

Of Scholarship, Piety, and Community:
Origen's Purpose(s) in *Contra Celsum*¹

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The *Contra Celsum* was among the last of Origen's major works to be completed, and most likely in the year 248.² Origen himself tells us that it was composed at the request of his long-standing patron Ambrose.³ But what do these bare facts tell us about Origen's purposes in composing the work? We simply do not know with any precision why Ambrose asked Origen to write a refutation, and we do not know why Origen chose to respond at that particular point. We can, however, say a little more about how Origen understood his task.⁴ He comments in the preface that he had initially decided to provide only brief notes responding to Celsus's main charges, but eventually decided to produce a more extensive, and more finished response to Celsus's charges. Was this because Origen found Celsus's charges more worthy of answer the more he responded to them, or because he found that answering those charges en-

1. I am grateful to the participants in the original seminar at which this paper was presented for their comments, especially to Rowan Williams for responding, and to George Boys-Stones, Matthew Crawford, Mark Edwards, Brendan Harris and Teresa Morgan for help during the process of revision.

2. See the discussion of Marcel Borret at SC 132: 15-21; Pierre Nautin, *Origène. Sa vie et son oeuvre* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1977), 439-440.

3. *Cels. pref. 3*. Eusebius, *h.e.* 6.34.

4. In understanding the preface I have found particularly helpful Gilles Dorival, "La forme littéraire du Contre Celse d'Origène", in L. Perrone, ed., *Discorsidi verità: paganism, giudaismo e cristianismo a confronto nel Contro Celso di Origene* (Rome: Augustinianum, 1998), 29-45.

abled him to draw out themes that seemed worth putting before his public? Something of both, I suspect. We are told that the resulting text is aimed at either non-Christians or those of only weak in faith (*ἀσθενοῦσιν ἐν τῇ πίστει*).⁵ The referent of this last phrase is not immediately clear, though Rowan Williams seems quite right, in his response to this paper, to note that Origen uses the work in part to defend himself against Christians who saw his speculative work as denying the simple truths of Christian belief.

The polemic of the *Contra Celsum* has most frequently been viewed through the lens of their philosophical disagreements - Celsus charging that Christians are philosophically crude, Origen responding that Celsus himself holds to philosophically untenable positions, and that he fails to understand how Christian belief is an appropriate point of departure for philosophically sophisticated reflection. While such a viewpoint has been highly fruitful, in this essay I will focus on Origen's persistent claim that Celsus fails as a scholar, that Celsus fails to study Christian texts and beliefs as one should who has been skilled in the techniques of investigation and analysis taught initially by the *grammatikos*, and then developed within all branches of higher learning in Origen's time.⁶

5. *Cels. pref.* 6. (SC 132. 76).

6. This theme has been understudied in treatments of *Cels.* It does not, for example, play a significant role in either M. Fédou, *Christianisme et religions païennes dans le Contre Celse d'Origène* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1988), in C. Reemts, *Vernunftgemäßer Glaube. Die Begründung des Christentums in der Schrift des Origenes gegen Celsus* (Bonn: Borengässer, 1998), or in the excellent collection L. Perrone (ed.), *Discorsi di verità. Paganesimo, Giudaismo e Cristianesimo a Confronto nel Contro Celso di Origene* (Rome: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 1998). For Origen's use of techniques taught by the *grammatikos* see Bernhardt Neuschäfer, *Origenes als Philologe*, 2 vols. (Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt, 1987), Andrea Villani, "Origenes als Schriftsteller: ein Beitrag zu seiner Verwendung von Prosopopoiie, mit einigen Beobachtungen über die prosopologische Exegese", *Adamantius* 14 (2008), 130-150, and see the various essays and attendant bibliographies in H. Pietras & S. Kaczmarek (ed.), *Origeniana Decima: Origen as Writer* (Leuven: Brepols, 2011). From the vast literature on grammar I would point to the particular usefulness of Jaap Mansfeld, *Prolegomena. Questions to be Settled Before the Study of an Author, or a Text* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), Roos Meijering, *Literary and Rhetorical Theories in Greek Scholia* (Egbert Forsten: Groningen, 1987), René Nünlist, *The Ancient Critic at Work: Terms and Concepts of Literary Criticism in Greek Scholia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

When Origen argues that Celsus fails as a scholar he shows himself, at least initially, to be arguing within an intellectual culture shared between Christians and non-Christians, but to be arguing for a particular vision of how that culture's promise can be realized. And yet, the tensions of Origen's world are soon acutely apparent here, for his vision of the Christian scholar shows itself increasingly distant from anything Celsus could value; the Christian scholar must possess the 'eyes of the soul'⁷ that have been opened by Christ, and opened to Christ's economy of redemption. Origen shows us this Christian scholar as one inexorably drawn into the life of a community of those who seem to Celsus simply the uneducated and foolish, a community of those who know that martyrdom may be their fate even in a time of peace for the Church. In this account Origen seems to describe not merely the Christian scholar in the abstract, but himself - a scholar by all ancient standards, and yet one whose life stretched between his father's martyrdom and his own sufferings in the Decian persecution. Thus, I suggest that implicitly or even explicitly Origen's polemic against Celsus is also a description and justification of his life as *Christian* scholar.

However, the better we understand the vision of the Christian scholar that Origen promotes, and the better we understand how much it had evolved since the last decades of the second century, the more this perspective on the the *Contra Celsum* also highlights for us a series of questions about the different worlds of Origen and Celsus. Origen's vision of the character of good biblical exegesis, his vision of appropriate exegetical techniques, as well as of the authority and shape of the biblical text, was a vision only just beginning to take form when Celsus most likely wrote. The Christian scholar Origen defends would probably have been considerably surprised by the Christian world that Celsus knew.⁸ Continuities in both belief and practice there

7. See *Cels.* 3.14 & 6.68, as well as n. 35 below.

8. I assume here the date of c.177-80 for which Chadwick advocates; see Origen, *Contra Celsum*, trans Henry Chadwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), xxvi-xxviii. Marco Rizzi, "Some reflections about Origen, Celsus and their views on the Jews," in *Jews and Christians in Antiquity: A Regional Perspective*, ed. Pierluigi Lanfranchi and Joseph Verheyden (Leuven: Peeters, 2018), 37-59 argues for a slightly earlier date.

certainly were, and yet exploring the work from the perspective of this essay makes even clearer how careful we must be when we explore the relationship between Origen and Celsus.

I

My first task, then, is to show that among his central charges Origen claims Celsus fails to deploy responsibly (or even knowledgeably) that body of literary-critical and investigative techniques central to the good practice of almost any higher learning in his day. At *Contra Celsum* 1.40 Origen criticizes Celsus's failure to examine the gospel accounts in an appropriate order. It is those overcome with passion and hatred who are unable to speak or argue in appropriate order (*κατὰ τάξιν λέγειν*). And thus the discerning reader finds many things in Celsus's book are scattered indiscriminately (*συγκεχυμένως*). 'Those who know how to look for and preserve order' will find Celsus arrogant in his claims to knowledge.⁹ It is likely that Origen here is criticizing both Celsus's failure to examine passages from the gospels in the order that they are found within the overall text, and Celsus's failure to order his own discourse appropriately.¹⁰

A parallel critique of Celsus's scholarly habits is to be found in Book 5. Celsus ridicules Christian reports of miracles, but Origen opposes to him the serious discussion of the miraculous in Chrysippus, Pythagoras, Plutarch and Numenius. And, thus, with reference to Celsus:

9. *Cels.* 1.40 (SC 132. 182-4). Throughout my translations are based on those of Origen, *Contra Celsum*, trans Henry Chadwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965). I have not noted the various changes that I have made to his translation. I have also consulted the French of Marcel Borret published in *Sources Chrétiennes* 132, 136, 147, 150 & 227. On the concept of *τάξις* in ancient literary theory see Meijering, *Literary and Rhetorical Theories*, 138ff.

10. Though this raises a number of scholarly questions. I assume, in line with the work of Johannes Arnold in his magisterial *Der Wahre Logos des Kelsos: Eine Strukturanalyse* (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2016) (see also Arnold's chapter in this volume), that we are wrong to assume Celsus's treatise was poorly argued.

It is not reasonable to decide in this arbitrary way whether people are telling the truth or falsehood. For those who practice avoiding all mistakes take great pains to search and examine the statements on each subject and give their opinion rather slowly and carefully when they are deciding that one group of people is telling the truth and another telling falsehood in their narratives about miraculous happenings. For not all give clear evidence of their credibility...¹¹

Here Origen attacks Celsus in terms that can be paralleled from a number of ancient commentators, rhetoricians and historians.¹²

At 3.20 Origen responds to Celsus's charge that while the seeming worship of animal forms by the Egyptians veils profound truths about the worship of the immaterial, Christians' worship is aimed at realities no better than 'the goats and dogs of the Egyptians'. To Celsus Origen says 'but you do not act as you should in criticizing us', and he suggests Celsus needs to attend to Paul's insistence that Christians 'speak God's

11. *Cels.* 5. 57 (SC 147. 156): Ἄλλ' οὐκ εὔλογον οὕτω κρίνειν τὰ περὶ ἀληθευόντων ἢ ψευδομένων. Οἱ γὰρ τὸ ἀνεξαπάτητον ἀσκοῦντες μετὰ πολλῆς καὶ ἀκριβοῦς ἐρεύνης καὶ ἐξέτ' ἀσεως τῶν κατὰ τοὺς τόπους βράδιον καὶ ἀσφαλῶς ἀποφαίνονται περὶ τοῦ τοὺς τοιουσδὶ μὲν ἀληθεύειν τοὺς τοιουσδὶ δὲ ψεύδεσθαι ἐν οἷς ἱστοροῦσι παραδόξοις...

12. E.g. see the discussion, focusing on Galen but also commenting on some Neoplatonic commentators, of Mansfeld, *Prolegomena*, 161-173. For historians criticizing their peers for failing to discern the truth because they are driven by passion see e.g. Lucian, *Hist. Conscr.* 47 (in the context of the discussion at 38-40), or Polybius's polemic against Timaeus, which distinguishes between careful study and writing which reflects only emotion and personal prejudice: 12.4c-d (on Timaeus's failure to investigate properly), 14.5-7 (on the dangers of allowing passion to guide historical investigation), and 25e (on the necessity of beginning history with the careful study of documents). On the centrality of truth itself in historical accounts see Cicero, *De Orat.* 2.62 (even if one follows A.J. Woodman, *Rhetoric in Classical Historiography* (Beckenham: Croom Helm, 1988), 78-83 in seeing truth here as opposed to partiality rather than fiction). On the necessity of carefully mastering the facts see e.g. Cicero *De Orat.* 2.99. In a philosophical context Simplicius's attacks on John Philoponus in his *in Cael.* offer another example of one scholar accusing another of ineptitude. We find the same charges of inordinate passion: Philoponus is rash (*προπετής* 173 Heiberg), arbitrary (*ἀποκληρωτικός* 161) and 'swims in a sea of irrationality' (*ἐν τῷ τῆς ἀλογίας πόντῳ νηχόμενος* 185). He simply fails to understand arguments (*μὴ παρακολουθῶν αὐτός* 170), and does not seek to harmonize seemingly contradictory statements in an author, the act of someone without sufficient education (158-9).

wisdom in a mystery' (1Cor 2.7), and that 'we speak wisdom among the perfect' (1Cor 2.6).¹³ What form would appropriate attention take?:

...first, understand clearly the epistles of the man who says this, and look carefully into the meaning of each word in them (*τῷ βουλήματι ἐκάστης ἐν αὐταῖς λέξεως*), for example, in the Epistles to the Ephesians, the Colossians, the Thessalonians, the Philippians, and the Romans; then show that you have understood Paul's words, and that you can show some to be silly or foolish. If he devotes himself to attentive reading (*Ἐὰν γὰρ ἐπιδῶ ἑαυτὸν τῇ μετὰ τοῦ προσέχειν ἀναγνώσει*), I know well that he will admire the mind of the man who uses an ordinary vocabulary to contemplate great truths (*ἐν ἰδιωτικῇ λέξει μεγάλα περινοῶντος*), or, if he does not do that, will himself appear ludicrous, whether he explains what he has understood of the man's meaning, or attempts to oppose and refute what he imagined he had understood.¹⁴

For Origen, Celsus has failed to read appropriately *kata lexin*, examining the words used by Paul, and then straining to understand the *dianoia*, *hypothesis* or *boulema* of his texts. Had he done so, he would have recognized that Paul's writings, like the religious texts and beliefs of the Egyptians, are texts that use plain language to speak of deep truths. Once again Origen is dependent on an account of judiciousness that almost

13. *Cels.* 3.19.

14. *Cels.* 3.20 (SC 136. 48).

any ancient scholar of his day might have weaponized against an opponent,¹⁵ and indeed an account that seems to have deeply informed his own teaching.¹⁶

II

The obvious accompaniment to the charge that Celsus fails as a scholar is a defense of the Christian Scriptures as a worthy object of such study - especially important given Celsus's strong attack on their structure, style and content. From one perspective Origen's defense reveals the full extent of his faith in ancient scholarly practices and assumptions. But, this defense also provides the perfect background

15. E.g. see again Mansfeld, *Prolegomena*, 161-173. At the end of the next section of the paper I provide some non-Christian parallels to Origen's defense of a literature which might be thought inferior as worthy of study. On the theme of authors hiding their teaching through stylistic choice (though here through the choice of obscure expression) see also Simplicius's account of Aristotle at *In Cat* 1, 7-8 (Kalbfleisch). Like other great philosophers Aristotle does not give us his teaching in words of 'obvious clarity' (διὰ τὴν προφανομένην σαφήνειαν), but hides by obscurity (ἀσάφεια) (rather than in the myths or symbols others used; the theme goes back to Plato, *Theat.* 180d). But anyone who can follow a *logos* knows that Aristotle's obscurity does not owe to an inability in reasoning; when he does want to teach clearly he does so with remarkable efficiency of expression. Hence, the worthy exegete of Aristotle must know about the subjects concerning which Aristotle writes, have a sense of his stylistic habits and possess the quality of impartiality (ἀδέκαστος) (which here, showing a difference between the biblical and philosophical scholar, may involve recognizing that Aristotle is *not* infallible). The good interpreter must also look not only to the letter of the text but to Aristotle's *nous*, he must be virtuous, and practice the in-depth examination of Aristotle's concepts (τῶν Ἀριστοτελικῶν νοημάτων ἐξέτασιν). A translation of this fascinating passage may be found in Simplicius, *On Aristotle Categories 1-4*, tr. Michale Chase (London: Duckworth, 2003), 22-3.

16. Here Gregory Thaumaturgus, reporting on Origen's teaching in Caesarea, *pan. Or.* 7.102 (SC 148.**; translation Michael Slusser in FoC 98) comments: 'As for our lack of judgement and impetuosity - we would agree to anything at all, even if it happened to be false, and often contradict what was said even if it was true - out of this too he educated us... For this part of philosophy is of general application, accustoming us not to tear testimonies to shreds and reject them out of hand, whether carelessly or by accident, but to examine them with precision... (πολυειδὲς γὰρ τοῦτὶ τὸ μέρος τῆς φιλοσοφίας, συνεθίζον μὴ εἰκῆ μηδ' ὡς ἔτυχε ρίπτειν τε τὰς μαρτυρίας καὶ πάλιν ἀνανεύειν, ἀλλ' ἐξετάζοντας ἀκριβῶς)'. Note that here Gregory seems to be speaking of studies preliminary to the exegesis of Scripture, and that if the thesis of Knauber, in its slightly more subtle form as revised by Crouzel is correct, Origen is probably teaching both Christians and non-Christians (Henri Crouzel, L'École d'Origène à Césarée: Postscriptum à une édition de Grégoire le Thaumaturge,' *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique* 71 (1970): 15-27). The passage thus likely shows scholarly values Origen highly valued, and which were held in common high regard.

against which to see how Origen also offers a distinctively Christian account of scholarly attention and practice, and how he identifies his role as one within a community composed of learned and the unlearned Christians.

Central to Origen's defense of the Christian Scriptures as worthy objects of scholarly attention is the claim that they are historically reliable witnesses to well ordered teaching. In Book 3 we find Origen complaining about those who accept traditional Greek mythology by reading allegorically:

Does Celsus want to make out that their stories are true, while these of Jesus are inventions, although they were recorded by eyewitnesses (*ταῦτα δὲ ἀναγραφέντα ὑπὸ τῶν τεθεαμένων*), and showed in practice their clear apprehension of the one whom they saw (*τὴν ἐνάργειαν τῆς καταλήψεως περὶ τοῦ τεθεωρημένου*), and proved their sincerity by the persecutions which they willingly suffered for his doctrine.¹⁷

Again Origen has deployed commonplace assertions about the value placed in actual eyewitnesses, especially those who are of reputable character.¹⁸

Turning to the quality of the rhetoric embedded in the scriptures we find Origen insisting that,

[the Jews] were won over not only by [Jesus's] well-reasoned arguments (for he always expressed himself in language appropriate to his hearers) (*κρατούμενα οὐ μόνον ὑπὸ τῆς τῶν λόγων αὐτοῦ ἀκολουθίας ἀρμόζοντα τοῖς ἀκούουσιν ἀεὶ λέγοντος*), but also by the fact that by his miracles he impressed those who did not believe the sequence of the argument (*τοῦ λόγου αὐτοῦ ἀκολουθία*).¹⁹

17. *Cels.* 3.23 (SC 136. 54-6).

18. E.g. Quintilian, *Inst.* 5.7.4: ...nullam firmiorem probationem esse... quam quae sit hominum scientia nixa. At 5.7.34 one of the natural questions that pertains to witnesses is, utri meliores viri...

19. *Cels.* 2.39 (SC132. 376).

Christ speaks in a manner appropriate to his audience, and offers arguments that are well-ordered. Moreover, his actions are ordered toward the same ends. Along the same lines Origen will later comment that the sending of the Son to restore the world is in line with the divine character (*κατὰ τὸν θεόν*), following consistently from the earlier actions of the Logos at the time of the flood.²⁰ He culminates that comment thus:

...those who are interested in the exactness and accuracy of everything in the Bible (*τῆς πάντων γεγραμμένων διαρθρώσεως καὶ ἀκριβείας*) will try to show not only the antiquity of the men who wrote these things, but also the dignity of what they say, and the consistency of their teaching (*τὴν σεμνότητα τῶν λελεγμένων καὶ τὸ ἀκόλουθον αὐτοῖς*).²¹

If one attends to these texts as if they are deserving of the most serious historical attention, their *σεμνότης* and the *ἀκολουθία* of what they say will be evident.

These claims about the manner in which Christian scripture is not just resilient to scholarly perusal, but *needs* some form of scholarly attention if its riches are to be uncovered imply much about the authors of that scripture. We have already seen Origen accord Christ great rhetorical skill, and we will see the same with regard to the gospel writers and the apostle shortly. Note also Origen's commentary in Book 3 on Stephen's comment at Acts 7:22 that Moses was 'instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians.' For Origen this testifies to Moses's *πολυμάθεια*, and must stem from Stephen's access to documents that are otherwise unknown.²² Similarly, in Book 6 Origen quotes Celsus saluting Plato's emphasis on the rational process of 'questions and answers' at *ep.* 7, 344B, and then tells us that the 'divine Word exhorts us to study *διαλεκτική*.' Solomon tells that 'unchallenged education goes wrong' (Prov. 10:17) and the author of Wisdom likewise tells us that 'as unexamined words' are the knowledge

20. [Add note on propriety to God]

21. *Cels.* 4.20 (SC 136. 230-2).

22. *Cels.* 3.46 (SC 136. 110) & 6.4ff.

of the 'unwise' (Sir. 21.18).²³ A little later, Origen argues that, when appropriate Christians themselves utilize the very process of rational questions and answers that Celsus had celebrated in Plato.²⁴ It is no surprise, then, that Peter Martens in his recent treatment of Origen's exegesis can show us Origen's deep commitment to the view that philology (in a broad sense) is a divine gift enabling us to unfold the order of things.²⁵

Although I spoke above of the Scriptures 'needing' scholarly attention if they are to be appropriately understood, Origen does not present the Scriptures as *only* comprehensible to one with an advanced level of philological skill. One strategy he deploys is to emphasize the vividness or self-evidence of Scripture's presentation, a quality subject to extensive discussion in ancient rhetoric.²⁶ At *Contra Celsum* 2.30 Origen contradicts Celsus's claim that if the Son of God had appeared he would have revealed himself by incontrovertible evidence, by stating that the facts about Jesus are 'self-evident' (*ὡς ἡ ἐνάργεια παρίστησι περὶ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ*). At 1.57 Origen states that it was 'self-evident' that Simon Magus was not divine (*καὶ ἡ ἐνάργεια ἐμαρτύρησεν ὅτι οὐδὲν θεῖον ὁ Σίμων ἦν*). For a more complex example, see *Contra Celsum* 1.62. Origen criticizes Celsus's inattentiveness in calling the disciples 'the most wicked tax collectors and sailors.' Celsus has failed to observe that only Matthew was a tax collector, and he 'muddles together' (*εἶπε συγκεχυμένως*) James and John into a 'set' of sailors. As an alternative to Celsus's sloppy analysis Origen sketches the character and consequences of a more attentive study. Those who study 'intelligently and reasonably' (*τοῖς δυναμένοις φρονίμως καὶ εὐγνωμόνως ἐξετάζειν*) will be forced to conclude that the apostles succeeded in their teaching through divine power. Why? Because if Jesus had chosen disciples as a philosopher would have done, that is, had he chosen those who 'were wise in the eyes of the multitude' and those 'who were capable of thinking and

23. *Cels.* 6.7 (SC 147. 194).

24. *Cels.* 6.10 (SC 147. 202): *ἄλλοις δὲ ὅση δύναμις ἀποδεικτικῶς δι' ἐρωτήσεων καὶ ἀποκρίσεων προσερχόμεθα*

25. Martens, *Origen and Scripture*, 77-81.

26. For discussions of *ἐνάργεια* in non-Christian contexts see Meijering, *Literary and Rhetorical Theories*, 29–53; Nünlist, *The Ancient Critic at Work*, 194–98.

speaking acceptably to crowds' then his method (*ἀγωγή*) would be like that of any philosopher leading a sect. The divine character of his teaching shines out, is self-evident, because of his disciples' rhetorical inability (*περὶ τοῦ θεῶν εἶναι τὸν λόγον ἐπαγγελία ἀνεφαίνετο*).²⁷ 'Shining out' seems to be a synonym for the quality of *ἐνάργεια*. The sophistication of Christ's teaching is thus evident in the vividness with which he can draw in those without intellectual training, and this teaching is an appropriate object of study *because* it so easily reaches those who know little of scholarly practice.

The most important strategy Origen uses to show that the Scriptures are an appropriate object of scholarly study, and yet able reach both the educated and the uneducated, is through his insistence that the Scriptures open toward a higher learning. I quoted above a section of *Contra Celsus* 3.20 in which Origen exhorts his readers to careful study of Paul's letters in order to discover the skill with which he writes in 'ordinary vocabulary to contemplate great things' (*ἐν ἰδιωτικῇ λέξει μεγάλα περιουούτος*). That passage is part of an extensive attack on Celsus's commendation of Egyptian 'mysteries.' After the passage I quoted earlier Origen continues:

I have not yet mentioned the careful study of everything written in the gospels (*περὶ τῆς ἐν τοῖς εὐαγγελίοις τηρήσεως πάντων τῶν γεγραμμένων*). Each saying possesses a great meaning (*πολὺν... λόγον*), hard to perceive not only for the multitude but even for some of the intelligent (*τοῖς πολλοῖς ἀλλὰ καί τισι τῶν συνετῶν*), together with a most profound interpretation of the parables (*διήγησιν βαθυτάτην παραβολῶν*). Jesus spoke them to the people outside, and kept their explanation for those who had advanced beyond exoteric understanding and who came to him privately 'in the house.'...²⁸

27. *Cels.* 1.62 (SC 132.246).

28. *Cels.* 3.21 (SC 136. 48-50).

In this passage Origen is not making a claim about the possibility of allegorical reading, but about the existence beyond the letter of a higher understanding of intelligible realities.²⁹

This treatment of the Gospels is complemented by Origen's insistence on the educative value of the law and the prophets:

But, while we have avoided the mythologies of the Jews, yet we are made wise and are educated by mystical contemplation (*μυστικῆ θεωρία*) of the law and the prophets. The prophets do not limit the meaning of their sayings to the obvious history and to the text and the letter of the law (*τὸν νοῦν τῶν λεγομένων ἐν τῇ προφανεῖ ἱστορίᾳ μηδ' ἐν τῇ κατὰ τὰς λέξεις καὶ τὸ γράμμα νομοθεσίᾳ*). For in one place, when about to recount supposed history, they say: 'I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter dark sayings of old' (Ps. 77.2).³⁰

Here Origen repeats his career-long insistence that on occasion the *ἱστορία* simply lacks sense and must be read allegorically, and, in another career-long insistence, that even when the history does make sense the prophets 'do not limit themselves' to that level of meaning.³¹ These two quotations, I suggest, give us the same two types of higher learning that we encounter in Book 5 of Clement's *Stromateis*, where the symbolic in scripture is restricted to two categories: that which is foreshadowed in prophecy and revealed in Christ, and the higher *θεωρία* of the Church's teaching.³²

29. With this passage one might compare Origen's insistence that each event in the life of Christ is also a symbol of some higher truth, see *Cels.* 2.69 (SC132. 446): *Τὰ συμβεβηκέναι ἀναγεγραμμένα τῷ Ἰησοῦ οὐκ ἐν ψιλῇ τῇ λέξει καὶ τῇ ἱστορίᾳ τὴν πᾶσαν ἔχει θεωρίαν τῆς ἀληθείας· ἕκαστον γὰρ αὐτῶν καὶ σύμβολόν τινος εἶναι παρὰ τοῖς συνετώτερον ἐντυγχάνουσι τῇ γραφῇ ἀποδείκνυται. Cf. *prin.* 4.2.3.*

30. *Cels.* 2.6 (SC 132. 294).

31. For classic statements from the early part of Origen's career see e.g. *Prin.* 4.2.2, 5 & 9.

32. Clement, *Strom.* 5.10.61 (SC 278. 126): *ὥστε ἄλλα μὲν τὰ μυστήρια τὰ ἀποκεκρυμμένα ἄχρι τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ ὑπ' αὐτῶν παραδοθέντα ὡς ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου παρελήφασιν (ἀποκεκρυμμένα δὲ ἐν τῇ παλαιᾷ διαθήκῃ), ἃ νῦν ἐφανερῶθη τοῖς ἀγίοις, ἄλλο δὲ τὸ πλοῦτος τῆς δόξης τοῦ μυστηρίου τοῦ ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, ὃ ἐστὶν ἡ πίστις καὶ ἡ ἐλπίς ἢ εἰς*

Origen ascribes to Moses exactly the oratorical skill and purpose that he had ascribed to Paul. Whereas the poets that Celsus values wrote:

...only for people able to interpret figuratively and allegorically... But in his five books Moses acted like a distinguished orator who pays attention to outward form and everywhere keeps carefully the double meaning of his words (Ὁ δὲ Μωϋσῆς ἀνάλογον γενναίῳ ῥήτορι σχῆμα μελετῶντι καὶ πανταχοῦ τὴν διπλόην τῆς λέξεως πεφυλαγμένως προφερομένῳ ἐπὶ τῶν πέντε βιβλίων πεποιήκε). To the multitude of the Jews under his legislation he provided no occasions for them to come to any harm in their moral behaviour, and yet he did not produce a work which gave no opportunities for deeper study for the few who are able to read with more understanding, and who are capable of searching out his meaning (μήτε τοῖς ὀλίγοις καὶ συνετώτερον ἐντυγχάνειν δυναμένοις οὐχὶ πλήρη θεωρίας ἐκτιθέμενος, τοῖς ἐρευνᾶν τὸ βούλημα αὐτοῦ δυναμένοις, γραφήν).³³

Lest anyone forget how much weight Origen places on the *necessity* of scholarship for the opening of these scriptural mysteries, note that in Book 7 he rejects Celsus's charge that Christians defend their beliefs with an implausible selection of texts drawn from prophets who speak unworthily of God:

He ought to realize that those who desire to live in accordance with the divine scriptures, and who know that 'the knowledge of the fool is as unexamined words'... do not merely take refuge in affirming that these matters were predicted. They also attempt to solve the apparent absurdities (τὰς δοκούσας ἀπεμφάσεις λύειν πειρῶνται), and to show that in the words there is nothing

Χριστόν, ὃν ἀλλαγῆ θεμέλιον εἴρηκεν. I have learnt a great deal about this book from the excellent PhD thesis of H. Clifton Ward, 'Clement of Alexandria and the Creative Exegesis of Christian Scripture,' PhD Diss., Durham 2017.

33. *Cels.* 1.18 (SC 132. 122).

wicked, or disgraceful, or impure, or abominable, but that they only appear so to people who do not know the right way to understand the divine scripture.³⁴

The deeper one's attention and devotion to the text of scripture, then, the more one will be found making use of detailed scholarly techniques to unlock its mysteries.

So far, Origen's defense of the Christian scriptures as worthy of study despite seeming unworthiness finds a number of parallels in non-Christian literature. Two examples will suffice. In Book 10 of the *Institutions* Quintilian defends the quality of Latin literature over against Greek, and Cicero as only a close second to Demosthenes. Quintilian argues that their virtues are similar: Cicero and Demosthenes are similarly skilled at all the parts of *inventio*, at arranging discourse in a suitable order, at appropriate division of an argument, at providing convincing proof and the rest. They differ in some aspects of style, showing different aspects of that art, even if Cicero's Latin means that he lacks the Atticism of Demosthenes. And yet Cicero excels in certain respects: "who can give information more precisely, or stir feelings more deeply?"³⁵ And, a little later, "instead of the partisanship of an advocate, he displays the trustworthiness of a witness or a judge."³⁶ Interestingly, for our purposes, even though Cicero's Latin prevents him exhibiting Demosthenes' stylistic beauty, his accuracy and impartiality as a witness, and his emotional effectiveness bring him in only a close second.

The mysterious Heraclitus defends Homer's fundamental piety by proof-texting the constant solemnity with which he speaks of the Gods.³⁷ Heraclitus then condemns those who, because of their hastiness, have failed to see 'the sacred depths of

34. *Cels.* 7.12 (SC 150. 42). Eusebius notes, *h.e.* 6.18.4, that Origen encouraged even the uneducated to undertake some basic study in aid of a better knowledge of the Scriptures.

35. *inst.* 10.1.110.

36. *inst.* 10.1.111.

37. *All.* 2.

[Homer's] wisdom' or to recognize that he speaks *philosophōs*.³⁸ Indeed, when he comes to Plato and Epicurus, Heraclitus condemns them both for their impiety in not acknowledging that Homer was the source of their teaching. Once again, the parallels with aspects of Origen's defense of the Christian Scriptures are striking. Now, just as Quintilian defends an author most of his audience already value, Heraclitus defends an author already central to Hellenic culture, even if deeply contested. Origen's defense must bridge a broader gap, but the techniques he uses should have been easily recognizable to his audience, at least so far.

III

However, alongside and interwoven with the arguments we have so far studied - arguments that involve Origen presenting Christianity as intellectually respectable by canons shared with Celsus - we find distinctively Christian arguments that show us Origen also distinguishing himself quite radically from the target of his polemic. The Christian scriptures speak to both the learned and the unlearned, and they do so because Christ himself reveals in a way that draws the unlearned even as it allows the learned to grow in knowledge and love of God. This Christological core to his account of revelation proceeds along paths that we have followed already, Origen offering an account of how Christianity's texts and teachings possess great philosophical depth if we are appropriately attentive. But, at the same time, this Christological core pushes Origen to set out a distinctively Christian account of scholarly attention and of the community to which one must adhere if that form of attention is to be learnt.

At *Contra Celsum* 2.64, in response to Celsus's claim that Christ should have displayed his divine power 'to everyone everywhere,' Origen first states that Christ was one and yet plural in *ἐπίνοιαι*.³⁹ Christ was consequently perceived differently accord-

38. *All.* 3.3.

39. For the classic discussion of Christ's *ἐπίνοιαι* in Origen's corpus see *Io.* 1, esp. 1.118-119, 200, 218, 222, *Io.* 2.66.

ing to the capacity of those looking (*ὡς ἐχώρουν οἱ βλέποντες*); just as the parables were spoken to crowds with their meaning hidden, and only explained to a small group, Christ himself was seen differently not only with the 'eyes of their souls' but also with their physical sight (*οὕτως καὶ ταῖς ὄψεσι πάντως μὲν τῆς ψυχῆς, ἐγὼ δ' ἠγοῦμαι ὅτι καὶ τοῦ σώματος*).⁴⁰ 'For when he was sent into the world,' Origen remarks, 'he did not merely make himself known; he also concealed himself.'⁴¹

The overall character of Christ's revealing and hiding may be seen in Origen's response to the question of whether it would have been appropriate for Christ simply to come down from the cross and reveal who he was (as Celsus thinks). While Origen thinks that Christ could have done so he did not, Origen explains, because of the inappropriateness of such an act 'for the whole dispensation' (*πρὸς τὴν οἰκονομίαν ὄλην*) of the incarnation.⁴² Christ acts consistently at the literal level, but in a sequence of actions and words that creates a world of signs through which the one who recognizes may ascend.⁴³ Christ's spoken rhetoric is thus matched by a metaphysical rhetoric. Christ accepts crucifixion, death and burial partly because this fits with the character of his previous actions, but also because those actions contain the truth of Paul's 'being conformed into his death' and other statements about our own death and resurrection in Christ. Even the details that the evangelists record about the burial, for example, are there so that the attentive examiner of the scriptures will find 'some point worthy of comment,' by which Origen means worthy of an allegorical reading to

40. *Cels.* 2.64 (SC 132. 434-6). Similarly, at 2.65 only some were taken up to see the transfiguration because not all could bear the sight of him thus; and through 2.65-7 Origen argues that the resurrected Christ did not appear to all probably because he was sensitive to their incapacity.

41. *Cels.* 2.67 (SC 132. 44): *πέμφθη γὰρ οὐ μόνον, ἵνα γνωσθῆ, ἀλλ' ἵνα καὶ λάθῃ*. On this theme see Henri Crouzel, *Origène et la 'connaissance mystique'* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1961), 389-91. Marguerite Harl, *Origène et la fonction révélatrice du Verbe Incarné* (Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1958).

42. *Cels.* 2.69 (SC 132. 446).

43. In the same regard one should note Origen's insistence at *Cels.* 2.40 (SC 132. 378) that Christ acts in accord with the role or persona that he assumed: *...ἀλλὰ ἐν τῷ παρὰ τὴν ὑπόθεσιν οὐ ἀνείληφε προσώπου ποιῆσαι...*

draw out the spiritual truths indicated by these details'.⁴⁴ The consistency found at the literal level is matched by, and intended to reveal, the consistency and inter-relationship of spiritual realities.⁴⁵

But who knows how to follow this ascent from literal to spiritual played out for us in Christ's oracular and metaphysical rhetoric? Let us return to a passage, the beginning of which I quoted earlier, but now at a little more length:

Jesus spoke [the parables] to the people outside, and kept their explanation for those who had advanced beyond exoteric understanding and who came to him privately 'in the house.' Celsus would be amazed if he understood what meaning there is in the fact that some are said to be outside, and others 'in the house.' Again, who would not be astounded if he could see the changes of Jesus when he ascends the mountain to preach certain doctrines or to do certain things or for his transfiguration, while down below he heals the weak who are not able to ascend to where his disciples follow him? But now it is not the time to discuss here the truths of the Gospels which really are solemn and divine, or the mind of Christ, that is of wisdom and of the Logos in Paul.⁴⁶

Celsus, being 'outside,' does not understand the depths of Christ's spoken and metaphysical rhetoric. There is, in this passage, a vital sleight of hand. On the one hand, Origen is keen to hold out to his non-Christian readers enough so that they see that there is a higher learning here, enough to tempt them. But, on the other hand, even though he will not reveal the full character of Christian higher learning to the audience of the *Contra Celsum*, he needs to let us know that those 'within the house', those

44. *Cels.* 2.69 (SC 132. 450).

45. This language is intended to reflect Origen's emphasis on the principle that the letter and narrative of Scripture may make known 'mystical economies' (*οἰκονομίαι... μυστικά*) (*princ.* 4.2.2) and that the principle purpose in the Word's construction of scripture was to announce 'the sequence of spiritual things' (*τὸν ἐν τοῖς πνευματικοῖς εἰρημὸν*) (*princ.* 4.2.9). However we interpret this language Origen's concern is not simply with a correspondence between isolated terms or incidents and isolated 'spiritual' truths.

46. *Cels.* 3.21 (SC 136. 48-50).

who do know, are those who are able to understand Christ's complex economy of appearance. Thus, Origen is telling us, while this looks like pagan higher learning, the more one grasps its content, the more one sees its quite distinctive constitution. Only one who comes to faith in Christ, and thus to acceptance of the Christian valorization of Christ's death can fully appreciate why Christianity should be accorded the status of true philosophy! The theme is here heard only *sotto voce*, but already it may be clear that making such a claim involves Origen in treating those with faith in Christ and yet little education rather differently from the manner in which Celsus envisions the unlearned.

In similar fashion, at *Contra Celsum* 3.28, Origen defends the character of the incarnation against Celsus's charge that Christ should have revealed his divine status more directly:

Both Jesus himself and his disciples did not want people who came to them to believe only in his divine nature and miracles, as though he did not share in human nature and had not assumed the human flesh which lusts against the Spirit; but as a result of their faith they also saw the power that descended into human nature and human limitations... For Christians see that with Jesus human and divine nature began to be woven together (*ὁρῶσιν ὅτι ἀπ' ἐκείνου ἤρξατο θεία καὶ ἀνθρωπίνη συνυφαίνεσθαι φύσις*), so that by fellowship with divinity human nature might become divine, not only in Jesus, but also in all those who believe...⁴⁷

Christ does not simply lead Christians in an ascent away from the flesh (even though such a movement in the intellect is necessary to see the relationship between flesh and spirit), but leads Christians *as they come to understand the constitution of his person* toward a realization of the true end of flesh. In other words, at the heart of that to which one must attend is the bridging of dualities embodied and effected by the incarnate Logos. Attention to the Logos's bridging of dualities then orients our understanding of the

47. *Cels.* 3.28 (SC 136. 68).

movement from sensible to intellectual. In so doing we are, as Origen describes in Book 6, 'following the rays of the Logos'.⁴⁸

I will return to the mention of 'community' shortly. First, I suggest that, just as Origen has subtly recast the nature of 'higher learning' through his Christological framing, he similarly attempts to recast the very phenomenology of scholarly attention. At a number of points Origen insinuates into his discussion of the Christian scriptures a sense of how one should feel as a result of exercising scholarly virtues. Thus, to take one small example, at *Contra Celsum* 4.41, Origen responds to Celsus's dismissal of the flood story as a 'debased' version of the Deucalion narrative. The true scholar, we are told, should see in this dismissal Celsus's 'unphilosophical hatred' of Jewish scripture. Instead we should pay attention to scholarly opinion on the ark to understand more fully its size and scope. We should 'admire' the planning and construction, be 'amazed' at God's providential activity. Without such appropriate modes of attention we will miss the meaning and give only a show of correct reading. The allegorical complexity of the text can only be seen when one's reading unites particular scholarly techniques with appropriate attention and wonder at Christ's revelatory economy.⁴⁹

With Origen's attempt to show us where admiration and wonder will be evoked in the truly attentive scholar of the Scriptures we should link his claim that only Christians are capable of fully rational prayer and worship. Here we find Origen sets out a general account of Christians as (at their best) possessing an account of humble attention to Christ that provides an overarching frame for all other virtue. Toward the end of Book Eight - a book in which the question of correct worship takes centre-stage - Origen responds to Celsus's claim that Christians' refusal to set up or worship at altars reveals them to be a secret society. Celsus has failed to notice that

48. *Cels.* 6.66 (SC 147. 344): ...πάντα τὸν ταῖς τοῦ λόγου ἀνγαῖς ἀκολουθήσαντα...

49. *Cels.* 4.44. Origen's attempt to offer a phenomenology of Christian scholarly attention to the Scriptures finds a parallel in the way that he offers Christ's prayer as a model for our own. See Lorenzo Perrone, 'Prayer in Origen's *Contra Celsum*: The knowledge of God and the Truth of Christianity,' *VigChr* 55 (2001): 1-19, esp. n. 23.

Christians do have altars, their minds, from which a fragrance, their prayers, rises toward the divine.⁵⁰ There are even images on these altars: the virtues, prudence, righteousness etc, through which we may honor the image of the invisible God. While many images of the divine are constructed by painters and sculptors who produce material representations, Christians construct their images 'by looking to God with a pure heart.'⁵¹ This looking to God is only possible, for Origen, because: 'through the teaching of Jesus (τῆν Ἰησοῦ διδασκαλίαν) we have found the way to worship God.' In those with intellectual gifts rational judgements about what does and does not assist true worship become possible. In those without those gifts Christ's teaching nevertheless makes possible the development of virtue. And thus, Origen argues, because no rational explanation is possible for partaking of public feasts then it is rational to avoid them.⁵² Because, on the basis of Christ's teaching, the Christian community exhibits virtue, and at its best rational piety, it is able to make judgments about how the community should attend to God.

This passage follows on from the discussion at *Contra Celsum* 7.41 where Origen discusses whom we should follow. Celsus recommends to us 'the inspired poets... and wise men and philosophers'. Origen offers Moses, the prophets and Christ. Christ has provided the educated with a *θεολογία* that enables the raising of the soul through the Logos toward the Father of the Logos (*θεολογία* means something like an account of the divine that enables worship) *and* a doctrine (*δόγμα*) according to their capacities for the less able Christian (a doctrine which, nevertheless, may result in the virtues described, for example, in the passage from Book Eight discussed above).⁵³ Thus Origen

50. *Cels.* 8.17.

51. *Cels.* 8.18.

52. *Cels.* 8.20.

53. *Cels.* 7.41 (SC 150. 110). On the term *θεολογία* see Christoph Marksches, *Kaiserzeitliche christliche Theologie und ihre Institutionen: Prolegomena zu einer Geschichte der antiken christlichen Theologie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 5-14. For further examples of Origen's usage see 6.4 & 6.18; for comparison see Celsus's similar usage at 7.42, 6.22. One of the clearest accounts of the difference between faith and rational piety or understanding is at *Cels.* 4.9 (SC 136. 206). Origen writes, 'anyone who philosophises [as a Christian] will need to argue the truth of

is able to give an account of Christ's teaching - as *θεολογία* or merely *δόγμα* - as that which forms the mind that it may, according to its capacity, look toward God. As the mind is thus formed, the virtues in the soul that the careful scholar exhibits are also formed.

Here humility has taken centre stage. At *Contra Celsum* 6.15 Origen responds to the charge that Christian interest in humility is merely a distortion of Plato's insistence that happiness involves humility before justice (at *Laws* 715e). Celsus in particular condemns the Christian practice of accepting public signs of penance, the wearing of sackcloth and ashes. In defense Origen claims that the Psalmist advocates humility long before Plato: '...neither would I have gone into great matters nor into things too wonderful for me, if I had not been humble' (Ps. 130.1-2 LXX). For Origen the key principle set out here is that it is *because* of his humility that the humble one may walk in 'great and wonderful things' which are the 'truly great doctrine and wonderful insights' (τοῖς ἀληθῶς «μεγάλους» δόγμασι καὶ τοῖς «θαυμασίους» νοήμασι). Moreover, the truly humble one - in a manner that surpasses the one Plato describes - is humble *voluntarily* (ἐκῶν), and is so *when* uplifted by such doctrines (not before being uplifted, or because the doctrines are simply unattainable). Humility is, most importantly, not a response of failure, but a necessary accompaniment to the knowledge that is given us. Moreover, this humility is not to a human being, but humility before Jesus, the one who 'humbled himself unto death' and who teaches us the dogma of humility (δόγμα τὸ περὶ ταπεινοφροσύνης) himself.⁵⁴

Returning for a moment to Book Seven, one more step here is necessary. The 'images' within the Christian soul are differentiated from pagan images not only by be-

[Christ's] doctrines with proofs of all kinds, taken from the divine scriptures and from rational arguments (παντοδαπῶν ἀποδείξεων, τῶν τε ἀπὸ τῶν θείων γραμμάτων καὶ τῶν ἀπὸ τῆς ἐν τοῖς λόγοις ἀκολουθίας). The simple minded masses, however, who cannot comprehend the complex theology of the wisdom of God (μὴ δυνάμενον παρακολουθεῖν τοῖς ποικιλωτάτοις τῆς σοφίας τοῦ θεοῦ θεωρήμασιν), must trust themselves to God and to the Saviour of our race with the *ipse dixit* of Jesus rather than with anything beyond this (...τούτου μᾶλλον ἀρκεσθῆναι τῷ "Αὐτὸς ἔφα" ἢ ἄλλου οὐτιμοσοῦν).

54. *Cels.* 6.15 (SC 147. 214-6).

ing invisible rather than visible, but also by being alive because the spirit of God 'sits' on them and is in them.⁵⁵ At 7.42 Origen writes:

But we affirm that human nature is not sufficient in any way to seek for God and to find him in his pure nature, unless it is helped by the God who is the object of the search. And he is found by those who, after doing what they can, admit that they need him, and shows himself to those to whom he judges it right to appear...⁵⁶

The seeking for God that Origen encourages depends upon the Christian's ability to admit the need for help, and it is striking that over against Celsus's rather restrictive account of prayer Origen feels the need to note in Book Seven the importance of *all* Christians praying 'Create in me a clean heart, O God...'⁵⁷

This discussion in Book Seven is part of Celsus's assertion that one knows God by synthesis, distinction, and analogy informed by 'a certain indescribable power'⁵⁸ - a power that appears to be operative only in the intellectually capable. To this Origen opposes a far more inclusive vision:

when the Logos of God says that 'no one has known the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son may reveal him,' he indicates that God is known by a certain divine grace, which does not come about in the soul without God's action, but with a sort of inspiration.. Moreover, it is probable that the knowledge of God is beyond the capacity of human nature (*κατὰ τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην φύσιν εἶναι τὴν γνώσιν τοῦ θεοῦ*)... but that by God's kindness and love to man, and by a miraculous divine grace (*παραδόξῳ καὶ θειοτέρῳ χάριτι*), the knowledge of God extends to those who by

55. *Cels.* 8.18.

56. *Cels.* 7.42 (SC 150. 114).

57. *Cels.* 7.45.

58. For synthesis, distinction and analogy see *Cels.* 7.42, for the mention of 'power' see 7.45 (SC 150. 122).

God's foreknowledge have been previously determined, because they would live lives worthy of Him after he was made known to them.⁵⁹

Origen here is *not* talking only about the higher knowledge, *θεολογία*. He follows this passage immediately with reference to the martyrs as those who, despite the ridicule that Celsus pours on them, possess the knowledge that comes through divine action. Here, then, *gnosis* is that which all faithful Christians possess, whatever their intellectual powers.⁶⁰

There is then, a tension shot through Origen's defense of the Christian Scriptures. Origen offers a defense whose elements would have been familiar to any inhabiting the Greek and Roman scholarly world. And yet, this defense also has a distinctly Christian twist, presenting the Christian scholar as one fascinated with the modes of Christ's appearing, aware that the divine economy demands a rethinking of what it means to attend, and to attend as part of a group that includes the uneducated as well as the educated. This Christian twist certainly answers some of Celsus's charges, but the subtlety and complexity with which Origen develops it perhaps reflects him describing his own self-understanding - showing Celsus and his Christian readers how one may both be a scholar *and* identified oneself with the full shape of the Christian community.⁶¹

IV

59. *Cels.* 7.44 (SC 150. 116-120). On this text see Perrone, 'Prayer,' 13-19.

60. Similarly, the unity that even Celsus confesses the Christians to possess comes from grace: *Cels.* 3.14.

61. And we may fairly read this theme as also a defense of his own position against those in the Christian community who seem him to be moving too far beyond the faith of the *simpliciores*.

Origen's discussions of his role within this community exhibit the very same tensions I have explored throughout this paper. The Christian scholar is conceived as an apologist and educator of those in the body of Christ:

For now we need words to root out ideas contrary to the truth from every soul which has been distressed by Celsus' treatise or by opinions like his. And we also need ideas to destroy buildings of all false opinions and the arguments in Celsus which are like the building of those who said 'come let us build ourselves a city and a tower, of which the top shall reach to heaven.' (Gen 11.4)... we must therefore pray to the Lord who bestowed the gifts described in Jeremiah, that he may give words also to us which build up the doctrines of Christ and plant the spiritual law and the prophetic words corresponding to it.⁶²

The first task here is one of refuting ideas that may undermine Christian belief, and the second two tasks seem to involve supporting basic Christian doctrine and deepening awareness of the 'spiritual law' to which that doctrine points.

In Book 3, Origen turns to Celsus's claim that Christians are 'divided and rent asunder.' In reply Origen begins by asserting that 'any teaching which has had a serious origin, and is beneficial to life (*σπουδαία ἐστὶν ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ τῷ βίῳ χρήσιμος*) has caused different sects.' The seriousness of medicine and philosophy is not in doubt, but in both cases, differences of opinion about reality lead to division. Judaism itself was divided in its interpretation of the Torah, and in similar fashion Christianity also divided because 'several learned men made a serious attempt to understand the doctrines of Christianity' (*διὰ τὸ σπουδάξαι συνιέναι τὰ χριστιανισμοῦ καὶ τῶν φιλολόγων πλείονας*), that is they differed over scriptural interpretation.⁶³ In the case of

62. *Cels.* 4.1 (SC 136. 186-188).

63. *Cels.* 3.12 (SC 136. 34-6). At *Cels.* 3.58 Origen presents Christians as discoursing about 'the greatest and most advanced truths', a discourse for which traditional training in philosophical study is an acceptable preliminary. This account of Christian philosophy's culmination of Hellenic traditions also, of course, locates its practitioners as philosophers. A portrait of Origen as Christian exegetical expert is offered by *dial.*

medicine, the truly 'excellent' is the one who trains in and examines judiciously many different sects. But, at the same time, it is important not to confuse sects with Christian proper, and it is Celsus's intellectual inattentiveness that leads him to equate what are, Origen argues, probably Ophites and Cainites with other types of Christians.⁶⁴ Thus there are both disputes *within* what Origen considers the body of believers, and disputes with other groups who share only a few of the markers Origen considers necessary for Christian identity.

And yet, Origen takes care to describe his work as a Christian scholar always within a unified community where strength of faith bears no direct correlation with strength of intellect. Moreover, he does so in ways that present what seem to a Celsus the most irrational aspects of Christianity as revealing true virtue. Origen comments a number of times on Christianity's success in teaching virtue. For example, Chrysippus rightly recommends control of the passions (though, illogically, refusing to be clear which doctrines are true and will aid such control); yet the church has taught many more to control those very same passions.⁶⁵ However, Origen also pushes the envelope of this argument, by not only claiming that even those of few intellectual gifts have learnt, but that the specific *exempla* and virtues Christians hold dear should be understood as reconfiguring the canons of virtue. Thus, at *Contra Celsum* 2.40, the claim that Christ's death was unworthy demonstrates for Origen that Celsus has simply failed to discern the nature of piety. Celsus has failed to see the virtue in those who are drawn by the *paradeigma* of Christ's death and give themselves up even to death 'because of their clear vision of the one supreme God.'⁶⁶ Here Origen casts as virtuous that which Celsus has marked out as irrational 'extremism'.

Book Seven contains one of the most extended and interesting considerations of this theme. Celsus criticizes Christians as 'bound to the flesh', and then offers a short account of the difference between being and becoming (*οὐσία καὶ γένεσις*) which

64. *Cels.* 3.12-13.

65. *Cels.* 1.64. Cf. *Cels.* 3.51.

66. *Cels.* 2.40.

he claims is for those of intelligence (*ἀνθρώποις νοῦν ἔχουσιν*) - as opposed to those who lack education.⁶⁷ Origen argues that Celsus abuses those who seek to live piously under the God of all things, and that God approves the 'faith' of common folk *and* the 'rational piety' of the educated (*ἀποδεχόμενον ἰδιωτῶν τὴν εἰς αὐτὸν πίστιν καὶ συνεπτέρων τὴν μετὰ λόγου εἰς αὐτὸν εὐσέβειαν*). But this is to abuse the 'reasonableness and tranquility of spirit' that has been 'implanted in the rational nature' (*τὸ ἐπιεικὲς καὶ τὸ εὐσταθές, ἐνεσπαρμένα φυσικῶς ὑπὸ τοῦ δημιουργοῦ τῇ λογικῇ φύσει*). That which Origen seeks to characterise as a distinctive Christian virtue is now simply an innate marker of rational life (one should also note that this virtue is close cousin to the detachment and equanimity he has already presented as a quintessential *scholarly* virtue).

Christians, educated and not, are also characterised thus:

It is those who, among other things, have learnt from the divine scriptures (a command which they also put into practice) that they should bless when they are reviled and endure when they are persecuted and entreat when defamed, who have ordered correctly the steps of their lives and who purify and restore their soul entirely. It is not merely a matter of theory when they distinguish between being and becoming (*οὐχ ἵνα λέξεσι μόναις οὐσίαν ἀπὸ γενέσεως χωρίζωσι*), and between what is intelligible and what is visible, and when they associate truth with being and by all possible means avoid the error that is bound up with becoming. They look, as they have learnt, not at the things which are becoming, which are seen and on that account temporal, but at the higher things... It is in this way... that the disciples of Jesus look at the things that are becoming, so that they use them as steps to the contemplation of the nature of intelligible things. (*Οὕτω δὲ καὶ τοῖς γενέσεως ἐνορώσιν οἱ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ μαθηταί, ὥστε οἰονεὶ ἐπιβάθρα χρῆσθαι αὐτοῖς πρὸς τὴν κατανόησιν τῆς τῶν νοητῶν φύσεως*).⁶⁸

67. *Cels.* 7.45 (SC 150. 120-2).

68. *Cels.* 7.46 (SC 150. 124).

This passage seems to speak first of Christians in general, and then turns to those Christians who are able to distinguish 'being and becoming'. A few sentences later Origen admits that some of the latter fail morally - but if they do so they have no excuse before God. Thus while Origen certainly sees the 'rational piety' of the intellectually trained Christian as a higher state than the 'faith' of the *simpliciores*, it is the living out of the key virtues 'tranquility of spirit' even in the face of martyrdom, and purity of heart, that are most to be admired. And so, Origen celebrates those uneducated Christians held to be 'fools and slaves', many of whom yet remain entirely pure (*παντελῶς καθαρεύειν*).⁶⁹ Through this section of Book Seven Origen argues that Christianity and the prophets of Israel have long taught the best of the principles that Celsus espouses and ridicules the Christians for not grasping; yet he also identifies as the true object of emulation not the philosopher - Christian or non-Christian - but those with tranquility of mind and purity, whatever their level of education. In emphasizing the unlearned and the martyrs as exemplars he consciously draws in those whom Celsus can see only as a manifestation of the irrational. In this aspect of Origen's apology, behind the calm face of Origen the philologist and philosopher, we see again his fierce determination to celebrate the distinctive social contours of the Christian community. Despite the clear differentiation he allows between the learned and the unlearned Origen is determined to undercut the judgements one might make about the latter because the virtues (even unto martyrdom) that they may exhibit are the standard for all Christians. There are some occasional celebrations of humility, and of the virtues exhibited by the uneducated in prior Classical tradition, but nothing to parallel this celebration of a unified community cutting across the distinction between educated and uneducated and in which the educated learn the true interrelationship, between and character of appropriate virtues by recognizing the virtues that may be exhibited by those without learning and whose faithfulness may result in a martyrdom that seems only to take them out of the realm of rationality.⁷⁰

69. *Cels.* 7.48 (SC 150. 128). See also 7.49.

70. I am grateful to Mark Edwards and Teresa Morgan for their responses to my questions

V

Against Celsus Origen does not simply claim that Christians may demonstrate serious rational inquiry in modes that non-Christians should honour, but that Christians demonstrate a form of rational inquiry that encompasses, re-orders and perfects non-Christian scholarly traditions, and that it does all this through celebrating those whom to Celsus cannot but appear the epitome of irrational passion. In developing his polemic Origen seems to go far beyond what might be necessary as mere refutation; he seems to be as much articulating in internal theological terms how he understands his own role as a *Christian* scholar within the Christian community as whole. The various aspects of the intellectual life that Origen draws together here were themselves also drawn together in Origen's own life. Whether or not Origen's account would have allayed the fears of those Christians worried about his speculative work we cannot know; but we can be clear that Origen sets out a strongly Christological vision of a unified Christian community as the context for his own work. There is no certainty to be had here, of course, but the suggestion that he has found himself offering a self-justification (for both Christian and non-Christian audiences) every bit as much as he is attempting to refute Celsus has considerable plausibility.

If this is an acceptable reading of the *Contra Celsum*, it points us also toward one of the great ironies in the work. While Origen opposes Celsus by showing us his own particular vision of the Christian scholar, in some important ways the constituent features of that vision had not yet coalesced when Celsus wrote. If we try to imagine the difference between the Christian community of the mid-third century and that of the 170s (supposing that we think Celsus to have been writing then), we should not simply imagine an even smaller community of Christian scholars, a smaller community of less well-able or less well-financed Origenes. Rather, we need to

about this point.

recognize that some of the fundamental assumptions that Origen makes about the shape of the Christian intellectual life resulted from shifts that occurred only in the 180s and 190s, in the generation of Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria.⁷¹ The social makeup of the Christian community - as one that drew together people from a remarkable social range - was most likely similar in both periods.⁷² I would also suggest that the set of Christian texts that were most central in worship and theological discussion was pretty much continuous between the 170s and 240s. But there was, I suggest, one very significant difference. Origen's assumptions about the central place of close grammatical study in the analysis of a unified Christian scriptural text resulted from conflicts underway at the time in which Celsus is likely to have been writing. While I certainly think there is continuity between Origen's vision of the Christian philosopher and scholar,⁷³ and that one might see in Justin, Valentinus, or Tatian, there is still a considerable gap. Both Celsus and Origen would have been surprised had they been able to visit the Christian community in the other's day.

71. Lewis Ayres, "Irenaeus vs the Valentinians: Toward a Rethinking of Patristic Exegetical Origins," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 23 (2015): 153-187. It is also worth noting that, at *Cels.* 6.14, Origen himself comments on how few of his peers possess his own level of scholarly learning.

72. One might point, e.g., to Tatian, *orat.* 32, or to Justin's description of the range of people persecuted as Christians, *2Apol.* 12.4 (a passage that, in its mention of 'our people's slaves' fights against any romantic assumptions that the striking social makeup of the Christian community automatically involved the rejection of the Roman social institutions that we find particularly reprehensible).

73. As I have tried to argue in Lewis Ayres, "Continuity and Change in Second Century Christianity: A Narrative Against the Trend," James Carleton Paget & Judith Lieu (eds.), *Christianity in the Second Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 106-121.