saying they "display their trickery in the market-places and go about begging," but he adds that they "would never enter a gathering of intelligent men, nor would they dare to reveal their noble beliefs in their presence; but whenever they see adolescent boys and a crowd of slaves and a company of fools they push themselves in and show off."³⁵² By these arguments, Celsus maintains that Christian

doctrine is not new or important, it splinters against itself and it has appeal only to the wicked and foolish, and to those who are stupid, the unwise.

Celsus represents that Christians hold to the belief that “as for the righteous man, though he may look up to Him with virtue from the beginning, God will not receive him.”³⁵³ In contrast Christians, receive “sinners because we are unable to convert anyone really good and righteous, and that this is the reason why we open our doors to the most impious and abominable men.”³⁵⁴ Celsus complains that the Christian God has “compassion for people who lament and relieves bad men, while he casts out good men who have done nothing of that kind, which is very unfair,”³⁵⁵ and he notes that “the wise turn away from what we say, since they are led astray and hindered by wisdom.”³⁵⁶ Christian teachers, then, seduce and deceive, for Celsus states that they “lead wicked men away with vain hopes and persuade them to despise good men, saying that if they keep away from them it will be better for them,”³⁵⁷ and by this Celsus means the philosophers and expounders of the true doctrine and the pagan gods.

In addressing Celsus’ more specific objections, we begin by noting Celsus’ contention that any belief in a descent by God, or by a Son of God, upon the earth, is incredible, wrong and unbelievable, whether held by Jew or Christian. Celsus states that such an assertion “is most shameful, and no lengthy argument is required to refute it.”³⁵⁸ Celsus questions the purpose of such a visit and mockingly asks, “Was it in order to learn what was going on among men?”³⁵⁹ and “Does not he know everything?”³⁶⁰ If man needs correction, “why can he not do this by divine power?”³⁶¹ Celsus argues of God that, “For

if you changed any one quite insignificant thing on earth, you would upset and destroy everything.”³⁶² Celsus questions the timing of such a visit, saying, “Is it only now after such a long age that God has remembered to judge the human race? Did He not care before?”³⁶³ Of the contention that Christ came to convict us of our sins, with a need for punishment, Celsus cannot accept this, because he says that Christians “do not speak the truth about the punishments for those who have sinned,” and he compares Christians with “those in the Bacchic mysteries who introduce phantoms and terrors.”³⁶⁴

Celsus argues that God does not change and come to the earth, for to do so would cause a change in him for the worse, and he would encounter matter. He writes, “God is good and beautiful and happy, and exists in the most beautiful state. If then He comes down to men, He must undergo change, a change from good to bad, from beautiful to shameful, from happiness to misfortune, and from what is best to what is most wicked.”³⁶⁵ He argues, “It is the nature only of a mortal being to undergo change and remoulding, whereas it is the nature of an immortal being to remain the same without alteration. Accordingly, God could not be capable of undergoing this change,”³⁶⁶ for “this is an impossibility.”³⁶⁷ If God does not change, “but makes those who see him think He does,” He leads “them astray and tells lies.”³⁶⁸ Therefore, he says most emphatically “Jews and Christians, no God or child of God either has come down or would have come down.”³⁶⁹ If the Christians refer to angels as having come down, then they must mean another kind of beings, “the daemons.”³⁷⁰

Further, the doctrines of Jews and Christians exists on a foundation of non-sense stories that are untrustworthy, including the descent of God to earth. In reference to the first book of the Scriptures, Genesis, Celsus castigates both Christians and Jews, holding that “they shamelessly undertook to trace their genealogy back to the first offspring of sorcerers and deceivers,”³⁷¹ and composing:

a most improbable and crude story that a man was formed by the hands of God and given breath, that a woman was formed out of his side, that God gave commands, and that a serpent opposed them and even proved superior to the ordinances of God --- a legend which they expound to old women, most impiously making God into a weakling right from the beginning, and incapable of persuading even one man whom He had formed.³⁷²

The story of the ark and the flood Celsus regards as a myth, for he states:

Then they tell of a flood and a prodigious ark holding everything inside it, and that a dove and a crow were messengers. This is a debased and unscrupulous version of the story of Deucalion,[*sic*] I suppose they did not expect that this would come to light, but simply recounted the myth to small children.³⁷³

For Celsus another nonsensical story is that of Abraham having a child by Sarah, as he says that “Utterly absurd also is the begetting of children when the parents were too old,”³⁷⁴ and the story of Lot and his daughters he regarded as “more iniquitous than Thyestian sins.”³⁷⁵ Of these and other such stories he says that, “the more reasonable Jews and Christians allegorize these things,” and it is “because they are ashamed of

them, they take refuge in allegory,"³⁷⁶ although ironically, and, in contrast, Celsus comments that the Scriptures "are incapable of being interpreted allegorically,"³⁷⁷ and the attempts to do so "are manifestly very stupid fables."³⁷⁸

According to Celsus, the Christian notion of the order of nature is false, because:

God made nothing mortal. Whatever beings are immortal are works of God, and mortal beings are made by them. And the soul is God's work, but the nature of the body is different. In fact, in this respect there will be no difference between the body of a bat or a worm or a frog or a man. For they are made of the same matter, and are equally liable to corruption.³⁷⁹

Celsus says of animal and human bodies that, "the single nature of all bodies passes through changes into many forms and returns again to what it was," but, "No product of matter is immortal."³⁸⁰

According to Celsus, Christians and Jews are wrong about their concepts of evil. Reflecting his Platonic views, he says that, "In the existing world there is no decrease or increase of evils either in the past or in the present or in the future. For the nature of the universe is one and the same, and the origin of evils is always the same."³⁸¹ Celsus' preference for the study of philosophy, and his opinion of the masses, becomes apparent, when he says in connection with a comment on evil that:

It is not easy for one who has not read philosophy to know what is the origin of evils; however, it is enough for the masses to be told that evils are not caused by

God, but inhere in matter and dwell among mortals; . . . and it is inevitable that according to the determined cycles the same things always have happened, are now happening, and will happen.³⁸²

However, his comment about the determined cycles reflects Stoic concepts, which he has adopted. Celsus writes for emphasis to assert that, “neither good nor bad can increase among mortals.”³⁸³

Celsus contradicts Christian beliefs by maintaining that humankind is not God’s special creation, in that, God did not make all things for man, and that there is no individual providence from God. Rather, Celsus asserts that, “everything was made just as much for the irrational animals as for men,” and he takes the view that “thunders and lightnings and rainstorms are not made by God,” admitting at last, as Origen says, “his Epicurean views more clearly,” and, “that these things happen by chance, and not by providence, like a true Epicurean.”³⁸⁴ Later Celsus writes, “Accordingly, all things have not been made for man any more than for the lion or the eagle or the dolphin, but so that this world, as God’s work, may be made complete and perfect in all its parts.”³⁸⁵ He goes on to argue that, “And God takes care of the universe, and providence never abandons it, nor does it become more evil; . . . nor is he angry because of men any more than He is because of monkeys or mice; nor does He threaten them.”³⁸⁶ These views would be consistent with Epicurean beliefs, see page 49-50 *infra*. However, it is established that Celsus was not an Epicurean, but, as Bergjan states, “Rather, Celsus has been recognized as a Middle Platonist.”³⁸⁷ Celsus denied that the notion of divine

providence necessarily implied that God cares for humans individually. Rather, God's providence implies only an equal care or concern for humans and the irrational beings; God simply cares for the whole of creation, with no special care for any part of creation. All share the same providence. God does not desert the heavens and the whole world to give attention to human beings; thus, providence is located in the heavens and the whole world. By this argument, Celsus denied an anthropocentric view of the world, and Bergjan notes that Chadwick has shown that this argument "is rooted in the Academic critique of Stoic anthropocentrism."³⁸⁸ Celsus trivializes when he questions, "Come then, if anyone were to look out from heaven at the earth, what difference would appear between what is done by us and by ants and bees?"³⁸⁹ He finishes this portion of his diatribe by writing "For this purpose all things have been proportioned, not for one another except incidentally, but for the universe as a whole."³⁹⁰ By this Celsus means a universal providence, to which he gives precedence, "in contrast to an individual providence which he rejects."³⁹¹

According to Celsus both Christian and Jewish worship is deficient and neither group is worthy of any preference by God. It is clear to Celsus that "both the Jews and these people have the same God," and they both "believe that the story of the making of the world current among the Jews is true even in respect of the six days and the seventh in which God rested,"³⁹² which for Celsus reflects notions that vary from the true doctrine. Celsus believes that the beings that Christians and Jews refer to as angels are presumably "the daemons."³⁹³ Regarding Jewish worship, Celsus says that the Jews:

worship the heaven and the angels in it, yet they reject its most sacred and powerful parts, the sun, moon, and the other stars, both the fixed stars and the planets. They behave as though it were possible that the whole could be God but its parts not divine, or that one might quite rightly worship beings which are alleged to draw near to people blinded in darkness somewhere as a result of black magic, or who have dreams of obscure phantoms.³⁹⁴

As for the Jews, “they do not know the great [most high, supreme] God, but have been led on and deceived by Moses’ sorcery and have learnt about that for no good purpose,” and he says, “Nor is it at all likely that they are in favor with God and are loved any more than other folk, and that angels are sent to them alone, as though indeed they have been assigned some land of the blessed.”³⁹⁵ As for the Christians, “they themselves originated from Judaism, and they cannot name any other source for their teacher and chorus leader. Nevertheless they rebelled against the Jews.”³⁹⁶ By this linkage, we again see an attempt to establish guilt by association. Even if Jesus were the Son of God, or even an angel, Celsus belittles his importance and abilities by questioning and mocking him, saying:

were there also others before him? . . . For they say that others also have often come, and, in fact, sixty or seventy at once, who became evil and were punished by being cast under the earth in chains. . . . Furthermore, they say that an angel came to the tomb of this very man (some say one angel, some two), who replied

to the women that he was risen. The Son of God, it seems, was not able to open the tomb, but needed someone else to move the stone.³⁹⁷

Chapter IX

Celsus Uses Philosophy to Attack and Belittle Christianity

As Origen notes, Celsus urges Christians to “follow reason and a rational guide in accepting doctrines,” because “anyone who believes people without so doing is certain to be deceived.”³⁹⁸ Clearly, Celsus is contemplating philosophical pursuits here, as he states, “why is it bad to have been educated and to have studied the best doctrines, and both to be and to appear intelligent?”³⁹⁹ apparently referring to himself and all others who study philosophy. At the beginning of Book VI Origen remarks that Celsus quotes philosophical ideas and writings, especially from Plato, and with reference to the contents of and the comparison of the scriptures to these writings, Celsus argues that, “these ideas have been better expressed among the Greeks, who refrained from making exalted claims.”⁴⁰⁰ He goes on to say that “ancient and wise men reveal their meaning to those able to understand it,”⁴⁰¹ that is, to those who are cultured, to philosophers, the educated and the wise. In contrast, Christians “flee headlong from cultured people because they are not prepared to be deceived; but we trap illiterate folks.”⁴⁰² Celsus would have Christians “follow inspired poets and wise men and philosophers from whom” they could, “hear many divine truths.”⁴⁰³ In his criticism of Christians, Celsus argues that he first “must speak of all the misunderstandings and corruptions of the truth which they have made through ignorance. For they vulgarly discuss fundamental principles and make arrogant pronouncements about matters of which they know nothing,”⁴⁰⁴ and here Celsus means the teachings of philosophy, which, as explained by

Origen, Celsus contends, in contrast, “have been expressed both better and more clearly by the philosophers.”⁴⁰⁵

Celsus reports “Plato the son of Ariston points out the truth about the highest good in one of his epistles when he says that the highest good cannot at all be expressed in words, but comes to us by long familiarity and suddenly like a light in the soul kindled by a leaping spark.”⁴⁰⁶ In contrast, Moses and other Jewish prophets “misunderstood Plato.”⁴⁰⁷ In contrast to Jesus Christ, and Christianity, “Plato is not arrogant, nor does he tell lies, asserting that he has found something new, or that he has come from heaven to proclaim it; but he confesses the source from which these doctrines come.”⁴⁰⁸

Moreover, Celsus quotes Christians as saying “that the wisdom possessed by men is foolishness with God,” for the reason that Christians “aim to convert only the uneducated and stupid.”⁴⁰⁹ He belittles Christians, saying they “throw dice in order to divine where we may turn and whom we are to follow.”⁴¹⁰ Celsus asserts that Christians are “sorcerers” who “flee headlong from cultured people because we are not prepared to be deceived; but we trap illiterate folk.”⁴¹¹ Regarding Celsus’ statement that the Christians believe that the wisdom of men is foolishness, Celsus writes that this notion was actually “taken over from the Greek wise men who said that human wisdom is one thing and divine wisdom another,” and “the antiquity of this distinction goes back to Heraclitus and Plato.”⁴¹² Christians use this phrase because they “aim to convert only the uneducated and stupid.”⁴¹³ On the other hand, Origen points out that Celsus describes those who are “very uneducated” and “slaves” and “quite ignorant” as those

“who do not understand what he has to say, and have not been educated in the learning of the Greeks.”⁴¹⁴

Celsus’ view is that “the highest good cannot at all be expressed in words,” and, therefore, is knowable only by a few because it “comes to us by long familiarity and suddenly like a light in the soul kindled by a leaping spark.”⁴¹⁵ Celsus demonstrates his Platonic views as he quotes Plato as saying, “the Good is known ‘to a few’ since, when the multitude are filled with ‘a wrong contempt and a high and conceited ambition because they have learned some sacred truths’, they say that certain things are true,” and according to Celsus this is true because Plato “does not relate some incredible tale, nor does he check the tongue of the man who wants to inquire. . . .”⁴¹⁶ For Celsus it was incredible that Christians were “requiring immediate belief” and he suggests that Christians would “order people to ‘start by believing that God is like this and He has a Son like that, and that the latter came down and talked with me.’”⁴¹⁷ These statements help demonstrate Celsus’ view that the Platonic approach to knowing God, the “good,” is superior to that of the Christian view of faith.

Celsus argues that the Christians take their conceptions of humility from Plato, which they misunderstand. Celsus writes that for Christians “the humble man humiliates himself in a disgraceful and undignified manner, throwing himself headlong to the ground upon his knees, clothing himself in a beggar’s rags, and heaping dust upon himself.”⁴¹⁸ He says that Christian teachings on humility reflect “a misunderstanding of the words of Plato.”⁴¹⁹ Furthermore, “Jesus’ judgment against the rich, when he said, ‘It

is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God', was manifestly borrowed from Plato," and that, "Jesus corrupts" this saying of Plato: "'It is impossible for an outstandingly good man to be exceptionally rich.'"⁴²⁰

As to the realm of God, the heavens, and the kingdom of God, Celsus reflects Platonic philosophy when he accuses Christians of misunderstanding Plato when Christians speak "of a God who is above the heavens and place him higher than the heaven in which the Jews believe."⁴²¹ Celsus quotes Plato, that, " 'No earthly poet either has sung or will sing of the regions above the heavens as it deserves,'" and as also saying that the " 'Ultimate being, colourless, formless, and impalpable, visible only to the mind that is guide of the soul, round which is the species of true knowledge, lives in this place.'"⁴²² From this, Celsus argues that Christians misunderstand the true location and concept of God. Moreover, Celsus in accord with Plato believed that, "the way for the souls to and from the earth passes through the planets."⁴²³ In contrast, Celsus asserts that Christians believed in "seven heavens," and that "they borrowed from the Persians or the Cabeiri"⁴²⁴ some of their sayings attributed to Jesus, his apostles or the prophets, and he compared Christian and Jewish teaching with "the mysteries of the Persian Mithras and their interpretation of them."⁴²⁵ According to Origen, here Celsus is discussing "the way in which the soul enters into the divine realm,"⁴²⁶ and of Christian beliefs on this matter, Celsus finds them to be "matters only fit for fools and slaves to listen to."⁴²⁷

Celsus accuses Christians of sorcery when he states that Christians “use some sort of magic and sorcery and invoke certain daemons with barbarous names.”⁴²⁸ Celsus asserts that Christians “maintain that the God of the Jews is accursed, being the God who sends rain and thunder, and who is the creator of this world and the God of Moses, described in his account of the creation of the world.”⁴²⁹ Of Christian sorcery, Celsus says, as if the matter is settled, “Why need I enumerate all those who have taught rites of purification, or spells which bring deliverance, or formulas that avert evil, who produce noisy crashes, or pretend miracles, or all the various prophylactics of clothes, or numbers, or stones, or plants, or roots, and other objects of every sort?”⁴³⁰ After noting these sorcerers “profess nothing good, but everything that is harmful to men,”⁴³¹ Celsus reports that Dionysius, an Egyptian musician “told him that magical arts were effective with uneducated people and with men of depraved moral character, but that with people who had studied philosophy they were not able to have any effect, because they were careful to lead a healthy way of life.”⁴³² Thus, he argues for the philosophical arts.

Celsus attacks Christian teachings regarding Satan, the devil, saying:

it is blasphemy to say that when the greatest God indeed wishes to confer some benefit upon men, He has a power which is opposed to Him, and so is unable to do it. The Son of God, then, is worsted by the devil, and is punished by him . . . He declares that even Satan himself will appear in a similar way . . . and will manifest great and amazing works, usurping the glory of God.⁴³³

Celsus says of Jesus' teachings concerning Satan that, "This is blatantly the utterance of a man who is a sorcerer, who is out for profit and is taking precautions against possible rivals to his opinions and to his begging."⁴³⁴ Celsus concludes, then, that here Christians are making "some quite blasphemous errors," and have been led, "to depart from the true meaning of the divine enigmas, when they make a being opposed to God; devil, and in the Hebrew tongue, Satanas are the names which they give to this same being."⁴³⁵

Celsus regards Christian concepts of the creation of the world as unbelievable, foolish, ridiculous, saying that the Christian "cosmogony too is very silly."⁴³⁶ According to Celsus, the Christian "record of the origin of man is very silly"⁴³⁷ and "Moses and the prophets who left our books had no idea what the nature of the world and of mankind really is, and put together utter trash."⁴³⁸ Celsus suggests that Christians believe that "some things were devised by another Creator, different from the great God, against his Spirit while the higher God restrained himself," and "after the great God has given the Spirit to the Creator, He asks for it to be returned."⁴³⁹ This "creator" god, or demigod, is evil and Celsus sarcastically comments, "An impressive God, indeed, who desires to be the father of sinners condemned by another and of poor wretches . . . and who is incapable of taking vengeance upon the Creator when he has caught the one whom he had sent out to bring them to himself."⁴⁴⁰ Celsus mockingly asks "how can it be that God should make what is evil? And how can he be incapable of persuading and admonishing men?"⁴⁴¹

Celsus ridicules the Jewish-Christian creation account of the world and of man, saying “But far more silly is to have allotted certain days to the making of the world before days existed. For when the heaven had not yet been made, or the earth yet fixed, or the sun borne round it, how could days exist?”⁴⁴² For Celsus it is “absurd for . . . God to command, Let this come into existence . . . so that He made so much on one day, and again so much more on the second, and on with the third, fourth, fifth and sixth?”⁴⁴³ Of God’s resting on the seventh day, he dares to say, “God, exactly like a bad workman, was worn out and needed a holiday to have a rest.”⁴⁴⁴ Celsus writes of God “He has neither mouth nor voice,” and “Nor does God have any other of the characteristics of which we know.”⁴⁴⁵ Of man’s creation in God’s image Celsus writes “Nor did he make man in his image; for God is not like that, nor does he resemble any other form at all.”⁴⁴⁶ He describes God as having no form, quoting Plato’s *Phaedrus* 247 C, saying that God is “‘Ultimate being, colourless, formless, and impalpable, visible only to the mind that is guide of the soul, round which is the species of true knowledge.’”⁴⁴⁷ In contrast, Celsus accuses Christians of beliefs that God will “partake of movement,” and that “God participates in shapes or colour.”⁴⁴⁸ These ideas are obviously wrong, because God is not “attainable by reason,”⁴⁴⁹ and “God is outside any emotional experience.”⁴⁵⁰ By neither reason nor emotion is God perceived, and with this in mind he asks of Christians “How do we think we can come to know God, and how do we imagine we shall be saved by him?”⁴⁵¹ as if this is impossible for them.

Celsus questions Christ’s physical appearance at his advent, and he comments first that when Christians “say God is spirit, there is in this respect no difference between us

and the Stoics among the Greeks who affirm that God is spirit that has permeated all things and contains all things within itself.”⁴⁵² He then argues, “since the son is a spirit derived from God who was born in a human body, even the Son of God himself would not be immortal,” because “the nature of the spirit is certainly not such that it survives for ever.”⁴⁵³ Furthermore, “Jesus could not have risen with his body; for God would not have received back the spirit which he gave after it had been defiled by the nature of the body.”⁴⁵⁴ Celsus believed that for Jesus God “could have formed a body for this one also without having to thrust his own spirit into such foul pollution,”⁴⁵⁵ as into a woman’s womb. Moreover, Celsus thought it “impossible that a body which has something more divine than the rest should be no different from any other. Yet Jesus’ body was no different from any other, but, as they say, was little and ugly and undistinguished.”⁴⁵⁶ Celsus’ ridicule continues, as he writes “Furthermore, if God . . . woke up out of his long slumber and wanted to deliver the human race from evils, why on earth did he send this spirit that you mention into one corner? . . . Yet do you not think it is more ludicrous to make the Son of God to be sent to the Jews?”⁴⁵⁷

Of Jewish and Christian prophecies, Celsus questions “whether they were actually spoken or not”⁴⁵⁸ and then he claims that such prophecies are made even now by “those who live round about Phoenicia and Palestine, [which] are thought to be wonderful and unalterable.”⁴⁵⁹ Celsus claims to be familiar with this style of prophecy, because he has “heard it and had a thorough first hand knowledge of it,” and he says “There are many who are nameless, who prophesy at the slightest excuse for some trivial cause both inside and outside temples; and there are some who wander about

begging and roaming around cities and military camps; and they pretend to be moved as if giving some oracular utterance.”⁴⁶⁰ Celsus writes:

It is an ordinary and common custom for each one to say: ‘I am God (or a son of God, or a divine spirit). And I have come. . . . Blessed is he who has worshipped me now! . . . And men who fail to realize the penalties in store for them will in vain repent and groan. But I will preserve for ever those who have been convinced by me.’⁴⁶¹

Celsus scorns the prophecies as being “incomprehensible, incoherent, and utterly obscure utterances, the meaning of which no intelligent person could discover; for they are meaningless and non-sensical, and give a chance for any fool or sorcerer to take the words in whatever sense he likes.”⁴⁶² Celsus even claims to have cross-examined some of the prophets of his day and says they “admitted that they were a fraud, and that their words . . . were their own invention,”⁴⁶³ although he identifies none of them, according to Origen. He claims that in speaking of Jesus certain prophets “predicted that God should minister to evil, or should do and suffer the most shameful things,” and as illustrative of this point he asks “For when God eats the flesh of sheep or drinks vinegar or gall, what else is he doing but eating filth?”⁴⁶⁴

In Celsus’ opinion, the prophecies concerning Jesus suffering and dying for humanity were:

wicked and impious. So we should not consider either whether they did or whether they did not foretell it, but whether the act is worthy of God and is

good. And we should disbelieve what is disgraceful and evil, even if all men should seem to predict it in a state of frenzy. How, then, is it anything but blasphemy to assert that the things done to Jesus were done to God?⁴⁶⁵

To Celsus “it would be impossible to believe in the predictions that he should suffer and do these things,”⁴⁶⁶ or that “the great God will serve as a slave or will die?”⁴⁶⁷

Jesus is unworthy of belief because he contradicted Moses, as Celsus says:

Yet his son, the man of Nazareth, gives contradictory laws, saying that a man cannot come forward to the Father if he is rich or loves power or lays claim to any intelligence or reputation, and that he must not pay attention to food or to his storehouse any more than the ravens, or to clothing any more than the lilies, and that to a man who has struck him once he should offer himself to be struck once again.⁴⁶⁸

Celsus exclaims in a question “Who is wrong? Moses or Jesus? Or when the Father sent Jesus had he forgotten what commands he gave to Moses?”⁴⁶⁹ Here Celsus claims that God gave laws to Moses indicating that the Jews “were to become rich and powerful and to fill the earth and to massacre their enemies, children and all, and slaughter their entire race, which he himself did, so Moses says, before the eyes of the Jews,” and then, he asks “Or did he condemn his own laws and change his mind, and send his messenger for quite the opposite purpose?”⁴⁷⁰

As for life after death, Celsus writes that Christians believe that they will go "To another earth, better than this one," but in contrast, he argues "Divinely inspired men of ancient times" held that there was "a happy life for fortunate souls. Some called it the Islands of the Blessed; others the Elysian Fields because they were there set free from the evils of the world. . . . And Plato, who thinks the soul immortal, quite openly calls that region where the soul is sent a land, . . . [which] 'itself is pure and lies in the pure heaven.'" ⁴⁷¹ Although Celsus admits that "It is not easy for anyone to know what he [Plato] means by these words," ⁴⁷² he would put Christians in a similar situation by holding that even Christians ask "How shall we go to God?" ⁴⁷³ The answer for Christians, according to Celsus, is that they know "we shall see God with the eyes of the body and hear his voice with our ears and touch him with our sensible hands." ⁴⁷⁴

In one part of his argument Celsus asserts that here on earth already "gods are to be seen in human form and [these] are not deceitful imposters, but true manifestations." ⁴⁷⁵ Celsus says of some gods who have "human form" that they do not appear only once but they are "continually having communion with any who so desire." ⁴⁷⁶ Celsus argues that Jesus was no more than a phantom, when, speaking of or to Christians, he says:

For you make yourselves a laughing-stock in the eyes of everybody when you blasphemously assert that the other gods who are made manifest are phantoms, while you worship a man who is more wretched than even what really are

phantoms, and who is not even any longer a phantom, but is in fact dead; and when you look for a father like him.⁴⁷⁷

Celsus had earlier noted that Christians would not accept that certain Greek heroes, such as Heracles and Asclepius, had become gods and were divine after living as humans, and he accused Christians of admitting that Jesus had appeared after he died “even then as a phantom.”⁴⁷⁸ Here Celsus raised the question “whether anyone who was once a human being might properly be regarded as divine.”⁴⁷⁹

There already was a philosophical tradition or notion then used to criticize the popular religion, that the gods were but dead men, which was “commonly attributed to Euhemerus of Messene, after whom it is designated ‘euhemerism’.”⁴⁸⁰ Early Christian writers used skeptical euhemerism, “as an eminently suitable weapon in their struggle against competing forms of Graeco-Roman religion, and the theory that the pagan gods were but dead men is exploited by the apologists with all the confidence of an incontrovertible fact.”⁴⁸¹ Here it should be noted that Christians took the divine nature of Jesus to be a fact because of his previous reality, as Jesus was but God made manifest as a man. However, Celsus argues that, “the honor which we give to Jesus is no different from that paid to Hadrian’s favourite,”⁴⁸² meaning the boy Antinous, who was deified by the Roman emperor Hadrian after Antinous drowned in the Nile, AD 130. Further Celsus says of Christians that, “our faith has prejudiced our souls and makes us hold this belief about Jesus.”⁴⁸³ Yet again Celsus argues that, “we think him a god though he was born of a mortal body,” and in comparing Jesus’ body to “gold, silver, and stone,” Celsus

asserts that, "his flesh was more corruptible than these."⁴⁸⁴ Celsus here construes Jesus as of a type of the deified mortal, and, at that time a post mortem appearance was prima facie evidence of divinity. However, for Celsus Jesus is no more worthy than Antinous of deification, as both lack any notable excellence. Jesus' mortal origin would preclude divinity, for what is born is subject to death and is by nature corruptible, as Celsus argues in his reference to gold, silver and stone. These remarks of Celsus support the position of skeptical euhemerism that men do not and cannot become divine, but in making this argument it is the goal of Celsus to "place Christians in the dilemma of venerating all ostensibly deified men, or none of them, including Jesus."⁴⁸⁵

Further, it follows that Christian concepts of life after death, of a bodily resurrection, and of both Jesus' and God's physical appearance are wrong and foolish misunderstandings of the ancient and true doctrines of old. After noting that Christians have "misunderstood the doctrine of reincarnation,"⁴⁸⁶ Celsus ridicules Christians for their beliefs of the resurrection of the body, writing:

Furthermore, are not these notions of yours absurd? For on the one hand you long for the body, and hope that it will rise again in the same form as if we possessed nothing better or more precious than that, while on the other hand you would cast it into punishment as though it were of no value.⁴⁸⁷

Then he further condemns Christians, saying "However, it is not worthwhile discussing this with people who believe this, who are absolutely bound to the body; for they are people who in other respects also are boorish and unclean, who are destitute of reason

and suffer from the disease of sedition.”⁴⁸⁸ Curiously, Celsus observes, “Men are born bound to the body, whether because of the administration of the world, or because they are paying the penalty for their sin, or because the soul is weighed down by certain passions until it has been purified through the appointed periods.”⁴⁸⁹ As for punishment and rewards due for one’s life on earth, Celsus asserts, “that those who have lived good lives will be happy, while people who are totally wicked will be afflicted with eternal evils,”⁴⁹⁰ and he says, “this doctrine may never be abandoned either by them or by any other person.”⁴⁹¹

Returning to the apprehension of God, Celsus says that, “If you shut your eyes to the world of sense and look up with the mind, if you turn away from the flesh and raise the eye of the soul, only so will you see God.”⁴⁹² For suitable direction, Celsus would have those who seek God to follow “inspired poets, and wise men and philosophers,” as “guides” to “hear many divine truths”.⁴⁹³ Celsus prefers Plato as “a more effective teacher of the problems of theology,” and he says that, “You see how the way of truth is sought by seers and philosophers,” but “Plato knew that it is impossible for all men to travel it.”⁴⁹⁴ For Celsus, God is nameless, as he comments that “Since this is the reason why wise men have discovered it, that we might set some conception of the nameless First Being.”⁴⁹⁵ However, for Celsus it is possible to know God “either by synthesis with other things or by analytical distinction or by analogy,”⁴⁹⁶ but for Christians this is impossible because they “are completely bound to the flesh,” and “see nothing pure.”⁴⁹⁷

According to Celsus, Christians say, "How are they to know God unless they lay hold of him by sense-perception? How is it possible to have any knowledge except by sense-perception?"⁴⁹⁸ He says that Christians are "completely bound to the flesh," and that they "see nothing pure."⁴⁹⁹ Hauck states, "Celsus is critical of the Christians' use of biblical stories based on the senses to support their doctrine and [he] rebukes them with Platonic language . . . ," noting that "This concern is evident in his criticism of two Christian stories which are based on seeing: the appearance of the heavenly dove at Jesus' baptism, and the post-resurrection appearance of Jesus."⁵⁰⁰ These accounts are untrustworthy because they are stories of dreams or apparitions, to which a wise man would not assent. The appearance of the dove is an apparition, allegedly seen by an equally unworthy witness, and Jesus' resurrection was either dreamt or fanaticized by hysterical women. Origen states that here Celsus "continues like an Epicurean,"⁵⁰¹ but Hauck explains that in Stoic terms, these descriptions were formed in the witness' imaginative faculties, but which occurred on the basis of a deceived opinion, in Celsus' view. Celsus used the current philosophical language then available to discuss sense knowledge and its trustworthiness from the Stoic/Academic debate. Origen responds to Celsus with the Stoic doctrine of the cataleptic impression, where knowledge arises from an object, which, through the senses, produces an impression on the soul. A true impression produces nothing in the mind but its object, bringing its own authentication and knowledge, which is then an unequivocal source. However, mental assent is a component, but for the Stoic the necessary assent springs from the cataleptic

impression. Perhaps it really is true in some sense that Celsus is but an Epicurean who simply will not believe anything good about Christianity.

God is neither “mind nor intelligence nor knowledge, but [He]enables the mind to think and is the cause of the existence of intelligence and the possibility of knowledge, and causes the existence of all intelligible things and of truth itself and of being itself, since he transcends all things and is intelligible by a certain indescribable power.”⁵⁰²

Celsus pronounces that, “These doctrines I have set forth for men of intelligence. If you understand any of them, you are doing well.”⁵⁰³ Celsus says that if in the past God used some divine spirit to “come down from God to foretell the divine truths . . . indeed, it was because men of ancient times were touched by this spirit that they proclaimed many excellent doctrines.”⁵⁰⁴

Celsus says that Jesus’ teachings concerning suffering and dying actually comes from Plato’s *Crito*. He relates that Christians “have also a precept to this effect – that you must not resist a man who insults you. Even, he says, if someone strikes you on one cheek, yet you should offer the other as well.”⁵⁰⁵ Celsus then asserts that “This too is old stuff, and was better said before them,” and Celsus quotes a conversation of Socrates, found in Plato’s *Crito*, which includes the statement “that it is never right either to do wrong or to take revenge, or for one who has suffered harm to resist and to requite evil. . . . For to me this has seemed to be the truth for a long time.”⁵⁰⁶ Celsus notes, “This was the opinion of Plato. But these views were set forth still earlier by divinely inspired men.”⁵⁰⁷

Celsus attacks the Christian refusal to worship idols and defends the worship of the pagan gods. Celsus notes of Christians that, "They cannot bear to see temples and altars and images," and, as for the images, he reports "But they openly dishonor the images. If what they mean is that an image of stone or wood or bronze or gold which some man or other has wrought cannot be a god, their wisdom is ludicrous. Who but an utter infant imagines that these things are gods and not votive offerings and images of gods?"⁵⁰⁸ Regarding the images, Celsus explains that Christians "think that those to whom they are dedicated are not gods but daemons, and that no one who worships God ought to serve daemons."⁵⁰⁹ In contrast, Celsus argues that Christians should worship the gods; their worship of Jesus is empty, futile, because they "are clearly refuted, for the reason that they worship not a god, nor even a daemon, but a corpse."⁵¹⁰ Celsus proceeds to argue that Christians must worship the pagan gods and daemons and he challenges Christians by saying, "Why do we not worship daemons?"⁵¹¹ He writes:

Are not all things indeed administered according to God's will, and is not all providence derived from him? . . . And has there not been appointed over each particular thing a being who has been thought worthy to be allotted power? Would not a man, therefore, who worships God rightly worship the being who has obtained authority from him?⁵¹²

Celsus compares the lesser gods and daemons to the human officials who are subordinate to a Persian or Roman emperor, and he asks, "Would the satraps and ministers both in the air and on earth do but little harm if they were insulted?"⁵¹³ Celsus

argues that “The man who worships several gods, because he worships some one of those which belong to the great God, even by this very action does that which is loved by him.”⁵¹⁴

Celsus further faults Christian logic in the worship of Jesus, saying:

If these men worshipped no other God but one, perhaps they would have had a valid argument against the others. But in fact they worship to an extravagant degree this man who appeared recently, and yet think it is not inconsistent with monotheism if they also worship His servant.⁵¹⁵

For this Jesus is blamed because it is he “who is the author of their sedition.”⁵¹⁶ In what likely is a Gnostic version of one report of Jesus, Celsus says “For in one place in the heavenly dialogue they speak there in these words: ‘If the Son of God is mightier, and the Son of man is his Lord (and who else will overcome the God who is mighty?), how is it that many are round the well and no one goes into it?’”⁵¹⁷ Celsus writes, “Thus it is not their object to worship the super-celestial God, but him whom they suppose to be the Father of Jesus who is the central object of their society. They want to worship only this Son of man, . . . And they say that he is mightier than and lord of the God who is mighty.”⁵¹⁸ Origen responds that this report by Celsus came from some unknown and undistinguished sect, and he indicates that this report was mere opinion taken from “heretics.”⁵¹⁹ As to this “Celestial Dialogue”, Celsus interprets it as partial proof that the Christians intend “to worship not the supercelestial god [*sic*]but rather the god that Christians have posited as the father of the real focus of their group.”⁵²⁰ Gamble notes

that the consensus of opinion is that this “Celestial Dialogue” has a Gnostic character, and that Celsus is complaining of various Christian (Gnostic) groups who believed that Jesus’ father was “a different god, superior and opposed to Yahweh, the Creator (cites omitted).”⁵²¹ After an extensive discussion, Gamble concludes that the Gnostic group responsible for the “Celestial Dialogue” are the followers of Marcion, the Marcionites.⁵²²

Celsus ridicules the power of the Christian God and of Jesus, saying that the “son of God, takes no vengeance,”⁵²³ even on those who took him away and crucified him, “But the men who tortured and punished your God in person suffered nothing for doing it, not even afterwards as long as they lived. What new thing has happened since then which might lead one to believe that he was not a sorcerer but son of God?”⁵²⁴ As for God, Celsus says, “And He who sent his son to deliver certain messages overlooked him when he was so cruelly punished so that the messages also were destroyed with him; and though such a long time has passed, He has not paid any attention.”⁵²⁵ In contrast, Celsus extols the demonstrations of power by the pagan gods and daemons, saying, “The whole of life is full of these experiences. How many cities have been built by oracles, and have got rid of diseases and famines, and how many that have neglected or forgotten them have suffered terrible destruction?”⁵²⁶ Moreover, the rulers on earth are aided by the daemons, for Celsus says “If this is the case, what is dreadful in propitiating the powers on earth, both the others, and the rulers and emperors among men, since not even they hold their position without the might of the daemons.”⁵²⁷ Since this is true, it followed for Celsus to think that Christians were “mad” to “deliberately rush forward to arouse the wrath of an emperor or governor which brings

upon us blows and tortures and even death,”⁵²⁸ and everyone, Christians included, should “swear by the fortune (genius) of the emperor,”⁵²⁹ as that only made sense to him. Further, he writes that, “Even if someone tells you to take an oath by an emperor among men, that also is nothing dreadful. For earthly things have been given to him, and whatever you receive in this life you receive from him.”⁵³⁰

Celsus also argues that Christians must sacrifice and take part in the pagan feasts, after first observing that Christians “avoid setting up altars and images and temples . . . a sure token of an obscure and secret society.”⁵³¹ Celsus argues that, “God is surely common to all men. He is both good and in need of nothing, and without envy. What, then, prevents people particularly devoted to them from partaking of the public feasts?”⁵³² Celsus goes on, “If these idols are nothing, why is it terrible to take part in the high festival? And if they are daemons of some sort, obviously these too belong to God, and we ought to believe them and sacrifice to them according to the laws, and pray to them that they may be kindly disposed.”⁵³³ Celsus commands the worship of pagan gods and daemons, as he says, “if anyone tells you to praise Helios or with a noble paeon to speak in enthusiastic praise of Athena, in so doing you will appear much more to be worshipping the great God when you are singing a hymn to them. For the worship of God becomes more perfect by going through them all.”⁵³⁴

Of Christian and Jewish customs to abstain from the eating of certain animals, Celsus comments “If they follow a custom of their fathers when they abstain from particular sacrificial victims, surely they ought also to abstain from the food of all animals – such is

the view taken by Pythagoras with the intention of honouring thereby the soul and its organs.”⁵³⁵ He harshly states of Christians that:

Either we ought not to live at all anywhere on earth and not enter this life, or, if we do enter this life under these conditions, we ought to give thanks to the daemons who have been allotted control over earthly things, and render to them first fruits and prayers as long as we live that we may obtain their goodwill towards us.⁵³⁶

Celsus continues, stating:

Reason demands one of two alternatives. If they refuse to worship in the proper way . . . then they ought neither to come to marriageable age, nor to marry a wife, nor to beget children, nor to do anything else in life. But they should depart from this world leaving no descendants at all behind them, so that such a race would entirely cease to exist on earth.⁵³⁷

The alternative “is to offer the due rites of worship in this life until they are set free from their bonds, lest they even appear ungrateful to them.”⁵³⁸

Chapter X

Christians Are Rebels against Rome and the Emperor

According to Celsus, if others in Roman and Greek society conducted themselves as the Christians there would be no respect for law, anarchy and chaos would prevail, and legitimate authority abandoned. In Schoedel's opinion, Celsus reflects the view that, "the traditional worship of the various gods of the cities contributed to the peace of the whole Roman world," and Schoedel explains that, "The old Roman idea that dutiful attention to the gods went hand in hand with the political and military health of Rome is set by Celsus in the context of the universal Roman rule and the need to follow traditional religious customs throughout the empire."⁵³⁹ Celsus asserts that Christians should hold to the ancient precepts, including the doctrine that there should be "one king," one emperor. Celsus writes:

If you overthrow this doctrine, . . . If everyone were to do the same as you, there would be nothing to prevent him from being abandoned, alone and deserted, while earthly things would come in to the power of the most lawless and savage barbarians, and nothing more would be heard among men either of your worship or of the true wisdom.⁵⁴⁰

Celsus was convinced that the Christian God would not come to the aide of the emperor, which, again, would lead to the failure of the empire and to lawlessness. Of God's support of the Christians, Celsus notes that "You will surely not say that if the Romans were convinced by you and were to neglect their customary honours to both

gods and men and were to call upon your Most High, . . . He would come down and fight on their side, and they would have no need for any other defence.”⁵⁴¹ Rather, Celsus writes of the Christians that they have gotten nothing from their God, as “In earlier times also the same God made these promises and some far greater than these, so you say, to those who pay regard to him. But see how much help he has been both to them and you,”⁵⁴² with the result that Christians, “Instead of being masters of the whole world, they have been left no land or home of any kind. While in your case, if anyone does still wander about in secret, yet he is sought out and condemned to death.”⁵⁴³

From all of the arguments made in his book Celsus concludes by asserting that the Christians are wicked rebels against the Roman government and the emperor, who should repent of their terrible and blasphemous ways, and conform to and practice the pagan theology. Celsus, however, seems to engage in some wishful thinking, for in the end he says that “Would that it were possible to unite under one law the inhabitants of Asia, Europe, and Libya, both Greeks and barbarians even at the furthest limits.”⁵⁴⁴

Origen relates that Celsus actually exhorts and encourages Christians to “help the emperor with all our power, and cooperate with him in what is right, and fight for him and be fellow-soldiers if he presses for this, and fellow generals with him.”⁵⁴⁵

Furthermore, Christians should even “accept public office in our country if it is necessary to do this for the sake of the preservation of the laws and of piety.”⁵⁴⁶

Conclusion

For the period c. AD 170-180, the Roman Empire was an empire under great stress. Although in general terms the empire was prosperous, it was a collection of cities dependent upon outlying regions to provide the necessary foodstuffs to support the population, and this was very true of the largest cities and especially of Rome itself. The majority of the people worked in agricultural pursuits, with only local artisans and small shops to produce goods, with no large industries involving any sort of mass production. Manual labor was the norm for everyone, except that large numbers of slaves did the work for those who could afford their expense. Although Rome's empire encompassed the Mediterranean, every district, city or region of some distance from the sea was dependent upon its own area's food resources, because land transport was prohibitive in cost. In any given year, crop failures could cause local famines and in general, the empire was not able to generate consistent surpluses of food to make it self-sufficient. While the army and other military forces were of great effect wherever they went, they could not be everywhere in the countryside or on the sea, and banditry and pirates were serious threats to the security of any traveler, a constant hazard throughout the empire. Another calamity that was extremely serious during Celsus' day was disease, the plague. Great epidemics occurred during the reigns of Marcus Aurelius and of his successor, Commodus. Estimates vary, but from a tenth to a third of the empire's population died of the plague during the fifteen years of 165-180. With little understanding of the disease, the effects of the plague must have been terrifying, with whole districts, villages and estates depopulated of important labor resources. The fears

of war, whether from internal revolts or from external invasions, were very real, causing great expenditures of public resources for defense. The emperor Marcus Aurelius (161-180) spent almost all of his reign with his armies repulsing one threat after another, and while he was successful, the government of the empire fell into desperate financial straits, as it struggled to raise armies and defeat the invaders and the rebellions. As a result, one manifestation of the instability of the period upon Rome's economy was "the constant debasement of Rome's coinage."⁵⁴⁷ For example, a modius of wheat "(about 8.6 dry liters) cost two sesterces around A.D. 150 but 400 sesterces around A.D. 300; its nominal price thus increased two hundredfold in a century and a half."⁵⁴⁸ A sesterces was a quarter denarius, and the silver denarius was regarded as the standard coin. During our time period, Rome's money, its coinage, suffered debasement and was reduced in value, so that its silver content was less than its face value, with the denarius being reduced under Marcus Aurelius to about "75 percent"⁵⁴⁹ of the purity of its original value, weight, the remainder being bronze.

During the period of Celsus, most Christians still worshipped in secret to avoid suspicion and arrest, as Christianity was a capital offense, and many Christians suffered violence for their beliefs. Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, was martyred (burned at the stake) at the Smyrna stadium in 156 after he confessed to being a Christian. The pagan masses viewed Christians with grave suspicion in any time of calamity, and pagan mobs could turn on Christians and do violence to them for their failure to engage in the pagan cult. Chadwick notes that, "The mob was always ready to believe that catastrophes like floods or bad harvests or barbarian invasions were a sign of the gods' displeasure at

their neglect under the influence of Christian 'atheism'."⁵⁵⁰ For the purpose of placating the gods and winning their favor, about 164, as the empire faced war, famine and the plague, Emperor Marcus Aurelius issued an edict or law requiring sacrifices to the gods, throughout the empire. The city prefect of Rome executed Justin Martyr and six of his disciples in Rome about 165 or 167 for being Christians. Likewise, in Gaul, north of Rome, in c. 177 some 48 Christians were put to death, and Chadwick notes that, "In 177 an ugly persecution broke out with savage violence against the Christians at Lyons and Vienne in the Rhone valley; the emperor Marcus Aurelius had directed that they should be tortured to death, and no refinement of cruelty was spared."⁵⁵¹ In a time of war, plague, famine and economic uncertainty the emperor Marcus Aurelius employed all of the traditional state rites "in his effort to placate the gods and to preserve the empire from destruction."⁵⁵²

Why then did Celsus attack Christianity? Chadwick states that, "persecution was far from being continuous or systematic. . . . Much was left to private informers, and action remained in the discretion of individual governors, A few provincial governors actually protected the church."⁵⁵³ Christianity was growing and winning converts despite pagan opposition and by the end of the second century Christianity was penetrating into the upper classes of society. Chadwick notes that, "Because the early persecutions were limited they did not seriously slow down the expansion of Christianity, but on the contrary tended to give the church the maximum of publicity."⁵⁵⁴ Celsus lived and wrote his book about AD 170-180, perhaps in 177, at a time when he perceived that Christianity had "spread to become a multitude,"⁵⁵⁵ and for Celsus the growth of

Christianity was a direct threat to his belief system and to the continued strength and vitality of the Roman Empire. As a well educated and well informed pagan intellectual, Celsus would have been keenly aware of the growth of Christianity, despite earlier persecutions, especially if he lived in Rome, the empire's imperial seat of government.

At the beginning of his book, Celsus observes that Christians taught "their doctrines in secret," in order to "escape the death penalty that hangs over them."⁵⁵⁶ In his view, the Christian Church was an evil, secret society and therefore, "an illegal body which ought not to exist. The Christian associations violate the common law."⁵⁵⁷ Chadwick observes, "That the Christians have corrupted ancient tradition is a leading theme in Celsus' book."⁵⁵⁸ For Celsus, Christianity was a "fanatical new movement that is taking people away from the worship of the old gods and is undermining the structure and stability of society."⁵⁵⁹ Celsus felt that if the growth of Christianity did not stop, it would be disastrous for the future of the Roman Empire. Christians were not worshipping the pagan gods and keeping them happy, placated, they were not serving in the Roman Army or in the public institutions or offices (which would have involved the worship of the pagan gods), nor did they support and take part in the imperial cult. Chadwick states, in sum, that in Celsus' view, "The Christians are not pulling their weight; they ought to take their share of civic responsibility, hold public office, fight in the army, and support the Emperor in his struggle to maintain the peace of the Empire."⁵⁶⁰ Moreover, Celsus was convinced that the Christian god would not "come down and fight"⁵⁶¹ for the Romans and their empire in their time of need.

Celsus was a second century Middle Platonist philosopher who felt threatened by the growth of Christianity, but he genuinely believed that the ancient pagan Roman Hellenistic and philosophical culture of his day embodied a true doctrine that was superior to Christianity. This true doctrine embodied a supreme most high god at the top of a hierarchy of lesser immortal gods or beings (daemons) who administered and secured the various regions of the world, including Rome's empire. For Celsus, it made no difference whether the name of this most high god was Zeus, or some other name.⁵⁶²

Celsus writes that:

the different parts of the earth were allotted to different overseers, and are governed in this way by having been divided between certain authorities. In fact, the practices done by each nation are right when . . . done in the way that pleases the overseers; and it is impious to abandon the customs which have existed in each locality from the beginning.⁵⁶³

Celsus' views combined piety to the pagan gods with the philosopher's pursuit of an intellectual union with the supreme entity, the most high god, through his philosophical endeavors. While everyone should worship the lesser gods and the supreme god, only the few who could engage in the extended study of philosophy could hope to find union with the supreme god. Since Christianity fell far short of this in Celsus' view, relying only on a simple faith, it was foolish, defective and unworthy of serious consideration, fit only for knaves, fools, the unwise and the intellectually deficient.

Celsus believed that Judaic and Christian beliefs were defective in part simply because their “doctrine was originally barbarian.”⁵⁶⁴ In other words, their beliefs were not Greek in origin and were inferior for that reason. Celsus quickly asserted the superiority of Greek culture when he stated that, “the Greeks are better able to judge the value of what the barbarians have discovered, and to establish the doctrines and put them into practice by virtue.”⁵⁶⁵ As Origen reports, Celsus urged Christians “to follow reason and a rational guide in accepting doctrines,” because “anyone who believes people without so doing is certain to be deceived.”⁵⁶⁶ For Celsus, Jesus’ doctrine was “vulgar” and “successful only among the uneducated because of its vulgarity and utter illiteracy.”⁵⁶⁷ In contrast to philosophy and pagan religion, Christians “drive away every intelligent man from arguing about this faith, and invite only the stupid and low class folk.”⁵⁶⁸ Celsus complains that the Christian God has “compassion for people who lament and relieves bad men, while he casts out good men who have done nothing of that kind, which is very unfair.”⁵⁶⁹ Apparently referring to all who study philosophy Celsus asks, “why is it bad to have been educated and to have studied the best doctrines, and both to be and to appear intelligent?”⁵⁷⁰

Celsus favors the pursuit of philosophy to apprehend the one supreme god, and he argues that, “If you shut your eyes to the world of sense and look up with the mind, if you turn away from the flesh and raise the eye of the soul, only so will you see God.”⁵⁷¹ For suitable direction Celsus commands those who seek God to follow “inspired poets, and wise men and philosophers,” as “guides” to “hear many divine truths.”⁵⁷² For Celsus, it is only possible to know God “either by synthesis with other things or by

analytical distinction or by analogy,”⁵⁷³ but this task is not really possible for Christians because they “are completely bound to the flesh,” and “see nothing pure.”⁵⁷⁴ In describing God, Celsus asserts that God “is neither mind nor intelligence nor knowledge, but [He] enables the mind to think and is the cause of the existence of intelligence and the possibility of knowledge, and causes the existence of all intelligible things . . . and is intelligible by a certain indescribable power.”⁵⁷⁵ Commenting upon his own use of philosophy, Celsus states “These doctrines I have set forth for men of intelligence. If you understand any of them, you are doing well.”⁵⁷⁶ From this I submit that Celsus clearly thought that Roman and Greek Hellenistic culture, religion, and philosophy were vastly superior to Christianity.

It is evident that Celsus knew a lot about pagan religion and philosophy and he was a relatively informed critic of Judaism and Christianity. This is remarkable, for Celsus’ day was a time when scribes copied books by hand and preserved them on scrolls, and they were not printed and bound, as we know books today. Celsus’ written sources surely included at least some of the books of the Jewish scriptures, and some of the Christian gospel accounts and various other books that became part of the New Testament cannon of the Bible. As a Greek philosopher he was very familiar with the writings of the various philosophical schools and of pagan religious thought, and he has some knowledge of Gnostic, heretical writings, not later accepted into the New Testament cannon, but which may have appeared to Celsus to be “Christian” in nature at the time he wrote. Celsus must have lived in a great city of the day, such as Rome or Alexandria, in order to have access to such knowledge.

To get some sense of Celsus' grasp of the Christian and Judaic religious scriptures, one must look for them within the context of some of his statements, since Celsus does not quote scripture. A few examples follow. For a start, it is noteworthy that the creation account and the fall (sin) of man, ridiculed by Celsus,⁵⁷⁷ is in Genesis, chapters 1-3. The story of the worldwide flood and Noah's ark, which Celsus thought a myth, a debased version of the Deucalion,⁵⁷⁸ is in Genesis, Chapters 6-9. Celsus was familiar with stories of the early patriarchs, involving Abraham, Sarah, Lot and his daughters, and their offspring,⁵⁷⁹ found in Genesis, chapters 12-19. Of Moses and the laws given to the Israelites by God through Moses, Celsus comments, particularly of the direction for them to take possession of the land and to destroy their enemies,⁵⁸⁰ found in such places as Exodus, chapter 34 (verses 11-17) and Numbers, chapters 21 (verses 34-35) and chapter 33. Celsus could have learned about certain Messianic prophecies which indicate that Israel's Messiah is to be a great prince and ruler of the world,⁵⁸¹ by studying Isaiah, chapters 9 (verses 1-7), 11, 59 (verses 17-21), and 60, from Daniel, chapter 7 (verses 13-14 and 26-27), and in Revelation, chapter 1 (verses 4-8), and chapters 19-22. Although Jesus' general appearance is not described in the gospel accounts, Celsus described Jesus as "little and ugly and undistinguished,"⁵⁸² which Celsus may have inferred from Isaiah, chapter 52 (verse 14), and chapter 53 (verses 2-5), Matthew, chapters 26 (verse 67) and 27 (verses 29-30), and Mark, chapter 15 (verse 19). Celsus mentions "those who mocked him and put a purple robe round him and the crown of thorns and the reed in his hand,"⁵⁸³ after Jesus' arrest and at his trial, and the source of this information most likely is John, chapter 19 (verses 2-3), Mark, chapter 15

(verses 16-20), and Matthew, chapter 27 (verses 28-29). After asserting that Christians misunderstood the ancient doctrines concerning floods and conflagrations, Celsus states “This is responsible for their mistaken opinion that God will come down and bring fire like a torturer.”⁵⁸⁴ Celsus’ sources for this interpretation of Christian belief are most likely Second Peter, chapter 3 (verses 7, 10), Hebrews, chapter 12 (verse 29), and Isaiah, chapters 13 (verses 6-12) and 24 (verse 6).

Although Celsus is a Middle Platonist philosopher, he is an eclectic one, and when it suits him uses in his arguments concepts drawn from the other schools without apology. Origen points out that in the course of his book Celsus makes many references to the legends of many gods which were often seen, even in his day, as embarrassing or as myths difficult of explanation, which the Greeks then allegorized in order to explain away the myth,⁵⁸⁵ and this would be consistent with Stoic doctrine.⁵⁸⁶ Celsus endorses Stoic doctrine in connection with his view that Christians have simply misunderstood Greek and barbarian doctrine regarding the earth’s coming destruction by fire (see above paragraph). Celsus states that there is a coming conflagration, which he explains by saying that, “after cycles of long periods and after returns and conjunctions of stars there are conflagrations and floods, and that after the last flood in the time of Deucalion the cycle demands a conflagration in accordance with the alternating succession of the universe.”⁵⁸⁷ In another place, Celsus accuses Christians of being no different from the Stoics, “who affirm that God is spirit that has permeated all things and contains all things within itself.”⁵⁸⁸ Although it is well established now that Celsus is a Middle Platonist, and not an Epicurean, Celsus denied that the concept of divine providence

applied to human beings individually, arguing that God cared no more for irrational beings or animals than for mankind and vice-versa. Early on Origen did accuse Celsus of being an Epicurean,⁵⁸⁹ but the denial of an anthropocentric world- view also reflected Platonic criticism of Stoic anthropocentrism,⁵⁹⁰ and thus Celsus may have been reflecting his Platonic views, although he seems to be consistent with Epicurean doctrine on this point. Celsus used skeptical euhemerism to argue that mortal men, such as Jesus, do not and cannot become divine, but by using this argument Celsus also sought to embarrass Christians by putting them “in the dilemma of venerating all ostensibly deified men, or none of them, including Jesus.”⁵⁹¹

Celsus used Gnostic, Marcionite, sources to argue that there were big differences or divisions within the church and that Christians were worshipping a new god, or a demigod, a Father of Jesus who was opposed to and different from Yahweh,⁵⁹² and he said of some Christians, to indicate divisions, that of these, “there are some too who profess to be Gnostics.”⁵⁹³ Celsus may have used Gnostic sources as a basis to accuse later “Christian” (Gnostic) writers of altering “the original text of the gospel three or four or several times over . . . to enable them to deny difficulties in the face of criticism.”⁵⁹⁴ Celsus also referred to other Gnostics, such as the Marcellians,⁵⁹⁵ in his efforts to criticize, confuse and divide Christian doctrines, beliefs. Earlier Celsus had stated of Christians that, “But since they have spread to become a multitude, they are divided and rent asunder and each wants to have his own party.”⁵⁹⁶ Celsus went further and wrote of Christians that, “they are divided again by becoming too numerous, and condemn one another; they only have one thing still in common, so to speak, if indeed

they have that --- the name.”⁵⁹⁷ Besides his Gnostic sources, Celsus was probably aware the Apostle Paul had addressed various disputes within the church, including the issue of the resurrection, in his efforts to address divisions within the church.⁵⁹⁸

Celsus, then, lived at a time when the Roman Empire, powerful as it was, faced enormous threats to its existence, particularly from war, from threats both external and internal. As a Greek intellectual and philosopher who by his own reckoning was intelligent, well educated, well read and well informed, Celsus would have been keenly aware of these threats and of the tremendous costs both in lives and in treasure that was required in order to stave off these dangers, especially if he lived in Rome. Likewise, he would have known of other great difficulties the empire faced, including the effects of food shortages and local famines, and the damaging effects of disease, of the plagues, which both decimated and terrified the populations and which greatly reduced the empire’s man-power pool and its ability to both be productive economically and to defend itself. Celsus had grown up with the pagan gods and learning pagan religious observances and then had studied philosophy, and this experience cemented his beliefs in the ancient true doctrine, which he alludes to in his book. As a Greek, he had an intellectual bias against anything new or barbarian. As Celsus learned of Christianity and of its growth to multitude proportions, Celsus saw Christianity as a severe threat to the well-being of the empire and of all that he held to be important, to all that he valued. Celsus took the time to study Christianity and its scriptures, as well as the Jewish scriptures, as demonstrated above, in order to attack them. Seeing an opportunity that suited his purposes, he seized upon non-canon Gnostic sources in order to denigrate

Christianity and point out divisions of those Celsus supposed to be Christians, whenever it suited the purposes of his argument. Celsus attacked Christianity by arguing at length against its social exclusivity, involving its secrecy, the failure of Christians to attend pagan public events, and the undermining of the pagan home and its authority. Celsus used Judaism as a weapon against Christianity to tarnish it by guilt by association, by provoking a hostile reaction to their mutual hostility to idolatry, and by the use of a Jewish figure to argue against, ridicule and mock Christian doctrine. As an eclectic Middle Platonist, Celsus used the many doctrines and beliefs from the various philosophical schools (especially Platonism, but also Stoicism, Epicureanism, and of Aristotle) to vigorously ridicule and attack Christianity and the simple faith of Christians, as opposed to the educated philosopher intellectual elites of his class. Celsus saw Christianity as a threat that deserved extermination, as in his view it was a grave danger to the continued vitality and success of the empire, and to pagan religious beliefs and to philosophy. From the discussion and the examples given, I submit that Celsus has in fact artfully used his book, *The True Doctrine*, to employ every means available to him from the culture of his day to attack, disparage, mock, ridicule, neutralize and destroy Christianity and to demonstrate the superiority of Hellenic culture.

Endnotes

¹ See, Graeme Clark, "Third-Century Christianity", in *The Crisis of Empire, A.D. 193-337*, vol. 12 of *The Cambridge Ancient History*, 2nd ed., ed. by Alan K. Bowman, Peter Garnsey and Averil Cameron, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 589-616.

² Mark Humphries, *Early Christianity*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 206 and 111-112.

³ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, trans. by Henry Chadwick, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 134.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Introduction by Henry Chadwick, ix.

⁵ *Ibid.*, xiii.

⁶ Bernhard Pick, "The Attack of Celsus On Christianity", *The Monist*, 21, (April 1911): 225.

⁷ Origen, Preface by Origen, 3.

⁸ Origen, Introduction by Chadwick, xiii.

⁹ Jeffrey W. Hargis, *Against the Christians: The Rise of Early Anti-Christian Polemic*, (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 17.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 59; the remainder of this paragraph reflects a summary of page 59, unless otherwise noted.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹² *Ibid.*, 61.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 24; this general approach is suggested in part by Hargis, pages 24-58, and in part by Pick, pages 227-264.

¹⁴ Origen, 38; 4, 7, and xxiii of the Introduction by Chadwick; also 129, par.1, 130, par. 3.

¹⁵ Avery Dulles, *A History of Apologetics*, (Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1999), 38.

¹⁶ Pick, 225.

¹⁷ This outline draws heavily from Pick, pages 227-264, and from Hargis, pages 24-58.

¹⁸ Origen, Preface by Origen, 3.

¹⁹ Origen, Introduction by Chadwick, xiv-xv.

²⁰ Origen, Preface by Origen, 5.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

²² Origen, See, e.g. 8, 66.

²³ *Ibid.*, 101.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 217.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 274 and 484.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 264.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 305.

²⁸ *Ibid.*; See, e.g. 273, 304, 471, 476, 477, and 484.

²⁹ Everett Ferguson, Editor, *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, vol. 846, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1990), 188.

³⁰ Origen, Introduction by Chadwick, xxii.

³¹ *Ibid.*, xxiii

³² Celsus, *On The True Doctrine: A Discourse Against the Christians*, Translated by R. Joseph Hoffmann, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 44.

³³ *Ibid.*, 45.

³⁴ Origen, Introduction by Chadwick, xxviii.

³⁵ Henry Chadwick, *The Church in Ancient Society*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 111.

³⁶ Hargis, 23.

³⁷ Origen, Introduction by Chadwick; xxii.

³⁸ Henry Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 22.

³⁹ Origen, Introduction by Chadwick, xxviii-xxix.

⁴⁰ Everett Ferguson, Editor, *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 188.

- ⁴¹ Ibid.; see, John Granger Cook, *The Interpretation of the Old Testament in Greco-Roman Paganism*, (Tubingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 55, 85-86.
- ⁴² Celsus, 29-30.
- ⁴³ A.J. Droge, "Self-definition vis-a-vie the Graeco-Roman World", in vol. 1, *The Cambridge History of Christianity: Origen to Constantine*, ed. By Margaret M. Mitchell and Frances M. Young, (New York: Cambridge University Press: 2006), 242.
- ⁴⁴ Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*, Rev. ed., (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 75.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., 76; Origen, Introduction by Chadwick, ix.
- ⁴⁶ Droge, 238.
- ⁴⁷ Origen, 7.
- ⁴⁸ Origen, Introduction by Chadwick, xvi.
- ⁴⁹ Origen, 17.
- ⁵⁰ Origen, Introduction by Chadwick; xvii; the remainder of this paragraph reflects a summary of p. xvii-xxi, unless otherwise noted.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., xix.
- ⁵² Chadwick, *The Church in Ancient Society*, 111.
- ⁵³ Ibid.
- ⁵⁴ Origen, Introduction by Chadwick, xxv.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., xxvi.
- ⁵⁶ Chadwick, *The Early Church*, 116.
- ⁵⁷ Celsus, 34-35.
- ⁵⁸ Ronald H. Nash, *The Gospel and the Greeks: Did the New Testament Borrow From Pagan Thought?*, 2d ed. (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Publishing Co., 2003), 10-11.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., 11.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., 12.
- ⁶¹ Ramsay MacMullen, *Paganism In The Roman Empire*, (Westford, Mass.: Yale University Press, 1981), 1.
- ⁶² Robert Turcan, *The Gods of Ancient Rome*, trans.by Antonia Nevill, (New York: Routledge, 2011), 2.
- ⁶³ Ibid., 5.
- ⁶⁴ Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*, 152; the remainder of this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 152-153, unless otherwise noted.
- ⁶⁵ A.J. Rayner, "Christian Society In The Roman Empire", *Greece and Rome*, 11 (May 1942), 113.
- ⁶⁶ Paul Fredriksen, "Christians In The Roman Empire in the First Three Centuries CE", in *Philosophy in the Roman Empire*, David Potter, ed., (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 590; the remainder of this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 590-593, unless otherwise noted.
- ⁶⁷ See, Robert Turcan, *The Gods of Ancient Rome*, for a detailed account of Roman religious practices.
- ⁶⁸ Molly Whittaker, *Jews & Christians: Graeco-Roman Views*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); unless otherwise noted, this paragraph summarizes pages 195-196.
- ⁶⁹ Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 3d ed., (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003); unless otherwise noted, this paragraph summarizes material from pages 153-157.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid.; this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 161-162 unless otherwise noted.
- ⁷¹ Whittaker, 196.
- ⁷² Ibid.
- ⁷³ Ibid., 197.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid., 197-198; see, Robert Turcan, *The Gods of Ancient Rome*, 14-18.
- ⁷⁷ Whittaker, 198.
- ⁷⁸ Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*; this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 178-182, unless otherwise noted.
- ⁷⁹ Ibid., 182; the remainder of this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 182-183, unless otherwise noted.

- ⁸⁰ Richard Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*, Rev. ed., (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 23; the remainder of this paragraph reflects a summary of page 23 unless otherwise noted.
- ⁸¹ Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*; this paragraph reflects a summary of page 593, unless otherwise noted.
- ⁸² Whittaker, 207.
- ⁸³ Martin Goodman, *The Roman World: 44 BC- AD 180*, (New York: Routledge, 1997); this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 299-301, unless otherwise noted.
- ⁸⁴ Whittaker, 209.
- ⁸⁵ David S. Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay: AD 180-395*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 6.
- ⁸⁶ Martin Goodman, *The Roman World: 44 BC- AD 180*, (New York: Routledge, 1997); this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 289-291, unless otherwise noted.
- ⁸⁷ Whittaker, 211; the remainder of this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 211-212, unless otherwise noted.
- ⁸⁸ Ibid., 214; the remainder of this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 214-215 and 217, unless otherwise noted.
- ⁸⁹ Ibid., 219.
- ⁹⁰ Ibid., 210; the remainder of this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 223-224, unless otherwise noted.
- ⁹¹ Ibid., 224.
- ⁹² Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*; this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 251-252, unless otherwise noted.
- ⁹³ Ronald N. Nash, *The Gospel and the Greeks: Did the New Testament Borrow from Pagan Thought?*, 2d ed., (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Publishing, 2003) 105.
- ⁹⁴ Ibid., 113; the remainder of this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 113-114, unless otherwise noted.
- ⁹⁵ Ibid., 121.
- ⁹⁶ Ibid., 122.
- ⁹⁷ Ibid., 123.
- ⁹⁸ Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 253.
- ⁹⁹ Nash, 123; the remainder of this paragraph summarizes pages 123-124, unless otherwise noted.
- ¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 123-124.
- ¹⁰¹ Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 254; for a detailed description of the initiations into the Eleusinian Mysteries, see pages 256-259.
- ¹⁰² Whittaker, 225.
- ¹⁰³ Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*; this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 259 and 265, unless otherwise noted.
- ¹⁰⁴ Nash, 124.
- ¹⁰⁵ Ibid.; the remainder of this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 125-126, unless otherwise noted.
- ¹⁰⁶ Ibid.; 126; the remainder of this paragraph reflects a summary of page 126, unless otherwise noted.
- ¹⁰⁷ Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 269.
- ¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 277; this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 277-278 and 280, unless otherwise noted.
- ¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 280.
- ¹¹⁰ Ibid.; this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 281-283, unless otherwise noted.
- ¹¹¹ Nash, 128-129; the remainder of this paragraph reflects a summary of page 130, unless otherwise noted.
- ¹¹² Ibid., 133; this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 133-136, unless otherwise noted.
- ¹¹³ Ibid., 135.
- ¹¹⁴ Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 295.
- ¹¹⁵ Nash, 200; the discussion of the Gnostics which follows reflects a summary of pages 200-210, unless otherwise noted; see also, Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 307-316.
- ¹¹⁶ Nash, 204.

- ¹¹⁷ Ibid.; this paragraph reflects a summary of p. 205-210, unless otherwise noted.
- ¹¹⁸ Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 320; the remainder of this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 320-326, unless otherwise noted.
- ¹¹⁹ Ibid., 326; unless otherwise noted, the remainder of this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 327-329.
- ¹²⁰ Ibid., 331; unless otherwise noted, the remainder of this paragraph reflects a summary of page 332.
- ¹²¹ Ibid., 332; unless otherwise noted, the remainder of this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 332-334.
- ¹²² Ibid., 334; unless otherwise noted, the remainder of this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 334-335.
- ¹²³ Nash, 22; the remainder of this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 23-28, unless otherwise noted.
- ¹²⁴ Ibid., 26.
- ¹²⁵ Ibid., 28; the remainder of this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 28-29, unless otherwise noted.
- ¹²⁶ Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 339.
- ¹²⁷ Nash, 35-36; the remainder of this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 36-42, unless otherwise noted.
- ¹²⁸ Ibid., 40.
- ¹²⁹ Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 346; the remainder of this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 346-348, unless otherwise noted.
- ¹³⁰ Ibid., 349; the remainder of this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 348-351, unless otherwise noted.
- ¹³¹ Ibid., 354; the remainder of this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 356-357, unless otherwise noted.
- ¹³² Ibid., 357; the remainder of this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 357-358, unless otherwise noted.
- ¹³³ Nash, 62.
- ¹³⁴ Ibid.
- ¹³⁵ Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 359; the remainder of this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 359-360, unless otherwise noted.
- ¹³⁶ Nash, 57; the remainder of this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 58-61, unless otherwise noted.
- ¹³⁷ Ibid.; 58-59.
- ¹³⁸ Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 369.
- ¹³⁹ Ibid., 370; the remainder of this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 373-374, unless otherwise noted.
- ¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 372.
- ¹⁴¹ Ibid., 374; the remainder of this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 374-377, unless otherwise noted.
- ¹⁴² Ibid., 377, note 92.
- ¹⁴³ Ibid., 379; the remainder of this paragraph reflects a summary of page 379, unless otherwise noted.
- ¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 380.
- ¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 382; unless otherwise noted, the remainder of this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 382-384.
- ¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 384.
- ¹⁴⁷ Nash, 46.
- ¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 47.
- ¹⁴⁹ Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 387-388; unless otherwise noted, the remainder of this paragraph reflects a summary of page 388.
- ¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 333.
- ¹⁵¹ Nash, 45.
- ¹⁵² Ibid.
- ¹⁵³ Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 390.

- ¹⁵⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 5-6.
- ¹⁵⁶ Ibid.; this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 23-24, unless otherwise noted.
- ¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 135.
- ¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 136.
- ¹⁵⁹ Ibid.; this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 109-113 unless otherwise noted.
- ¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 132; this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 132-133, unless otherwise noted.
- ¹⁶¹ Ibid.; this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 83-85, unless otherwise noted.
- ¹⁶² Ibid., 85.
- ¹⁶³ Ibid.; this paragraph reflects a summary from pages 40-41, unless otherwise noted.
- ¹⁶⁴ Ibid.; this paragraph reflects a summary from pages 43-44, unless otherwise noted.
- ¹⁶⁵ Ibid.; this paragraph reflects a summary from pages 49-55, unless otherwise noted.
- ¹⁶⁶ David S. Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay: AD 180-395*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 125.
- ¹⁶⁷ Pat Southern, *The Roman Army: A Social & Institutional History*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 160; this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 160-61, unless otherwise noted.
- ¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 160.
- ¹⁶⁹ Ibid.; this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 130-131, unless otherwise noted.
- ¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 131.
- ¹⁷¹ Ibid., 132.
- ¹⁷² Ibid., 133.
- ¹⁷³ Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 55; this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 55-59, unless otherwise noted.
- ¹⁷⁴ Ibid.; this paragraph reflects a summary of page 82, unless otherwise noted.
- ¹⁷⁵ Mason Hammond, "Economic Stagnation in the Early Roman Empire", *The Journal of Economic History*, 6 [Supplement: The Tasks of Economic History], (May 1946), 72.
- ¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 69.
- ¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 70.
- ¹⁷⁸ J.K. Evans, "Wheat Production and Its Social Consequences in the Roman World", *The Classical Quarterly*, New Series, 31, (1981), 429.
- ¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 428.
- ¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 441.
- ¹⁸¹ Ibid.
- ¹⁸² Hammond, 72.
- ¹⁸³ Ibid., 71.
- ¹⁸⁴ Brent D. Shaw, "Bandits in the Roman Empire", *Past and Present*, 105 (November 1984), 9.
- ¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 10.
- ¹⁸⁶ Michael Grant, *The Antonines: The Roman Empire in Transition*, (New York: Routledge, 1996), 148.
- ¹⁸⁷ J.F. Gilliam, "The Plague Under Marcus Aurelius", *The American Journal of Philology*, 82, (July 1961), 249.
- ¹⁸⁸ Rodney Starke, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 73.
- ¹⁸⁹ Mary T. Boatwright, et al, *The Romans: From Village to Empire*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 394.
- ¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 231.
- ¹⁹¹ Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization: Part III Caesar and Christ*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1944), 429.
- ¹⁹² Boatwright, et al, 231.
- ¹⁹³ Potter, 17.
- ¹⁹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁹⁵ Michael Grant, *The Antonines: The Roman Empire in Transition*, (New York: Routledge, 1996), 32.
- ¹⁹⁶ Ibid.; this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 30-32, unless otherwise noted.

- ¹⁹⁷ Michael Grant, *The Army of the Caesars*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974), 246.
- ¹⁹⁸ Ibid.; this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 246-247, unless otherwise noted.
- ¹⁹⁹ Michael Grant, *The Antonines: The Roman Empire in Transition*, 35.
- ²⁰⁰ Ibid., 36.
- ²⁰¹ Ibid.
- ²⁰² Ibid.
- ²⁰³ Ibid., 50.
- ²⁰⁴ Robert M. Grant, *Greek Apologists of the Second Century*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988), 78.
- ²⁰⁵ Ibid., 80-81.
- ²⁰⁶ Michael Grant, *The Antonines: The Roman Empire in Transition*, 51.
- ²⁰⁷ David S. Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay: AD 180-395*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 86.
- ²⁰⁸ Ibid., 87.
- ²⁰⁹ Michael Grant, *The Army of the Caesars*, 247.
- ²¹⁰ Ibid., 248.
- ²¹¹ Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*, Rev. ed., (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 68.
- ²¹² Mark Humphries, *Early Christianity*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 199.
- ²¹³ Chadwick, *The Early Church*, 54-55.
- ²¹⁴ Ibid., 24.
- ²¹⁵ Ibid.
- ²¹⁶ Ibid., 29.
- ²¹⁷ Ibid., 68.
- ²¹⁸ Ibid., 28.
- ²¹⁹ Paul Keresztes, *Imperial Rome and the Christians*, (Lanham, MD.: University Press of America, 1989); this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 123-125, unless otherwise noted; see also, Paul Keresztes, "Marcus Aurelius a Persecutor?", *Harvard Theological Review*, 61 (1968), 322-323.
- ²²⁰ Stephen Benko, *Pagan Rome and the Early Christians*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 4.
- ²²¹ Keresztes, *Imperial Rome and the Christians*, 148.; see also pages 328-329 of his journal article, "Marcus Aurelius a Persecutor", above.
- ²²² Ibid., *Imperial Rome and the Christians*, 134; see also pages 330-332 of his journal article, "Marcus Aurelius a Persecutor", above.
- ²²³ Michael Grant, *The Antonines: The Roman Empire in Transition*, 45.
- ²²⁴ Ibid.; see also, Paul Keresztes, *Imperial Rome and the Christians*, 125.
- ²²⁵ Michael Grant, *The Antonines: The Roman Empire in Transition*, 45.
- ²²⁶ Ibid., 46; Chadwick, *The Early Church*, 91, puts the number at 12.
- ²²⁷ Robert M. Grant, *Greek Apologists of the Second Century*, 112.
- ²²⁸ Ibid., 113.
- ²²⁹ Ibid., 93.
- ²³⁰ Ibid., 100.
- ²³¹ William R. Schoedel, "Christian 'Atheism' and the Peace of the Roman Empire", *Church History*, 42, (Sept 1973), 317.
- ²³² Ibid.
- ²³³ Michael Grant, *The Antonines: The Roman Empire in Transition*, 44.
- ²³⁴ Ibid., 42.
- ²³⁵ Ibid., 46.
- ²³⁶ Chadwick, *The Early Church*, 29.
- ²³⁷ Origen, 17.
- ²³⁸ Ibid., 21.
- ²³⁹ Ibid., 495.
- ²⁴⁰ Ibid., Chadwick's Introduction, xvii.
- ²⁴¹ Ibid., xix.
- ²⁴² Origen, 283.

- ²⁴³ Ibid., 8.
²⁴⁴ Ibid., 7.
²⁴⁵ Ibid., 464.
²⁴⁶ Jeffrey W. Hargis, *Against the Christians: The Rise of Early Anti-Christian Polemic*, (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 25.
²⁴⁷ Origen, 446.
²⁴⁸ Ibid., 467.
²⁴⁹ Hargis, 25; the remainder of this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 25-27, unless otherwise noted.
²⁵⁰ Origen, 469.
²⁵¹ Ibid., 165-166.
²⁵² Hargis, 27.
²⁵³ Ibid.
²⁵⁴ Origen, 289.
²⁵⁵ Ibid., 199.
²⁵⁶ Ibid.
²⁵⁷ Ibid., 200.
²⁵⁸ Ibid., 7.
²⁵⁹ Hargis, 34.
²⁶⁰ Origen, 7.
²⁶¹ Hargis.
²⁶² Origen, 129.
²⁶³ Ibid., 131.
²⁶⁴ Ibid., 22.
²⁶⁵ Ibid., 26.
²⁶⁶ Ibid., 66.
²⁶⁷ Ibid., 27.
²⁶⁸ Ibid., 131.
²⁶⁹ Louis H. Feldman, "Origen's *Contra Celsum* and Josephus' *Contra Apionem*: The Issue of Jewish Origins", *Vigiliae Christianae*, 44, (June 1990), 112.
²⁷⁰ Hargis, 35.
²⁷¹ Origen, 16, 17.
²⁷² Hargis, 36.
²⁷³ Origen, 206-207.
²⁷⁴ Ibid., 28.
²⁷⁵ Ibid.
²⁷⁶ Ibid., 31.
²⁷⁷ Ibid., 78.
²⁷⁸ Ibid., 53.
²⁷⁹ Ibid., 60.
²⁸⁰ Ibid., 56.
²⁸¹ Ibid., 57.
²⁸² Ibid., 62.
²⁸³ Ibid., 10.
²⁸⁴ Ibid., 73.
²⁸⁵ Ibid., 90.
²⁸⁶ Ibid.
²⁸⁷ Ibid., 101.
²⁸⁸ Ibid., 39.
²⁸⁹ Ibid., 47.
²⁹⁰ Ibid., 56.
²⁹¹ Ibid., 60.

²⁹² Ibid., 62-63.
²⁹³ Ibid., 64.
²⁹⁴ Ibid., 388-389.
²⁹⁵ Ibid., 64.
²⁹⁶ Ibid., 192.
²⁹⁷ Ibid., 192-193.
²⁹⁸ Ibid., 195.
²⁹⁹ Ibid., 227.
³⁰⁰ Ibid.
³⁰¹ Ibid., 233.
³⁰² Ibid.
³⁰³ Ibid., 386.
³⁰⁴ Ibid.
³⁰⁵ Ibid., 405.
³⁰⁶ Ibid., 68-69.
³⁰⁷ Ibid., 71.
³⁰⁸ Ibid., 73.
³⁰⁹ Ibid., 77.
³¹⁰ Ibid., 78.
³¹¹ Ibid., 81.
³¹² Ibid., 82.
³¹³ Ibid., 84.
³¹⁴ Ibid., 87.
³¹⁵ Ibid., 90.
³¹⁶ Ibid.
³¹⁷ Ibid., 91.
³¹⁸ Ibid.
³¹⁹ Ibid., 92.
³²⁰ Ibid., 93.
³²¹ Ibid.
³²² Ibid.
³²³ Ibid., 94.
³²⁴ Ibid., 95.
³²⁵ Ibid., 97.
³²⁶ Ibid., 98.
³²⁷ Ibid., 99.
³²⁸ Ibid., 101.
³²⁹ Ibid.
³³⁰ Ibid., 102.
³³¹ Ibid.
³³² Ibid., 104 and 108.
³³³ Ibid., 109.
³³⁴ Ibid., 118.
³³⁵ Ibid., 109.
³³⁶ Ibid., 113.
³³⁷ Ibid., 114 and 117.
³³⁸ Ibid., 120.
³³⁹ Ibid., 122.
³⁴⁰ Ibid.
³⁴¹ Ibid., 123.
³⁴² Ibid.

- ³⁴³ Ibid., 126.
³⁴⁴ Ibid., 127.
³⁴⁵ Ibid.; 131.
³⁴⁶ Ibid., 134.
³⁴⁷ Ibid., 135.
³⁴⁸ Ibid., 136.
³⁴⁹ Ibid., 138.
³⁵⁰ Ibid., 139.
³⁵¹ Ibid., 158.
³⁵² Ibid., 162 and 164.
³⁵³ Ibid., 170.
³⁵⁴ Ibid., 172.
³⁵⁵ Ibid., 176.
³⁵⁶ Ibid.
³⁵⁷ Ibid., 180.
³⁵⁸ Ibid., 184.
³⁵⁹ Ibid., 185.
³⁶⁰ Ibid., 186.
³⁶¹ Ibid.
³⁶² Ibid., 187.
³⁶³ Ibid., 189.
³⁶⁴ Ibid., 190.
³⁶⁵ Ibid., 192.
³⁶⁶ Ibid., 192-193.
³⁶⁷ Ibid., 195.
³⁶⁸ Ibid.
³⁶⁹ Ibid., 264.
³⁷⁰ Ibid., 266.
³⁷¹ Ibid., 209.
³⁷² Ibid., 211-212.
³⁷³ Ibid., 217.
³⁷⁴ Ibid., 218.
³⁷⁵ Ibid., 220.
³⁷⁶ Ibid., 223.
³⁷⁷ Ibid., 224.
³⁷⁸ Ibid., 225.
³⁷⁹ Ibid., 227.
³⁸⁰ Ibid., 233.
³⁸¹ Ibid., 234.
³⁸² Ibid., 236.
³⁸³ Ibid., 238.
³⁸⁴ Ibid., 243.
³⁸⁵ Ibid., 262.
³⁸⁶ Ibid.
³⁸⁷ Silke-Petra Bergjan, "Celsus the Epicurean? The Interpretation of an Argument in Origen, *Contra Celsum*", *Harvard Theological Review*, 94, (April 2001), 179; the remainder of this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 188-189, unless otherwise noted.
³⁸⁸ Ibid., 190, and see footnotes 48-49 of the article.
³⁸⁹ Origen, 251.
³⁹⁰ Ibid., 262.
³⁹¹ Bergjan, 198.

³⁹² Origen, 310.
³⁹³ Ibid., 265, 266.
³⁹⁴ Ibid., 267.
³⁹⁵ Ibid., 297.
³⁹⁶ Ibid., 289.
³⁹⁷ Ibid., 305.
³⁹⁸ Ibid., 12.
³⁹⁹ Ibid., 162.
⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 316.
⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 317.
⁴⁰² Ibid., 327.
⁴⁰³ Ibid., 428-429.
⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., 315.
⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.
⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 317.
⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., 320.
⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., 323.
⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., 325.
⁴¹⁰ Ibid.
⁴¹¹ Ibid., 327.
⁴¹² Ibid., 326.
⁴¹³ Ibid., 325.
⁴¹⁴ Ibid., 327.
⁴¹⁵ Ibid., 317, 318.
⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 321.
⁴¹⁷ Ibid.
⁴¹⁸ Ibid., 328.
⁴¹⁹ Ibid.
⁴²⁰ Ibid., 329.
⁴²¹ Ibid., 331.
⁴²² Ibid., 332.
⁴²³ Ibid., 333.
⁴²⁴ Ibid., 333, 337.
⁴²⁵ Ibid., 335.
⁴²⁶ Ibid., 336.
⁴²⁷ Ibid.
⁴²⁸ Ibid., 354.
⁴²⁹ Ibid., 343.
⁴³⁰ Ibid., 355.
⁴³¹ Ibid.
⁴³² Ibid., 355-356.
⁴³³ Ibid., 357.
⁴³⁴ Ibid.
⁴³⁵ Ibid., 357.
⁴³⁶ Ibid., 365.
⁴³⁷ Ibid., 366.
⁴³⁸ Ibid., 367.
⁴³⁹ Ibid., 368.
⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., 369.
⁴⁴¹ Ibid., 370.
⁴⁴² Ibid., 375.

- ⁴⁴³ Ibid.
⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., 376.
⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., 377.
⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., 378.
⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., 332.
⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., 379.
⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., 380.
⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., 381.
⁴⁵¹ Ibid., 383.
⁴⁵² Ibid., 385.
⁴⁵³ Ibid., 386.
⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.
⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.
⁴⁵⁶ Ibid., 388-389.
⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., 391.
⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., 396, 401.
⁴⁵⁹ Ibid., 396.
⁴⁶⁰ Ibid., 402.
⁴⁶¹ Ibid.
⁴⁶² Ibid., 403.
⁴⁶³ Ibid., 404.
⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., 405.
⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., 406.
⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.
⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., 408.
⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., 409.
⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.
⁴⁷⁰ Ibid.
⁴⁷¹ Ibid., 417.
⁴⁷² Ibid., 419.
⁴⁷³ Ibid., 421.
⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., 422.
⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.
⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., 423.
⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., 424, 427.
⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., 140.
⁴⁷⁹ Harry Y. Gamble, "Euhemerism and Christology in Origen: *Contra Celsum* III 22-43", *Vigiliae Christianae*, 33, (March 1979), 16-17.
⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., 12.
⁴⁸¹ Ibid., 15; the remainder of this paragraph reflects a summary of pages 15-22, unless otherwise noted.
⁴⁸² Origen, 152.
⁴⁸³ Ibid., 155.
⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., 156.
⁴⁸⁵ Gamble, 22.
⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., 420.
⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., 488.
⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.
⁴⁸⁹ Ibid., 491.
⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., 488.
⁴⁹¹ Ibid., 488, 489.
⁴⁹² Ibid., 426.

- ⁴⁹³ Ibid., 428-429.
⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 429.
⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., 429, 431.
⁴⁹⁶ Ibid.
⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., 430, 433.
⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., 423.
⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., 433.
⁵⁰⁰ Robert J. Hauck, "They Saw What They Said They Saw: Sense Knowledge in Early Christian Polemic", *Harvard Theological Review*, 81, (Jul 1988), 240; what follows in the remainder of this paragraph is a summary of pages 240-244, unless otherwise noted.
⁵⁰¹ Origen, 112.
⁵⁰² Ibid., 433.
⁵⁰³ Ibid.
⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., 438.
⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., 443.
⁵⁰⁶ Ibid.
⁵⁰⁷ Ibid., 444.
⁵⁰⁸ Ibid., 446-447.
⁵⁰⁹ Ibid.
⁵¹⁰ Ibid., 450.
⁵¹¹ Ibid., 454.
⁵¹² Ibid., 451.
⁵¹³ Ibid., 477.
⁵¹⁴ Ibid., 454.
⁵¹⁵ Ibid., 460.
⁵¹⁶ Ibid., 461.
⁵¹⁷ Ibid., 462.
⁵¹⁸ Ibid., 462-463.
⁵¹⁹ Ibid., 463.
⁵²⁰ Howard M. Jackson, "The Setting and Sectarian Provenance of the Fragment of the 'Celestial Dialogue' Preserved by Origen from Celsus' *Alethes Logos*", *Harvard Theological Review*, 85, (July 1992), 275.
⁵²¹ Ibid., 282.
⁵²² Ibid., 283-300.
⁵²³ Origen, 480.
⁵²⁴ Ibid., 481.
⁵²⁵ Ibid.
⁵²⁶ Ibid., 484-485.
⁵²⁷ Ibid., 500.
⁵²⁸ Ibid., 501.
⁵²⁹ Ibid., 502.
⁵³⁰ Ibid., 503.
⁵³¹ Ibid., 464.
⁵³² Ibid., 467.
⁵³³ Ibid., 469.
⁵³⁴ Ibid., 502.
⁵³⁵ Ibid., 471.
⁵³⁶ Ibid., 476.
⁵³⁷ Ibid., 493.
⁵³⁸ Ibid.
⁵³⁹ Schoedel, 312 and 315.
⁵⁴⁰ Origen, 504.

- ⁵⁴¹ Ibid., 505.
⁵⁴² Ibid.
⁵⁴³ Ibid.
⁵⁴⁴ Ibid., 507.
⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., 509.
⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., 510.
⁵⁴⁷ Boatwright, et al, 433.
⁵⁴⁸ Ibid.
⁵⁴⁹ Ibid; A.H.M. Jones, "Inflation Under the Roman Empire", *The Economic History Review*, 5, (1953), 296.
⁵⁵⁰ Chadwick, *The Early Church*, 29.
⁵⁵¹ Ibid.
⁵⁵² Schoedel, 317.
⁵⁵³ Chadwick, *The Early Church*, 29.
⁵⁵⁴ Ibid.
⁵⁵⁵ Origen, 134.
⁵⁵⁶ Ibid., 8.
⁵⁵⁷ Ibid., Introduction by Chadwick, xvi.
⁵⁵⁸ Ibid., xx.
⁵⁵⁹ Ibid., xxi.
⁵⁶⁰ Ibid., xxii; Origen, 509-510.
⁵⁶¹ Origen, 505.
⁵⁶² Ibid., 297, 23.
⁵⁶³ Ibid., 283.
⁵⁶⁴ Ibid., 7.
⁵⁶⁵ Ibid.
⁵⁶⁶ Ibid., 12.
⁵⁶⁷ Ibid., 27.
⁵⁶⁸ Ibid., 139.
⁵⁶⁹ Ibid., 176.
⁵⁷⁰ Ibid., 162.
⁵⁷¹ Ibid., 426.
⁵⁷² Ibid., 428-429.
⁵⁷³ Ibid., 431.
⁵⁷⁴ Ibid., 433.
⁵⁷⁵ Ibid.
⁵⁷⁶ Ibid.
⁵⁷⁷ Ibid., 211-212; 375-376.
⁵⁷⁸ Ibid., 217.
⁵⁷⁹ Ibid., 218-221.
⁵⁸⁰ Ibid., 409.
⁵⁸¹ Ibid.
⁵⁸² Ibid., 389.
⁵⁸³ Ibid., 95.
⁵⁸⁴ Ibid., 190.
⁵⁸⁵ Ibid., 109-111, 194, 213-215, 218, 226, 418-419.
⁵⁸⁶ See page 46 this paper.
⁵⁸⁷ Origen, 190; see also re Stoic cycles 237-238.
⁵⁸⁸ Ibid., 385.
⁵⁸⁹ Ibid., 243.
⁵⁹⁰ See footnotes 386- 387, this paper.
⁵⁹¹ See footnote 479 and pages 112-113, this paper.

⁵⁹² See, page 106 and footnotes 515-516, this paper; Origen, 306, 368, 387-388, 462-463.

⁵⁹³ Origen, 311.

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 312.

⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁸ See First Corinthians, chapters 1, 11, 15 and Second Timothy, chapter 2 (verses 16-19).

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Origen. *Contra Celsum*. Translated by Henry Chadwick. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980.

Secondary Sources and Sources Consulted

Benko, Stephen. *Pagan Rome and the Early Christians*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.

Boatwright, Mary, Gargola, Daniel J., Lenski, Noel, and Talbert, Richard J.A. *The Romans: From Village to Empire*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Celsus. *On the True Doctrine: A Discourse Against the Christians*. Translated by R. Joseph Hoffman. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Chadwick, Henry. *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition*. New York: Clarendon Press, 1984.

_____. "Origen, Celsus and the Stoa." *Journal of Theological Studies*. 48 (1947): 34-49.

_____. *The Church in Ancient Society*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

_____. *The Early Church*. Rev. ed. New York: Penguin Books, 1993.

Clark, Graeme. "Third-Century Christianity." In *The Crisis of Empire, A.D. 193-337*, vol. 12 of *The Cambridge Ancient History*, edited by Alan K. Bowman, Peter Garnsey and Averil Cameron, 589-671. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Cook, John Granger. *The Interpretation of the Old Testament in Greco-Roman Paganism*. Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2004.

Droge, A.J. "Self-definition vis-a-vie the Graeco-Roman World." In *The Cambridge History of Christianity: Origen to Constantine*, vol. 1, edited by Margaret M.

- Mitchell and Frances M. Young, 230-244. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Dulles, Avery. *A History of Apologetics*. Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1999.
- Durant, Will. *The Story of Civilization: Part III Caesar and Christ*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1944.
- Evans, J.K. "Wheat Production and Its Social Consequences in the Early Roman Empire." *The Classical Quarterly, New Series*. 31 (1981): 428-442.
- Feldman, Louis H. "Origen's Contra Celsum and Josephus' Contra Apionem: The Issue of Jewish Origins." *Vigiliae Christianae*. 44 (June 1990): 105-135.
- Ferguson, Everett. *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*. 3d ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003.
- _____. Editor. *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*. vol. 846 Garland Reference Library of the Humanities. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1990.
- Fredriksen, Paul. "Christians in the Roman Empire in the First Three Centuries CE." In *Philosophy In the Roman Empire*. Edited by David Potter. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006.
- Gamble, Harry Y. "Euhemerism and Christology in Origen: *Contra Celsum* III 22-43." *Vigiliae Christianae*. 33 (March 1979): 12-29.
- Gilliam, J.F. "The Plague Under Marcus Aurelius." *The American Journal of Philology*. 82 (July 1961): 225-251.
- Goodman, Martin. *The Roman World: 44 BC-AD 180*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Grant, Michael. *The Antioines: The Roman Empire in Transition*. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- _____. *The Army of the Caesars*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974.

Grant, Robert M. *Greek Apologists of the Second Century*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988.

Hammond, Mason. "Economic Stagnation in the Early Roman Empire." *The Journal of Economic History*. 6 (Supplement: "The Tasks of Economic History") (May 1946): 63-90.

Hargis, Jeffrey W. *Against the Christians: The Rise of Early Anti-Christian Polemic*. New York: Peter Lang, 1999.

Hauck, Robert J. "They Saw What They Said They Saw: Sense Knowledge in Early Christian Polemic." *The Harvard Theological Review*. 81 (Jul 1988): 239-249.

Humphries, Mark. *Early Christianity*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Jackson, Howard M. "The Setting and Sectarian Provenance of the Fragment of the 'Celestial Dialogue' Preserved by Origen from Celsus' *Alethes Logos*." *Harvard Theological Review*. 85 (July 1992): 273-305.

Jones, A. H. M. "Inflation Under the Roman Empire." *The Economic History Review*. 5 (1953): 293-318.

Keresztes, Paul. *Imperial Rome and the Christians*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989.

_____. "Marcus Aurelius A Persecutor?" *Harvard Theological Review*. 61 (1968): 321-341.

Krautheimer, Richard. *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*. Rev. ed. New York: Penguin Books, 1981.

MacMullen, Ramsay. *Paganism In The Roman Empire*. Westford, MA: Yale University Press, 1981.

Nash, Ronald H. *The Gospel and the Greeks: Did the New Testament Borrow From Pagan*

- Thought?* Second ed. Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Publishing Co., 2003.
- Pick, Bernhard. "The Attack of Celsus On Christianity." *The Monist*. 21 (April 1911): 223-266.
- Potter, David S. *The Roman Empire at Bay: AD 180-395*. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Rayner, A.J. "Christian Society In The Roman Empire." *Greece and Rome*. 11 (May 1942): 113-123.
- Schoedel, William R. "Christian 'Atheism' and the Peace of the Roman Empire." *Church History*. 42 (September 1973): 309-319.
- Shaw, Brent D. "Bandits in the Roman Empire." *Past and Present*. 105 (November 1984): 3-52.
- Southern, Pat. *The Roman Army: A Social & Institutional History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Stark, Rodney. *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.
- Turcan, Robert. *The Gods of Ancient Rome*. Translated by Antonia Nevill. New York: Routledge, 2011.
- Whittaker, Molly. *Jews and Christians: Graeco-Roman Views*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

