

Early Anti-Christian Literature



Early Anti-Christian Literature

- As Christianity continues to spread in the late second century, despite hostilities, more refined attacks are hurled against it
- Attacks move from wild rumors of cannibalism, incest, and immorality to a more trenchant attack on its doctrines and beliefs
 - There were still *ad hominem* attacks however
- Early anti-Christian literature almost certainly has its roots in early anti-Jewish literature

Contra Apionem (Against Apion)

- Josephus published an apologetic work against an Egyptian grammarian named Apion who had been slandering the Jews
- Work was written sometime in the 90s of the first century
- The treatise of Apion, which is no longer extant, is a multifaceted with diverse kinds of slanders and attacks



Against Apion 1:1-3

I suppose, that by my books of the “Antiquity of the Jews,” most excellent Epaphroditus, have made it evident to those who peruse them, that our Jewish nation is of very great antiquity, and had a distinct subsistence of its own originally; as also, I have therein declared how we came to inhabit this country wherein we now live. Those Antiquities contain the history of five thousand years, and are taken out of our sacred books; but are translated by me into the Greek tongue.

² However, since I observe a considerable number of people giving ear to the reproaches that are laid against us by those who bear ill will to us, and will not believe what I have written concerning the antiquity of our nation, while they take it for a plain sign that our nation is of a late date, because they are not so much as vouchsafed a bare mention by the most famous historiographers among the Greeks,

³ I, therefore, have thought myself under an obligation to write something briefly about these subjects, in order to convict those who reproach us of spite and voluntary falsehood, and to correct the ignorance of others, and withal to instruct all those who are desirous of knowing the truth of what great antiquity we really are.

Against Apion

² I shall now, therefore, begin a confutation of the remaining authors who have written anything against us; although, I confess, I have had a doubt upon me about Apion, the grammarian, whether I ought to take the trouble of refuting him or not;

³ for some of his writings contain much the same accusations which the others have laid against us, some things that he has added are very frigid and contemptible, and for the greatest part of what he says, it is very scurrilous, and, to speak no more than the plain truth, it shows him to be a very unlearned person, and what he writes looks like the work of a man of very bad morals, and of one no better in his whole life than a charlatan.

Against Apion 2.2–3

Against Apion

“⁸⁰ for Apion has the impudence to pretend, that ‘the Jews placed an ass’s head in their holy place;’ and he affirms that this was discovered when Antiochus Epiphanes spoiled our temple, and found that ass’s head there made of gold, and worth a great deal of money.

⁸¹ To this my first answer shall be this, that had there been any such thing among us, an Egyptian ought by no means to have thrown it in our teeth, since an ass is not a more contemptible animal than goats, and other such creatures, which among them are gods.”

Against Apion 2.80–81

Against Apion (Charge of Jewish Canibalism)

⁹¹ Apion becomes another men’s prophet upon this occasion, and says that “Antiochus found in our temple a bed, and a man lying upon it, with a small table before him, full of dainties, from the [fishes of the] sea, and the fowls of the dry land; that this man was amazed at these dainties thus set before him; ⁹² that he immediately adored the king, upon his coming in, as hoping that he would afford him all possible assistance; that he fell down upon his knees, and stretched out to him his right hand, and begged to be released; and that when the king bade him sit down, and tell him who he was, and why he dwelt there, and what was the meaning of those various sorts of food that were set before him the man made a lamentable complaint, and with sighs, and tears in his eyes, gave him this account of the distress he was in; ⁹³ and said that he was a Greek and that as he went over this province, in order to get his living, he was seized upon by foreigners, on a sudden, and brought to this temple, and shut up therein, and was seen by no one, but was fattened by these curious provisions thus set before him; ⁹⁴ and that truly at the first such unexpected advantages seemed to him a matter of great joy; that, after a while, they brought a suspicion him, and at length astonishment, what their meaning should be; that at last he inquired of the servants that came to him and was by them informed that it was in order to the fulfilling a law of the Jews, which they must not tell him, that he was thus fed; and that they did the same at a set time every year: ⁹⁵ that they used to catch a Greek foreigner, and fatten him thus up every year, and then lead him to a certain woods, and kill him, and sacrifice with their accustomed solemnities, and taste of his entrails, and take an oath upon this sacrificing a Greek, that they would ever be at enmity with the Greeks; and that then they threw the remaining parts of the miserable wretch into a certain pit.’ ⁹⁶ Apion adds further, that “the man said there were but a few days to come ere he was to be slain, and implored of Antiochus that, out of the reverence he bore to the Greek gods, he would disappoint the snares the Jews laid for his blood, and would deliver him from the miseries with which he was surrounded.”

Against Apion 2.90–96

Early Anti-Jewish Literature

- Tendency to malign Jews as a race and their sacred history (i.e. scriptures)
- Attacks and lampoons beliefs and practices
- Alleges fantastic and horrific stories
- Attacks founders like Moses (claims he lead out of Egypt a group of lepers who were expelled by Pharaoh)

Anti-Christian Writers of Antiquity

■ **Celsus *True Doctrine* c. A.D. 180**

- A neoplatonic Philosopher philosopher of the second century
- Composed a treatise called “True Doctrine” in which he attempts to disprove Christianity and its claims
- Celsus was relatively well-informed about Christianity and had consulted their scriptures (had certainly read the Gospel of Matthew)
- Criticizes Jesus for being nothing more than a magician
- Attacks the early disciples and Christian doctrines

■ **Porphyry *Against the Christians* c. A.D. 270**

■ **Julian “the apostate” *Against the Galileans* c. A.D. 362**

Origen's Response to Celsus

Our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ was silent when false witnesses spoke against him, and answered nothing when he was accused; he was convinced that all his life and actions among the Jews were better than any speech in refutation of the false witness and superior to any words that he might say in reply to the accusations. And, God-loving Ambrose, I do not know why you wanted me to write an answer to Celsus' false accusations in his book against the Christians and the faith of the churches. It is as though there was not in the mere facts a clear refutation better than any written reply, which dispels the false charges and deprives the accusations of any plausibility and force. . . I would therefore go so far as to say that the defense which you ask me to compose will weaken the force of the defense that is in the mere facts, and detract from the power of Jesus which is manifest to those who are not quite stupid. Nevertheless, that we may not appear to shirk the task which you have set us, we have tried our best to reply to each particular point in Celsus' book and to refute it as it seemed fitting to us, although his arguments cannot shake the faith of any true Christian. God forbid that there should be found anyone who, after receiving such love of God as that which is in Christ Jesus, has been shaken in his purpose by the words of Celsus or one of his sort.

praef. C.Cels. 1-3

Celsus Attacks Christianity

Celsus' first main point in his desire to attack Christianity is that the Christians secretly make associations with one another contrary to the laws, because societies which are public are allowed by the laws, but secret societies are illegal. And wishing to slander the so-called love (*agape*) which Christians have for one another, he says that it exists because of the common danger and is more powerful than any oath. As he talks much of the common law saying that the associations of the Christians violate this, I have to make this reply. . .

C.Cels. 1

Celsus Attacks Christianity

“After this he represents the Jew as having a conversation with Jesus himself and refuting him on many charges, as he thinks: first, because *he fabricated the story of his birth from a virgin; and he reproaches him because he came from a Jewish village and from a poor country woman who earned her living by spinning.* He says that *she was driven out by her husband, who was a carpenter by trade, as she was convicted of adultery.* Then he says that *after she had been driven out by her husband and while she was wandering about in a disgraceful way she secretly gave birth to Jesus. And he says that because he was poor he hired himself out as a workman in Egypt, and there tried his hand at certain magical powers on which the Egyptians pride themselves; he returned full of conceit because of these powers, and on account of them gave himself the title of God.*”

C.Cels. 1.28

Celsus Attacks Christianity

Let us return, however, to the words put into the mouth of the Jew, where the mother of Jesus is described as having been *turned out by the carpenter who was betrothed to her, as she had been convicted of adultery and had a child by a certain soldier named Panthera.*

1.32

Eusebius, Ecl. Proph. 3.10 commenting on Hos. 5:14: διότι ἐγώ εἰμι ὡς πανθὴρ τῷ Εφραιμ

states:

“The text may be quoted against those of the circumcision who slanderously and abusively assert that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ was born of Panthera ...”

The True Doctrine of Celsus

- Celsus challenged Jesus' divine birth (1.28)
- Accused Jesus of practicing sorcery and magic (1.6, 68)
- Castigated him as an itinerant beggar (1.61)
- Jesus was full of conceit (1.28) and was an arrogant liar (2.7)
- The head of a movement of vulgarity and illiteracy (1.27)
- A common carouser who was impious and wicked (2.20)
- Author of sedition (8.14)
- A man possessed of a demon (1.68)
- Was disgracefully arrested and crucified as a criminal (2.31)
- At the cross greedily slurped a drink (2.37)
- Lacked heroic virtue and character because he did not laugh at his fate (2.33)