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Against Celsus: Piety in Context

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores Celsus's and Origen's differing understandings of what it means to be "pious" (ἅγιος). Celsus conceived of tradition as the norm for determining piety. On the other hand, Origen maintained that the true norm was found in the Logos and Wisdom of God—i.e., Jesus. This dichotomy of understanding is consistent with the backdrop of the religious revolution happening in the Roman world during the early centuries CE proposed by scholars like Guy Stroumsa.

While this thesis does not aim to prove or fully expound on the religious revolution, it will use the shift in religious thought as a heuristic tool for analyzing *Against Celsus*, in order to show that Celsus's and Origen's dialogue proves to be an apt illustration of the religious revolution. Celsus focuses on maintaining tradition in order to uphold the foundations of society, whereas Origen focuses on the individual's heart in the matter of proper piety and the upholding of society. This dichotomy of village/state versus individual outlook for religion is in line with the proposed religious revolution and thus lends some credence to the proposal.

Against Celsus:

Piety in Context

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CHAPTER I

PIETY IN CONTEXT

Origen's apologetic work *Against Celsus* has often been used in scholarship to construct a Pagan-Christian religious dichotomy.¹ While that dichotomy aids in understanding *Against Celsus*, the Pagan-Christian distinction is not the only aid that could be applied. Additionally, it is helpful to read *Against Celsus* as a thoughtful dialogue on religion between two philosophers who share a Platonist background.² This thesis will explore the idea that while both Celsus and Origen think that "true doctrine" entails the practice of proper piety as reason demands, Origen works with a different norm for piety—Jesus—while Celsus uses the popular norm—Tradition. These differing norms illustrate a shift in religious thought in the Roman world during the early Common

1. While I use the word "often," the Pagan-Christian dichotomy is what *Against Celsus* is mainly known for. The work being an apologetic makes the Pagan-Christian label easy and apt to apply. As Henri Crouzel states it, "*Contre Celse* d'Origène qui nous présente l'affrontement de deux personnalités de haut niveau intellectuel et religieux, le païen Celse et le chrétien Origène." Henri Crouzel, "Conviction intérieure et aspect extérieurs de la religion chez Celse et Origène," *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique* 77 (1976): 83.

2. A major question concerning Celsus is whether he is one of the Epicurean Celsi, as Origen claims, or some other Middle Platonist philosopher, as the argument of and use of Plato by Celsus would suggest. In a recent article, Silke-Petra Bergjan contends that the question of Celsus's philosophical school is no longer a controversial topic. If we take what Origen says about Celsus at face value, the most likely candidate that we know of is the Epicurean Celsus mentioned in Lucian's *Alexander, the False Prophet* (cf. 25, 43, and 61). The problem is that Celsus does not sound Epicurean -- a fact which Origen himself points out several times in *Against Celsus*. In I.8, Origen claims that Celsus merely hides his Epicureanism, since not to do so would make the argument run foul. Bergjan suggests that Origen was using the term in reference not to any Epicurean tenet, but instead as a device to characterize Celsus in relation to his view that God does not care for individual humans. This becomes a means to sharpen the polemical argument by calling the Platonist Celsus an Epicurean. Further, it has been suggested that Celsus is an eclectic Platonist, who may at one time have been an Epicurean. Silke-Petra Bergjan, "Celsus the Epicurean? the interpretation of an argument in Origen, *Contra Celsum*," *Harvard Theological Review* 94, no. 2 (April 1, 2001): 179-204, 181.

Era. Moreover, the dialogue between the two philosophers presents an opportunity to examine the differences in the lines of thought on each side of the alleged transformation.

Scholars, such as Guy Stroumsa, have proposed that in the first few centuries of the Common Era the Roman world experienced a shift in religious thought that entailed the development and impact of Christianity but occurred in a broader frame than just Christianity. With the rise of more individual-centered religions that encouraged personal growth like Christianity and the Isis Cult, many in the Roman world were increasingly experiencing religion as something other than formal, obligatory, state-sponsored activity.³ As broadly understood and practiced, religion was finding a new emphasis on personal moral reformation—i.e., a conversion from the practices of the world to practices deemed fit by the cult—alongside reverence for the divine. That is to say, in many respects, the norm for determining religious piety was changing. This change is evident also in *Against Celsus*, as both Origen and Celsus call people to piety, yet understand it differently.

That is not to say that Origen is the originator of the shift in religious thought, nor that Origen was even aware of such a change occurring around him and perhaps within him. Origen may very well have been participating in the social transformation unawares. I mention the transformation of religious thought as a backdrop against which to view *Against Celsus*. This thesis does not attempt to bear the burden of proving the occurrence of an alleged religious transformation, since doing so is beyond the scope of this thesis.

3. Guy G. Stroumsa, *Barbarian Philosophy: The Religious Revolution of Early Christianity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999). Stroumsa gives a helpful, brief overview of the historiography of the proposed religious revolution. His work is recommended for further investigation of the topic. A good example of this shift for the Isis cult is Apuleius's *The Golden Ass*. However, with that said, this thesis's focus is on the Christian side.

For my purposes, the shift is not important in and of itself, but the construct of a shift will provide a tool to aid in exploring Celsus's and Origen's ideas in a distinctive way that will contribute to our understanding of their ideas and the text itself by allowing one to more easily move away from the backdrop of Pagan-Christian to a backdrop of Pre-/Post-shift. The heuristic use of the proposed religious transformation as an analytical tool may also be seen as a partial test of the proposal. Depending on the extent to which it proves to be an apt tool for better understanding *Against Celsus* as a major expression of competing religious ideologies during the period in question, this partial test could possibly support the proposal or call it into question.

Regrettably, Celsus's work itself is lost to us. However, Origen's counter seems to have saved a good portion of Celsus's *True Doctrine*, though the exact amount it preserves is still debated.⁴ While Origen is certainly hostile towards Celsus's ideas, we may presume that he gives a fair treatment to Celsus and his work, as far as citing it accurately and representing its basic contents. From looking at the character of Origen's writing, Origen's arguments against Celsus focus on what Celsus actually asserts rather than depending on a false picture of Celsus' viewpoints. On occasion, Origen even writes that Celsus had a small glimpse of truth, if only daemons had not clouded his mind (e.g., *Cels.* VIII.43). However, until a copy of *True Doctrine* is found, we can only work from the quotes derived from *Against Celsus*. With that said, it is more productive to assume Origen's fairness in citing Celsus unless strong evidence suggests otherwise.

4. Henry Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), xxii. Many scholars think that enough is preserved to recreate the work. Neumann suggests as much as 90% of the work has been saved. For example, Joseph Hoffman has published his recreation in English. Hoffmann, R. Joseph, tr., *Celsus On The True Doctrine: A Discourse Against the Christians* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). However, Origen readily shows that he omits or abbreviates (cf. II.32, II.79, VI.22, etc.).

Un Dialogue de Sourds

Guy Stroumsa describes *Against Celsus* as *un dialogue de sourds*. Stroumsa suggests that Origen and Celsus talk past one another due to the religious revolution he is proposing.⁵ In Stroumsa's view, this *dialogue de sourds* was due to a shift in religious thought that led Origen to a different understanding of piety than Celsus held—they are talking about different things. According to Stroumsa, “For Celsus, religion is above all a matter of cultural tradition. For Origen, it is a matter of truth. While the former is a radical relativist, the latter supports a new form of religion ...” And again, “Celsus’s religion is a central attribute of the state and of society, and is the business of citizens, who try to strengthen social structures. For Origen, it is in the human heart that the true religion is implanted, which calls for revolt against the state of things.”⁶ Stroumsa contends that Celsus sees religion solely as the work of citizenship. While on the other hand, Origen has religion focus on the human person.

Stroumsa's description sums up the shift, but too strongly. Celsus is not unconcerned with truth. As Celsus conceives of truth, the Christians have deviated from the truth by not following the tradition. This observation calls for a qualification of Stroumsa's conclusions. As will be shown, Origen and Celsus have different goals and different norms in mind when it comes to truth and piety, yet each is concerned with both truth and piety.⁷ By his norm, Celsus calls the Christians back to the customs of the state as piety demanded of all, and therefore back to the truth as normed by the tradition given

5. Stroumsa, *Barbarian Philosophy*, 44-45.

6. Idem, *The End of Sacrifice: Religious Transformations in Late Antiquity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 102-03.

7. Piety is defined in the next section.

by the Overseers. For his part, Origen defends Christianity with a different norm for piety. That different norm is the perfect moral example of Jesus Christ. If they were having a *dialogue de sourds*, it was not simply because Origen failed to understand Celsus or that Celsus was unconcerned with truth. Instead, the *dialogue de sourds* is due to the different approaches to reaching the truth. Because they are on different sides of the religious transformation with its differing norm for judging religious truth, Origen and Celsus use different toolsets in their attempts to call people to their respective ideas of religious truth. The two differ in intent in that Celsus is calling Christians to return to tradition, while Origen reinforces the truth of Christianity and its superiority to Celsus's tradition. Yet they both intend to bring people to the truth though through different approaches.

Therefore, we must nuance our understanding of the debate between the two, more so than Stroumsa's terse prose allows.

In his own right, Origen engages the text he receives. The dialogue Origen initiates is not one of free, two-way communication, but still provides insight into the two perspectives the text represents. Further analysis of those two perspectives will confirm Stroumsa's basic observations concerning the religious transformation, as we will see, while requiring greater nuance. With that said, this thesis will further examine *Against Celsus* by analyzing the matter of differing norms for religious truth, i.e., the norm of tradition proposed by Celsus and the norm of the Logos of God proposed by Origen.

Piety and True Doctrine

Before discussing Celsus's and Origen's norms for piety, it will be useful to conduct a brief survey of previous definitions so that we may have a better understanding of the dialogue. A full study of the concepts and terms associated with piety is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, even a few examples will aid our understanding of the conceptual and terminological contexts in which Celsus and Origen are working. For this task, Plato and Cicero provide helpful and appropriate points of departure.

Whereas the English "piety" is commonly used to render εὐσέβεια, another word under consideration here is ὅσιος.⁸ A review of the glosses and contexts cited in the venerable Liddell-Scott-Jones shows that the two words overlap a good deal in usage. One way in which they differ is that ὅσιος does not normally denote reverence towards the gods as εὐσέβεια does. Instead, ὅσιος refers to the decrees of the gods or the worship owed to the divine by humans. When used of a human, instead of the decrees themselves, ὅσιος denotes a person who keeps the decrees of the gods and recognizes the difference between δίκαια (something within the regulations of humans) and ἱερός (that which belongs to the gods alone).⁹ Such a person who upholds the decrees of the gods can rightly be called "pious." Recognizing the difference in nuance between εὐσέβεια and ὅσιος, this thesis will use forms of the word "piety" to translate ὅσιος and its related words. This translation of ὅσιος as piety will also be consistent with Henry Chadwick's translation. The term εὐσέβεια will keep its traditional gloss as "piety" as well. Both terms have a slightly different nuance. Yet, they are both covered under the umbrella of

8. Both εὐσέβεια and ὅσιος are used throughout *Against Celsus*.

9. *Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. "ὅσιος," <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/lsg/#eid=77915&context=lsj&action=from-search>.

the word “piety,” as the English word refers to both reverence for God and the upholding of God’s law. At least in the works cited in this thesis, the two terms seem to be used almost interchangeably at times by the authors. To enable us to distinguish more clearly the concepts as they occur in *Against Celsus*, the Greek word will be provided alongside the English.

We may gain a firmer grasp on the common meanings of ὅσιος by consulting Plato. Plato’s *Euthyphro* is a classic treatment of the meaning of piety. On his way to answer Meletus’s charges of inventing new gods and corrupting the youth, Socrates meets Euthyphro in the Royal Stoa. Euthyphro is also embroiled in a lawsuit. The two of them engage in a discussion of the nature of piety and impiety. Having been charged with impiety (τὸ ἀνόσιον), Socrates questions Euthyphro, hoping for enlightenment on the topic of piety. Euthyphro, an expert in theology, tells Socrates, “Piety (ὅσιος), then, is that which is dear to the gods, and impiety (ἀνόσιος) is that which is not dear to them” (*Euthyphr.* 6e-7a).¹⁰ Of course, Socrates is unsatisfied with the answer and points out the insufficiency of Euthyphro’s definition, by showing that the gods hold dear different things leading to an action possibly being both pious and impious. Euthyphro quickly tires of Socrates’s questioning, complaining, “I have told you already, Socrates, that to learn all these things accurately will be very tiresome.” He offers a concise answer, “Let me simply say that piety or holiness (τὰ ὅσια) is learning how to please the gods in word and deed, by prayers and sacrifices. Such piety is the salvation of families and states, just

10. B. Jowett, tr., *The Dialogues of Plato: Translated into English with Analyses and Introductions*, 4th ed., vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), 314. Greek text is Plato, *Opera*, vol. 1, edited by John Burnet, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961).

as impiety (ἀσεβῆ), which is displeasing to the gods, is their ruin and destruction.”¹¹ Socrates rebukes this answer because Euthyphro makes the practice of piety—the sacrifices and prayers—equate to the nature of piety.¹² Though unsatisfied with his interlocutor’s answer, Socrates never gives his own definition. He simply leaves in despair to meet Meletus without the hoped for enlightenment concerning piety from Euthyphro, receiving nothing to help him in his upcoming trial.

In Plato’s dialogue, Euthyphro seems to represent the popular notion of piety as right conduct towards the gods, family, and state. In this sense, piety upholds the order put in place by the gods. On the other hand, its opposite, impiety, destroys the order and corrupts the youth, both of which are held dear by the gods. Piety is then seen as a moral duty and virtue, where destruction of the proper order of society is immoral and a vice. Through Socrates, Plato disagrees with Euthyphro’s definition, but he does not offer a clear alternative view of piety in the dialogue. As will be shown, Euthyphro’s understanding of piety parallels Celsus’s understanding, whereas Celsus seems unconcerned with Socrates’s concerns with this understanding.

Turning to the classical Latin tradition, in *De Natura Deorum*, Cicero has Velleius, Balbus, and Cotta discuss the views of religion (*religio*) held by the Epicureans, Stoics, and the Academy, respectively.¹³ While the main part of the work is about the

11. *Euthyphr.* 14.a-b; Jowett, 324. Note that Euthyphro uses both ὅσια and ἀσεβῆ. Socrates also does a similar switching of the words in 5d, using εὐσεβῆς and ἀσεβείας in his explanation, and then switching to ὅσιον and ἀνόσιον when he questions Euthyphro.

12. Ronna Burger, “Making New Gods,” in *Plato and Platonism*, ed. Van Ophuijsen and M. Johannes (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1999), 57.

13. The Greek ὅσιος and the Latin *religio* hold similar meaning, hence ὅσιος being glossed as religious. Piety and religion are not equivocal. However, when referring to a person and their actions, the two words hold a very similar meaning.

nature of the gods themselves, some parts are concerned with the human element. One of these is in Cotta's speech. In Book III, Cotta begins his statement by commending Balbus for reminding him that he is both Cotta and a pontiff (a priest). "I do believe and shall defend the beliefs that the ancestors accept concerning the immortal gods, the consecrated and religious rites." Cotta continues in the mindset of pontiff, "I, truly, shall defend them forever and forever defending, nor shall I be moved any or ever by oratory learned or uneducated from that opinion, which the ancestors accept of the cult of the immortal gods."¹⁴ Near the end of this speech, Cotta claims that he has always believed that none of the customs of religion were to be despised, and he ought to uphold the rituals that laid the foundations of Rome.

With that said, however, the three interlocutors go on to discuss the nature of religion, questioning the tradition as it has been passed down. The pontiff, Cotta, states his views not as a philosopher, but as a practitioner. For him, the pious do not superstitiously pray and offer sacrifices (cf. 2.72), as Balbus says, but they do defend the beliefs of the ancestors, because those beliefs are the foundation of the family and state. It may then be assumed that not to uphold the beliefs, to be impious, would be to undermine the foundations of society, causing the state to crumble. This idea is at least similar to the idea of piety that Celsus holds. However, the discussion of the interlocutors in question surfaces a certain reluctance on the part of at least some to endorse fully a traditional understanding of piety. This reluctance could very well be a precursor to the proposed religious transformation.

14. *De Natura Deorum* 3.5. Author's translation. Latin text is from Perseus Project, last accessed 22 May 2015, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>.

As flavored by both the Greek and the Roman mindset, piety is a virtue, moreover an obligation, to have a right attitude and carry out the necessary rites in the correct manner that pleases the gods. This correct manner had been transmitted by tradition since the foundations of humanity. This reverence for the foundational tradition meant that for the pious, the old held far more value than the new. This meant that the traditional religious forms and practices constituted a functional norm for piety. In Pierre Hadot's words, "truth and tradition, reason and authority were identified with each other."¹⁵ Hadot would translate the title of Celsus's work differently from what has been normally done. Instead of *True Doctrine*, the title "'The Ancient Norm,' or 'The True Tradition'" better sums up Celsus's argument.¹⁶ It is by this norm of tradition that Celsus charges the Christians with impiety.

For Celsus, in *True Doctrine*, the major concern is that Christians are acting irrationally and impiously according to the traditional norms by which he evaluates piety. Celsus calls them to return to and follow the true doctrine with reason and piety—i.e., to follow tradition and honor the social order with its societal norms. In his refutation of Celsus, Origen agrees that true doctrine entails the practice of proper and reasonable piety. However, Origen refocuses the meaning of the terms so that a different norm materializes: one constituted by morality and divine revelation instead of foundational religious tradition.

In other words, as we will see in chapters 2 and 3 especially, both Celsus and Origen agree that piety means giving reverence to the divine and honoring divine decrees.

15. Pierre Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2002), 153.

16. *Ibid.*

However, Celsus uses the concept of piety normed by tradition to charge the Christians with impiety and demand that they return to the true doctrine. On the other hand, Origen upholds Christianity as the example of piety par excellence because it adheres to a norm transmitted by God himself rather than human custom. Rather than submitting to a human authority, Origen contends that humans should submit their lives to the rule of the divine authority. This difference between these norms becomes a key point of contention between Celsus and Origen. For his part, Origen appears to be aware of this contention between them, as he speaks of Celsus not knowing the true nature of piety (V.27).

Piety's Norm

We shall now examine a few examples from the text of *Against Celsus* in order to see what it says about Celsus's and Origen's understanding of piety. Here we give only a few examples to illustrate the matter broadly; these will be further discussed in chapters 2 and 3, along with other passages.

*In fact, the practices done by each nation are right when they are done in the way that pleases the overseers. Consider whether it is not obvious from his statement that he wants the Jew who lives by his own laws not to abandon them because he would act impiously (οὐχ ὄσιον) if he did so. For he says: It is impious to abandon the customs which have existed in each locality from the beginning.*¹⁷

Let Celsus inform us how it is impious (οὐχ ὄσιον) to break ancestral laws which allow men to marry their wives and daughters, or which say that it is blessed to depart this life by being strangled, or assert that complete purification is attained by those who surrender themselves to the flames and depart from life by means of fire. And how is it impious to break laws such as those for example among the Taurians, where strangers are offered as victims to Artemis, or among some Libyans, where they sacrifice children to Kronos? Yet this is the logical consequence of Celsus's opinion that it is impious for the Jews to break the traditional laws which lay down that they ought not to worship any other God

17. *Cels.* V.26, Translations are from Henry Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 283. Italics throughout indicate quotations from Celsus's *True Doctrine*. Greek text is M. Marcovich, ed., *Contra Celsum Libri VIII* (Boston: Brill, 2001).

than the Creator of the universe. According to his view piety will not be divine by nature (οὐ φύσει τὸ ὅσιον), but a matter of arbitrary arrangement and opinion ...¹⁸

Even in these short passages, one can see the difference of opinion. For Celsus, piety demands that the customs are maintained to “please the overseers,” whereas departing from local customs counts as impiety. Yet, Origen holds a different norm for piety, one that has nothing to do with local customs as such. The reasons for this will be investigated in chapter 3. For him, the norm is no longer the foundational tradition that no oratory could derail. Origen calls this an “arbitrary arrangement and opinion,” which fluctuate from place to place. For Origen, the true norm for piety would be “divine by nature,” thereby ascending above the volatile and even sometimes immoral practices of different localities. That divine norm takes shape according to the personified Logos and Wisdom of God and is not affected by the fluctuating world. The norm of the personified Logos is not an “arbitrary arrangement and opinion.” Furthermore, Origen argues that this divine tradition given by the supreme God takes precedence over all other traditions, as it comes from the transcendent Creator himself.

We may speculate that Celsus would probably reply that the gods and overseers appoint the traditions for each region through divine reason and thus the tradition is not arbitrary or mere opinion. However, Origen’s response to the “overseers” makes a further argument. Is it reasonable to expect that people should change how they act as they move from region to region in order to please the various overseers? Alternatively, is the nature of piety to be relative, so that it is at once everything and nothing? Origen will not accept such a condition. Origen attests that a pious act in one region should stand as a pious act

18. *Cels.* V.27; Chadwick, 284-85.

in all regions and an impious act in one region should stand as an impious act in all regions (cf. *Cels.* V.27-28). Only this is consistent with Origen's understanding of the divine.

Celsus's expectation that right practices should be done "in a way to please the overseers" creates a complex situation aside from the problem of the relativisation of piety. Celsus appears to be saying that the practice of religion should not only follow foundational local tradition, but that it should also please the government, i.e., "overseers." This is a grand charge against Christians, who do not follow the traditions and have acquired a reputation for offending overseers. According to Celsus, by not following the traditions, the Christians do not uphold the social order or maintain the foundations of society by honoring the emperor, by worshipping the gods, and by keeping the customs. For Celsus, religious piety demands and forms good citizens. Origen's response is to question the overseers' authority by asking who put the overseers in charge: "And if the parts of the earth were not assigned to their overseers by someone, then each one took possession of his own division of the earth according to chance, at random, and without the commission of any superintendent. But this is monstrous and to a large extent does away with the providence of the supreme God."¹⁹ The overseers owe their roles and authority to God. Origen questions the authority of the overseers, but not the providence of the supreme God. For both Origen and Celsus, to question the providence of God is to hold opinions not befitting the divine and thus impious.

Furthermore, Origen says that virtue may dictate breaking the customs, even customs pleasing to the overseer:

19. *Cels.*V.26; Chadwick, 284.

Since those who moved from the east on account of their sins were given over ‘to a reprobate mind’ and ‘to passions of dishonor’ and ‘to impurity in the lusts of their hearts’, in order that by being sated with sin they might hate it, we would not agree with Celsus’s opinion when he maintains that because of the overseers that have been allotted to the parts of the earth *the practices done by each nation are right*. Moreover, we do not want to do their practices *in the way that pleases them*. For we see that it is pious (ὅσιον) to break *customs which have existed in each locality from the beginning* and to adopt better and more divine laws given us by Jesus, as the most powerful being, ‘delivering us from the present evil world’, and from ‘the rulers of this world who are coming to nought’. On the other hand, it is impious (ἀνόσιον) not to cast oneself upon him who appeared and proved himself to be purer and more powerful than all rulers.²⁰

With this, Origen questions the moral virtue of the overseers and thereby the morality of those who practice the customs. In this sense, morality is not an abstract idea to Origen, but living and breathing in the supreme God and in the incarnation of his Logos. Not only does Origen question the morality and authority of the overseers, but throughout the text points to the one true, pure overseer and example of moral excellence in Christ (e.g., VIII.9).

Moreover, for Origen, Celsus’s norm of tradition is faulty, *per se*, in that it is of sinful human origin and not primordial or foundational as Celsus claims. Overseers and ancestors could not reveal piety as perfectly as God himself could reveal. However, humans do not have to rely on faulty tradition, since God has revealed a new example of piety, a perfect example in the life of Christ. If one is to follow a foundational tradition, Origen argues that it is far more rational and pious to follow divine tradition as seen in Jesus, since divine tradition is more fully rooted in the good and the beautiful than the arbitrary, faulty customs and opinions of human tradition.

20. *Cels.* V.32; Chadwick, 289.

In this way, Origen links piety and morality together. Moral purity allows for the proper exercise of piety:

People who pour abuse on those who wish to do all in their power to live a life of piety towards the God of the universe (θεοσεβείας), who approves the faith of common folk in Him and the rational piety towards Him of more intelligent people who send up their prayers to the Creator of the universe with thanksgiving, an offering of prayer which they make as by the mediation of a high priest who has shown to men the pure way to worship God ... because of their simplicity, or even by reason of the fact that they have had no one to encourage them towards a rational piety (λογικὴν εὐσεβειαν), because they believe the supreme God and His only-begotten Son who is Logos and God, you would find among them a reverence and purity and unsophisticated habits and a simplicity which is often excellent, and which has not been attained by those who assert that they are wise and wallow in immorality with boys, ‘men performing obscenities with men’.²¹

Once again, Origen sees God-revealed morality as a necessary for the practice of piety.

The norm is not tradition that has only the appearance of rationality, but the piety handed down through the divine Logos himself. A piety normed by the example of God, specifically in the Son, is the most reasonable piety, because it is guided by “His only-begotten Son who is Logos and God.” This means that living according to reason (κατὰ λόγον) is equivalent to living according to the example of Jesus who is the Logos of God.

According to Reason

At present, it suffices to show that Celsus and Origen held particularly different views on what constitutes the norm for piety—foundational tradition versus divine revelation and moral virtue. I shall now briefly show the connection between piety and religion as it stands in *Against Celsus*, and how Celsus’s and Origen’s differing norms illustrate the religious transformation that Stroumsa and others have proposed. We shall first look at the former before ending with the latter.

21. *Cels.* VII.46, 49; Chadwick, 434, 437.

For both Celsus and Origen, the true doctrine and the practice of piety is founded upon reason: “*follow reason and a rational guide in accepting doctrines ... My answer to this is that if every man could abandon the business of life and devote his time to philosophy, no other course ought to be followed but this alone.*”²² In this respect, Origen appears to agree with Celsus. As the basis for true doctrine, reason demands its followers to practice piety:

*Reason (λόγος) demands one of two alternatives. If they refuse to worship in the proper way the lords in charge of the following activities, 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. But if they are going to marry wives, and beget children, and taste of the fruits, and partake of the joys of this life ... then they ought to render the due honours to the beings who have been entrusted with these things. And they ought 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 ... We ought, then, to propitiate the one supreme God and to pray that He may be gracious, propitiating Him by piety and every virtue (εὐσεβεία καὶ πάση ἀρετῇ).*²³

The word translated “reason” here is λόγος. I shall explore what Celsus and Origen mean by living “according to reason” (κατὰ λόγον) in chapters 2 and 3, respectively. While λόγος does not equate to piety, both Celsus and Origen suggest that proper enacting of piety should precede κατὰ λόγον if it is to be true piety.

This is a major point of contention in *Against Celsus*; both Origen and Celsus seem far more interested in what piety κατὰ λόγον would be than in piety *per se*.²⁴

Nevertheless, one can still draw conclusions about the nature of piety in the thinking of

22. *Cels.* I.9; Chadwick, 12.

23. *Cels.* VIII.55, 64; Chadwick, 493, 500.

24. Admittedly, the text’s apparent stress on reasonability in the practice of piety may be due to Origen’s selectivity in quoting and responding to Celsus, yet it is apparent that the topic is important to Celsus also.

each by examining how the two thought piety should be practiced. For both Celsus and Origen true doctrine entails the practice of proper and reasonable piety. However, as we have seen, the two have noticeably different norms at work. Thus, they would practice piety in very different ways.

On Celsus's side, proper piety uses the "ancient norm" or foundational tradition handed down by the ancestors and the overseers since time primordial. Piety demands the following of the normative tradition. Not to follow those customs in the correct manner is impious and undermines the foundations of society. Rather than being impious, nefarious citizens, Celsus calls for Christians to return to true virtue, to be good citizens, and to uphold the traditions that give civilization stability. Celsus contends not only that there is a pious obligation to follow the customs, but also that reason demands that one follow the truth, i.e., the true doctrine.

On the other hand, Origen refutes Celsus by showing that Christianity leads to more complete and perfect moral reformation, which is a better piety and more superior foundation than unreasonably sticking with a tradition disguised as divine and primordial. Origen asks which is more pious: blindly to sacrifice to evil daemons or to follow the pure example of Christ in contemplation of the divine revelation? Christianity enacts the practice of proper and reasonable piety, utilizing a different and more divine norm for determining piety and religious truth. From Origen's vantage point, not only does Christianity follow the true doctrine in piety, but Christianity also does a better job of shaping the hearts of the followers in true virtue and pious lives before the divine. Thus, Christianity does not undermine the foundations of society as Celsus argues, but creates a better and more perfect society. Origen seeks more than the exoneration of Christianity

from Celsus's accusations. Origen recommends Christianity as vastly superior to the piety Celsus defends and more beneficial to the world.

Conclusion

Against Celsus provides a unique opportunity to examine concepts and practices of piety and religion in a time of change in the Roman Empire. Analyzing the text not as the artifact of the conflict between a Pagan and a Christian, but instead as a debate between two philosophers before and after a supposed shift in thought provides new insights about the text and possibly the context in which Origen was writing. With that said, the purpose of this thesis is not to prove whether the alleged shift occurred or to explain all its possible features. Instead, this thesis will examine *Against Celsus* with such a shift in mind as the possible context in which it was written. Reading *Against Celsus* against such a backdrop may help reveal more about religious thought in the Roman world in the second and third centuries.

Origen's lengthy quotations of Celsus allow us to analyze the two philosophers' thoughts in parallel. Although Celsus's thoughts are in Origen's hand and not in his own, Origen focuses more on ideas and not on defacing Celsus. For Origen, the importance was truth. Looking at *Against Celsus* and analyzing how the two philosophers conceived of piety and its norm allow for more than just insight into the second- and third-century Roman world. This analysis will prove an apt test for the proposed shift in religious thought.

Moving from this brief look at the background to the idea of piety, the second chapter will further and more closely examine Celsus's definition of piety, the normative nature of tradition, and true doctrine. The third chapter will analyze Origen's refutation of

Celsus, and his re-norming of piety. Finally, the fourth chapter will draw conclusions from Celsus and Origen's differing understandings for the norm of piety as well as provide a possible answer to the question of whence it may have been that Origen fashioned this norm.

CHAPTER II

CELSUS AND PIETY

Having looked briefly at key aspects of the background, we will now turn to investigate Celsus and his side of the dialogue in greater depth. For his part, Celsus is working with an inherited norm for piety, that norm being tradition. While Plato seems weary of readily accepting the popular notions of tradition's normative nature, Celsus shows a more ready acceptance for the idea of the normative nature of tradition in determining piety.¹ Moreover, this very idea is the cornerstone on which Celsus constructs his entire argument against Christianity.

As stated above in the first chapter, Celsus's own writings are available only in quotes that Origen supplies. Although he is Celsus's opponent, Origen appears to give fair treatment in terms of citing Celsus's ideas and arguments. Origen's strategy is not to deface Celsus by distorting his character, but rather to refute what Celsus actually wrote. Assuming Origen's accuracy in citing Celsus in the main, we can productively extrapolate Celsus's understanding of piety and its norm from *Against Celsus*.

Normative Tradition

Celsus writes, "*They [the Jews] maintain these laws among themselves at the present day, and observe a worship which may be very peculiar but is at least traditional. In this respect they behave like the rest of mankind.*"² Celsus observes that even the Jews,

1. Celsus's divergence from Plato on this point is further discussed in the section titled "The Inadequacy of Tradition" in chapter 3, as Origen brings up some of the same points as Plato.

2. *Cels.* V.25; Chadwick, 283.

from whom the Christians claim descendants, follow tradition like the rest of humanity. In this comment, Celsus implies that the Christians should follow tradition as well or at least that their unwillingness to do so underscores their error. A tradition, no matter how odd or particular, is foundational to civilization. As such, tradition should be followed. Following Celsus's line of thought, Origen notes that Celsus's arguments "lead to the conclusion that all men ought to live according to their traditional customs and should not be criticized for this"; and even more pointedly, he adds, "but that since the Christians have forsaken their traditional laws and are not one individual nation like the Jews they are to be criticized for agreeing to the teaching of Jesus."³ Origen sees that from Celsus's perspective, the Christians are forsaking their nation and their customs. Nation and tradition are the foundation of society. To forsake these things is equated to forsaking the gods who have established and maintain the social order. Celsus's conception of the gods and social order is due to the idea of foundational tradition—i.e., customs that were established from the beginning of time on the authority of the supreme God.

Celsus's reason for following the foundational tradition is "*because each nation follows its traditional customs, whatever kind may happen to be established ... because it is probable that from the beginning the different parts of the earth were allotted to different overseers, and are governed in the way by having been divided between certain authorities.*"⁴ Celsus accommodates the plurality of traditions in the world by ascribing them to primitive divisions of hierarchies. These "overseers" give the authority to the traditions "from the beginning." The tradition is right not only because the ancestors

3. *Cels.* V.35; Chadwick, 291.

4. *Cels.* V.25; Chadwick, 283.

transmitted it, but because the authorities established the tradition from the beginning on their authority and rationality as divinely appointed overseers. The traditions are not merely the opinions of humans or arbitrarily given by the overseers. In this cosmology, far from being the opinions of humans, the customs are rooted in the supreme God.

Celsus anticipates Origen's counter argument (cf. V.27) that the apparent randomness of traditions in different areas shows that the customs are arbitrary opinions, not divinely appointed. In V.25, Celsus claims,

This situation seems to have come to pass not only because it came into the head of different people to think differently and because it is necessary to preserve the established social conventions, but also because it is probable that from the beginning the different part of the earth were allotted to different overseers, and are governed by having been divided in this way.⁵

While some of the differences in customs may have come to pass because they “came into the head of different people,” these differences are also, or rather more so, due to “different overseers.” To combat the randomness equating to arbitrary or irrational, Celsus trusts that his readers will agree with the proposition that the overseers are divine authorities and thus rational. With this proposition granted, the authority of the overseers and the supreme God counters the argument that arbitrariness of the different traditions around the world makes the customs mere arbitrary opinions. To Celsus, the mere fact that the traditions have existed from the beginning of time and have authority from the overseers should be sufficient reason to see the rationality of and need to follow tradition. Instead of being mere opinions, the traditions are primordial and of divine origin given by the overseers of the world with authority from the supreme God.

5. *Cels.* V.25; Chadwick, 283.

Celsus sees the tradition not only as primordial, but also as right. Celsus maintains, “*In fact, the practices done by each nation are right when they are done in the way that pleases the overseers; and it is impious (οὐχ ὄσιον) to abandon the customs which have existed in each locality from the beginning.*”⁶ The very act of going against foundational traditions established by the authority of the overseers and the supreme God is irrational and impious. The act of going against tradition is impious because one is acting against the authority of the overseers and the will of the supreme God. It is irrational to act in this way, since one acts against the foundation laid with divine reason. The necessity to follow reason will be discussed further in the next section.

It is illuminating at this point to consider G. R. Boys-Stones’s research on post-Hellenistic philosophy. Boys-Stones argues that Stoic thought found its way into Platonism. This is important because there are parallels between what the Stoics taught and what Celsus argued. In proving the case of the mixing of Stoic and Middle Platonism, Boys-Stones concludes that Celsus is a perfect example of the mixture of the two philosophical schools.⁷ He observes that the use of tradition in Stoic writings is no “mere rhetoric.” The appeal to the authority of tradition was an actual and authentic appeal rather than one made simply for rhetorical effect. Tradition held an actual authoritative power in the Greco-Roman mindset. That is to say, tradition was a widely accepted norm for truth. One of the ways that this actual appeal reveals itself is in the title, *True Doctrine*. The title parallels the phrase “ancient doctrine” in Celsus’s usage (cf., *Cels.* I.14). Boys-Stones shows that Celsus’s argument is consistent with that of the

6. *Cels.* V.25; Chadwick, 283.

7. This could further show the eclectic nature of Celsus (cf. Chadwick, xxvi).

Stoics.⁸ To illuminate these analogous lines of thought in both Celsus and the Stoics, it will be helpful to compare the two in more detail.

Epictetus (ca. 55-135) was a seminal Stoic thinker. In his *Encheiridion* 31.4-5, he writes, “Wherefore, whoever is careful to exercise desire and aversion as he should, is at the same time careful also about piety (εὐσεβείας). But it is always appropriate to make libations, and sacrifices, and to give the firstfruits *after the manner of our fathers*, and to do all this with purity ...”⁹ As Epictetus goes on, he exhorts people to follow tradition even if one is pursuing the life of the philosopher and therefore ignoring externals. It is always “appropriate” to follow the traditions. In this, Epictetus parallels Celsus. Yet, Epictetus does not mention the opposite—i.e., it is inappropriate not to follow the traditions. Celsus makes such a claim when he writes, “It is impious to abandon the customs...”¹⁰

Celsus does more than just claim that abandoning the customs is impious. He exhorts people to rightly perform the traditions for it pleases the overseers. Origen takes this passage “to indicate that some being or beings watch over the land.”¹¹ Celsus conceives of these overseers as divine beings. Alongside divine beings, Celsus may also be referring to the earthly overseers. Two facts support this: later he encourages people to “*accept public office in our country if it is necessary to do this for the sake of*

8. G. R. Boys-Stones, *Post-Hellenistic Philosophy: A Study of Its Development from the Stoics to Origen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 107.

9. Epictetus, *Encheiridion*, tr. W.A. Oldfather, LCL 218 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928), 513-15. Emphasis added.

10. *Cels.* V.25; Chadwick, 283.

11. *Cels.* V.25; Chadwick, 283.

preservation of the laws and of piety (εὐσεβείας),¹² and he stresses the importance of maintaining the established order by following the overseers (cf. V.25). For the sake of piety understood as directed to both divine and earthly overseers, Celsus claims that people should not only honor the customs dedicated to the gods but all customs meaning to honor the family and the state. As Celsus conceives it, piety not only creates people who perfectly follow the cult and rituals of the gods, it also maintains the social order by creating good citizens, who properly honor those in authority.

The Stoic side of Celsus further reveals itself with parallels to the founder of Stoicism. Zeno also conceived the good as pious people and maintainers of the social order. Zeno teaches that “the good alone [are] true citizens or friends or kindred or free men” (VII.33). Zeno further qualifies this idea, teaching, “The good, it is added, are also worshippers of God; for they have acquaintance with the rites of the gods, and piety (εὐσέβειαν) is the knowledge of how to serve the gods. Further, they will sacrifice to the gods and they keep themselves pure; for they avoid all acts that are offences against the gods ...” (VII.119).¹³ The good are true citizens because they practice proper piety and have right relations with the gods. Zeno’s teachings help to illustrate the mindset that Celsus employed. Zeno and Celsus hold similar understandings of the good, at least in the sense that they both believe the good practice proper piety. This conception of the good is a second key element to Celsus’s argument. Piety properly normed by tradition upholds civilization; the good practice it, while the bad ignore the rites and proper knowledge of

12. *Cels.* VIII.75; Chadwick, 510.

13. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, vol. 2, tr. R. D. Hicks, LCL 185 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931), 145, 225.

the gods. This evaluative formula fundamentally shapes Celsus's criticisms of Christian belief and practices.

Piety calls for and demands that the foundational tradition be kept. This is a grand charge against Christians. The Christians do not follow the foundational tradition. Consequently, Christians appear not to support the welfare of society nor to give the government due honor and respect, which virtuous citizens would give. Religious piety demands good citizens both for the sake of the divine and for the sake of the mundane world. Like the rest of civilized humanity, Christians should exercise the virtue of piety and return to the foundational tradition and true doctrine.

Though Celsus was one of the first of whom we have a clear record to take an intellectual approach in criticizing the Christians, he was not alone in thinking that good citizens practiced proper piety, as understood by Celsus. Early on in the life of Christianity, the Romans described Christianity as a *superstitio* instead of *religio* (cf. Tacitus (56-117 CE) *Ann.* 15.44, Pliny (61-112 CE) *Ep.* 10.96).¹⁴ This distinction meant that Romans saw Christians as a fifth column instead of fellow citizens. In *On Mercy* 2.5.1, Seneca describes the difference between *religio* and *superstitio*: “religion [*religio*] does honour to the gods, while superstition [*superstitio*] wrongs them.”¹⁵ The superstition wrongs the gods by not properly showing them honor through correct conduct of the tradition. Alternatively, in his *Moralia*, Plutarch put it this way, “no deed that you may do will be more likely to find favour with the gods than your belief in their true nature, you

14. Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 592-601.

15. Seneca, *Moral Essays*, tr. John W. Basore, LCL 214 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928), 439.

may avoid *superstition which is no less an evil than atheism.*¹⁶ Superstition, like atheism, is turning against the gods. The former turns against the gods by not giving proper honor, while the latter denies the gods. In both cases, the one who practices superstition and the atheist undermine the tradition and do wrong to the gods and society.

From the viewpoint of upper-class Romans like Tacitus and Pliny, Christians may not have committed arson or crimes. However, from their viewpoint, Christians were far from good citizens. This is because Christians practiced a superstition, which does harm to the gods that protect and provide for the nation. Celsus hones in on this linking of good citizens, proper honor, and piety as he admonishes the Christians.

While Celsus used Platonic thought like the idea of intermediaries (i.e., overseers), Celsus also draws upon other understandings to persuade the Christians. These parallels between Celsus and the Stoics and other Roman citizens help to further illustrate how common Celsus's understanding concerning piety was, as well as how common the hesitation to accept Christian practices was.

As Celsus *et alli* demonstrate, piety is a virtue that requires the right conduct of the customs in honoring the gods. The overseers of the earth rightly handed down these customs through the ages from the beginning on the authority of the supreme God. Keeping the tradition and being pious pleases the overseers, both divine and mortal. Even the Jews, as particular a nation as they are, act like the rest of humanity, warding off any who would tell them to do otherwise in keeping their foundational tradition, "*for there is*

16. Plutarch, *Moralia*, vol. 5, tr. Frank Cole Babbitt, LCL 306 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936), 31.

*a true doctrine, which meets anyone who ventures to write anything at all about such matters.*¹⁷

Κατὰ Λόγον

Religion has a guiding principal “for anyone who ventures” to understand it. For Celsus and the Stoics that guiding principal is *κατὰ λόγον* or “according to reason.” “Nature’s rule is to follow the direction of impulse,” according to Zeno, “But when reason by way of a more perfect leadership has been bestowed on the beings we call rational, for them life according to reason rightly becomes the natural life. For reason supervenes to shape impulse scientifically.”¹⁸ As Zeno understands the concepts, reason and the natural life are meant to be synonymous for humans. Furthermore, humans should not act as the other animals that are guided by irrational impulse but by reason as nature would have them do. In this understanding of human nature, the proper guiding principle for human action is reason. To act irrationally is to go against proper human nature and to live as a non-human animal.

Put another way: “And this is why the end may be defined as life in accordance with nature, or, in other words, in accordance with our own human nature as well as that of the universe,” Zeno explains, “a life in which we refrain from every action forbidden by the law common to all things, that is to say, the *right reason which pervades all things, and is identical with this Zeus, lord and ruler of all that is.*”¹⁹ The *telos* is to live the according-to-nature life, which for humans is equivalent to the according-to-reason

17. *Cels.* VI.9; Chadwick, 322. Celsus quoting Plato.

18. *Diog.* VII.86.

19. *Diog.* VII.88. Emphases added.

life. Reason is the foundation of creation as Zeno conceives it. It is only right and proper to follow and work in accordance with this reason. Celsus takes up this same strain of thought in calling the Christians back to tradition.

He exhorts Christians to live according to reason saying, “*follow reason and a rational guide in accepting doctrine ...*” for as Origen adds, “anyone who believes people without so doing is certain to be deceived.”²⁰ Charlatans are present in any age. Celsus argues that the best way to avoid deception is to continue to follow the tradition of the ancestors. The traditions have stood the test of time and have the support of divine reason. Following reason means to obey the supreme God by following the customs established by his appointed overseers.

To support his claim that the tradition is the “rational guide to accepting doctrine,” Celsus gives Plato as an example. Celsus exhorts Christians to act as Plato did. For Celsus, living as Plato means to have a sound reason for every belief. Celsus writes further, “*Nevertheless [Plato] gives a reason for this difficulty lest he should appear to retreat by putting the matter beyond discussion.*”²¹ Celsus sees Plato as a paragon of reason and the perfect example to follow in examining truth.

In this line of thought, Celsus uses Plato to show that a reasonable person does not forsake the tradition and create a new path: “*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.*”²² Plato did not make

20. *Cels.* I.9; Chadwick, 12.

21. *Cels.* VI.10; Chadwick, 323.

22. *Cels.* VI.10; Chadwick, 323.

something new or claim divine revelation. Plato followed reason and the foundational tradition of old. If such a grand paragon like Plato did not make something new or derail the traditions, then neither should the Christians.²³

With the guiding principal of true doctrine—according to reason—in mind, Celsus questions the sincerity of the Christians’ dedication to the supreme God, since they do not seem to hold the correct notions about the divine. He insists that it is only right to worship daemons, because the daemons have their authority bestowed upon them by the supreme God:

*First I would ask, Why should we not worship daemons? Are not all things indeed administered according to God’s will, and is not all providence derived from him? And whatever there may be in the universe, whether the work of God or of angels, or of other daemons, or heroes, do not all these things keep a law given by the greatest God? 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? But it is impossible, he says, for the same man to serve several masters.*²⁴

In Celsus’s understanding, a pious person does not avoid giving due honor. The supreme God has given to the daemons the right to honor, and a pious person should respond appropriately and give them honor. The pious uphold the will of the supreme God. Since

23. As a side note, Celsus’s understanding of Plato here may have some merit. In his chapter on Timaeus, Eric Voegelin writes that Plato’s “philosophizing” is free from the inclination to say anything about god “perhaps because he shared unreservedly the common Greek conviction that things divine are not for mortals to know.” Eric Voegelin, *Plato* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), 193. However, Origen disagrees with this interpretation of Plato. Also using Timaeus, Origen writes, “Anyone seeking a reply to Celsus would say to this that even Plato is arrogant when in the Timaeus he puts these words into the mouth of Zeus...” *Cels.* VI.10; Chadwick, 323. Origen claims that Plato does assert things about the divine even if Plato may qualify such statements. Regardless of the accuracy of Celsus’s treatment of Plato, Celsus uses Plato, as he conceives of him, as a perfect example and paragon to follow. That means, Plato used reason in assessing doctrine, and so should everyone.

24. *Cels.* VII.68; Chadwick, 450-451.

the supreme God has put the daemons in authority, it is only right and proper to see that due honor is given to them.

Showing some awareness of Christian teaching, Celsus anticipates the Christian reluctance of “serving two masters” by honoring daemons alongside God. Celsus concedes that in the case of human masters, serving two could do harm to one or both of the masters. However, “*but where God is concerned, whom neither harm nor grief can affect,*” Celsus counters that “*it is irrational to avoid worshipping several gods on principles similar to those which apply in the case of men and heroes and daemons of these sort.*”²⁵ Serving more than one god could do no harm to the divine for the divine are impassible. Indeed, it would be impious to say otherwise, as the notion of a passible God is unfitting of the divine. Therefore, in Celsus’s way of thinking, worshipping the daemons and gods is only of benefit, as they are in authority over all humanity. In this way both sides benefit; the gods receive due honor and thanks and the humans receive the blessings of the gods.

Seneca provides a parallel to this idea that will further aid our understanding. Seneca writes, “Although a man hear what limit he should observe in sacrifice, and how far he should recoil from burdensome superstitions, he will never make sufficient progress until he has conceived a right idea of God,—regarding Him as one who possesses all things, and allots all things.” Reason would dictate that god gives all things and piety would require the right idea of the divine meaning that “*they cannot do harm [to the gods] ... The universal nature, all-glorious and all-beautiful, has rendered incapable of inflicting ill those whom it has removed from the danger of ill*” (Ep. 95. 48-

25. *Cels.* VIII.2; Chadwick, 454.

49).²⁶ Reason and piety require attributing only fitting characteristics and ideas to the gods. As Seneca and Celsus understand, it is both irrational and impious to hold false beliefs about the gods and to say something unbefitting of the divine.

Seneca and Celsus show that piety requires more than just correctly following the transmitted tradition. Piety as a virtue requires correctly thinking of the gods. Celsus exhorts the Christians:

If you happen to be a worshipper of God and someone commands you either to act blasphemously or to say some other disgraceful thing, you ought not to put any confidence in him at all. Rather than this you must remain firm in face of all tortures and endure any death rather than say or even think anything profane about God. ... But if anyone tells you to praise Helios or with a noble paean to peak 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.²⁷

Christians would readily agree to this idea, if not for the last part about praising Helios or Athena. Celsus believes that proper piety requires praising gods such as Helios or Athena with hymns. By praising the gods, those doing so perform perfect worship towards the supreme God. To put it another way, giving honor to the beings whom the supreme God placed in charge also honors the supreme God himself. One may expect the same in the governing of the human world. Is giving due honor to a governor not the same as honoring the emperor himself? Given his line of reasoning, Celsus would surely agree that this is the case. Hence, those who honor gods are not thereby serving two masters but the one supreme master who gives authority to all from the beginning.

26. Seneca, *Epistles*, tr. Richard M. Gummere, LCL 77 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925), 89. Emphasis is Gummere's.

27. *Cels.* VIII.66; Chadwick, 502.

In this way, Celsus provides one aspect of his interpretation of Plato's supreme God. The supreme God is impassible and is more immediately worshipped by all of the gods, whereas humans appropriately worship him through the intermediaries that are more accessible to them.²⁸

Celsus furthers his idea concerning the supreme God by writing, "*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.*"²⁹ Though Celsus mentions the worship of several gods, he proposes, "*it makes no difference whether we call Zeus the Most High, or Zen, or Adonai, or Saboth, or Amoun like the Egyptians, or Papaeus like the Scythians.*"³⁰ In this way, Celsus condenses the entire pantheon of the world's deities into the one supreme God, functionally. Celsus's monotheism has a syncretistic inclination.

As Chadwick points out, the differentiating of the names of distinct deities not mattering is a part of broader Platonic ideas current since the time of Xenocrates (d. 314/3 BCE). Intermediates exist between the supreme God and humans. These intermediates are the daemons or the overseers, of whom Celsus wrote. However, the idea that there are intermediaries does not necessarily lead to conceiving of them as all being one and the same, since the intermediaries have separate personae and are not themselves the supreme God. Rather, the local deity could easily become subordinate to

28. This is a point of contention for Origen, who interprets the supreme God differently than Celsus. This lends credence to the idea that *Against Celsus* is not so much solely a Pagan-Christian debate, but also could be viewed as a Platonist debate—i.e., who is the true inheritor of Plato?

29. *Cels.* VIII.2; Chadwick, 454.

30. *Cels.* V.41; Chadwick, 297.

the supreme God.³¹ It is this idea that all of the gods serve the supreme God, which leads Celsus to argue, “*It makes no difference whether we call Zeus the Most High, or Zen, or Adonai, or Sabaoth ...*”³² Though worshipping the subordinate, Celsus contends that the supreme God is worshipped. Thus, it does not matter what name is used in worshipping the supreme God.

Celsus’s contemporary Maximus of Tyre says much the same as Celsus: “The gods are one nature, but many names.”³³ This is a slightly different approach to the collapsing of the names. The names, rather than referring to subordinate overseers, instead refer to the different natures of the supreme God. Facing this same problem in his thirty-first discourse, Dio Chrysostom (40-120 CE) explains, “Indeed, some do maintain that Apollo, Helius, and Dionysus are one and the same ... and many people even go so far as to combine all the gods and make of them one single force and power, so that it makes no difference at all whether you are honouring this one or that one.”³⁴ Dio Chrysostom seems to have been aware of both the idea of the subordinate gods and the names referring to different natures of the supreme God. Thus, this idea concerning the divine names appears to have been a common notion.

31. Chadwick, xvii.

32. *Cels.* V.45; Chadwick, 299.

33. Max. Tyr. xxxix, 5. Quoted in Chadwick, xvii.

34. Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses*, vol. 3, tr. J. W. Cohoon, LCL 358 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1940), 17.

We find the same idea in Zeno's teachings. Diogenes reports, in VII.135-136, "God is one and the same with Reason, Fate, and Zeus; he is also called by many other names."³⁵ This same idea continues later in VII.147:

They give the name Dia (Δία) because all things are due (διὰ) to him; Zeus (Ζῆνα) in so far as he is the cause of life (ζῆν) or pervades all life; the name Athena is given, because the ruling part of the divinity extends to the aether; the name Hera marks its extension to the air; he is called Hephaestus since it spreads to the creative fire; Poseidon, since it stretches to the sea; Demeter, since it reaches to the earth.

Though Celsus does not make use of the word play that Zeno makes, Celsus certainly draws upon the very same idea. This notion is important for his argument, because if the whole pantheon in some sense constitutes the one supreme God, then the Christians are mistaken to conclude that worshipping the gods is tantamount to serving two masters.

If the gods are all servants of the supreme God and the divine is impassible, then Celsus contends that the Christians are being irrational to not worship all of the gods in fear of serving two masters. In Celsus's understanding, the tradition is more rational than Christianity, since through tradition people have a proper understanding of the divine and act rationally towards the supreme God.

If the previous arguments were not enough persuasion of the rationality of the ancient doctrine, Celsus takes another approach in trying to convince the Christians to return to reason. Celsus applies reasoning that is basically a pagan version of Pascal's gambit, to invoke a modern parallel: *"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*

35. Diog. VII.135-36.

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.”³⁶

If the beings that the idols represent exist, then worshipping them is right, since they rule on the authority of the supreme God. In worshipping the gods or daemons, you make them kindly disposed to helping society. If the beings do not exist, participating in the event at least shows support for society. Participation can do no harm, only benefit. With this in mind, Celsus pleads with the Christians to follow reason and see that their actions have no benefit and are merely causing harm.

From Celsus’s perspective, more is at stake than just religious festivals. The festivals and the associated worship of the idols are customs that bind society together by making the gods “kindly disposed.” By participating in the festivals, citizens show their allegiance and thankfulness to the gods and their gifts that uphold society. Even if the Christians do not agree with the idea of the idols behind the festivals, from Celsus’s perspective, there is more to lose in forfeiting the festivals than in their dismissal.

Celsus reaches the zenith of his argument and takes a rather extreme position to make his point:

Reason demands one of two alternatives. If they refuse to worship in the proper way the lords in charge of the following activities, 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. But if they are going to marry wives, and beget children, and taste of the fruits, and partake of the joys of this life, and endure the appointed evils (by nature’s law all men must have experience of evils; evil is necessary and has nowhere else to exist), then they ought to render the due honours to the beings who have been entrusted with these things. And they ought to offer the due rites of worship in this life until they are set free from their bonds, lest they even appear

36. *Cels.* VIII.24; Chadwick, 469.

*ungrateful to them. It is wrong for people who partake of what is their property to offer them nothing in return.*³⁷

In Celsus's mindset, it is only proper and reasonable to worship and honor the daemons and gods. They supply everything that humans need to exist and oversee all aspects of earthly activity from every morsel and drink to even the act of marriage and the begetting of children. It is of the upmost impiety to take from the goodness of the divine and not to return the favor shown no matter how mundane that gift may seem. Piety demands that the proper honor be returned *quid pro quo* to the daemons, who allow life and its pleasures. The Christians do not exercise proper thanksgiving (εὐχαριστία). Humans should either give true, pious thanksgiving to the gods, or else cease from ungraciously partaking in the property of the overseers.

Celsus's view of tradition allows no reason not to follow custom in worshipping and honoring the daemons. No harm can come to God, so the fear that one will somehow do injury by "serving two masters" is ridiculous. Only good and not harm will come by worshipping the daemons. The daemons provide their favor upon humans, so it is only right to give thanks and thereby maintain a fruitful relationship with them. Reason demands following custom in honoring the gods. Just as failing to honor a parent or a friend who gave you a gift would be atrocious and impious due to the failure of reciprocation, how much more then should you honor the divine overseers who give much greater gifts than a human parent?

Celsus reminds the Christians, "*we ought never to forsake God at all, neither by day nor by night, neither in public nor in private. In every word and deed, and in fact,*

37. *Cels.* VIII.55, Chadwick 493-94.

both with them and without them, let the soul be continually directed towards God."³⁸

The supreme God should not be forsaken, not even for the sake of pursuing some new, unproven path. Christians, like everyone else, should remember to direct their thoughts and actions towards God in accordance with reason—this means acting in piety as tradition has dictated.

Conclusion

Celsus advocated respect for tradition as it has been handed down by the overseers as the decisive argument concerning the proper norm for piety. In Celsus's view, following tradition is the only reasonable path. The alternative creates poor citizens, who fail to return honor and thanks to the deserving gods even as they partake in the gifts of the divine. If they fail to honor the divine, what will that mean for their respect of earthly matters? Piety leads to the proper conduct of oneself before all authorities and those deserving of honor and worship. Celsus sees the Christians' lack of piety as he understands it not only as a religious problem, but also as a societal-political problem. More precisely, for Celsus religion and socio-political concerns are necessarily intertwined.

As we have seen, Celsus's views exhibit the influences of Stoicism and Platonism. These influences are manifest, for example, in Celsus's understanding and use of the Stoic ideas of the good and living according to reason and the Platonic ideas of the supreme God and the intermediates. A century later, Origen would interpret Plato in a different way than Celsus does. Origen also comes to a vastly different conclusion concerning the norm of piety. Origen argues that Celsus is not following his supposed

38. *Cels.* VIII.63; Chadwick, 500.

paragon, Plato, nor is he being reasonable. Origen agrees that true doctrine entails the practice of proper piety as reason demands. However, for Origen, Celsus's view of piety is fundamentally flawed. In Origen's view, tradition, or the "ancient norm," is not the basis of proper piety, but something else properly serves that function. Exploring Origen's response to Celsus in this regard is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

ORIGEN AND PIETY

Having examined Celsus's understanding of piety, we now turn to consider Origen's understanding of piety. For Origen, Celsus's use of tradition as a norm for piety leads to several problems, one of which is the relativisation of piety. It is an incorrectly applied norm. Adhering to tradition in this way is the true underminer of the social order, not Christian belief and practice, as Celsus argued. In his response to Celsus, Origen shows the inadequate normative power of tradition and juxtaposes the superior normative power of divine revelation present in Jesus: the Logos and Wisdom of God. In Origen's perspective, piety is an instantiation of virtue rooted in God himself rather than something transmitted by the observance of local tradition. Origen asserts that the supreme God has revealed the true primordial and divine norm in the person of Christ and not in the tradition handed down by the ancestors. Moreover, Origen finds confirmation for the superiority of this God-revealed norm over tradition in the experience of the person who practices true piety: that person exhibits an increase in virtue as he or she practices the piety that comes by the revelation of Christ. This chapter will examine several contexts in Origen's work *Against Celsus* in order to substantiate and develop these characterizations of Origen's thought.

The Inadequacy of Tradition

In his reply to Celsus, Origen takes a two-fold approach: that is, Origen shows that tradition makes a deeply inadequate norm for piety and he insists that the best norm

for piety is God-centered, or God-revealed. Speaking of Celsus, Origen asserts, “His view will not be divine by nature (οὐ φύσει τὸ ὅσιον), but a matter of arbitrary arrangement and opinion.”¹ Rather than “divine by nature,” a better reading may be “pious by nature.” Origen writes that Celsus’s ὅσιος is not really ὅσιος. Origen insists that Celsus does not truly understand the nature of ὅσιος. Celsus knows only “arbitrary arrangement and opinion” instead. This is the case because the overseers on whom Celsus relies for definitions of piety seem to love and hate different things, depending on their locations and circumstances. Hence Celsus’s respect for the rationality and authority of the divinely-placed overseers is misplaced, “for among some people it is pious to worship the crocodile and to eat some animal worshipped by others, and among others it is pious to worship the calf, and among others to regard the goat as a god.” The plurality and even contradictions between religious traditions from place to place undermine their authority. Origen sums up the problem: “Thus the same person will be making things to be pious (ὅσια) by the standard of one set of laws and impious (ἀνόσια) by another, which is the most monstrous thing of all.”² Tradition cannot convey a transcendent norm because it is variable and inconsistent.

In discounting tradition as a norm, Origen’s thinking echoes the same lines of thought discussed earlier in the description of Socrates’s questioning of Euthyphro (cf. 7e-8b).³ Socrates raised the very same concern about piety becoming relative. Piety cannot simply be what pleases the gods if the gods love and hate different things. This

1. *Cels.* V.27; Chadwick, 284.

2. *Cels.* V.27; Chadwick, 284.

3. The discussion of Socrates is pg. 5-6.

results in the impossible situation where an action in one place is pious, while in another it may stand as impious. Tradition cannot norm piety, as it leads to various, even contradictory definitions and practices.

Reflecting about the concern of relativisation, the concern creates a manifold of problems. If piety can consist of contradictory actions, what does that mean for the other outworkings of virtue? It would be odd to argue that an act of courage, for example, could become uncourageous depending on the location, or that an act of love could become unloving because one merely steps into a different country overseen by a different intermediary. From the viewpoint of a monotheist, if the traditions all stem from the supreme God, what do the contradictory practices say about the rationality of the divine? If there were one supreme and rational God, then that God would be consistent in his likes and dislikes. There would be reason for the actions that the supreme God calls pious or impious. If what is pious and impious are truly relative, then that would suggest that there are many gods or that the supreme God is not rational, but arbitrary.

Surely, Celsus understood these concerns as well. It would seem that to Celsus the relativisation of virtue was less of a concern than maintaining social order. Celsus was not unconcerned with maintaining proper ideals about the divine. Rather, while trying to maintain proper ideals concerning the whole of the divine, not just the supreme God, Celsus works at trying to solve what he saw as a social problem, not a theological problem. After the Christians return to tradition and rationality, then Celsus could discuss the relativisation problem. Perhaps, the lost second pamphlet that Origen mentions in VIII.76 deals with this issue.

In *True Doctrine*, Celsus's main concern is not to speculate on the nature of the divine, but to address the proper status and behavior of humans in relation to the divine and its agents. Though Celsus is concerned with the divine as such (e.g., his emphasis on maintaining right ideas about the divine), Celsus's goal is to solve what he saw as a social problem. As Celsus understood it, the Christians were the source of an intolerable social problem and the solution to the social problem caused by the Christians was a return to the traditions. By contrast, explicating the nature of the divine is of much greater concern to Origen, since his argument rests on the authority and nature of the supreme God.

Even though Celsus claims one supreme god, he demands that the different overseers all be pleased; yet they each require different and contradictory things. Celsus insists that this expresses rationality, but Origen contends that such a position is not rational:

If piety and holiness and righteousness (ἡ εὐσέβεια καὶ ἡ ὁσιότης καὶ ἡ δικαιοσύνη) are reckoned to be relative, so that one and the same thing is pious (ὅσιον) and impious (ἀνόσιον) under differing conditions and laws, consider whether we should not logically reckon self-control also as relative, and courage, intelligence, knowledge, and the other virtues. Nothing could be more absurd than this.⁴

The practice of virtue must hold coherent and consistent content. If it is to be a proper and reasonable working of the virtue in question, the practice of it needs to be consistent and hence the same no matter where one is practicing it. Piety cannot and should not be reckoned relative, whereas local tradition is relative by necessity. Origen presumes the same act cannot reasonably be both pious and impious merely because it is performed in different regions where different traditional standards apply. Yet, this is inevitably the

4. *Cels.* V.28; Chadwick, 285.

result when local tradition provides the norm. Since tradition differs from place to place and is relative, it cannot act as a proper norm for piety.

This impulse to establish a non-relative reference point for discerning meaning, particularly religious meaning, may seem odd for a culture saturated in pluralism. However, that very climate of pluralism may have been a major factor impelling many in the Greco-Roman to seek the one supreme truth, in an effort to find solid ground on which to base life and meaning where for many there seemed to be none.⁵ The collapsing of the gods into one supreme god discussed in chapter 2 is an illustration of this impulse. If the gods are not many, but one, then the truth and virtue the one God represents must also have a single reference point.

During the Hellenistic and Roman period, this unification remained an abstract principal, operative in the philosophical realm but far removed from praxis of daily life for most people.⁶ It would take a more personal touch before the idea could gain mainstream support or have practical effect. Ideas such as the personified Logos, which Origen employed, would help to make the unifying impulse less abstract and more concrete, not only for sophisticated philosophical thinkers but also in the popular mindset. Slowly, these ideas would gain more credence and begin supplanting the relativistic norm of local tradition.⁷ Origen is an early participant in this transformation.

5. A. D. Nock highlights this phenomenon in his *Conversion*. In chapter seven, Nock points to the expanding world—i.e. village to empire. This expanding horizon led people to turn to astrology and the mystery cults in search of the universal law. A. D. Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), 99-101.

6. Ferguson, 317.

7. This can be seen with the rise of monotheistic, personal religions like Christianity and the Mystery Cults. (See Ferguson, 317, and Stroumsa's introduction to *Barbarian Philosophy*)

Tradition is not only relative; in Origen's view, it is also inherently faulty, due to its basically human nature. Human vice and the presence of sin hinder humans from holding correct and proper understandings. Their traditions preserve and embody these faulty understandings. Therefore, tradition cannot help but be an inconsistent and deeply inadequate norm for piety. Origen insists that without divine aid humans are spiritually blind. Most strikingly, they ought to worship the Creator, yet they insist on worshipping creation instead, and they act in ways not reverent to the divine. Origen explains the problem this way:

In our view, however, who are the people who cannot see?... we do not say that people with sharp eyesight suffer from ophthalmia or are defective; but we do maintain that those who in ignorance of God give themselves to the temples, the images, and so-called sacred months, have been blinded in mind, and especially when they live in impiety (ἀσεβεία) and licentiousness, not even seeking to do anything honourable at all, but doing everything of which they ought to be ashamed.⁸

Although humans may not have defective physical eyes, their spiritual vision is impaired. Furthermore, even when conducting the rites as tradition dictates, the people still live in impiety.⁹ This impious conduct is due to the fact that they follow not the Law of God, but the Law of Sin, which shows in their licentious and dishonorable behavior. In order for a person to honor God, Origen claims that all the moral virtues need to be at work in the person; otherwise, that person cannot be considered pious. As Origen understands the Law of God, the Law requires the working of virtue rather than sacrifice. This would mean that a pious person, someone ὅσιος, would not be someone blindly sacrificing and performing the rites, but instead someone practicing virtue. That is because ὅσιος does

8. *Cels.* III.77; Chadwick, 180.

9. Origen is likely thinking of the OT prophets and their admonishments to the Jews like Hosea's: "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings." Hos 6:6 NRSV.

not refer to the arbitrary customs of society, but to the Law of God and the increase of virtue. As Origen exclaims, “But I do not know if even an uneducated man would call anyone pious (εὐσεβῆ) who was not adorned with all moderation and virtue.”¹⁰ Origen calls to attention here that he is not the only one who conceives of piety in moral terms. Origen goes as far as to say that he does not know a single person who would not agree that a pious person needs to be moral. There is a precedence to Origen’s ideas, a precedence that Origen claims is widespread.¹¹ One of the possible implications of this precedence is further credence that the mindset that the shift is proposing is more widespread than just the intellectual realm.

In summary, tradition makes an inadequate norm, since tradition by necessity is relative. Piety cannot have a relative norm because that would make piety relative, creating several problems. Tradition is not only inadequate but also faulty because it was created, or at least transmitted, by humans blinded by vice and Sin. However, Origen knows of a solution: a stable and worthy norm for piety that is revealed by God himself. This new norm would shift the focus from the faulty Law of Sin to the perfect Law of Nature and God.

Law of Sin and Law of Nature

According to Origen’s explanation, the world has two laws at work in it. These laws are the Law of Nature—equated to the Law of God—and the Law of Sin. Celsus is mistaking the tradition—i.e., the Law of Sin—as the norm for piety. Origen writes that the true norm in accordance with nature and reason is the Law of God. “Now there are

10. *Cels.* III.25; Chadwick, 143.

11. Chapter 4 will further the discussion of the precedence to Origen’s ideas.

two kinds of law for our consideration. The one is the ultimate law of nature (τῆς φύσεως νόμου), which is probably derived from God, and the other the written code of cities,” that is, the tradition of which Celsus speaks.¹² “Where the written law does not contradict the law (νόμος) of God it is good that the citizens should not be troubled by the introduction of strange laws [...],” Origen explains. “If in other instances it is reasonable to prefer the law of nature, as being God’s law, before the written law which has been laid down by men in contradiction to the law of God, should we not do this even more in the case of the laws which concern the worship of God?”¹³

The Law of Nature is to be preferred over the customs of the cities, i.e., the tradition of which Celsus wrote. Where the two contradict one another, “we see that it is pious (ὅσιον) to break *customs which have existed in each locality from the beginning* and to adopt better and more divine laws (νόμοις) given us by Jesus, as the most powerful being, ‘delivering us from the present evil world’, and from ‘the rulers of this world who are coming to nought’.”¹⁴ Once again, Origen insists that tradition cannot be the norm for piety as it leads to a relativisation of virtue. In addition, tradition does not follow the Law of Nature according to reason, but instead follows the Law of Sin, and is therefore inadequate for the task of defining piety and governing human religion.

Just as Celsus appears to assume that his readers would agree that the overseers hold divine authority, Origen seems to assume that his readers will agree with the authority of the Scriptures and Jesus Christ. These are not items for whose authority

12. *Cels.* V.37; Chadwick, 293.

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Cels.* V.32; Chadwick 289.

Origen argues in detail. Origen's purpose was not to argue the authority of Scripture and Jesus. Rather, in writing *Against Celsus*, Origen aims show where Celsus is false so as to ensure that the believers' faith remains firm in the manifest power of Christ:

I would therefore go so far as to say that the defence which you ask me to compose will weaken the force of the defence that is in the mere facts, and detract from the power of Jesus which is manifest to those who are not quite stupid. Nevertheless, that we may not appear to shirk the task which you have set us, we have tried our best to reply to each particular point in Celsus' book and to refute it as it seemed fitting to us, although his arguments cannot shake the faith of any true Christian.¹⁵

You have here, holy Ambrose, the end of the task that you set me, according to the ability possessed by and granted to me. We have concluded in eight books everything which we have thought fit to say in reply to Celsus' book entitled *The True Doctrine*. It is for the reader of his treatise, and of our reply against him, to judge which of the two breathes more of the spirit of the true God and of the temper of devotion towards Him and of the truth attainable by men, that is, of sound doctrines which lead men to live the best life.¹⁶ (Prae.3, VIII.76)

Origen's stated purpose was to give a response to Celsus's claims in order to defend the faith. As his purpose is to reaffirm Christians, Origen's treatise was addressed to fellow Christians and not outsiders to the faith. Since the addressees are Christians, Origen makes a fair assumption. However, this assumption limits the plausibility of Origen's assumption for non-Christian readers, who would want Origen to explicate his reasoning for trusting the authority of Scripture while denying the authority of Celsus's overseers. Both the overseers and Scripture represent indirect revelation of God's will and might therefore be considered to have the same potential for authority and pitfalls with respect to their revelatory capacity.

15. *Cels.* Prae.3; Chadwick, 4.

16. *Cels.* VIII.76; Chadwick, 510-11.

Origen's Christocentric assumptions are evident in the way he uses Christ as determiner of what is normative. By making the Law of God the standard for piety, "we avoid things which, though they have an appearance of piety (τὰ φαντασία εὐσεβείας), make impious (ἄσεβεῖς) those who have been led astray from the piety (εὐσεβείας) which is mediated through Jesus Christ. He alone is the way of piety and truly said 'I am the way, the truth, and the life.'"¹⁷ Celsus's tradition only has an "appearance of piety" and an appearance of being in accordance with nature and reason. In reality, Celsus's tradition fails to worship the supreme God in the correct and proper manner.

Origen undermines confidence in the gods, daemons, and heroes as Celsus conceives of them:

By what argument, my good fellow, are you able to prove that the right to receive honour has been granted to these beings from God, and that it is not the result of ignorance and lack of knowledge on the part of men who are in error and fallen away from Him who is the proper object of their worship?¹⁸

It is not self-evident that the daemons or heroes received authority from the supreme God. Even if that were the case, there is no evidence that the daemons and heroes truly represent the will of the supreme God. The authority of the daemons in relation to the divine is a necessary point for Celsus's argument that the traditions mediated and governed by them are right and reasonable. If it is possible that they were appointed in ignorance, Celsus's entire argument is in danger of falling apart. Celsus's rhetoric relies on the people agreeing that the supreme God has granted the right of honor to the gods, daemons, and heroes.

17. *Cels.* VIII.20; Chadwick, 467.

18. *Cels.* VIII.9; Chadwick, 458-59.

Though both Celsus and Origen are monotheistic in assuming that there is a supreme God, Origen's argument is that the proper object of religious piety is the supreme God and no other. The gods, daemons, and heroes are distractions from the one proper object of piety. Origen argues that Celsus has forgotten the true nature of piety and its proper object: the supreme God.

In ignorance and in error, tradition does not follow the Law of God, worshipping the proper object of piety, but follows the Law of Sin, giving honor to distractions in the form of the daemons. This makes the tradition a legacy of dangerous error rather than a repository of divine purposes safeguarding piety. However, in his providence, the supreme God corrected this mistake on the part of humanity. God sent his Wisdom and Logos in the form of Jesus to show the proper working of the virtue.

Κατὰ Ἀληθῆν λόγον

Origen's response to the accusations that Christians do not worship daemons is based on more than just Origen's judgment that the daemons are evil. For Origen, it is more in accordance with nature and reason not to honor the daemons. Christians give honor to whom it is due: the proper object of worship, God. Hence Christianity does not prevent giving due honor to whom it is due, as Celsus contends.

Origen maintains the notion that the daemons are evil and that they are undeserving of honor:

At any rate, none of them [the daemons] prevents honours from being given to others; but Jesus, being convinced that he was more powerful than all of them, forbade the bestowing of favours on them on the ground that they are wicked daemons who have taken possession of places on earth because they are unable to attain to the purer and more divine region far removed from the grossness of the earth and the countless evils in it.¹⁹

19. *Cels.* III.35; Chadwick 152.

The daemons have not been granted the right to honor by the supreme God. By extension of being the improper object of piety, the gods and heroes are as daemons. Origen makes the claim that the daemons have been stripped of their honor by their baseness and their ill-gotten possession of earth. The daemons are not of a divine nature as Celsus contends but are far removed from the pure divine and deserve expulsion and banishment rather than honor, as Jesus Christ demonstrated.

Virtue reaches for the divine, not the base. Origen not only undermines the idea that the daemons derive their authority from the supreme God, but also his statement reinforces the idea that the daemons are of a base and evil nature and should not be served or followed. Jesus's treatment of the daemons argues for a very different evaluation of their status than Celsus would have. This idea that the true nature of the daemons is evil undermines Celsus's argument that it offends the divine not to give the daemons due honor due to their right granted by the supreme God.

Additionally, this line of thought helps support Origen's argument that Jesus provides a purer, more divine example to follow for one seeking to pursue a pious life. Jesus is in fact of the divine nature and holds the power to forbid the giving of favors and honor. However, in Origen's view, Jesus provides more than just an example to follow or reveal the base nature of the daemons.

Jesus serves humanity by being the example of perfect piety and also aids directly in providing humanity with the means to practice proper piety. This is accomplished by Jesus enabling Christians to contemplate the incorruptible and no longer to occupy their minds with the corruptible. Jesus allows Christians to honor God in true virtue and in pure prayers. Since the Christian's mind is no longer focused on the corruptible things

like the daemons, the Christian is able to focus on the incorruptible Jesus as the perfect example and to follow his example.

This change is because “we offer these prayers to Him through him who is, as it were, midway between uncreated nature and that of all created things; and he brings to us the benefits of the Father, while as our high priest he conveys our prayers to the supreme God.”²⁰ Jesus’s intermediary role as a channel of divine grace and conveyor of human prayer make him the means of the practice of proper piety. Unlike the daemons and human tradition, Jesus is actually of the divine nature and is the embodied Logos and Wisdom of God. Since Jesus is the embodied Logos and Wisdom of God, and thus a part of the supreme God, honoring Jesus does not distract from the proper object of worship as does honoring the daemons. Because of this conception of Jesus’s place and function as part of the divinity, Origen is able to commend him as the proper normative power for piety, an authority far outranking human tradition.

When it comes to living a pious life, Origen’s basic contention is that we should live according to reason, and there is no better way to satisfy that injunction than to follow the example of the Reason (Logos) of God. The prophets and God himself revealed this path:

in order that he who honours the Son, who is Reason (Logos), may do nothing irrational, and by giving him honour may derive benefit therefrom, and that he who honours him who is the Truth may become a better person as a result of honouring Truth, and similarly also by honouring Wisdom and Righteousness, and all the characteristics which the divine scriptures ascribe to the Son of God.²¹

20. *Cels.* III.34; Chadwick, 151.

21. *Cels.* VIII.9; Chadwick, 459.

Christians are not irrational, as Celsus claims. Instead, they are doing as reason demands. Celsus exhorts Christians to live *κατὰ λόγον*, i.e., reasonably. Origen does the same, though he qualifies the idea in view of his convictions about the nature of *λόγος*. Origen exhorts people to live *κατὰ ἀληθῆν λόγον*, i.e., according to the true word: Jesus Christ. While Celsus uses *λόγος* idiomatically to signify reason, Origen reveals a different idiom. Origen's conception of *λόγος* involves a more personal and definite understanding than Celsus has in mind. The true word and personified reason is Jesus Christ. Jesus is rationality at its purest, as Origen defines it.

When one lives according to the Law of God and practices fully the virtues, that person ascends towards the supreme God, and he or she is “without any divided loyalty whatever, worships Him through His Son, the divine Logos and Wisdom seen in Jesus, who alone leads to Him those who by all means try to draw near to God, the Creator of all things, by exceptionally good words and deeds and thoughts.”²² For Origen, it is not the proper practice of the rites that show one is pious and honoring God, as Celsus maintains. Instead, when one practices a proper life by drawing near to God, only then does one have authentic piety. In Origen's mindset, if society were to unite under the same Logos, the Law of Nature, in piety according to His teachings, such a society would be “a precious stone of the entire temple of God.”²³ That temple, though, is not a temple dedicated to Helios or Athena, where those who live according to the Law of Sin continue to swarm. Instead, it is the body of believers.

22. *Cels.* VIII.4; Chadwick, 456.

23. *Cels.* VIII.19; Chadwick, 466.

With this conception of the temple as the people of God, caring for the temple and conducting the proper rites takes on a quite different meaning than in Celsus's conceptions. To live according to reason is to practice virtue and strive to become more like God for that is the proper conduct of the rites under this notion of a humanized temple. Origen writes, "If anyone by licentiousness or sin corrupts the temple of God, that man will be destroyed because he is the one who is truly impious (ἀληθῶς ἀσεβῆς) in his attitude to the true temple."²⁴ The pure and perfect example of a temple is the person of Jesus Christ:

The sacred and pure body of our Saviour Jesus was a temple better than and superior to all the so-called temples. For because he knew that impious men (τῶν ἀσεβῶν) were able to form designs against the temple of God within him, though it was certainly not the case that the purpose of the men who had such designs was stronger than the divine power which built the temple, he said to them "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." But, "this he said of the temple of his body."²⁵

In this context of humans as the proper temple, piety consists of practicing virtue by living a moral life according to the path revealed by the Logos of God and enabled through his mediation. Its opposite, impiety, is living in vice according to the Law of Sin; those who do are ignoring the purer, more reasonable Law of Nature and God.

Origen agrees with Celsus that a life lived according to reason demands rendering honor to whom it is due and the proper practice of piety. Yet, reason implores people to reach higher than the base daemons towards the divine realm, which is piety's proper object. Reason shows how to acquire a precious stone for the temple of the supreme God through the example of Reason himself, the Logos. Jesus, not the traditions handed down

24. *Cels.* VIII.19; Chadwick, 465.

25. *Ibid.*

by humans, serves as the pure example and perfect norm for piety in accordance with true doctrine.

True Worship and Society

Living according to the example of Jesus instills in people and society not only piety but also all aspects of virtue. Celsus claims that the Christians refuse to help society and maintain the social order. Origen refutes Celsus's claim, saying that Christians help society:

If Christians do avoid these responsibilities, it is not with the motive of shirking the public services of life. But they keep themselves for a more divine and necessary service in the church of God for the sake of the salvation of men. Here it is both necessary and right for them to be leaders and to be concerned about all men, both those who are within the Church, that they may live better every day, and those who appear to be outside it, that they may become familiar with the sacred words and acts of worship; and that, offering a true worship to God in this way and instructing as many as possible, that may become absorbed in the word of God and the divine law, and so be united to the supreme God through the Son of God, the Logos, Wisdom, Truth, and Righteousness, who unites to Him every one who has been persuaded to live according to God's will in all things.²⁶

Christians do serve to uphold the social order. Christians, however, uphold the social order in a different manner than Celsus would recommend. Origen's argument is that Christians do more than just help uphold society. Christians also provide an example of true worship and true piety in accordance with "the Logos, Wisdom, Truth, and Righteousness." Christians serve the social order by being salt and light for the world as the Logos called them to be. Those following Celsus's idea of piety do not incline the supreme God to show favor, but the Christians incline God's favor by offering true worship to him.

26. *Cels.* VIII.75; Chadwick, 510.

From Origen's perspective, the Christians are far from being the underminers of society. They are the practitioners of properly based piety revealed by God. Christians do not worship those of a corruptible and base nature as the norm of tradition would have them worship. Instead, Christians live in accordance with the Law of Nature striving towards the supreme God who transcends all others. They live in this manner not only for their own sake, but also for the sake of all humanity. However, non-Christians may not see what the Christians do as helping society. However, since Christians live by the law of nature and not the law of sin, they are able to properly worship God and by that example lead others to the true God. Origen's hope is that by living in this manner they will one day draw all humanity to join in true worship following the true doctrine.

Conclusion

For Origen, piety is not normed by tradition as Celsus claims. Instead, the norm for piety is the very Logos and Wisdom of God made incarnate in Jesus Christ. There are various reasons for Origen to advocate this norm over that of tradition. In Origen's mindset, tradition is inherently faulty, since humans who live according to the Law of Sin handed it down. Human error caused piety to take corruptible objects such as the daemons instead of the proper object—God. However, God saw fit to intervene and has provided aid in the form of a perfect example and true normative power: Jesus Christ, the personified λόγος. Jesus makes the divine accessible to humans, yet does so in a way that is far superior to the tradition or daemons, since he is a full participant in the divine.

Since piety is one instance of virtue, Origen makes the argument that the other instantiations of virtue should and must accompany the practice of piety. Only someone who has turned away from the Law of Sin and has started to live according to reason and

the Law of God can practice true piety in perfect worship of the supreme God. This is due in part to the temple not being in reference to a temple made by human hands, but instead the more personal and spiritual or moral conception of the temple being that of the human body. In Origen's view, proper conduct of the rites and care of the temple is the cultivation and the practice of the virtues including, but not limited to, piety. That other virtues accompany true piety as practiced by Christians further substantiates Origen's understanding of piety as correct.

Having examined Celsus's and Origen's understandings of the norm for piety in turn, we will now attempt to draw constructive conclusions as a result of the comparison. Some of the more pressing questions for consideration in view of the proposed religious transformation in which Origen participates are: Whence did Origen get the material from which he constructed his understanding of the norm for piety? How original was he, and to what extent did he draw on precedent in his refutation of Celsus? These questions will lead the way as we move to the fourth and final chapter of the thesis.

CHAPTER IV

PIETY AND HEART

Having examined Celsus's and Origen's understandings of piety, we will now turn our attention to drawing conclusions from their differing understandings. It is evident that the two philosophers disagreed on what constituted the norm for piety. However, the fact of a difference in understanding is not in itself evidence of a shift in religious thought. Origen's ideas have precedent in both Greco-Roman and Jewish thought. While Origen does not create something entirely new, his work provides an apt example of a shift in religious thought. With its presentation of two differing philosophers talking about religious truth, *Against Celsus* provides a good illustration of a dichotomy of thought in the Roman world of the early Common Era. Celsus focuses on maintaining tradition in order to uphold the foundations of society, whereas Origen focuses on the individual heart in the matter of proper piety and the upholding of society. This dichotomy of village/state versus individual outlook for religion is in line with the proposed religious revolution and thus lends some credence to the proposal.

Whence Origen's Understanding May Have Come

While it is most likely the case that Origen is not creating a new understanding, *Against Celsus* could still serve the purpose of illustrating the proposed shift as Stroumsa attests. This thesis does show that there is a difference in thinking between Celsus and Origen. Those differences parallel what Stroumsa is supposing took place in the Greco-Roman world.

The idea that the tradition is not absolute in determining piety is seen even as far back as Plato in the dialogue with Euthyphro. Socrates and Origen both point out that if piety is simply that which pleases the gods, then piety will be reckoned relative. If this were the case, then an action could be both pious and impious. Socrates and Origen both believed that this could not be the case. As such, philosophers like Plato and Origen called for a different norm to determine if an action was pious or impious. It is not the questioning of the norm that marks a contrast that would lead to thinking a religious shift is taking place, but instead the norm that Origen puts in place of tradition.

The idea that is likely representative of the proposed shift is Origen's use of a personal Logos. It is the idea of a personal being who cares to show humanity a perfect example to follow that is vastly different from the tradition of Celsus. Origen's God is not a distant being appointing overseers in his stead, but instead sends his very self in human form to model and aid humanity into reaching their proper end. This personal Logos cares for each individual and calls for the individual to follow the model he has provided.¹

The personal understanding of Logos most likely comes from a combination of Origen's reading of scripture, particularly the Gospel of John, and the work of other theologians on Logos. While Origen makes greater use of Matthew than the Gospels, he also makes heavy use of John. Chadwick lists one hundred and forty four instances of Origen's use of John of which twenty-three are from the Prologue (1:1-18).² Origen also wrote an extensive commentary on the Gospel of John. John's use of the word *logos* and

1. As the Logos himself said, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." Matt 16:24 (NRSV).

2. Chadwick, 527-28.

the story of Jesus combined with the philosophical use of logos creates a unique opportunity for Origen. Origen uses the opportunity to combine the two meanings as he does in saying that Christians live κατὰ λόγον. That is to say that Jesus becomes the embodiment of reason that binds and holds the world together.

This idea of Logos as both reason and Jesus is not Origen's alone, but it is also present in his predecessors such as Justin Martyr and Irenaeus.³ Justin Martyr used Socrates as an example of an incomplete Logos even suffering death for discounting the daemons. Like Jesus, Socrates was an embodied Logos but an imperfect one. According to Justin Martyr (100-165 CE), Socrates lacked the true understanding of the whole Logos, who is Christ (2 *Apology* 10.8).⁴ Irenaeus (130-202 CE) conceives the Word of God as God's image and likeness in the fullest way possible (*Against Heresies* 5.16.1).⁵ Clement of Alexandria (150-215 CE) sees the Logos as the perfect man, i.e., the fullness of virtue in all perfection. Like Plato, Clement defines the telos of life as "likeness to god" (*Theaetetus* 176b); this means that the aim of Christians should be oneness with Christ, the Logos of God.⁶ As a learned scholar, Origen surely read his predecessors' works. While Origen does not quote them, it would seem that their ideas and understanding influenced Origen's work. However, Origen would take the ideas further,

[laying] the foundations of Christology, hermeneutics, anthropology and the doctrine of the Trinity for all theologians after him. For him, these four were reducible to one discipline, the pursuit of the Word incarnate in the word of

3. This is just a brief examination. However, even a brief examination shows parallel thought with Origen. A fuller study would surely strengthen the connections between Origen and his predecessors. Though, that task is for another work.

4. Mark Edwards, *Image, Word and God in Early Christian Centuries* (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2013), 85.

5. *Ibid.*, 94.

6. *Ibid.*, 100.

scripture, from which it was his task to unweave the Saviour's image and knit that image to the reader's soul.⁷

In addition to the personal Logos as the incarnate God present in John, the idea of piety requiring a moral lifestyle is not a new idea from Origen. This idea is seen in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. The prophets preached that the exercise of mercy is far superior to sacrifices in the view of God. As Hosea preached, "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings."⁸ This meant that the God of Israel was calling the Jews to more than just following custom. Hosea, like Origen, called people to practice all instantiations of virtue and by doing so become truly pious. On a similar note, Micah taught, "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"⁹ The prophets exhorted the people to do more than just follow the tradition. As Origen would do, the prophets taught that pious people would live upright lives full of the virtues like steadfast love, justice, and kindness, which would make those so practicing pious before God.

This theme continues into the NT. Matthew even has Jesus quoting the above preaching of Hosea.¹⁰ Matthew wrote of Jesus stressing in the Sermon on the Mount the importance of people practicing the laws inwardly and outwardly. This meant that Jesus requires a person to not only uphold the tradition, but also to practice the virtue that the tradition is meant to increase. Outside of the Gospels, in Timothy, ὁσιος is placed as a

7. Ibid., 97.

8. Hos 6:6 (NRSV).

9. Mic 6:8 (NRSV).

10. Matt 9:13 (NRSV).

virtue needed by leaders alongside δίκαιος.¹¹ Origen uses these themes in his own work as he shows the difference between the truly pious and those with merely an appearance of piety.

The idea of proper honor to God being the practice of virtue is present in Greco-Roman thought as well. For example, we will use two of the philosophers mentioned above—i.e., Epictetus and Seneca. In the *Encheiridion*, Epictetus wrote that rather than sacrifice being the “chief element” of piety, the true primary consideration was to have right opinions, to obey them, and to submit to everything that happens (cf. 31.1). Likewise, Seneca went as far as to suggest forbidding rituals, as God needs no servants. Rather, Seneca teaches that one should acknowledge the gods and humans by cherishing virtue (cf. 95.47-58). The Stoics valued a life lived in virtue over the practice of tradition. In countering Celsus, Origen uses the philosophy and writings of both the Greco-Roman world and the Jewish world.

Origen’s reading and use of Paul and the book of Hebrews influence Origen’s understanding of Jesus. The idea of the body of Christ being the temple is derived from 1 Corinthians 3 and 6. Origen's claims that Jesus serves as the intermediate between humans and God as the perfect High Priest and that he serves as a perfect example both show the influence of Paul and Hebrews. When Origen exhorts us “to adopt better and more divine laws given us by Jesus, as the most powerful being, ‘delivering us from the present evil world’, and from ‘the rulers of this world who are coming to nought’,”

11. Tim 1:8 (NRSV).

Origen shows the great extent to which the Scriptures have influenced this thinking (e.g., see Gal 1:4; 1 Cor 2:6).¹²

Alongside these ideas, Origen's understanding of Jesus is surely the driving factor in his retort. If Jesus is the Logos of the supreme God, then Jesus is the perfect and divine example of piety that humanity lacked. Origen was not the first nor the last to see Jesus as the perfect example. The NT writers also showed Jesus as the perfect, divine example to follow. However, unlike the NT, Origen puts the idea of a personal Logos alongside the Greco-Roman understanding of logos in a philosophical treatment.

Origen's understanding of the norm for piety appears to come from the combination of his knowledge of Greco-Roman philosophy and his studies of Judeo-Christian thinking and writings. Origen is not creating some completely new understanding of piety or its norm. Instead, Origen is philosophically applying Judeo-Christian thought found in the OT and NT.

The Two Laws

Reflecting on both Judeo-Christian and Greek thought, Origen offers his own explanation for this dichotomy present between himself and Celsus. Celsus and those who think as he does live under the influence of the Law of Sin. The Christians no longer live under the Law of Sin, but are now able to live under the Law of Nature/God due to the aid of Jesus. Origen sees the change in religious thought not in terms of the individualization of religion, but as a turning from a false law and understanding of the nature of religion to the one true law and understanding. In this way, Origen acknowledges that there is a change: a change from false worship and sacrifice to true

12. *Cels.* V.32; Chadwick, 289.

worship in mercy and practice of the virtues. The emphasis is not on blindly sacrificing or upholding the customs. Instead, true worship has its individual practitioners exercise the virtues to their fullest both outwardly and inwardly.

However, Origen would not talk about the shift as modern scholars would. For Origen, the shift is more personal and more defined. The shift sees people move from the Law of Sin and condemnation to the Law of Nature and salvation. The Logos and Wisdom of God are at work in humanity showing a perfect example in which to follow. Instead of the customs corroded by the Law of Sin, Origen offers the hope provided by the personified Logos.

Whether the shift occurred or not, there is a dichotomy of thought present in *Against Celsus*, and the text provides an apt test for the shift. For Celsus, tradition holds a normative power for determining the proper attitude and practices concerning the gods. Origen holds that God himself gives the perfect example to follow in determining a pious action. Celsus claims that the Christians are not living according to reason since they do not give honor to whom it is due. For Origen, Christians are not only living according to reason, but moreover Christians are living according to the purest, most true reason: Jesus Christ, the Logos of God.

Celsus provides an excellent example of how society thinks while living under the Law of Sin. Origen commends the example of Christians living under the Law of Nature. For both Celsus and Origen, this dichotomy of understanding is a grave matter as piety is the foundation of the social order, as Celsus and Origen understand it. While Origen seems to put more focus on the individual, the proper working of religion leads to the stability of not only the individual, but also more importantly of the society as a whole.

The focus on society and the social order may be due to Origen refuting Celsus and the apologetic nature of the work. However, the importance of society as a whole is still there.

The two philosophers and the two laws provide a good starting point to begin to understand what may have been going on in the first few centuries CE concerning religious thought. However, it still needs to be shown definitely whether the understanding Origen and those like him held is really a change in religious thought or whether it is a continuation of strains beneath the popular understanding. Something of the nature that Stroumsa and others are proposing certainly stems in part from the mixing of Jewish and Greco-Roman thought. That mixing appears in *Against Celsus*. As such, the work easily helps illustrate Stroumsa's points.

On this point, reiterating Stroumsa's words is appropriate to further understand the contrast between Celsus and Origen:

The great caesura between Celsus and Origen is not located so much around the unity of God as around the nature of religion and its role in the state. Celsus is a conservative who desires to preserve society and its traditional values against an external threat of unknown nature. As such, he remains blind to the spiritual novelty of Christianity that seems to him to undermine the very foundations of which the civil society of the empire is established. For Celsus, religion is above all a matter of cultural tradition. For Origen, it is a matter of truth. While the former is a radical relativist, the latter supports a new form of religion, in a revolutionary sense, established on the "objective" truth of revelation and on personal conviction. Celsus's religion is a central attribute of the state and of society, and is the business of citizens, who try to strengthen social structures. For Origen, it is in the human heart that the true religion is implanted, which calls for revolt against the state of things.¹³

Stroumsa sees Celsus and Origen on two vastly different sides: one a conservative and blind, the other a spiritual novelist and revolutionary. These strains of thought do appear

13. Stroumsa, *Sacrifice*, 103.

in *Against Celsus*. However, the sides put so starkly seems to remove the heart from both sides of the dialogue.

Celsus focuses on the state and society, and Origen on the human heart. However, it does not seem to be the case that either Celsus or Origen fails to see the significance and need of both society and the heart. There certainly is a dichotomy of understanding and focus. However, Celsus would argue that tradition and custom as they have been handed down uphold society, which grants citizens the opportunity to improve the human heart. Origen approaches the situation from the other side. By improving and focusing on the human heart and “revolt[ing] against the state of things” as it were, society and the state improve alongside the heart practicing true religion.

Conclusion

Both Celsus and Origen understood religion as something that should lead people to live κατὰ λόγον, which would subsequently lead to a stable foundation for society. However, Celsus conceived of piety as normed by tradition. Origen took a different norm, that of the divinely revealed Christ, whom he understood as the personified Logos and Wisdom of God. This different understanding of the norm leads Celsus to accuse the Christians of impiety, and more importantly to him, of thereby undermining the social order and stability.

Origen’s approach is more personal and focused on the Body of Christ, but he was not unconcerned with society or social order. Origen saw in Jesus the perfect example to follow. Moreover, by sending himself down to the level of humanity, the supreme God allowed humans the ability to ascend to the level of God and practice true

worship and religion. In Origen's understanding, humanity could now do what Celsus was exhorting: live according to reason and uphold the foundations of society.

Additionally, Celsus and Origen understand Plato differently. *Against Celsus* is certainly religious in nature; this means that the hermeneutical use of Pagan-Christian dichotomy is appropriate for understanding *Against Celsus*. On the other hand, *Against Celsus* also holds the debate of two philosophers sharing Platonic ideals. This aspect and the question of who is the rightful inheritor of Plato is also an appropriate lens through which to view *Against Celsus*.

The presence of both understandings in *Against Celsus* provides opportunity for much further study, which will aid in understanding the mindset of those who lived in the Roman world. The dichotomy of the norms for piety is just a small piece of both *Against Celsus* and the proposed transformation in religious thought. In examining this dichotomy, the hermeneutical use of the proposed shift proved an appropriate and apt tool for analyzing *Against Celsus*. However, putting the sides so starkly threatens to remove the heart from both sides of the dialogue.

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