Celsus Encyclopedia Article

Celsus

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.

Contents

Celsus Encyclopedia Article.....1

Contents.....2

Celsus.....3

Celsus

Celsus, a Middle Platonist (Origen wrongly called him an Epicurean) critic of Christianity, wrote the *Alethes Logos* (True doctrine) about 178 CE. We know the work—whose title derives from a Platonic expression (*Meno* 81a)—only through quotations in Origen's reply, *Contra Celsum,* composed seventy years later. Celsus began his work by assuming the character of a Jew and attacking Christian views from this standpoint. Then he proceeded on his own to demonstrate their inadequacy in relation to the basic axioms of contemporary philosophical theology, especially with regard to the doctrines of God and providence and poetic-philosophical inspiration; as a Platonist he found the Christian idea of the Incarnation both impossible and immoral. At the end of his work he urged the Christians to abandon their irrational faith and join him in upholding the state and its religion. After Christianity was recognized by the Roman government, Celsus's work was destroyed.

The theology of Celsus is based, in his own view, on an ancient tradition handed down, especially among oriental wise men, from remote antiquity. This tradition, the "true doctrine," informed him of the existence of one god known by many names and worshiped by all pious men. Such a "polytheistic monotheism," he believed, had been perverted or misunderstood, first by the Jews and then by the Christians. If they were to return to the tradition, they would abandon their irrational exclusiveness and would recognize the divine right of the one emperor. His work thus culminates in a theology of politics.

Origen's reply is important not only because in it his philosophical theology, developed earlier, is clearly expressed in relation to Celsus's views, but also because it shows the extent to which he agreed with Celsus in opposing more literal religious conceptions. Each held, for example, that his own authoritative traditions are to be understood symbolically, whereas the other's traditions must be meant literally. But Origen finally took his stand on the particularity of the Hebrew-Christian tradition, which Celsus found totally unacceptable.

See Also

Origen; Platonism and the Platonic Tradition.

Bibliography

Bader, R. *Der Ἀληθησ̀ λόγοϛ des Kelsos.* Stuttgart and Berlin, 1940. Critical edition of Greek text.

Chadwick, Henry. *Origen: Contra Celsum.* Cambridge, U.K. Cambridge University Press, 1953. Translation with introduction and very full notes.