

# The Christians and Their Spineless God<sup>1</sup>

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About the year 175 in the Christian era, perhaps in the year 177, a new book hit the bookstores in the Roman World. The emperor at that time was Marcus Aurelius, notable for his enlightened beliefs but also for allowing persecution of Christians in many places in the empire. The author of the book was the philosopher Celsus, and the title was *On the True Doctrine*, hardly a title destined to make the book a bestseller.

But the book is remarkable for a number of reasons, the first of which is that it was written at all. Why would a non-Christian author like Celsus, a philosopher of some note, write a book on the Christians and their beliefs? Part of the answer is no doubt that Celsus did not like the teachings of believers in Jesus. But this is not the whole answer. Admitting that we know very little about Celsus, we can be sure that he disliked many things that did not bother him enough to become the subject of a book.

The other element that helps explain Celsus' book, therefore, is the growing influence of Christianity. The new faith was impacting the Roman world; it could no longer be ignored; its influence was reaching the educated tier of the empire. Celsus' book set for itself the task of countering the influence of the Christian message. In this sense his book was the first of its kind. It would not, as is well known, be the last.

Celsus is thought to have been a philosopher in the Platonic tradition.<sup>2</sup> When he goes on the attack against Christianity, he writes as an educated person, and he speaks as one who has done his homework reasonably well. For this reason his portrayal of the Christian message offers a rare opportunity to listen in on what Christians were saying in the latter half of the second century.

With respect to tone Celsus is condescending, never missing an opportunity to spite Christians or to put down their beliefs. While this may be a feature of polemical literature of that period, Celsus excels at it. We see it in the following example, where he directs his scorn at the belief that he finds most objectionable.

*Their utter stupidity [of the Christians] can be illustrated in any number of ways, but especially with their misreading of the divine enigmas and their insistence that there exists a being opposed to God, whom they know by the name of devil (in Hebrew, Satan, for they refer to one and the same being by various names).<sup>3</sup>*

In Celsus' eyes, the Christians are not very bright, as this statement shows. The teaching that proves their stupidity better than anything else is the notion that „*there exists a being opposed to God.*“ Having immersed himself in the preaching and teaching of the Early Church, Celsus has discovered that Christians operate with *a third category of being*, a being that is neither God nor human.

Christians in the Early Church, we learn, see the earth as the stage of a cosmic conflict that involves God, human beings, and Satan. Satan is a fallen angel, and his fall happened before the fall of human beings. After Satan had fallen, he played a crucial role in breaking up the relationship between human beings and God (Gen 3:1). This is the story Christians find in the Bible, and this view is at the core of their belief. Christians who read Celsus' book will disagree with his criticism, but they will not say that Celsus has failed to state correctly what the Christian belief is.

Celsus is mystified by Christians who depart from what he calls the „divine enigmas,“ the true mystery of God. Thinkers and philosophers have in his view thought long and hard about God and God's ways. The result of the hard work would go to waste for anyone who accepts the Christian teaching. In the eyes of the philosopher, the figure of Satan is therefore unthinkable for what it says about God.

*But they [the Christians] show how utterly concocted these ideas are when they go on to say that the highest god in heaven, desiring to do such and such – say, confer some great gift on man – cannot fulfil his purpose because he is opposed and thwarted by a god who is his opposite. Does this mean that the Son of God can be beaten by a devil?<sup>4</sup>*

This statement is as clear as it gets in Celsus' book. He writes as a philosopher, but he is not irreligious. On the contrary, he is a *believer*, seeking to defend God against the calumny with which the Christian teaching sullies God's dignity. What is this, we fairly hear him shout, portraying God as though God has an opponent that limits God! What is this but a God who is spineless, a pushover, and a weakling! God, in Celsus' view and in the view of the best philosophical tradition of the second century, should be a sovereign God and the undisputed boss. If asked, Celsus would answer that God's defining attribute is power. There should be no other power within sight that somehow challenges God.

*It is blasphemy to say that when the greatest God indeed wishes to confer some benefit upon men, He has a power which is opposed to Him, and so is unable to do it.<sup>5</sup>*

Celsus does not reject the notion of Satan because he refuses to believe that there is anything beyond the human sphere. His opposition to the Christian teaching is theological rather than ontological, as scholars might say. He is offended by the Christian view for what it says about God, not because it posits an unfamiliar category of being. A world-view that includes Satan diminishes God. The Christian teaching puts God's sovereignty at risk, jeopardizing the doctrine that is most sacred to Celsus. They make God seem less than what God is or what God must be in order to be God. Celsus feels duty bound to defend God's honor. His outrage is particularly palpable when he comments on Jesus.

*But the Christian notion that the Son of God accepted the punishments inflicted upon him by a devil is merely ludicrous, especially if we are to think that this is to teach us to endure punishments quietly. In my view the Son of God had a right to punish the devil; he certainly had no reason to threaten with punishment the men he came to save, the very ones who had suffered so much from the devil's abuse.<sup>6</sup>*

The power-relation between Jesus and Satan is in the Christian outlook turned on its head. Jesus, who should be strong if he is to do any good at all, seems the weaker party. To Celsus' mind this means that there cannot be a connection between Jesus and God. No God who takes his dignity seriously would consent to be treated abusively and kicked around the way Jesus was. If Jesus were truly representing God, as the Christians claim, he would have put the devil in his place. He would do it by force, the greater the force the better. In the Christian teaching logic and decency are violated because the bad one is allowed to inflict suffering on the good, and the good and the strong, whether God or Jesus, allows the bad one to get away with it.

To Celsus, this does not make sense. Who can respect anyone who lets himself be treated this way? Who in their right mind would want a *God* like that?

*It is mere impiety, therefore, to suggest that the things that were done to Jesus were done to God. Certain things are simply as a matter of logic impossible to God, namely those things which violate the consistency of his nature: God cannot do less than what it befits God to do, what it is God's nature to do. Even if the prophets had foretold such things about the Son of God, it would have been necessary to say, according to the axiom I have cited, that the prophets were wrong, rather than to believe that God has suffered and died.<sup>7</sup>*

Celsus has a fully developed idea of what God must be like that rules out the Christian view before the Christians get to the starting line. What believers in Jesus say violates the consistency of God's nature, taking God to such a low level that the Christian God is good for nothing. "God cannot do less than what it befits God to do, what it is

*God's nature to do!*" Celsus exclaims. If the prophets of the Old Testament predicted otherwise, they were not telling the truth, and we should not believe them.

It cannot be clearer than this. Non-Christian thinkers in the second century have found their voice. The basic principle of good theology is to Celsus to project the power and sovereignty of God. There should be no if's, and's, or but's. The Christian belief paints God as a Being that no thinking person can respect. What the writers of the New Testament praise as *good news*, never tiring of this term, is news that makes Celsus cringe in revulsion. He dismisses Christianity because he considers it an insult to God.

#### The Christians and the Being That Is Opposed to God

Sadly, the complete text of Celsus's book has been lost. We owe the quotes I have given above to the service of another author. Some seventy years after Celsus's book, probably around 244 CE, a leading Christian thinker was prevailed upon to write a rebuttal. The author of the Christian reply was Origen of Alexandria (185-254 CE), and the title of his book was short and to the point, *Against Celsus*.<sup>8</sup> If we venture to guess why Origen wrote *his* book, the answer will be a mirror image of Celsus's motivation. Origen believed that Celsus's attack on the Christian message was unjustified. The fact that he wrote a lengthy book, discussing Celsus's arguments point by point, should be taken to mean that Celsus's book was having an impact *against* the influence of Christianity.

Origen, the author of the second book, is remembered as one of the most devout and learned men in the history of the Christian Church. Today he is known somewhat in the Roman Catholic Church and hardly known at all in the Protestant world, but he remains the most influential theologian in the Eastern Orthodox Church. Origen is also

one of the most prolific authors ever, and, as one historian has said, he “is one of those figures, none too common even in Church history, of whose character we can say that we know nothing but what is good.”<sup>9</sup>

Origen does a great service to our knowledge of Celsus because he quotes the work of the deceased philosopher before answering him. We know what Celsus was saying thanks to Origen’s faithful rendition. Before he answers, he lets Celsus speak in his own voice. This might give the appearance of a dialogue, an impression that is misleading if it causes the reader of Origen’s book to believe that the two writers are actually talking to each other. While Origen is talking to Celsus, Celsus was not addressing Origen. The members of Celsus’s audience were readers in the latter part of the second century, and, to the extent that he had Christian readers in mind, they preceded Origen by at least two generations. It is important to realize that Celsus was not attacking what Origen believed so as to center the thrust of his critique on Origen and his beliefs. Through Celsus, we gain access to the beliefs of Christians at a much earlier date. As to style, Origen’s work is simple and matter-of-fact, “a work without pretension,” it has been said, “where style counts for nothing, thought for everything.”<sup>10</sup>

Two things need to be emphasized concerning Origen’s book. First, Origen says that Celsus *misunderstands* the Christian teaching, but he does not say that Celsus has *misrepresented* what the Christian teaching is. For instance, when Celsus attacks the Christian belief in Satan, Origen does not say that Christians do not hold this belief. He firmly believes that Celsus is misguided, but he does not try to get the Christians off the hook by walking away from the belief that is being attacked. Second, and equally important, the Christian belief in Satan is not invented by Origen in the third century CE.

The Christian view of reality is anchored in the New Testament. Those who ascribe the Christian view of Satan to Origen have their facts wrong and their timing mixed up by almost a century. When Celsus attacked Christians for believing in Satan, *a being that is opposed to God*, Origen was not yet born.

But Origen affirms the cosmic conflict perspective that riles Celsus, and he explains it in careful detail.

The name Devil, and Satan, and Wicked one, is mentioned in many places of scripture, and he who bears it is also described as being the enemy of God.<sup>11</sup>

We find this message everywhere in Origen's books, so much so that Origen has been called the greatest diabolist in the history of the Christian Church. The theme of cosmic conflict constitutes the framework for his understanding of God, and it bears on the most puzzling elements in God's story. Origen never lets his readers forget it.

He who was Lucifer and who arose in heaven, he who was without sin from the day of his birth and who was among the cherubim, was able to fall with respect to the kindness of the Son of God before he could be bound by chains of love.<sup>12</sup>

This is a comment on a passage in Paul's letter to the Romans (Rom 6:8-10).

Many readers will find it strange because the statement cannot be explained on the basis of a specific clue within this text. The reason, therefore, is that Origen never strays far from the theme of cosmic conflict. In this particular comment he manages to highlight the most important points in Lucifer's „biography:“ He „*was* Lucifer,“ the splendid „Son of the Morning“ (Isa 14:12). He „*arose* in heaven.“ He *was* „without sin from the day of his birth“ (Ezek 28:15). He „*was* among the cherubim“ (Ezek 28:14). And yet, despite the exalted origin and high standing, something went wrong. Lucifer „was able to fall with respect to the kindness of the Son of God before he could be bound by the chains of love.“

Origen has here touched on the essential and „hard“ facts of Lucifer’s story as well as on the subtle side that may not be apparent to readers unfamiliar with Origen. The thought that Lucifer was not „bound by the chains of love“ is a strange expression because „chains of love“ represent a bond that arises from within. It is a counterpoint and contrast to other kinds of chains, such as chains of obligation, coercion, or force applied from without. To be bound by „the chains of love“ means to be bound in freedom.

Origen is not in the slightest shaken by the ridicule Celsus heaps on the Christian story. The Christians in the third century, like the Christians in the first and the second centuries, still „*make a being who is opposed to God*;“ they do believe in the reality of Satan. Origen defends the belief. He finds its source in the Bible. He pursues its explanatory power, pressing the point home. And he takes on Celsus for what he considers flaws in Celsus’ view of God and human reality.

#### The Source of the Christian Belief

The source of the Christian belief, of course, is the Bible, the Old Testament as well as the New. Critics who say that the Old Testament does not say much about Satan will hear a different story from Origen. To him and to the Christian communities preceding him, the notion that the Old Testament has little to say about Satan could also to a large extent apply to the role of Jesus in the Old Testament. A number of Old Testament texts that in the New Testament are harnessed as prophecies pointing to Jesus were not, in their original context, fully recognized as Messianic.<sup>13</sup> In light of the life of Jesus these text have found the referent that alone does justice to their meaning.

The role of Satan in the Old Testament is similar in the sense that texts that on the surface refer to a human power, such as „the king of Babylon“ in Isaiah (Isa 14:12) or „the



prince of Tyre“ in Ezekiel (Ezek 28:12), have a meaning that looks beyond the human factor. They project a non-human figure on the screen. This insight is basic to the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament, and Origen defends it vigorously. His discussion of the text describing „the prince of Tyre“ in Ezekiel 28:12-19 is a case in point.

Who is there that, hearing such sayings as this, „Thou wast a signet of likeness and a crown of honour in the delights of the paradise of God“, or this, „from the time thou wast created with the cherubim, I placed thee in the holy mount of God,“ could possibly weaken their meaning to such an extent as to suppose them spoken of a human being, even a saint, not to mention the prince of Tyre? Or what „fiery stones“ can he think of, „in the midst“ of which any man could have lived? Or who could be regarded as „stainless“ from the very „day he was created,“ and yet at some later time could have acts of unrighteousness found in him and be said to be „cast forth into the earth“? This certainly indicated that the prophecy is spoken of one who, not being in the earth, was „cast forth into the earth,“ whose „holy places“ also are said to be „polluted.“<sup>4</sup>

The Christian interpretation is only taking stock of what is found in the Old Testament text, adding nothing and taking nothing away. Perfection of the kind envisioned in Ezekiel“s is not found in the human realm, especially when the one who fell originally was counted among the cherubim. To suggest that a historical „prince of Tyre“ at some point was “the signet of perfection” (Ezek 28:12) is to miss the mark entirely. Ezekiel, Origen contends, is concerned about a figure that transcends anything found in the human realm.

Isaiah“s description of „the king of Babylon“ (Isa 14:12-20) is deployed and defended along similar lines.

Again, we are taught by the prophet Isaiah the following facts about another opposing power. He says: „How hast Lucifer, who arose in the morning, fallen from heaven. He who assailed the nations is broken and dashed to the earth. Thou saidst indeed in thy heart, I will ascend into heaven; above the stars of heaven I will place my throne, I will sit upon a lofty mountains which are toward the north, I will ascend above the clouds; I will be like the Most High. But now

shalt thou be cast down to the lower world, and to the foundations of the earth. All who see thee shall be amazed over thee and say: This is the man that affected the whole earth, that moved kings, that made the whole round a desert, that destroyed cities and did not loose those who were in chains.<sup>15</sup>

As with the passage concerning „the prince of Tyre“ in Ezekiel, no person or power in the human realm have feet large enough to fit the shoes of Isaiah’s poem. The notion that the Bible has texts that contain a „surplus of meaning“ must in this connection not be taken to mean that the alleged „surplus“ is imported to the text by the reader.<sup>16</sup> If there is a „surplus of meaning“ in Isaiah’s poem, it refers to an opposing power that has an angelic or demonic referent. This „surplus,“ as noted, is not added to the basic meaning or imported to the text by restless and imaginative readers. It is the text itself that has this „surplus;“ it is put there by the author, who aspires to describe evil in ultimate and definitive terms. On this point, at least, Henri Crouzel’s depiction of Origen seems well taken. Origen “possesses to a unique degree the gift of the exegete, analogous to that of the inspired author; he knows how to listen to God.”<sup>17</sup>

Origen, following the precedent of the New Testament, will argue that Isaiah’s poem tells the story of the thinly veiled power that is opposed to God.

It is most clearly proved by these words that he who formerly was Lucifer and who „arose in the morning“ has fallen from heaven. For if, as some suppose, he was a being of darkness, why is he said to have formerly been Lucifer or light-bearer? Or how could he „rise in the morning,“ who had in him no light at all? Moreover the Saviour teaches us about the devil as follows: „Lo, I see Satan fallen as lightning from heaven.“ So he was light once.<sup>18</sup>

The foregoing are only a few smatterings of the way Origen mines the Bible for an account of the demonic. In his answer to Celsus and potential readers in his own time and beyond, the biblical basis for this teaching is above question. Origen is soft-spoken and humble on behalf of his own effort, but he does not harbor the slightest doubt that the

Bible tells the story of a cosmic conflict or that it traces the footprints of evil back to a non-human point of origin.

However, although we have boldly and rashly committed these few remarks to writing in this book, perhaps we have said nothing significant. But if anyone with the time to examine the holy scriptures were to collect texts from all the sources and were to give a coherent account of evil, both how it first came to exist and how it is being destroyed, he would see that the meaning of Moses and the prophets with regard to Satan has not even been dreamt of by Celsus or by any of the people who are dragged down by this wicked daemon and are drawn away in their soul from God and the right conception of Him and from His Word.<sup>19</sup>

### God in the Christian Belief

As explained and defended by Origen, the biblical account is not interested in Satan for his own sake only. If the story cannot avoid paying attention to Satan, it is because Satan has distorted the truth about God. This is the all-important subject. Origen maintains an unremitting focus on how Satan has misrepresented God. His statement on the scriptural basis for the role Christians attribute to Satan, quoted above, goes to the heart of the problem. People “are dragged down by this wicked daemon and are drawn away in their soul from God and the right conception of Him and from His Word.”<sup>20</sup>

„A right conception of God.“ This is Origen’s concern in a nutshell. Satan’s aim, also in a nutshell, is to promote a wrong conception of God and of God’s word. Origen’s view in this respect echoes the story of the temptation and fall in Genesis (Gen 3:1-6). The serpent begins by misrepresenting God, turning God’s command into a command of severity and restriction (Gen 3:1). Next, the serpent attacks God’s credibility, alleging that God is not telling the truth (Gen 3:4-5). The seed of misrepresentation sprouts into the plant of distrust, and the plant of distrust matures into hostility and alienation (Gen 3:6). Alienation yields the terrifying fruit of fear, expressed in the most grief-stricken

sentence in the Bible, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself” (Gen 3:10).

Much of this is captured in Origen’s succinct summary; it is Satan’s goal to entice human beings to misread God and to draw them away from “the right conception of Him.”<sup>21</sup> In this perception, the problem facing the human family and the core issue in the cosmic conflict center on what God is like.

As Celsus knew well, the pagan world also had myths of cosmic combat and opposition to God, but, says Celsus, *these myths are not like the [Christian] tales which tell of a devil who is a daemon, or (and here they are nearer the truth) which speak of a man who is a sorcerer and proclaims opposing opinions.*<sup>22</sup> On this point Celsus has understood the distinctive of the account almost as well as Origen.

What, as Celsus hears it, are the Christians saying about Satan? They are talking about a figure who “*proclaims opposing opinions.*”<sup>23</sup> It is on the strength of these opinions that people are deceived. Recalling again the story in the Garden of Eden, the false opinions that Satan is promoting are opinions about God. Celsus, however, cannot respect a God who allows a being that is opposed to Him to exist or gets away with expressing opposing opinions. He understands that this is what the Christians are saying, and he repudiates such a God. For God to be a Person in whom Celsus can believe, he must be an undisputed sovereign who will not allow anything to stand in His way.

### Evil and Freedom

The ideological stumbling block in this dispute is freedom. Celsus cannot understand the God of the Christians because the category of freedom is undeveloped or absent in his

view of reality. His vision of God is a thoroughly imperial vision. If we imagine Celsus thinking of God in political terms, God is the divine emperor, and Celsus is a subject who has no voice. Indeed, he might even be the subject who *wants* no say so as not to infringe on God's undisputed supremacy. Or, just as likely, he might be a subject who is happy to make do with less freedom because it means less responsibility. Celsus' mentality resembles that of Seneca, who for a number of years served as something like a „chief of staff“ under the emperor Nero. “Tell me what I have to do,” Seneca is reported to have said, “I do not want to learn. I want to obey.”<sup>24</sup> This is one reason why it is impossible for Celsus to make sense of Jesus and the apparent power gap between Jesus and Satan; *“the Christian notion that the Son of God accepted the punishments inflicted upon him by a devil is merely ludicrous.”*<sup>25</sup>

The very things that are a stumbling stone to Celsus are to Origen the cornerstone. Crouzel calls Origen “the supreme theologian of free will.”<sup>26</sup> René Cadiou writes that for Origen “liberty became the most general of all the laws of the universe.”<sup>27</sup> Evil arose in the context of freedom. There could not be evil if the angels and human beings were not endowed with the gift of freedom. And yet freedom only provides the opportunity and is not the *cause* of evil. Freedom, too, is the value that God will not surrender even in the face of sin.

For freedom of will shall always remain in rational natures. It was possible even for him who was Lucifer, owing to the splendor of his glory, and who rose in the morning because of the light of knowledge, to be changed from his own glory and become darkness because of the evil which he received. And to him who was without stain from the day of his birth and dwelled with the cherubim and lived in the midst of fiery stones and was clothed with the entire adornment of the virtues in the paradise of God, there was no tree of virtues which could compare. But later, iniquities were found in him and he was cast from heaven to earth.<sup>28</sup>

Unlike the God envisioned by Celsus, the God who is revealed in Jesus is a God who values freedom so highly that he allows the things that Celsus has declared to be logically impossible, untrue even if the prophets foretold it.

We certainly do not deny that free will always will remain in rational natures, but we affirm that the power of the cross of Christ and of his death which he undertook at the end of the ages is so great that it suffices for the healing and restoration not only of the present and the future but also of past ages. It suffices not only for our human order, but also for the heavenly powers and orders. For according to the Apostle Paul's own pronouncement: Christ has made peace „through the blood of his cross“ not only with „the things on earth“ but also with „the things in heaven.“<sup>29</sup>

The sweep of this vision is staggering, and the underlying ideology is crystal clear. While freedom has no role in Celsus' outlook, in the Christian account it is the most precious of all values, and it is grounded in the character of God. God is, as it were, willing to defend freedom at a high cost rather than solve the problem of sin by giving up on freedom. The power of the cross suffices for the healing not only of the human predicament but also reaching to heavenly powers and orders. At all stages of this argument lies the conviction that God's remedy will not overrule or eclipse freedom.

### Salvation as Healing

As noted in the statement quoted above, Origen describes salvation as healing. On this point, too, he strikes a note that to a large extent fell silent in later Christian theology. Jesus' death on the cross heals in the sense that it exposes „the prince of this world,“ disproving the misrepresentation of God for which Satan is responsible (John 12:23-32). The effect of the cross is so great that “it suffices for the healing and restoration not only of the present and the future but also of past ages,” meaning that its influence also

extends to the non-human realm. Far more than I can show here, Origen sees in the message of the Bible as a message of healing. Salvation is to him best understood in medical terms, and he labors to show how the life and death of Jesus heals the human misperception of God. When we listen to Celsus, on the other hand, prohibition and coercion are never far from the resources with which he would be willing to combat evil. Reviewing some of the statements we have visited earlier, we hear Celsus ask with poorly disguised contempt,

*Does this mean that the Son of God can be beaten by a devil?*<sup>30</sup>

*It is blasphemy to say that when the greatest God indeed wishes to confer some benefit upon men, He has a power which is opposed to Him, and so is unable to do it.*<sup>31</sup>

*In my view the Son of God had a right to punish the devil....*<sup>32</sup>

As seen in these statements, the attributes that to Celsus are most characteristic of God are power and sovereignty. Celsus stands at a loss before the Christian story. Why would Jesus submit to abuse by Satan if Jesus had the power of God at his command? Why would God choose *not* to do something that it is in God's power to do? Why would God *not* put Satan in his place and thus bring an end to the indignity of which Satan is the instigator?

Celsus has no compunctions about coercion. Indeed, he seems to relish the thought of its deployment, as if convinced that coercion, more than any other conceivable method, would drive home the message of God's honor and glory.

To Origen, by contrast, coercion is anathema. Not only is use of force incompatible with freedom, but if used, it will compound rather than solve the problem of

evil. God allows good and evil to develop and to run their course until each side has declared itself. “It was necessary for God,” says Origen, “who knows how to use for a needful end even the consequences of evil, to put those who became evil in this way in a particular part of the universe, and to make a school of virtue to be set up for those who wished to strive lawfully in order to obtain it.”<sup>33</sup> God’s remedy is revelation and not compulsion, persuasion and not force.

### Philosophy against Story

In his argument against the Christian view of reality and the message of Jesus, Celsus is confident that he has an insurmountable edge because he is a philosopher. Early in his attack he creates the expectation that he will provide a better and more persuasive explanation for the existence of evil than the Christians. After throwing his punches at the Christian view, he is ready to bring forth a superior explanation.

*I turn now to consider the existence of evil, which is analogous to matter itself in that there can be no decrease or increase of evils in the world – neither in the past nor in the future. From the beginning of time, the beginning of the universe, there has been just so much evil, and in quantity it has remained the same. It is in the nature of the universe that this be the case, and depends on our understanding of the origins of the universe itself. Certainly someone who has no learning in philosophy will be unaware of the origin of evil; but it is enough that the masses be told that evils are not caused by God; rather, that they are part of the nature of matter and of mankind; that the period of mortal life is the same from beginning to end, and that because all things happens in cycles, what is happening now – evils that is – happened before and will happen again.<sup>34</sup>*

What is this? The passage is hard to read, but it is mostly hard to read because it lacks coherence. “*It is not easy for one who has not read philosophy to know what is the origin of evils,*” Celsus says condescendingly.<sup>35</sup> The masses should not expect to understand; for them it is enough “*to be told that evils are not caused by God.*”<sup>36</sup> He



adds that the masses may also be told that evils “*inhere in matter and dwell among mortals.*”<sup>37</sup>

But Celsus appears unconvinced by his own argument. He fails to deliver on the expectation that the philosopher will give an answer that puts the Christian account to shame. Quite unexpectedly, he offers a fatalistic and pessimistic outlook, asserting that “*according to the determined cycles the same things always have happened, are now happening, and will happen.*”<sup>38</sup> Evil has no beginning and no end; it has always existed in the same amount and will always persist. But if „evil“ is a necessity, and if human beings are trapped in a cycle that no one can escape, the concept of evil has no meaning.

Origen is not impressed, but he answers in a more humble tone than Celsus. Having read philosophy, too, and no less than Celsus, he states modestly that “it is not easy even for one who has read philosophy to know the origin of evils, and probably it is impossible even for these men to know it absolutely, unless by inspiration of God it is made clear what are evils, and shown how they came to exist, and understood how they will be removed.”<sup>39</sup>

The great difference in *content* between the convictions of Celsus and Origen are matched by their very different *source* and *character*. Celsus argues on the basis of philosophy. His account falls back on constructing a story that may or may not explain evil or offer hope that evil one day will cease to exist. Origen, on the contrary, relies on a received *story*. The logic that underlies his account is the logic of narrative. If we ask why a certain story goes this way and not another, the answer is that we can only tell the story this way because this is what happened. This is the logic of narrative.

So much confusion exists on this point that it deserves a follow-up thought. John Hick, one of the theologians of the twentieth century who grappled with the reality of evil, speaks to this issue in two ways that are of interest. First, it is worth noting that Hick rejects the role of Satan in the Christian account because, to him, this perspective is incompatible with what “most educated inhabitants of the modern world” are prepared to accept.<sup>40</sup> His assertion on this point may be true to present reality, but it misrepresents history if modern objections to belief in Satan are held to be a novelty that became possible only because, in our time, unprecedented enlightenment. As we have seen, Celsus argued against the notion of Satan in the second century of the Christian era, claiming the prestige of learning and philosophy in support of his objection. On this point “educated inhabitants” of the ancient world, Celsus being one of them, were no different than what Hick claims on behalf of “most educated inhabitants of the modern world.”<sup>41</sup> The only difference is that the educated modern theologian now argues against the early Christian account along the lines of the *non-Christian* objections of Celsus.<sup>42</sup>

Second, Hick makes a philosophical objection to the early Christian account that puts the contrast between narrative logic and philosophical logic in bold relief. According to Hick, sin and evil should not logically arise in a flawless world, as the traditional account has it.<sup>43</sup> If the story says that evil arose without a cause, the story must be wrong.

It is impossible to conceive of wholly good beings in a wholly good world becoming sinful. To say that they do is to postulate the self-creation of evil *ex nihilo!* There must have been some moral flaw in the creature or in his situation to set up the tension of temptation; for creaturely freedom in itself and in the absence of any temptation cannot lead to sin.<sup>44</sup>

The exclamation mark in this passage is Hick's own, intended to expose the absurdity of the Christian account and thus to make further argument superfluous. This is yet another ironic twist, recalling that Celsus, too, lambasted the Christian account because he considered it absurd. A being who is genuinely good would not fall prey to evil; there would have to be a defect somewhere for evil to arise, says Hick.

How does the Christian account respond to this objection, so damning in the eyes of the critic? The answer, of course, is that the Christian account relies on the logic of narrative and not on philosophic logic. With respect to narrative, there is no traction for the argument that what is said to have happened cannot have happened because it is philosophically impossible. If, from the point of view of the narrative, something happened, it must be recounted the way it happened without any regard for objections to the contrary. Narrative logic refuses to be held hostage to other constraints than its own account. Origen's argument against Celsus is to prioritize the biblical narrative and to insist that philosophy must yield to the story. Philosophy, in turn, should not consider it an insult to its dignity that it is unable to explain something for which there is no explanation. The Christian account relates what happened not as an *explanation* but as a fact that defies comprehension.

The Christian account comes with an exclamation mark of its own on this point, proclaiming in bold letters that something happened that should not have happened. Evil came into being although it does not have a cause. In a sentence that is less strident than the passage quoted above, Hick concedes as much. "For we can never provide a complete causal explanation of a free act; if we could, it would not be a free act," he admits.<sup>45</sup>

The source that informs and obligates Origen's account is the story that is told in the Bible. This story involves God, human beings, and a third order of being. While the story gives rise to many questions, the framework for the questions that may be raised is given by the story. This thought is alien to Celsus.

### A Linear versus a Cyclic Account

Origen admits that he tells a story that he knows only "by inspiration of God;" that the Bible makes clear "what are evils;" it tells how evils "came to exist" and "how they will be removed."<sup>46</sup> Narrative towers above philosophy in this account. To Christians, the source is divine revelation and not human reason. Moreover, the conflicting accounts lead to very different views of reality. To Celsus, *all things happens in cycles, what is happening now – evils that is – happened before and will happen again.*<sup>47</sup> He appears to deduce what was and what will be one day from what is and to conclude that evil is a constant, asserting that *there can be no decrease of increase of evils in the world.*<sup>48</sup> This is a fatalistic view, to say the least, and it flies in the face of the Christian account. Not only does the Christian story see reality in a linear way rather than the cyclic view posited by Celsus, but it also proclaims a very different outcome. In a move that will offend many Christian believers today, Origen repudiates the doctrine of eternal punishment as a doctrine that contradicts the most basic values in the biblical story. To Origen, this idea would be the prime example of what it means to be drawn away from "a right conception" of God,<sup>49</sup> portraying God as cruel and vengeful and, in a view that is even less hopeful than in Celsus, asserting that many human beings will be consigned to burn in hell forever.

This outlook is not part of the Christian message defended by Origen, failing the test of healing and the expectation that suffering will come to an end. A person may be lost and forgo the healing he or she is offered by God, but God will not execute that person or torture him or her eternally. To Origen, Scripture indicates “that every sinner kindles for himself the flame of his own fire, and is not plunged into a fire which has been previously kindled by someone else or which existed before him.”<sup>50</sup> A vision of protracted torture for the damned is as incompatible with Origen’s view of God as his view of coercion. Indeed, the God who reveals himself as a healer cannot inflict eternal punishment on those who are lost except to concede that the diabolic misrepresentation of God has defeated the mission of the Son of God.

In the early Christian account evil has a beginning and will one day come to an end. Celsus, who begins his scathing critique by promising a better explanation, ends it by claiming that there is nothing to explain. What went up with a bang comes down with a whimper. For Origen, however, the point is not to defeat Celsus on the battlefield of logic. It is rather to tell the story that is his prized possession. The God who spoke in ages past “in many and various ways by the prophets,” has “in these last days” taken the dramatic step to speak through Jesus, “the pioneer and perfecter” of the Christian faith (Heb 1:1-2; 12:1-2). Origen has joined the cloud of witnesses (Heb 12:2), already large, that has been persuaded by this story. Even if he comes too late to persuade Celsus, it is not too late to tell the story and to share the hope it offers.

The Christian Story Today

As I mentioned at the beginning, Origen is not well known in large circles of the Christian Church. The account of evil that was told by the Early Church has likewise fallen on hard times. A striking case in point is the fact that when theologians in our time discuss the story of the cosmic conflict in the early Christian account, they consider Augustine (354-430) and not Origen the best spokesperson.<sup>51</sup> This is strange for a number of reasons. Almost two hundred years separate Augustine from Origen, and many of the convictions that are clear and emphatic in Origen's writings, have been abandoned by Augustine. While it is true that Augustine retains the notion of a cosmic conflict in his account of evil, the story he tells has been bleached by competing concerns in his own mind and by the changing fortunes of the Church.

What in Origen is unbleached narrative with respect to the cosmic conflict is in Augustine increasingly a philosophical construct that he deploys according to the demands of the situation.<sup>52</sup> Augustine will argue that freedom made sin a possibility,<sup>53</sup> but his most deeply held convictions lie elsewhere.<sup>54</sup> To the Early Church, the story of the cosmic conflict put of freedom at the center of the divine-human reality. This is no longer the case in Augustine's outlook. In the revised account, the arbitrary will of God counts for more than the choice of created beings because the former belief is the one he can least do without.<sup>55</sup> The ones whom God has predestined to be saved in the Augustinian account cannot refuse God's decision, and, by implication, those whom God has not predestined to be saved do not have the option of choosing it.<sup>56</sup> The argument is contorted and polemical, but the trend of the argument magnifies God's sovereign will over the choice of created beings. Even further from Origen, perhaps, is Augustine's

conviction that those who are not saved, despite that fact that choosing salvation is not an option for them, will be consigned to eternal punishment in hell.<sup>57</sup>

When the trend of Augustine's new emphasis is put on fast forward all the way to Martin Luther eleven centuries later, it is evident that that a chasm in perception and priorities have opened between Origen's defense of the Christian belief and that of Luther. In fact, on the critical point of freedom, Luther's view lies closer to the deterministic view of Celsus.

From this it follows irrefutably that everything we do, everything that happens, even if it seems to us to happen mutably and contingently, happens in fact nonetheless necessarily and immutably, if you have regard to the will of God. For the will of God is effectual and cannot be hindered, since it is the power of the divine nature itself; moreover it is wise, so that it cannot be deceived.<sup>58</sup>

The notion of divine sovereignty that looms large in Celsus' view of God gets a new lease on life in the theology of Augustine, and it rises to still greater heights in the theology of Martin Luther even if the emphasis on divine sovereignty means that freedom is reduced to nothing. For Augustine and Luther, eternal torment is defended as a Christian tenet of belief although it puts to the torch the expectation that suffering will one day end. If these beliefs seem offensive and incomprehensible to human reason, as Luther seems to expect that they will, he takes refuge in the notion of divine sovereignty, placing upon its shoulders a load that far exceeds the weight that Celsus commissions divine sovereignty to carry. While Celsus promises an explanation for the reality of human suffering that he fails to deliver, Luther promises nothing.

This is the highest degree of faith, to believe him [God] merciful when he saves so few and damns so many, and to believe him righteous when by his own will he makes us necessarily damnable, so that he seems, according to Erasmus, to delight in the torments of the wretched and to be worthy of hatred rather than of love. If, then, I could by any means comprehend how this God can be merciful

and just who displays so much wrath and iniquity, there would be no need of faith.<sup>59</sup>

Needless to say, whether in tone or content, this line from Luther's vehement debate with Erasmus is a far cry from the story and the vision held out by Origen in his answer to Celsus. The comparison must be qualified by differences in context and intent,<sup>60</sup> but the contrast is nevertheless striking. Where Celsus, the neo-Platonic philosopher, faults the beliefs of the Christians in the Early Church because they hold views that violate his notion of divine sovereignty, Luther is similarly concerned not to allow any idea that will diminish God's sovereignty. The softer voice of Origen stands between these two points, disowned within the Christian tradition precisely on the point that once was most distinctive in the early Christian account. To Luther, non-comprehensibility is not a negative because it increases the need for faith, driving home the message of divine sovereignty that to him has pride of place.

This huge shift in emphasis is easier to fathom when the dramatic change in context is taken into account. Eric Osborn writes that with the conversion of the emperor Constantine in the fourth century "theodicy gave way to triumphalism."<sup>61</sup> „Theodicy“ refers to the attempt to harmonize the reality of evil with belief in a just and loving God. The story that Origen tells, interprets, and defends belongs in the category of theodicy. To Luther, by contrast, theodicy is not a legitimate human concern.

„Triumphalism“ is a word that does not need an explanation. In the present context, it means that as the Church grew more powerful, it felt less the need to tell the biblical story of the origin of evil, or, for that matter, to explain anything. In particular, it felt less the need to tell a story that put freedom at the center of its account. After Constantine, the Church was in a position to command, no longer having to engage the



world from a position of weakness. When the Christian Emperor invited the Church to the table of power, the Church could resort to coercion when persuasion came up short. For this to happen, the Church needed a theology that justified coercion. Adapting to this change of fortune, the Church drifted away from the „weak“ God of the Early Church toward the no-nonsense God of Celsus and pagan philosophy. The result was a theology and a policy that had more in common with the ideology of Celsus than with the story and the ideals of the Early Church.

Thus, when Augustine condoned the use of coercion against the Donatists in North Africa and other dissenters,<sup>62</sup> he did it by reconfiguring basic tenets of the Christian view of God. “What earlier apologists celebrate as God’s gift to humankind – free will, liberty, autonomy, self-government – Augustine characterizes in surprisingly negative terms,” says Elaine Pagels of this change.<sup>63</sup> Augustine revised the map of interpretation to fit the new landscape. The new map, like the new political landscape, emphasized divine power and sovereignty over human freedom and responsibility.<sup>64</sup> Augustine’s theology triumphed, but its triumph required “the capitulation of all who held to the classical proclamation concerning human freedom, once regarded as the heart of the Christian gospel.”<sup>65</sup> It was a sign of changing times when Augustine became the first person to write a full justification “of the right of the state to suppress non-Catholics,” says Peter Brown.<sup>66</sup> The imperial God that sat enthroned on high in Celsus’ view of reality retook lost ground, this time not as a relic of Celsus’ religion but as the God of the Christian Church. The spineless God of the Early Church was out. Power was in. For the Church that early in its history made the origin of evil the centerpiece of its narrative and held liberty to be “the most general of all the laws of the universe,”<sup>67</sup> it

became necessary to reinterpret the narrative because the Church was adapting to a different reality.

As noted above, this transformation represents a process of contraction. The field of vision narrowed from the big story of the rebellion of Satan to the smaller story of personal salvation and to doctrines like the trinity and the nature of Christ.<sup>68</sup> I have elsewhere characterized this as a “more detailed picture within a much smaller frame.”<sup>69</sup> The values changed, too. One value that went precipitously into decline, as the history of Christianity demonstrates, was freedom.

In his answer to Celsus, Origen says that “[n]o one will be able to know the origin of evils who has not grasped the truth about the so-called devil and his angels, and who he was before he became a devil, and how he became a devil, and what caused his so-called angels to rebel with him.”<sup>70</sup> I owe it to the reader to admit that I share Origen’s conviction on this point. My conviction in this regard is influenced by a similar respect for the Bible and the early Christian tradition, much of it lost, but it is also reinforced by the way the biblical account sheds light on present human reality. Indeed, it is precisely the present human reality that cries out for something more than a human framework within which to take the measure evil. In a post-Holocaust reality, belief in “*a being opposed to God*” need not be the laughing matter that Celsus made it out to be in the second century.

As we revisit the biblical story in these pages, we are looking not only for the monstrous foot that fits the monstrous shoe that fits the monstrous footprint of evil in human experience. We are also mindful that the reality of evil is a genuine obstacle to faith, as are misconceptions of the God who permitted it to happen.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a more in-depth treatment of this subject, see Sigve K. Tonstad, “Theodicy and the Theme of Cosmic Conflict in the Early Church,” *AUSS* 42 (2004), 169-202.

<sup>2</sup> For an introduction to the thought-world of Middle Platonism, see John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists. 80 B.C. to A.D. 220*, rev. ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> *Celsus on the True Doctrine: A Discourse against the Christians* (trans. R. Joseph Hoffmann; New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 98-99.

<sup>4</sup> *Celsus on the True Doctrine*, 99.

<sup>5</sup> *Contra Celsum* 6.42. The reference here is to the translation by Henry Chadwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965).

<sup>6</sup> *Celsus on the True Doctrine*, 100.

<sup>7</sup> *Celsus on the True Doctrine*, 100.

<sup>8</sup> Henri Crouzel (*Origen*; trans. A. S. Worrall [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989], 47) calls *Contra Celsum* “the most important apologetic work of antiquity” along with Augustine’s *The City of God*, written almost two centuries later.

<sup>9</sup> G. W. Butterworth, *Origen on First Principles* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1936), v.

<sup>10</sup> Crouzel, *Origen*, 57.

<sup>11</sup> *First Principles*, 1.5.2.

<sup>12</sup> *ComRom* 5.10.16, books 1-5, 5.10.16; trans. Thomas P. Scheck; *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 103 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 377.

<sup>13</sup> A case in point is Psalm 110:1-5, one of the texts quoted most frequently in the New Testament, cf. Matt 22:42-45; Mark 12:35-37; Acts 2:34; 1 Cor 15:25; Eph 1:20-22; Heb 10:12-13.

<sup>14</sup> *First Principles* I.5.4; cf. *Contra Celsum* 6.43; 6.44; *Homélie sur Ézékiel* (trans. Marcel Borret; Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1989), 411-413.

<sup>15</sup> *First Principles* I.5.5; cf. *Contra Celsum* 6.43.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Forth Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976).

<sup>17</sup> Crouzel, *Origen*, 28. Adolf von Harnack’s verdict (*Der kirchengeschichtliche Ertrag der exegetischen Arbeiten des Origenes*, part 2 [Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, 1919], 4), based on a thorough and critical reading of all the available works of Origen, is worth noting: “There has never been a theologian in the Church that so wholeheartedly was and wanted to be an exegete of the Bible as Origen” (translation mine).

<sup>18</sup> *First Principles* I.5.5; cf. *Contra Celsum* 6.43.

<sup>19</sup> *Contra Celsum* 6.44.

<sup>20</sup> *Contra Celsum* 6.44.

<sup>21</sup> *Contra Celsum* 6.44.

<sup>22</sup> *Contra Celsum* 6.42.

<sup>23</sup> *Contra Celsum* 6.42.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Patrick D. Miller, “Divine Command and Beyond: The Ethics of the Commandments,” in *The Ten Commandments: The Reciprocity of Faithfulness*, ed. William P. Brown (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 26.

<sup>25</sup> *Celsus on the True Doctrine*, 100.

<sup>26</sup> Crouzel, *Origen*, 21.

<sup>27</sup> Rene Cadiou. *Introduction au système d’Origène* (Paris: Société d’édition “Les Belles Lettres,” 1932), quoted in Danielou, *Origen*, 205-206

<sup>28</sup> *ComRom* 5.10.16, books 1-5, 5.10.16; trans. Thomas P. Scheck; *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 103 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 377.

<sup>29</sup> *ComRom* 5.10.16.

<sup>30</sup> *Celsus on the True Doctrine*, 99.

<sup>31</sup> *Contra Celsum* 6.42.

<sup>32</sup> *Celsus on the True Doctrine*, 100.

<sup>33</sup> *Contra Celsum* 6.44.

<sup>34</sup> *Celsus on the True Doctrine*, 100.

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- <sup>35</sup> *Contra Celsum* 4.65.
- <sup>36</sup> *Contra Celsum* 4.65.
- <sup>37</sup> *Contra Celsum* 4.65.
- <sup>38</sup> *Contra Celsum* 4.65.
- <sup>39</sup> *Contra Celsum* 4.65.
- <sup>40</sup> John Hick, "An Irenaean Theodicy," in *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy*, ed. Stephen T. Davis (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1981), 40.
- Hick, "An Irenaean Theodicy," 40.
- <sup>42</sup> The „paternity“ of Hick’s theodicy has been a subject of discussion in contemporary scholarship. Hick claimed support in the Christian apology of Irenaeus (ca. 130-202) for his „soul-making“ view of human reality. Recently, it has been suggested that tenets in the outlook of Origen are a better fit with Hick’s view (Mark M. Scott, "Suffering and Soul-Making: Rethinking John Hick’s Theodicy," *JR* 90 [2010], 313-334). As noted here, neither Origen’s commitment to narrative over philosophy nor the centrality of Satan in his account is shared by Hick.
- <sup>43</sup> John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 43; idem., "An Irenaean Theodicy," 43-44.
- <sup>44</sup> John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977), 250.
- <sup>45</sup> Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, 43.
- <sup>46</sup> *Contra Celsum* 4.65.
- <sup>47</sup> *Celsus on the True Doctrine*, 100.
- <sup>48</sup> *Celsus on the True Doctrine*, 100.
- <sup>49</sup> *Contra Celsum* 6.44.
- <sup>50</sup> *First Principles* 2.20.4
- <sup>51</sup> Alvin Plantinga (*The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 164-195; idem., *God, Freedom, and Evil* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 29-64; idem., *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 459-489. Plantinga takes Augustine as his point of departure for his „free will defense,“ leaving Origen entirely out of the picture. David Ray Griffin (*God, Power, and Evil: A Process Theodicy* [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976]) begins his review of traditional Christian theodicies with Augustine, as if the latter is the foremost spokesperson for the cosmic conflict story and the Christian defense of free will.
- <sup>52</sup> Rowan A. Greer, "Augustine’s Transformation of the Free Will Defence," *Faith and Philosophy* 13 (1996), 471-486. Greer argues that the contradictions in Augustine’s writings ultimately must be resolved in the context of Augustine’s experience. He could see no other way to salvation than by God overruling his will, that is, the will of Augustine.
- <sup>53</sup> Augustine, *On the Problem of Free Choice*, trans. Dom Mark Pontifex (ACW 22; New York: Newman Press, 1955), 75.
- <sup>54</sup> Augustine, *On the Predestination of the Saints*, ch. 14, cf. [http://www.covenantor.org/Predestination/augustin\\_predestination.html](http://www.covenantor.org/Predestination/augustin_predestination.html)
- <sup>55</sup> Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 64-69; Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil*, 57-69.
- <sup>56</sup> Eleonore Stump, "Augustine on Free Will," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 134-147.
- <sup>57</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Pelican Books, 1972 [repr. Penguin Books, 1984]), Book XXI (pp. 964-1021). In the section dealing with hell, Augustine painstakingly makes the argument that the body of the depraved, will be in such a state that they will be able to experience torture that has no end.
- <sup>58</sup> Martin:Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, in *Luther's Works*, Vol. 33, trans. Philip S. Watson, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999, c1972 ), 37.
- <sup>59</sup> Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, 62.
- <sup>60</sup> For instance, it is important to point out that Luther’s debate with Erasmus focuses on contested points of theology and anthropology. It is not a prescription for public policy, or, in the arena of public policy, a proscription of freedom. Although his legacy is ambivalent, the young Luther was himself the foremost champion for freedom of conscience, leading by example and advocacy; cf. *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate* [1520] in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 44, trans. Charles M. Jacobs, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann ( Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 114-217;

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*Temporal Authority: To Which Extent It Should Be Obeyed* [1523], in *Luther's Works*, vol. 45, trans. J. J. Schindel, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 75-129.

<sup>61</sup> Eric Osborn, "The Apologist Origen and the Fourth Century: From Theodicy to Christology," in *Origeniana Septima*, ed. W. A. Bienert and U. Kühneweg (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1999), 58.

<sup>62</sup> John R. Bowlin ("Augustine on Justifying Coercion," *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics*, 17 [1997], 49-70) confirms that Augustine became a believer in, and a promoter of, coercion, but he also downplays its significance as though it is no more than what people might condone or approve of under certain circumstances today.

<sup>63</sup> Elaine Pagels, "The Politics of Paradise: Augustine's Exegesis of Genesis 1-3 versus That of John Chrysostom," *HTR* 78 (1985), 78.

<sup>64</sup> Elizabeth Clark, *The Origenist Controversy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 250.

<sup>65</sup> Pagels, "Politics of Paradise," 99.

<sup>66</sup> Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), 235, see also *The Political Writings of St. Augustine*, ed. Henry Paolucci (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 1996), 190-240 (excerpts from Letters XCIII and CLXXXV). Augustine carefully explains the factors that made him change from being opposed to coercion to approving it.

<sup>67</sup> Danielou, *Origen*, 205-206.

<sup>68</sup> Osborn, "From Theodicy to Christology," 58.

<sup>69</sup> Tonstad, "Theodicy and the Theme of Cosmic Conflict," 192.

<sup>70</sup> *Contra Celsum* 4.65.

<sup>71</sup> Tonstad, "Theodicy and the Theme of Cosmic Conflict," 202.