

JOHN GRANGER COOK

The Interpretation
of the New Testament in
Greco-Roman Paganism

*Studien und Texte zu
Antike und Christentum*

3

Mohr Siebeck

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The Interpretation
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JOHN GRANGER COOK, born 1955; 1976 B.A. in Philosophy, Davidson College; 1979 M.Div., Union Theological Seminary (VA); 1982–83 Doctoral research at the University of Göttingen; 1985 Ph.D. at Emory University; 1985–91 Pastor at Reems Creek Presbyterian Parish in Weaverville, NC/USA; 1991–94 post doctoral studies at Emory University; since 1994 Assistant Professor of Religion and Philosophy at LaGrange College, GA/USA.

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For my parents

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Introduction

The genesis of this monograph on the interpretation of the New Testament in Greco-Roman paganism is a long interest in religion and philosophy. My dissertation on Mark accepted by Emory University in 1985 (and later extensively revised into *The Structure and Persuasive Power of Mark*¹) prompted me to ask questions about the function of the text — its actual effect on ancient readers. During a period of post doctoral studies with Vernon K. Robbins on the topic of the relationship of early Christianity with Greco-Roman culture I had the opportunity to search for responses of ancient readers to the New Testament. Two articles emerged from those studies: “Some Hellenistic Responses to the Gospels and Gospel Traditions” and “The Proteptic Power of Early Christian Language: From John to Augustine”². The first article summarized the pagans’ readings of parts of the New Testament. The second article summarized the positive responses of some figures in Christian antiquity who were persuaded by early Christian language. The idea for the article on the pagans was suggested by me by Elaine Pagels’ books on Gnosticism’s exegesis of the New Testament³. I am grateful to Prof. Martin Hengel for asking me to expand my article into a monograph. His suggestion and encouragement have prompted this work.

Two scholars that have been most helpful in producing the book are Pierre de Labriolle and Robert Wilken⁴. De Labriolle’s magisterial survey of the pagan authors who reacted to Christianity is still unsurpassed in its scope and erudition. Wilken’s work is one of the most recent to comprehensively address the themes that were important to pagan authors in their attack on Christianity. Late in the project I discovered Giancarlo Rinaldi’s extensive collection of

¹ J. G. COOK, *The Structure and Persuasive Power of Mark*, Semeia Studies, Atlanta 1995.

² J. G. COOK, *Some Hellenistic Responses to the Gospels and Gospel Traditions*, ZNW 84, 1993, 233-54 / *The Proteptic Power of Early Christian Language: From John to Augustine*, VigChr 48, 1994, 105-134.

³ E. PAGELS, *The Gnostic Gospels*, New York 1979 / *The Gnostic Paul. Gnostic Exegesis of the Pauline Letters*, Philadelphia 1975.

⁴ P. DE LABRIOLLE, *La réaction païenne. Étude sur la polémique antichrétienne du I^{er} au VI^e Siècle*, Paris 1948 / R. WILKEN, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, New Haven/London 1984.

pagan comments on biblical passages. It will be indispensable in future research on this topic⁵. What remains to be done is a work that analyzes the pagan interpretation of the New Testament in particular. Below I intend to examine the response to the New Testament in the writings of Celsus, Porphyry, Hierocles, the anonymous pagan philosopher in Macarius Magnes' *Apocriticus*, and the emperor Julian⁶.

Apologetics in Judaism and Christianity

The encounter between paganism and Christianity that produced the literature to be surveyed in this book continued an exchange that had already begun between paganism and Judaism⁷. The first Hellenistic Jewish author (other than the translators of the LXX) was Demetrius the chronographer who was active toward the end of the third century B.C.E.⁸. While not an apologist in the sense of an author who directs his comments towards people outside the faith, Demetrius does take up issues about the LXX using the method of questions and solutions (*aporiai* and *luseis*),⁹ and he demonstrates the extreme antiquity of the patriarchs. Questions he answers include problems such as the

⁵ G. RINALDI, *Biblia Gentium: primo contributo per un indice delle citazioni, dei riferimenti e delle allusioni alla bibbia negli autori pagani, greci e latini, di età imperiale*, Rome 1989.

⁶ For a recent review of these authors (with bibliography) see RINALDI, *Biblia Gentium*, 103-66.

⁷ See M. HENGEL, for example, on the Jewish and Christian apologetic view that Greek philosophers borrowed their wisdom from the patriarchs and Moses in *Judaism and Hellenism. Studies in Their Encounter in Palestine in the Hellenistic Period*, Vols. 1-2, Philadelphia 1974, I, 90. I thank Prof. HENGEL for suggestions on the relationship between Jewish and Christian apologetic. On the whole issue see M. FRIEDLÄNDER, *Geschichte der jüdischen Apologetik als Vorgeschichte des Christentums*, Zürich 1903 and G. BARDY, *Art. Apologetik*, RAC I, 1950, 533-43. K. THRAEDE discusses the issue of cultural dependence as a *topos* in ancient Jewish apologetic in *Art. Erfinder II (geistesgeschichtlich)*, RAC V, 1962, (1191-1278) 1241-46.

⁸ On Demetrius see C. R. HOLLADAY, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors. Volume I. Historians, SBLTT 20, Pseudepigrapha Series 10*, Chico, CA 1983, 51-92 (the text, translation, comments and bibliography) / J. HANSON, *Demetrius the Chronographer*, in: OTP, ed. J. H. CHARLESWORTH, II, 843-54 / HENGEL, *Judaism and Hellenism*, I, 69 / P. DALBERT, *Die Theologie der hellenistisch-jüdischen Missionsliteratur unter Ausschluss von Philo und Josephus*, Hamburg-Volksdorff 1954, 27-34 / J. FREUDENTHAL, *Alexander Polyhistor und die von ihm erhaltenen Reste jüdischer und samaritanischer Geschichtswerke*, *Hellenistische Studien* 1-2, Breslau, 1875, 35-82, 205-207.

⁹ On this method see H. DÖRRIE/H. DÖRRIES, *Erotapokriseis*, RAC VI, 1966, 342-70 / DE LABRIOLLE, *La réaction*, 487-89 / G. BARDY, *La littérature des Quaestiones et Responsiones sur l'Écriture Sainte*, RB 41, 1932, 210-36, 341-69, 515-37; 42, 1933, 14-30, 211-229, 328-53. On chronology see F. 2, *Eus. P.E.* 9.21.18 (I, 72,5-12 HOLLADAY).

following: why did Joseph give Benjamin a five-fold portion at the banquet even though he could not consume it all; why scripture does not contradict itself (ἀντιπίπτει) in saying that Moses and Zipporah lived at the same time; and how Israel obtained weapons since they left Egypt unarmed¹⁰. Whether Demetrius should be described as an apologist, exegete, or historian, he does deal with the kind of questions apologists were later forced to answer¹¹.

The apologetic literature that began in Jewish writers such as Aristobulus reached a highly developed stage in Josephus' *Contra Apionem*. The Christian apologetic writers such as Quadratus, Aristides, Justin, Athenagoras, and Minucius Felix continued this tradition begun by writers such as Aristobulus, Philo, and Josephus¹². Pagan writers such as Fronto and Celsus who attacked Christianity emerged in the second century and used the same kind of rhetorical and polemical apologetic that the Christian and Jewish writers used. Celsus may even have known the works of Justin.

Aristobulus the Alexandrian Jewish philosopher wrote an apologetic work that he addressed to Ptolemy VI Philometor (181-145 BC)¹³. Some issues that were important to Aristobulus continued to be important in the debate between Judaism, Christianity, and paganism. These include the allegorical interpretation of Old Testament texts and the relation of Greek philosophy to Old Testament (and later NT) teaching. To understand the biblical description of God's hands, Aristobulus explains the hand as the power of God. He notes with reference to allegory: "And I wish to exhort you to receive the

¹⁰ F. 2, Eusebius, P.E. 9.21.14; F. 3, P.E. 9.29.1-3; F. 5, P.E. 9.29.16 (I, 70,6-9; 74,10-76,2; 76,17-18 HOLLADAY).

¹¹ On this question see HOLLADAY, Fragments, I, 53 with reference to J. FREUDENTHAL, *Alexander Polyhistor*, 67 who describes Demetrius as engaging in Hellenistic midrash. DALBERT, *Theologie*, 29 describes his method as exegesis in the interest of apologetics.

¹² V. TCHERIKOVER argues that most Hellenistic Jewish literature was internal and not directed to outsiders in: *Jewish Apologetic Literature Reconsidered*, *Eos* 48, 1956, (169-93) 182. In the Roman period he is willing to concede that Philo's *Apologia pro Iudaeis*, *In Flaccum*, and *De legatione ad Gaium* are directed to Gentiles (Roman authorities) and that the writings of Josephus are for the Gentiles (*Jewish Apologetic*, 182, 183 n. 32). L. FELDMAN argues that *De vita contemplativa* and *Quod omnis probus liber sit* are addressed to Gentiles. He finds statements in Philo that are also addressed to a non-Jewish audience. See *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World. Attitudes and Interactions from Alexander to Justinian*, Princeton 1993, 318-19.

¹³ On Aristobulus see: HENGEL, *Judaism and Hellenism*, I, 163-69 / C. R. HOLLADAY, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors. Volume III. Aristobulus*, SBLTT 39, Pseudepigrapha Series 13, Atlanta 1995 (the text, comments and bibliography) / A. YARBRO COLLINS, *Aristobulus*, in: *OTP*, ed. J. H. CHARLESWORTH, II, 831-42 (her translations are used here) / N. WALTER, *Der Thorausleger Aristobulos. Untersuchungen zu seinen Fragmenten und zu pseudepigraphischen Resten der jüdisch-hellenistischen Literatur*, TU 86, Berlin 1964, 35-40 (his relation to Ptolemy).

interpretations according to the laws of nature and grasp the fitting conception of God and not to fall into the mythical (τὸ μυθῶδες) and human way of thinking about God.”¹⁴ He also, in his view of Greek philosophy, claims that Plato followed Old Testament legislation and that Pythagoras “transferred many of our doctrines and integrated them into his own system of beliefs”¹⁵.

Josephus added to this apologetic tradition with his *Contra Apionem*¹⁶. He refuted Apion’s charges that Jews worship an ass’s head in the temple (C. Ap. 2.80-81)¹⁷ and that they annually fatten up a Greek to later sacrifice him and eat him (C. Ap. 2.91-96). Josephus attacks the Greek conceptions of the gods (C. Ap. 2.242-249; e. g. their quarrels and sexual passions) and rejects the attempt of Greek allegorists to defend the poets’ conceptions of the gods (C. Ap. 2.255-57). He notes Plato’s polite dismissal of Homer from his republic (C. Ap. 2.256) and continues Aristobulus’ line of argument by claiming that the Greek philosophers were disciples of Moses in conduct and philosophy (C. Ap. 2.168, 257, 281). Arthur Droge argues that Josephus never actually claims that the Greek philosophers “read” Moses¹⁸. This position is similar to Philo’s claim that Heraclitus got his doctrine of opposites from Moses¹⁹. Josephus defends Judaism’s rejection of image worship (C. Ap. 2.73-75;

¹⁴ Fragment 2, Eusebius, P.E. 8.10.2, 8 (III, 136,20-23; 138,43-53 HOLLADAY). TCHERIKOVER argues that “Such explanations of passages which had been subject to false interpretations could only be meant for people accustomed to read the Bible, i.e. for Jews and not for the King” (Jewish Apologetic, 173 n. 20). On the other hand the pagan critique of the NT (and OT) shows that some Gentiles were aware of biblical texts. See also HOLLADAY, Fragments, III, 71.

¹⁵ F. 3, Eus. P.E. 13.12.1 (III, 152,17-22; 154,39-43 HOLLADAY). See also F. 4, Eus. P.E. 13.12.4 (III, 162,7-17 HOLLADAY) where Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato follow Moses. On this issue see HOLLADAY, Fragments, III, 68, 207 n. 36. Philo attributes Heraclitus’ doctrine of opposites to Moses (Quaest. in Gen. 3.5, 4.152). On these texts and on the relationship of Greek philosophy to Judaism see: FELDMAN, Jew and Gentile, 318 / H. A. WOLFSON, Philo. Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, Vol. 1, Cambridge 1947, 141-42 / J. GEFFCKEN, Zwei griechische Apologeten, (1st ed. 1907) Hildesheim 1970, 31.

¹⁶ M. FRIEDLÄNDER reviews this work in his *Geschichte der jüdischen Apologetik*, 346-437. He draws many connections between Josephus’ text against Apion and early Christian apologetics. See also GEFFCKEN, *Zwei griechische Apologeten*, xxix-xxxii who reviews the *C. Apionem* and then notes that in a certain sense Christian apologetics is the inheritor of Jewish apologetics.

¹⁷ On this charge that was later used against the Christians see S. BENKO, *Pagan Rome and the Early Christians*, Bloomington/Indianapolis 1986, 58, 74 n. 8 with reference to Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 9.3 (7,18-19 KYTZLER) and other texts. W. SCHÄFKE reviews the breadth of this tradition in *Frühchristlicher Widerstand*, ANRW II.23.1, 1979, (460-723) 596-99.

¹⁸ A. DROGE, *Homer or Moses? Early Christian Interpretations of the History of Culture*, HUTH 26, Tübingen 1989, 46 n. 107.

¹⁹ Quaest. in Gen. 3.5, 4.152.

including statues of emperors) and its refusal to worship the Alexandrian gods (C. Ap. 2.66). He rejects Apion's charges that the Jews cause sedition (C. Ap. 2.68-70) and that Jewish laws and ceremonies are in error because the Jews are not masters of an empire (C. Ap. 2.125-26). Apion called the Jews atheists (C. Ap. 2.148). Celsus, the second century critic of Christianity, later used some of the same charges against Christianity that had been used against Judaism in Josephus' time²⁰.

The sharp attack on Christianity in the second century helped prompt Christian apologists to respond in the same fashion as Josephus had earlier. Quadratus, the earliest apologist, responded to the attacks of some "wicked men," according to Eusebius, who were troubling the Christians. During the reign of Hadrian, Quadratus answered with a defense of Christ's miracles and wrote that some of the individuals who had been healed and raised survived to "our own time"²¹. Aristides, the Athenian philosopher, is the next apologist whose work has survived. He wrote an apology that included attacks on Hellenistic polytheism and the allegorical defense of the gods' lawless acts²². Aristides does mention accusations of Christians' practicing homosexual and incestuous acts²³. He also obviously knew of the pagans' defense of their own traditions.

M. Cornelius Fronto (ca. 100-166) composed an oration against Christianity during the reign of Marcus Aurelius²⁴. Celsus probably wrote soon after Fronto. Minucius Felix created a pagan character named Caecilius in his *Octavius* who quoted Fronto's charges of sexual promiscuity during Christian

²⁰ Concerning the relationship of Celsus with Josephus see L. H. FELDMAN who notes that Celsus did not take over Apion's more scurrilous charges (such as the worship of an ass's head), Origen's *Contra Celsum* and Josephus' *Contra Apionem*: The Issue of Jewish Origins, *VigChr* 44, 1990, (105-35) 106. See also FELDMAN, *Jew and Gentile*, 217 for a number of topics common to both texts.

²¹ Eus., H.E. 4.3.1-2. This is the only extant fragment of his apology. See J. QUASTEN, *Patrology*. Volume 1. *The Beginnings of Patristic Literature*, Westminster, Md 1992, 190-91.

²² *Apol.* 13.7 (20,24-21,10 GEFFCKEN, *Zwei Griechische Apologeten*). Aristides addressed his work to Hadrian or Antoninus Pius. GEFFCKEN argues for the latter (*Zwei Griechische Apologeten*, 29-31) on the basis of the title in the Syriac translation. C. VONA has published a translation of the Syriac text and included the Greek fragments in: *L'apologia de Aristide*. *Introduzione versione dal siriano e commento*, Lateranum, N.S. 16, Rome 1950. VONA argues that the text was addressed to Hadrian (*L'apologia*, 19-24). R. GRANT, *Greek Apologists of the Second Century*, Philadelphia 1988, 36-39 suggests that the shorter Greek version might have been addressed to Hadrian.

²³ *Apol.* 17. 2 and compare 8.2 for similar practices among the gods (27,8-12; 11,18-20 GEFF.).

²⁴ On Fronto see S. BENKO, *Pagan Rome*, 54-58 / *idem*, *Pagan Criticism of Christianity During the First Two Centuries A.D.*, *ANRW* II.23.2, 1980, 1081-90 with bibliography / DE LABRIOLLE, *La réaction*, 87-94.

banquets²⁵. Caecilius included a charge of cannibalism immediately before his reference to Fronto²⁶. Werner Schäfke notes that the charges of Thyestean feasts and Oedipodean intercourse were a topos of the pagans' polemic against Christianity²⁷. It is unclear how much of Caecilius' arguments in the rest of the *Octavius* are due to Fronto's oration. Caecilius believes that Christians rashly yield to any sort of opinion and that they are unskilled in letters, but yet make categorical statements about the nature of the universe (Oct. 5.3-4 [3,20-26 Kytzler]). This is similar to Celsus' statement that Christians regularly make arrogant statements about matters which they know nothing about (C. Cels. 5.65 [GCS Origenes I, 68,26 Koetschau]). If Fronto is Caecilius' source here, then Fronto and Celsus hold similar opinions in this case²⁸. Celsus, however, did not make the charges of cannibalism and incest²⁹. Caecilius (Fronto?) and Celsus share other similarities in their attacks on Christianity including the following: shock at the Christian belief in the destruction of the universe³⁰; skepticism concerning the resurrection³¹; comments on the fact that God (or his Son) is not protecting Christians from persecution³²; revulsion at the low classes and credulous women who are attracted to Christianity³³; references to Christian refusal to take part in the processions, temple worship, and worship around altars and images³⁴; and the charge that Christians are guilty of

²⁵ Oct. 9.6-7 (8,1-10 KYT.). Concerning the relationship with Celsus see J.-M. VERMANDER, *Celse, source et adversaire de Minucius Felix*, REAug 17, 1971, 13-25. See also GRANT, *Greek Apologists*, 132-35 who is somewhat skeptical of VERMANDER's claims with regard to Theophilus' use of Celsus (J.-M. VERMANDER, *Théophile d'Antioche contre Celsus: A Autolykos III*, REAug 17, 1971, 203-25). See also *ibid.*, *La parution de l'ouvrage de Celse et la datation de quelques apologies*, REAug 18, 1972, 27-42 and *De quelques répliques à Celse dans l'Apologeticum de Tertullien*, REAug 16, 1970, 205-25.

²⁶ Oct. 9.5 (7,26-32 KYT.).

²⁷ W. SCHÄFKE, *Frühchristlicher Widerstand*, 579-96. See also BENKO, *Pagan Rome*, 54-74. Justin, *Apol.* 1.26.7 (71,29-32 MARCOVICH) concedes that Gnostic Christians may do such things although he does not know. In *Apol.* 1.29.2 (75,5 MARC.) Justin denies that Christians do such things. See also MARCOVICH's notes *ad loc.*

²⁸ BENKO, *Pagan Rome*, 58.

²⁹ BENKO, *Pagan Rome*, 157. See, however, Origen, C. Cels. 5.63 [GCS Origenes II, 66,9-11 KOETSCHAU] for evidence that Celsus was aware of iniquitous practices of some Christian groups.

³⁰ Oct. 11.1 (8,31 KYT.), C. Cels. 4.11, 4.79 (281,22-23; 349,12 KOET.).

³¹ Oct. 11.7 (9,21-24 KYT.), C. Cels. 5.14 (15,1-25 KOET.).

³² Oct. 12.4-5 (10,8-15 KYT.) and compare 10.4 (8,20-23 KYT.) on the miserable situation of the Jews; C. Cels. 8.39 (253,24-29 KOET.).

³³ Oct. 8.4 (6,32 KYT.), C. Cels. 3.55 (250,16-20 KOET.).

³⁴ Oct. 8.4, 10.2, 12.5 (7,3; 8,14; 10,13-15 KYT.), C. Cels. 7.62, 8.24 (211,17-19; 240,28 KOET.).

conspiracy³⁵. It seems quite possible that Fronto may have helped justify the persecutions of the church under Marcus Aurelius.³⁶

Celsus and Justin share a number of common interests and are both middle Platonists.³⁷ Justin, for example, argues that Greek philosophy was dependent on Moses — while Celsus argues that Christ was dependent on Greek philosophy³⁸. They both discuss the possibility of resurrection, the way to know God, the incarnation, and Greek parallels to the story of Christ (such as the birth of Perseus). Celsus, however, does not seem to answer Justin's specific arguments³⁹. Quintino Cataudella argued that they are independent⁴⁰. It seems more likely that Celsus was aware of Justin, but simply regarded his specific arguments as unworthy of refutation. Celsus is familiar with basic Christian beliefs, and he must have known more of Christianity than just what he could learn from the NT (e.g. his attack on Christian allegory). Robert Grant notes:

The significance of Celsus' work lies in the fact that he has investigated second-century Christianity and knows a good deal about it, perhaps more than Origen admits. He attacks it not on the basis of slander and scandal but from the standpoint of an enlightened, philosophically minded, pro-Roman Greek of the late second century, intolerant of

³⁵ Oct. 8.4 (6,33 KYT.), C. Cels. 8.14 (231,8 KOET.).

³⁶ Compare BENKO, *Pagan Rome*, 52 n. 44. DE LABRIOLLE, *La réaction*, 94, however, urges caution with regard to the question of Fronto's influence on Marcus.

³⁷ This relationship is richly explored in C. ANDRESEN's *Logos und Nomos. Die Polemik des Kelsos wider das Christentum*, AKG 30, Berlin 1955, 357-63 and passim. See § 1.1 below.

³⁸ Justin, *Apol.* 1.59.1-60.11 (115,1-117,30 MARC.). Origen, C. Cels. 7.58 (207,13-15 KOET.).

³⁹ CATAUDELLA notes that Celsus does not answer Justin's arguments in reference to these topics (Celsus e gli Apologeti Cristiani, NDid 1, 1947, 29-33): resurrection (Justin, *Apol.* 1.18.1-19.8 [59,1-61,30 MARC.], C. Cels. 5.14 [15,1-25 KOET.]); the knowledge of God (*Dial.* 3.7 [76,56-60 MARC.], C. Cels. 7.36 [186,13-27 KOET.]); the incarnation (*Dial.* 127.2 [290,6-12 MARC.], C. Cels. 4.5 [277,18; 278,8-9 KOET.]); Greek parallels (*Apol.* 1.22.5-6, 1.54.1-10 [65,15-19; 108,1-109,39 MARC.], *Dial.* 67.2, 69.1-3, 70 [185,5-9; 189,1-190,16 MARC.], C. Cels. 1.67, 3.24, 7.53 [121,6; 220,13; 203,10-15 KOET.]). They also both discuss the fate of those before Christ came (*Apol.* 1.46.1-6, 2.10.1-7, 2.13.1-6 [97,1-23; 151,1-152,27; 157,1-19 MARC.], C. Cels. 4.7 [279,11 KOET.]). H. CHADWICK argues that Celsus was aware of Justin and that he shuts his eyes to the existence of a "rational Christian theology" in: *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition*, Oxford 1984, 22-24. GRANT (*Greek Apologists*, 138) makes the important point that "... Celsus makes no special effort to reply to the apologists, who in turn paid little if any attention to his arguments." GRANT does not deny that Celsus may have read Justin's *Apology*.

⁴⁰ Celsus e gli Apologeti, 33. See also RINALDI, *Biblia Gentium*, 126 n. 56. Others such as A. DROGE argue that Celsus was aware of Justin either directly or through intermediaries (Homer or Moses, 76-78). CHADWICK mentions many common topics in Celsus and Justin in: *Early Christian Thought*, 132 n. 59.

innovation especially in religious affairs. The work is not directly relevant to the second-century apologists, however. Both Christians and pagans failed to communicate before Origen replied to Celsus about seventy years later⁴¹.

Athenagoras (writing during the reign of Marcus Aurelius) replies to some of the same kinds of criticism Fronto and Celsus raised. He defends Christians against the charges of atheism, Thyestean feasts, and Oedipodean intercourse⁴². Although sharing some of Celsus' interests, he writes from the other side of the debate⁴³. He describes the Hellenistic defense of image worship which refers to the gods in whose honor the statues are made and to whom the sacrifices are actually offered⁴⁴. The apologist attacks the immorality of the gods while Celsus attacks the character and actions of Jesus⁴⁵. Athenagoras rejects the allegorical explanations of the gods, and Celsus attacks Christian allegory of the Old Testament⁴⁶. He defends the Christian refusal to sacrifice to the gods, and Celsus attacks the Christian refusal to take part in the Hellenistic cult⁴⁷. Athenagoras also responded to criticism of the resurrection that was based on the various destinies of corpses — a pagan objection that became a *topos*⁴⁸.

Another kind of response the pagans used was a sort of deathly silence with regard to Christianity. De Labriolle notes that Julian was aware of the long silence of the ancient historians who simply ignored Christianity⁴⁹. Dio Cassius⁵⁰, for example, does not mention the Christians unless Flavius

⁴¹ Greek Apologists, 138-39.

⁴² *Legatio* 3.1-2, 4.1-2, 31.1 (8, 76 SCHOEDEL).

⁴³ It is doubtful that Athenagoras used Celsus given his appeal to the omnipotence of God to defend the doctrine of the resurrection (*De res.* 9.2 [108 SCH.]). Celsus had argued against such an appeal (*C. Cels.* 5.14, 23 [15,13; 24,11 KOET.]). On this issue see B. POUDERON, *Athénagore d'Athènes. Philosophe Chrétien*, ThH 82, Paris 1989, 99 in criticism of J. M. VERMANDER, *Celse et l'attribution à Athénagore d'un ouvrage sur la résurrection des morts*, MSR 85, 1978, 125-35. L. W. BARNARD argues that Athenagoras did not know Celsus' work given the evidence of his *Legatio* in Athenagoras. *A Study in Second Century Christian Apologetic*, ThH 18, Paris 1972, 66.

⁴⁴ *Legatio* 18.1 (36 SCH.). For Celsus' views on images see § 1.7.1 below.

⁴⁵ *Legatio* 20.3 (42 SCH.). See § 1.2.12 below for Celsus.

⁴⁶ *Legatio* 22.1-12 (48-52 SCH.). See § 1.4.1 below.

⁴⁷ *Legatio* 13.1-4 (26-28 SCH.). See § 1.6.6 and 1.7.1 below.

⁴⁸ *De res.* 4.1-4 (96-98 SCH.). See § 3.51 below.

⁴⁹ *La réaction*, I with reference to Julian, C. Galilaeos 206a,b (142,10-14 MASARACCHIA). The text is discussed in § 5.2.1 below.

⁵⁰ *Historia Romana* 67.14.1-3 in M. STERN, ed., *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*. Volume II. From Tacitus to Simplicius, Jerusalem 1980, II, F. 435. STERN argues that they were probably Jewish (II, 380-84). Although he shared many interests with the apologists, Maximus of Tyre was also silent about Christianity (M. B. TRAPP, *Maximus of Tyre. The Philosophical Orations*, Oxford 1997, xlix).

Crescens and Flavia Domitilla, victims of Domitian's wrath, were not Jews but actually Christians. In another text Dio composes a speech put in Maecenas' mouth (before Augustus) in which he discourages the tolerance of atheists⁵¹. Christians may be the intended reference⁵².

The Jewish apologetic writers paved the way for the Christian response to the pagan critique. This brief survey of the second century debate between pagans and Christians indicates that both groups made use of similar apologetic techniques. Ancient rhetoric and literary criticism provide some categories useful for understanding those various techniques that appear in the Hellenistic authors' attack on the NT. Below I will sketch some of the concepts that will aid the analysis carried out in the following chapters.

Rhetorical and Literary Tools in Polemic and Apologetic

The Christians and pagans were each attempting to persuade the other. One of Gorgias' definitions of rhetoric in Plato's dialogue is "the creator of persuasion" (πειθοῦς δημιουργός)⁵³. Aristotle defines rhetoric as the "... faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject whatever"⁵⁴. In epideictic rhetoric the hearer is a spectator. In forensic rhetoric the hearer judges about things past, and in deliberative rhetoric the hearer judges about things to come. Deliberative rhetoric is either hortatory (protreptic - προτροπή) or dissuasive (apotreptic - ἀποτροπή)⁵⁵ and could include questions of the rites of religion⁵⁶. Epideictic rhetoric either praises or blames, and forensic rhetoric either accuses or defends. The moral character of the speaker (ethos ἦθος), the speech (logos λόγος) itself with its proofs, and

⁵¹ H. R. 52.35-36 quoted in § 1.6.5 below.

⁵² WILKEN, Christians, 62-63 notes that the text may be a commentary on Pliny's (Ep. 10.96) persecution of the Christians in Bithynia. W. ENSSLIN, The Senate and the Army, CAH XII, 60 believes that the speech could contain allusions to Severus Alexander's policies. Compare SCHÄFKE, Frühchristlicher Widerstand, 608-09.

⁵³ Plato, Gorgias 453a. Plato disapproves of this amoral understanding of rhetoric and gives a definition more ethically oriented in 503a.

⁵⁴ Rhet. 1.2.1 δύναμις περὶ ἕκαστον τοῦ θεωρῆσαι τὸ ἐνδεχόμενον πιθανόν. Compare Cic., Brutus 15.59 where the orator's function is to bring about persuasion — πειθῶ, *suadam*. H. LAUSBERG, (Handbuch der Literarischen Rhetorik. Eine Grundlegung der Literaturwissenschaft, Stuttgart ³1990, § 33) gives other similar definitions of rhetoric.

⁵⁵ Rhet 1.3.2.3. LAUSBERG discusses the three kinds extensively (Handbuch, § 59ff.).

⁵⁶ Rhet. ad Alex. 1423a and compare Rhet. ad Her. 1.4.7 where the author includes the worship of the gods as a possible topic in the introduction of a judicial speech.

the rousing of the hearers to emotion (pathos πάθος) produce persuasion⁵⁷. The Hellenistic texts to be considered below are apotroptic because they attempt to persuade the hearer to reject the Christian faith⁵⁸. They also make liberal use of the techniques of epideictic rhetoric — specifically of the rhetoric of vituperation or blame. The charges that Jesus is a magician or a god who died in delusions, for example, exhibit features of vituperative rhetoric. Occasionally forensic rhetoric is involved because the authors sometimes use arguments to justify persecutions of the Christians.

Besides ancient rhetoric, Hellenistic historical and literary criticism are also a source of concepts important for understanding the critique of the NT in Greco-Roman paganism⁵⁹. In summarizing the various criticisms of poetry (and Homer in particular), Aristotle wrote, “The censures they bring are of five kinds: that things are either impossible or irrational or harmful or inconsistent (ὑπεναντία) or contrary to artistic correctness.”⁶⁰ These problems (προβλημάτων Poet. 25.1) assume that the poet represents reality. An impossibility appears in *Iliad* 22.205 where Hector is pursued, and the Greeks do not shoot at him on Achilles’ orders⁶¹. Homer has “taught the others the proper way of telling lies” according to Aristotle⁶². Plutarch is impressed by the presence of mutual contradictions in the poets (ὑπεναντιώσεις πρὸς αὐτούς). He asserts that when “comparison of passages makes their contradictions (τὰς ἀντιλογίας) evident, we must advocate the better side”⁶³. Plutarch believes that the solutions (λύσεις) to these problems are obvious if one directs the young to the better side. He offers an example in which a poet asks why sacrifice when we must die and then says the worship of the gods is not toil⁶⁴. Both Porphyry and Macarius’ anonymous philosopher made extensive use of this principle of contradiction to attack the NT.

Aristotle includes the criterion of whether something is morally good or bad⁶⁵. In this context he mentions Xenophanes who argued that stories about the gods were untrue because immoral⁶⁶. Rudolf Pfeiffer refers to one of Xenophanes’ statements in which he attacked Homer and Hesiod: “Homer and

⁵⁷ Rhet. 1.2.3-6. LAUSBERG, Handbuch, § 257 (the three forms of persuasion: *docere*, *delectare* and *movere* which correspond to logos, ethos, and pathos), 355 (gives examples of this trilogy in ancient rhetorical theory).

⁵⁸ This paragraph is largely from COOK, *Some Hellenistic Responses*, 233-34.

⁵⁹ I am indebted for this suggestion to Prof. W. SCHOEDEL.

⁶⁰ Poet. 25.32. ET from Aristotle, *The Poetics*, ed. and trans. W. H. FYFE, LCL, Cambridge/London 1965.

⁶¹ Poet. 24.16-17 and 25.8.

⁶² Poet. 24.18.

⁶³ Quomodo adolescens poetas audire debeat 20c.

⁶⁴ Quomodo 20d.

⁶⁵ Poet. 25.15.

⁶⁶ Poet. 25.13

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