



On the True Doctrine: A Discourse Against the Christians

Celsus , *R. Joseph Hoffmann* (Translator)

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The works of many early critics of the Christian church were burned by ruling emperors or otherwise destroyed in the second and third centuries, but the writings of the Greek pagan philosopher, Celsus, have survived indirectly through his eloquent opponent Origen of Alexandria. In his apologetical treatise, *Contra Celsum*, Origen argues against the ideas set forth by Celsus and quotes from Celsus' *The True Doctrine* at length. Through this treatise, Celsus has come to represent the detached pagan voice of the ages. In this translation, Professor Hoffmann has, for the first time, painstakingly reconstructed the main order of the philosopher's argument. Celsus' discourse shows him to be an eclectic philosopher--a dabbler in various schools of thought, including Platonism and Stoicism, and a student of the history and religious customs of many nations. Hoffman supplements this definitive translation with an informative introduction, summarizing Celsus' premises and placing the identity of Celsus in its historical context.

On the True Doctrine: A Discourse Against the Christians Details

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Lina Kerbelyte says

Read in Russian.

Kc says

This book was written by a Greek philosopher named Celsus in 178 AD and is a scathing critique of the then upstart cult of Jesus. I read it because I was interested in comparing early anti-christian literature to anti-Mormon literature. The similarities are striking.

Valenfore Alestreneon says

A very good historical perspective that educates a million times more than any of the various mass market paperbacks by political atheists who are just trying to rabble rouse. This is a guy was born in B.C. times and had to study under a Jew to criticize Christianity and does it quite well.

Joseph F. says

We don't have a complete version of Celsus's book unfortunately. It's been lost in the midst of time (as well as book burning). What we have is about 70 percent of it, reconstructed from the quotations in Origen's book Against Celsus. The True Doctrine is a sharp, irreverent and devastating Criticism of Christianity, probably the most famous in antiquity. Hoffmann has done a fine job not only putting this book together, but also giving us a lengthy introduction and copious notes. He also gives us a translation that incorporates today's idioms. Reading it I found it to be a mixed bag. Some of his insights are spot on, almost modern in their perception. Other times he seemed a tad confusing and inconsistent. Finally, there were some portions where I felt he did not understand Christianity as much as he thought. I did not read Origen's response, but I can anticipate his answers to Celsus's criticisms.

Christians might not like his constant backhanded nastiness, maybe even more than his arguments. I found them juicy!

Eli says

I enjoyed reading this and would encourage the reading of it for a better understanding of Christianity and its relationship with the Roman world of antiquity. Celsus ends up providing lots of corroborating evidence for Christianity, useful to us today. We also gain greater insights into the philosophical differences between Christians and non-Christians.

Celsus mounts his attack against Christianity, but none of his arguments were able to stop the truth of

Christianity from spreading across the Empire. He is sincere, but it is obvious from reading this work that he is grasping at straws. We can discern whose arguments are stronger easily: Celsus' "On the True Doctrine" is outdated, little known and only interesting for history buffs; the Bible is the best selling book of all time, is read by billions today, and is just as vibrant and relevant as it has ever been.

Keith Davis says

In the 2nd century CE a Roman author named Celsus wrote a book attacking the Christian movement, but when Christianity became the official religion of Rome Celsus' book was thoroughly suppressed, so no copies survived into modern times. Celsus was quoted extensively though by early Church Fathers who wrote books in response to his writings. This book is an attempt to reassemble Celsus' book based on the surviving quotations. It is impossible to know if Celsus' best arguments are represented here, or if his opponents only quoted his weaker arguments in order to more easily dismiss him, but either way it is still an interesting read.

Angela Wade says

From my Amazon review: While I had read numerous books with references to Celsus in them, I have just gotten around to reading a translation of his book "On the True Doctrine: A Discourse Against the Christians."

I was pleasantly surprised by how easy it was to read (due largely in part to the translator, R. Joseph Hoffmann). The text flows well from section to section, though it seems to be in no particular order.

Thankfully, the translator has included both a detailed introduction and 'notes' section. Both were extremely helpful in understanding certain passages contained within the main text, and the introduction (specifically) would be of interest to anyone who wants a better understanding of Celsus and/or the anti-Christian sentiment that existed during his time.

All in all, a good read, but not recommended for anyone who is staunchly Christian (i.e. cannot "willingly suspend disbelief) or does not have at least a general understanding of Christianity (obviously, there are numerous references both to Judaism and Christianity).

Alexander Kennedy says

Celsus' wit is fantastic. If you are interested in learning about the ways in which Christianity borrowed from pagan culture, this is must read. Celsus raises a whole assortment of points that seem to have not been readily answerable by Christians in the second century. For a book written by a philosopher it is very easy to read and not very long. At times Celsus can go overboard in his name calling of Christians,, but it does show that early Christianity mostly catered to lower classes that were not very literate. I think the most humerus part is when Celsus calls bodily resurrection at judgement day the stuff of worms.

David S. T. says

Sadly this book, like countless others, is currently lost, but a decent amount of the text survived as quotes in Origen's Contra Celsum (Origen takes Celsus's points and refutes them). I originally wanted just read Origen's book but due to its length (5x this) and cost (\$60), I decided to just start with this recreation of Celsus's original work.

This book was pretty interesting, the translation seems clear and he put the points together in a somewhat logical order. As for the book itself, I found it pretty interesting to see just what remains of what Celsus said about the Christians. I had a decent idea of what to expect from first reading Wilken's The Christians as the Romans Saw Them, but it was nice to read some of it for myself.

In this book Celsus tries to convince the reader that Christianity is a dumb religion and they're better off staying with the traditional Roman gods.

I don't have the book in front of me, but from what I remember:

He thinks that the creation account is stupid and Moses was stupid to have written it (day and night happens before sun and moon are created).

The flood was just a copy from other roman tales (I forget which one).

Mary was seduced and got pregnant by a roman soldier named Panthera, she made up the pregnancy by god to convince her Joseph to marry her.

He thinks that most of Jesus's best points were already said by Plato and Jesus just copies them.

He thinks most of the ideas of the Eucharist and the sacraments are just copies from the Mithra cult.

He really hates that Christians are exclusive in there beliefs, he feels that all people have worshiped the same supreme god, Romans, Greeks, Egyptians, although they call him by different names, where as Christians think they exclusively know him and he can't believe that Christians also raise a man Jesus to being equal to the supreme god (showing that back in 150AD Christians were already worshiping Jesus as god).

A decent part of this book is also spent refuting the gnostics which must have already been pretty prevalent by this time.

Overall this was a pretty interesting to get into the mind of a Roman pagan and see his thoughts on the early Christians, this book is also important because it caused some of the earliest apologetics to combat the claims made in this book (now I need to get Origen's refutations).
