

When I was a child, my speech, feelings, and thinking were all those of a child; now that I am a man, I have no more use for childish ways. What we see now is like the dim image in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. What I know now is only partial; then it will be complete, as complete as God's knowledge of me.

Meanwhile these three remain: faith, hope, and love; and the greatest of these is love.

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Christianity and Greco-Roman Thought

"Whatever has been uttered aright by any men in any place belongs to us Christians." — Justin

To the intellectuals of the Greco-Roman world early Christianity appeared to be just another mystery cult of interest only to the uneducated lower classes; in the words of Tacitus, it was a "pernicious superstition," particularly unattractive because of its "hatred for the whole human race." On the other hand, the earliest Christians were equally hostile to pagan philosophy, and they agreed with St. Paul that God had "made foolish the wisdom of this world." Before Christianity could spread triumphantly through the whole classical world, taking into its fold men on all levels of learning, some solution to this conflict had to be achieved. We have seen that in the early Roman Empire Greek philosophy, notably Stoicism and a revived Platonism, became increasingly imbued with religious values (see Selection 51 and the Introduction to Selection 52); consequently, when men trained in Greek learning began to accept Christianity, an amalgamation of philosophy and Christianity was not difficult to bring about. This process, the work of intellectual Christians known as Apologists and Church Fathers, began in the second century in the more Christian East and culminated in the work of St. Augustine at the end of the fourth century in the West.

Various methods were used in giving an intellectual tone to Christianity. The personal God of the Jews and Christians was identified with the abstract god of the Greek philosophers — a pure, invisible, incorporeal intelligence. The literal interpretation of the Old Testament was replaced by an allegorical one in which a deeper symbolical and spiritual meaning was found to lie behind the

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simple words of the text. Biblical truth, wrote Origen, one of the outstanding third-century Greek Apologists, "is sometimes conveyed in what one might call literal falsehood." Above all, use was made of the Logos doctrine, which explained how God was the source of all truth, both pagan and Christian. "Logos" was a term used in Greek philosophy to signify the powers of reason. It is translated variously as "word," "argument," and "reason." Plato and other Greek thinkers referred to the Logos as eternal and divine, and the Christian Apologists adopted the term for the divine principle regulating all things and bridging the gap between God and man. They taught that the Logos (reason) of the Greek philosophers was one means by which God sought to enlighten and save mankind, but that when this attempt failed He then sent the Logos in the form of his Only-Begotten Son, Jesus. "Thus philosophy was a preparation," wrote Clement, Origen's predecessor as head of the Christian school at Alexandria, "paving the way towards perfection in Christ." A better-known statement of the Logos doctrine and the incarnation of this divine force in Jesus is found in the Gospel of John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. . . . And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."

◆A◆ JUSTIN, APOLOGY

"Those who lived according to reason are Christians."

The first important Christian Apologist was Justin, whose Apology was addressed to the emperor Antoninus Pius about the middle of the second century. Although a Greek, he spent much time in Rome, where he conducted a school and where he ultimately suffered martyrdom. His conversion to Christianity from Stoicism and Platonism illustrates the strong appeal of what he called "the noble precepts of Christ" over the pagan way of life, a view he summarizes in the first selection given below. The second selection is an excellent short statement illustrating the attitude of the majority of Church Fathers towards pagan learning.

CHRISTIANITY AND MORAL REGENERATION

Since our conversion to Christianity, we who formerly delighted in debauchery, now rejoice in purity of life; we who formerly used magical arts, dedicate ourselves to the good and unbegotten God; we who valued above all things the acquisition of wealth and possessions, now bring together all that we have and share it with those who are in need. Formerly, we hated and destroyed one an-

From Justin, I, 14, 46; II, 13; based on the translation by Marcus Dods in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, 1885), Vol. I.

other and, because of differences in nationality and customs, would not allow strangers to live with us. Now, since the coming of Christ, we live familiarly with them, and pray for our enemies, and endeavor to persuade those who hate us unjustly to live according to the good precepts of Christ, to the end that they may become partakers with us of the same joyful hope of a reward from God the ruler of all. . . .

CHRISTIANITY AND PAGAN LEARNING

Lest some should assert, unreasonably and to turn men from what we teach, that we say that Christ was born one hundred and fifty years ago under Cyrenius, and subsequently, in the time of Pontius Pilate, taught what we say He taught, and then accuse us of saying that all men who were born before Him were irresponsible — let us anticipate and solve this difficulty. We have been taught that Christ is the first-born of God, and we have declared above that He is the Word [reason] of whom every race of men were partakers. Those who lived according to reason are Christians, even though they have been thought atheists — such as, among the Greeks, Socrates and Heraclitus, and men like them; and among barbarians, Abraham, and Ananias

For each man spoke rightly in proportion to the share he had of the seminal Word [reason], seeing what was related to it. . . . Whatever things were rightly said among all men in all places belong to us Christians. For next to God we worship and love the Word who is from the unbegotten and ineffable God, since also He became man for our sakes, that, becoming a partaker of our sufferings, He might also bring us healing. For all the writers were able to see realities darkly through the sowing of the implanted Word that was in them.

◆ B ◆ TERTULLIAN, AGAINST HERETICS

“What is there in common between Athens and Jerusalem?”

Justin had called Heraclitus “a Christian before Christ” and this liberal attitude towards pagan philosophers soon became dominant in Eastern Christianity. In the Latin West, however, this point of view did not find great favor until the appearance of St. Augustine in the late fourth century. The outstanding opponent of classical philosophy among the Latin Apologists was Tertullian, who died at Carthage about 222 A.D. He was trained in Roman law, and his view of Christianity was a legalistic one. To him Christianity was essentially a legal and moral code established by God and revealed through Christ. Sin and salvation were based on adherence to the Divine Law as judged by Christ. The subtleties of Greek philosophy were not only unnecessary to Tertullian; they were absurd and dangerous. He preached a “simple faith,” for “to know nothing against the rule of faith is to know everything.” The truest Christian was “the

From Tertullian, *Against Heretics*, Ch. 7, based on the translation by Peter Holmes in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, 1885), Vol. III.

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simple and uncultivated soul, whose whole experience has been gleaned on street-corners and cross-roads and in the factory." Such a man, Tertullian boasted, could answer all the questions that had puzzled the minds of the greatest philosophers.

These are "the doctrines" of men and "of demons" produced for itching ears of the spirit of this world's wisdom: this the Lord called "foolishness" and "chose the foolish things of the world" to confound even philosophy itself. For philosophy it is which is the material of the world's wisdom, the rash interpreter of the nature and the dispensation of God. Indeed heresies are themselves instigated by philosophy. From this source came the "Aeons," and I know not what "infinite forms" and the "trinity of man" in the system of Valentinus, who was of Plato's school. From the same source came Marcion's better god, with all his tranquillity; he came of the Stoics. Then, again, the opinion the the soul dies is held by the Epicureans; while the denial of the restoration of the body is taken from the aggregate school of all the philosophers; also, when matter is made equal to God, then you have the teaching of Zeno; and when any doctrine is alleged touching a god of fire, then Heraclitus comes in. The same subject matter is discussed over and over again by the heretics and the philosophers; the same arguments are involved. Whence comes evil? Why is it permitted? What is the origin of man? and in what way does he come? Besides the questions which Valentinus has very lately proposed — Whence comes God? Which he settles with the answer: From *enthymesis* and *ectroma*. Unhappy Aristotle! who invented for these men dialectics, the art of building up and pulling down; an art so evasive in its propositions, so far-fetched in its conjectures, so harsh in its arguments, so productive of contentions — embarrassing even to itself, retracting everything, and really treating of nothing! . . . What is there in common between Athens and Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the Church? what between heretics and Christians? . . . Away with all attempts to produce a mottled Christianity of Stoic, Platonic, and dialectic composition! We want no curious disputation after possessing Christ Jesus, no inquisition after enjoying the gospel! With our faith, we desire no further belief.

◆ C ◆ ST. AUGUSTINE, CONFESSIONS

"Our heart is restless until it rests in You."

Frequently when reading the works of the Church Fathers one comes across the statement, "Christians are not born but made." This cogently expressed the fact that Christianity came to these Greco-Roman intellectuals as a final and satisfying answer to their long search for truth and meaning. The classical em-

From St. Augustine I, 9, 13, 14; II, 1, 3, 4, 6, 9; III, 1-7; IV, 3; V, 10, 13, 14; VII, 9, 20; VIII, 3, 4, 6, 8, 11, 12; based on the translation by E. B. Pusey.

phasis on rationalistic humanism was no longer satisfying, and men turned from it to the spiritual truths of Christianity. This story is best told in the intellectual and spiritual autobiography of St. Augustine (354-430 A.D.), bishop of Hippo in North Africa. We see the picture of a man akin to ourselves in his gropings after truth in an age grown weary from disorder and anxiety.

As a boy, Augustine tells us, he thought of God in childish terms, as one who could hear such petitions as would help him to escape punishment in school. As he grew older and attended the university at Carthage, he discarded such simple beliefs and, plunging into a life of romantic excitements, "walked the streets of Babylon and wallowed in the mire thereof." But university life also marked an important advance toward maturity in that it turned him from the pursuit of sensual pleasures to a love of wisdom, a transformation he attributed to the writings of Cicero. Yet this new love was barren of permanently satisfying results, and a similar discouragement resulted when he turned to religion. The Christian Scriptures repelled him; he could not accept the immoralities and anthropomorphism of the Old Testament, and he saw only a deficiency of style and charm in the New Testament. The Manichaean heresy interested him for a number of years before it was revealed to be a tissue of sham and imposture. Then he "despaired of finding the truth" and found congenial the dictum of the Skeptic philosophers that "no truth can be comprehended by man." The major barriers to his conversion to Christianity were removed by Ambrose, who gave him the allegorical method of interpreting the Scriptures, and by Neo-Platonism, which taught him the immateriality of God. He felt that the affinities between Christianity and Platonism were so close that, as he stated later in his essay *Of True Religion*, all that was needed to convert Platonists was the modification of a few words and formulae. Like Platonism, too, which Plato said could be accepted only by "some few who are able . . . to find it out for themselves," Augustine's Christianity is a way of life that cannot be taught by one man to another. The real significance of Christianity can only be grasped by one who has experienced much, suffered much, and thought much; and such is the final message of the *Confessions*: "You, O God, are the Good, which is in need of no other good. . . . What man shall teach another to understand this? Or what angel another angel? Or what angel man? This must be asked of you, sought in you, knocked for at you: thus only shall it be received, thus shall it be found, thus shall it be opened to us. Amen." (XIII, 38)

The final step for Augustine is a wrenching free from a confused rationalism by a deliberate act, inspired by the example of the unlearned, of reaching up to "take heaven by force." Once more, in this final mystical step, we find an echo of Plato's words: "suddenly a light, as it were, is kindled in one soul by a flame that leaps to it from another, and thereafter sustains itself." (See page 216.)

SCHOOLDAYS

O God, my God, what miseries and mockeries did I now experience, when obedience to my teachers was proposed to me as proper in a boy in order that

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in this world I might prosper and excel in rhetorical learning, which would obtain for me the praise of men and deceitful riches. Then I was put to school to get learning, in which I (poor wretch) knew not what use there was; and yet, if idle in learning, I was beaten. For this was considered right by our forefathers; and many, passing the same way before us, had built for us a weary path along which we were compelled to go, multiplying toil and grief upon the sons of Adam.

Yet we noticed, Lord, that men prayed to You, and we learned from them to think of You (according to our capacities) as some great One, who, though hidden from our senses, could hear and help us. So as a boy I began to call upon You, my Aid and Refuge; though small, yet with no small earnestness, I broke the fetters of my tongue to call on You, praying to You that I might not be beaten at school. And when You did not hear me (not thereby encouraging my folly), my elders, yes, even my parents, who yet wished me no harm, laughed at my stripes, which were a great and grievous ill to me. . . .

It was not that we lacked, O Lord, memory or capacity; You gave us enough of these for our age. But our sole delight was play, and for this we were punished by those who were themselves doing the same thing. But older folks' idleness is called "business"; the idling of boys, though really the same, is punished by these older folks; and no one is sorry for either boys or men. For will anyone of sound discretion approve of my being beaten as a boy because, by playing ball, I made less progress in studies which, by learning, I might as a man play some more unbecoming game? . . .

Why I so much hated Greek, which I had to study as a boy, I do not fully understand. For I loved Latin; not the elementary grammar, but the literature. As for the rudiments — reading, writing, and arithmetic — I found them as hard and hateful as Greek. . . .

Why then did I hate Greek literature? . . . The difficulty of learning a foreign language sprinkled bitterness over all the sweetness of the Greek stories. For not one word of it did I understand, and to make me understand I was urged vehemently with cruel threats and punishments. There was a time also (as an infant) when I knew no Latin; but I learned it without fear or suffering, by mere observation, amid the caresses of my nurses and the jests of friends, whose smiles and laughter encouraged me. I learned it without any pressure or punishment to urge me on, for my heart urged me to give birth to thoughts which I could only do by learning words not from instructors but from those who talked with me and for whom I was able to express what I was feeling. There is no doubt, then, that free curiosity has more value in learning languages than harsh enforcement. . . .

"TO WHOM AM I TELLING THIS? AND TO WHAT PURPOSE?"

I will now call to mind my past foulness and the carnal corruptions of my soul, not because I love them but that I may love You, O my God. For love of Your love I do it, reviewing my most wicked ways in the very bitterness of my remembrance, that You may grow sweet to me (O sweetness never failing, blissful and assured sweetness). And I gather myself together out of that dissipated

state, in which I was torn to pieces while turned from You, the One Good, while losing myself among a multiplicity of things.

Having arrived at adolescence, I was on fire to take my fill of hell. I became like an animal, pursuing various and shady lusts: *my beauty consumed away* and I stank in Your sight; pleasing myself and desirous to please in the sight of men. . . .

To whom am I telling this? Not to You, my God, but in Your presence to my own kind, to that small portion of mankind as may come upon these writings of mine. And to what purpose? Simply that I and whoever reads this may think *out of what depths we are to cry unto Thee*. For what is nearer to Your ears than a confessing heart and a life of faith? . . .

AN ACT OF VANDALISM: "SEEKING ONLY TO BE WICKED"

Theft is punished by Your law, O Lord, and the law written in the hearts of men . . . Yet I wanted to steal, and did steal, compelled not by hunger or poverty but because I lacked a sense of justice and was filled with iniquity. For I stole that of which I had plenty, and of much better quality. Nor cared I to enjoy what I stole; I enjoyed the theft itself, and the sin.

There was a pear tree near our vineyard, laden with fruit but tempting neither in color or taste. To shake it and rob it, I and some lewd young fellows went late one night (having according to our depraved custom prolonged our sports in the street till then) and took huge loads, not for eating — we barely tasted them — but to fling to the hogs. Our real pleasure in doing this was that it was forbidden. Such was my heart, O God, such was my heart which You had pity on when it was at the bottom of the bottomless abyss. Now let my heart tell You what it sought there, when I was evil for no purpose, having no reason for wrongdoing except wrongdoing itself. It was foul, and I loved it; I loved destroying myself; I loved my sin, not the thing for which I had sinned but the sin itself. Foul soul, falling from Your firmament to utter destruction; not seeking profit from wickedness, but seeking only to be wicked! . . .

Did I find pleasure in appearing to break Your law, doing so by stealth since I had no real power to do so? Was I, like a prisoner, making a small show of liberty by doing unpunished what I was not allowed to do and so getting a false sense of omnipotence? Behold Your servant, fleeing from his Lord and pursuing a shadow! What rottenness! What monstrosity of life and abyss of death! Could I enjoy what was forbidden only because it was forbidden? . . .

See, my God, this vivid memory of my soul. Yet I could not have committed that theft alone. . . . When someone cries "Come on, let's do it," we are ashamed to be ashamed. . . .

"LOVING A VAGRANT LIBERTY"

I came to Carthage, where there sang all around me in my ears a cauldron of unholy loves. I was not yet in love, yet I loved the idea of love, and out of a deep-seated want I hated myself for not wanting more. I sought for something to love, being in love with loving, and I hated security and a life without snares. For within me was a famine of that spiritual food, Yourself, my God To

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Stage plays also carried me away, full of images of my miseries and of fuel for my fire. Why is it that man desires to be made sad, beholding miserable and tragic things which he himself would by no means wish to suffer? Yet he desires as a spectator to feel sorrow, and this sorrow is his pleasure. . . .

O my God, my exceeding great mercy, my refuge from those terrible destroyers, among whom I wandered in my arrogance, withdrawing further from You, loving my own ways and not Yours, loving a vagrant liberty.

“AROUSSED TO SEEK WISDOM WHATEVER IT MIGHT BE”

These studies of mine also, which were considered commendable, were designed to fit me to excel in the law courts — the more craftier I was, the more famous I should become. Such is men’s blindness, that blindness itself should become a source of pride! And by now I was a leader in the school of rhetoric, which I proudly enjoyed, swelling with arrogance, though (Lord, You know) I was far quieter and entirely removed from the subvertings of those “Subverters” (for this cruel and devilish name was their badge of sophistication) among whom I lived, with a shameless shame that I was not like them. With them I went about and sometimes I enjoyed their friendship, although I always hated their actions — that is, their “subvertings,” when they wantonly persecuted the modesty of freshmen whom they disturbed by mocking and jeering for no reason whatever, feeding thereby their own malicious mirth. Nothing can be more like the behavior of devils than this. They were rightly called “subverters,” being themselves subverted and perverted by the same deceiving spirits which secretly derided and seduced them when they amused themselves by jeering and deceiving others.

Among such companions, in that unsettled age of mine, I studied books of eloquence, wherein I desired to be eminent for a damnable and vainglorious end — joy in human vanity. In the normal course of study I fell upon a certain book by Cicero, whose style almost all admire, though not his heart. This book of his contains an exhortation to philosophy, and is called *Hortensius*. But this book altered my mind; it turned my prayers to You, O Lord, and gave me other purposes and desires. Every vain hope suddenly became worthless to me; I longed with an incredibly burning desire for an immortality of wisdom, and I began now to rise, so that I might return to You. For not to sharpen my tongue (which was the goal of the education I was purchasing with my mother’s allowances, in my nineteenth year, my father having died two years before), not to sharpen my tongue did I use that book; what moved me was not its style, but its content.

How did I burn then, my God, how did I burn to fly from earthly things to You. But I did not know what You would do with me; for with You is wisdom. But the love of wisdom is in Greek called “philosophy,” and it was with wisdom that that book inflamed me. . . . And since at that time (You, O light

of my heart, know this) Apostolic Scripture was not known to me, the one thing that delighted me in Cicero's exhortation was that I was greatly aroused, kindled, and inflamed to love, seek, obtain, hold, and embrace not this sect but wisdom itself, whatever it might be. And this alone checked my ardent desire, that the name of Christ was not there. For this name, O Lord, this name of my Savior, Your Son, had my tender heart, even with my mother's milk, devoutly drunk in and deeply treasured; and whatsoever was without that name, however learned, polished, or true, could not hold me entirely.

"THE HOLY SCRIPTURES SEEMED TO ME UNWORTHY"

I resolved then to direct my attention to the Holy Scriptures, that I might see what they were like. And what I saw was something not understood by the proud nor laid open to children; and I was not one who could enter into it, or stoop my neck to follow its path. For not as I now write did I feel when I first turned to those Scriptures; they seemed to me unworthy to be compared to the stateliness of Cicero. My swelling pride shunned their style, nor could my sharp wit pierce their depths. Yet they were such as would grow up with a little child; but I disdained to be a little child, and, swollen with pride, took myself to be grown-up.

THE MANICHAEANS: "FOOLISH DECEIVERS"

Therefore I fell among men who were proudly raving, exceedingly carnal and wordy, in whose mouths were the snares of the Devil, smeared with a mixture of the syllables of Your name and of our Lord Jesus Christ and of the Holy Ghost, the Paraclete, our Comforter. These names were always in their mouths, but only as sounds and the noise of the tongue, for their hearts were void of truth. Yet they cried out "Truth, Truth" and spoke much thereof to me, yet the truth was not in them. . . . Yet because I thought them to be You, I fed upon them; not eagerly, for You did not in them taste to me as You are; for You are not these empty falsehoods, nor was I nourished by them, but exhausted rather. . . .

For that which really is, I knew not; and I was through my sharpness of wit persuaded to assent to foolish deceivers when they asked me, "What is the origin of evil?" "Is God bounded by a bodily shape and has he hair and nails?" "Are those [patriarchs of the Old Testament] to be esteemed righteous who had many wives at the same time and killed men and sacrificed living creatures?" At which I, in my ignorance, was much troubled and, while departing from the truth, seemed to myself to be drawing towards it. This was because as yet I did not know that evil is nothing but an absence of good. . . . I did not even know that God is a spirit, having no parts extended in length and breadth. . . .

"THOSE IMPOSTERS CALLED ASTROLOGERS"

Thus I did not hesitate to consult those imposters called astrologers, because they offered no sacrifices and prayed to no spirit to assist their divinations. Yet

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true Christian piety necessarily rejects and condemns their art. For *it is a good thing to confess unto Thee*, and to say, *Have mercy upon me, heal my soul, for I have sinned against Thee*, and not to misuse Your mercy as a license, but to remember the Lord's words, *Behold, thou art made whole, sin no more, lest a worse thing happen to thee*. All this wholesome truth the astrologers strive to destroy, saying: "The cause of your sin is inevitably determined in the heavens" and "This did Venus do, or Saturn or Mars." As though man, who is flesh and blood and proud corruption, should be blameless, while the Creator and Ruler of heaven and the stars is to bear the blame. And who is He but our God? . . .

The governor of the province in those days was a wise man, skillful and renowned in medicine. . . . When I told him that I was much given to reading the books of the horoscope-casters, he kindly and in a fatherly way advised me to throw them away and not to waste on such nonsense care and attention that could be put to better use. . . . When I asked him why it was that many things were foretold by astrology, he reasoned that it was due to the force of chance, which is diffused throughout the whole order of things. Thus while haphazardly paging through a book of poetry, one often comes upon a line which is wondrously appropriate to some matter on one's mind, though the poet was singing and thinking of something quite different. So, he said, it is not to be wondered at if a man's mind should unconsciously by some instinct, and by chance rather than by art, produce an answer that would seem to correspond with the affairs and actions of the inquirer. . . .

SKEPTICISM: "MEN OUGHT TO DOUBT EVERYTHING"

At Rome I again associated with those false and deceiving "holy ones" [Manichaeans], not only with the "hearers" (one of whom was the man in whose house I had fallen sick and recovered), but also with those whom they call "the elect." For I still held the belief that it is not we who sin but some other nature sinning in us; it gratified my pride to think myself free of blame when I had done anything evil. . . . However, I now despaired of finding any profit in that false doctrine, and I began to hold laxly and carelessly even those ideas with which I had decided to rest content if I could find nothing better.

The thought occurred to me that those philosophers whom they call Academics were wiser than the rest because they held that men ought to doubt everything and had concluded that no truth can be comprehended by man [see p. 343]. For so I was clearly convinced that they thought (as is commonly believed), though I did not yet understand their real meaning. And I did openly discourage my host from that overconfidence which I perceived him to have in those fables of which the books of Manes are full. Yet I lived on more friendly terms with them than with others who were not of this heresy. I no longer defended it with my former eagerness; still my friendship with that sect (Rome secretly harboring many of them) made me slower to seek any other belief, especially since I despaired of finding the truth in Your Church, O Lord of heaven and earth, Creator of all things visible and invisible. For they had turned me against it, and it seemed to me degrading to believe that You had

the shape of human flesh and were bounded by the bodily outlines of our limbs. . . .

AMBROSE

To Milan I came, to Ambrose the bishop, known to the whole world as among the best of men, Your devout servant whose eloquence did then plentifully dispense to *Thy people the fatness of Thy wheat, the gladness of Thy oil and the sober intoxication of Thy wine*. To him was I unknowingly led by You, that I might knowingly be led to You by him. That man of God received me as a father, and as bishop welcomed my coming. I began to love him, at first indeed not as a teacher of the truth (which I utterly despaired of finding in Your Church), but as a person who was kind to me. I listened diligently to him preaching to the people, not with the right intent but, as it were, judging his eloquence, whether it was equal to his fame or flowed higher or lower than was reported. So I hung intently on his words, but of what he said I was a careless and scornful onlooker. I was delighted with the charm of his discourse; it was more learned, yet less winning and harmonious than that of Faustus. Of the actual matter, however, there was no comparison; Faustus was merely wandering amid Manichaean delusions, while Ambrose was soundly teaching salvation. But salvation is far from sinners such as I then was. Yet I was drawing nearer little by little, though unconsciously.

For though I took no pains to learn what he said but only to hear how he said it, . . . yet together with the words which I liked came also into my mind the subject matter to which I was indifferent, for I could not separate them. And while I opened my heart to admit how eloquently he spoke, it also occurred to me gradually how truly he spoke. The things he said now began to appear to me capable of being defended. The Catholic faith, for which I had thought nothing could be said against the Manichaean objections, I now thought might be maintained on sound grounds — especially after I had heard one or two passages of the Old Testament explained figuratively, which, when I had taken them literally, I was slain spiritually. Many passages then of those books having been explained in a spiritual sense, I now blamed my conceit for having believed that no answer could be given to those who hated and scoffed at the Law and the Prophets. Yet I did not then feel that the Catholic way was to be followed merely because it also could find learned maintainers who could at length and with some show of reason answer objections, nor that the faith which I held was to be condemned because both faiths could be defended. Thus the Catholic cause seemed to me not vanquished, nor not as yet victorious.

Then I earnestly bent my mind to see if in any way I could by any certain proof convict the Manichaeans of falsehood. Could I only have been able to conceive of a spiritual substance, all their strongholds would have collapsed and been cast out of my mind. But I could not. However, concerning the body of this world and the whole of nature which our senses can reach to, as I more and more considered and compared things, I judged the views of most of the philosophers to be much more probable. So then after the supposed manner of

the Academics, doubting everything and wavering between all, I decided that I must leave the Manichaeans. I judged that, while in a state of doubt, I could not continue in that sect to which I now preferred some of the philosophers. These philosophers, however, because they were without the saving name of Christ, I utterly refused to commit the cure of my sick soul. I determined therefore to be a catechumen in the Catholic Church, which my parents had encouraged me to join, until something certain should dawn upon me by which I might steer my course. . . .

“SOME BOOKS OF THE PLATONISTS”

By means of a man puffed up with the most exaggerated pride, You brought to my attention some books of the Platonists translated from Greek into Latin. And therein I read, not of course in the same words but to the very same effect and supported by many sorts of reasons, that *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God: the same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was nothing made: that which was made by Him is life, and the life was the light of men, and the light shineth in the darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.* And that the soul of man, though it bears witness to the light, yet itself is not that light; but the Word of God, being God, is that true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. Also that *He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not.* But I did not read there that *He came unto His own, and His own received Him not; but as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, as many as believed in His name.*

I also read there that *God the Word was born not of flesh, nor of blood, nor of the will of man, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God.* But I did not find there that *the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us. . . .*

And You have called the Gentiles into Your inheritance. I myself had come to You from the Gentiles, and I set my mind upon the gold which You willed Your people to take from Egypt, since it was Yours, wherever it was. And to the Athenians You said by Your Apostle, that in You we live, move, and have our being, as one of their own poets had said. And certainly these books came from Athens. . . .

Having then read those books of the Platonists, which taught me to search for incorporeal truth, I came to see Your *invisible things, understood by those things which are made.* And though I fell back from this point, I still perceived what that was which, through the darkness of my mind, I was unable to contemplate; I was certain that You are and that You are infinite, yet not being diffused in space whether finite or infinite: that You truly are and are ever the same, in no part or motion varying; and that all other things are from You, as is proved by the sure fact that they exist. . . . I believe it was Your will that I should come upon these books before I studied Your Scriptures, that it might be imprinted on my memory how I was affected by them; and that afterwards when my spirits were tamed through Your books, and my wounds dressed by Your healing fingers, I might be able to distinguish between presumption and

confession, between those who see the goal but not the way — the way that leads us not only to see but to dwell in the country of blessedness. . . .

CHRISTIANS ARE MADE, NOT BORN

Good God! what takes place in man that he should more rejoice at the salvation of a soul despaired of or freed from a great peril, than if there had always been hope or the peril had been less? . . .

What is it in the soul, then, which makes it more delighted at finding or recovering the things it loves than if it had always had them? Indeed, other creatures bear the same witness; everywhere all things cry out, "So it is." The conquering general has his triumph; yet he would not have conquered if he had not fought; and the more peril there was in the battle, the more joy there is in the triumph. The storm tosses the sailors and threatens shipwreck; all are pale at the approach of death; then the sky and sea are calmed, and they are as exceedingly joyful as they had been fearful. A friend is sick and his pulse threatens danger; all who long for his recovery are sick in mind with him. He recovers, though as yet he walks not with his former strength; yet there is more joy than there was before when he walked sound and strong. Even the ordinary pleasures of human life men acquire through pain, not only those pains which fall upon us unlooked for and against our will, but also self-chosen and pleasure-seeking pain. Eating and drinking give no pleasure unless they are preceded by the pains of hunger and thirst. Drunkards eat certain salty things to procure an uncomfortable dryness which drink alleviates, thus causing pleasure. It is also customary that the engaged girl should not at once give herself, lest the husband later should hold her cheap whom, as betrothed, he no longer sighed after. . . .

Do not many, out of a deeper hell of blindness . . . , come back to You and are enlightened by that light which *they who receive, receive power from Thee to become Thy sons?*" . . .

ANTONY THE EGYPTIAN MONK

One day there came to see Alypius and me a certain Ponticianus, our countryman, an African holding high office in the emperor's court. What he wanted of us I did not know, but we sat down to converse. It chanced that he noticed a book on a gaming table beside us. He took it, opened it, and contrary to his expectation — he thought it would be one of those books which I was wearying myself in teaching — found that it was the Apostle Paul. Smiling and looking at me, he expressed his joy and wonder that he had come suddenly upon this book, and only this book, beside me. For he was a Christian, and baptized. He often bowed himself before You, our God, in Church, in long and frequent prayers. When I then told him that I gave great attention to these works of Scripture, a conversation began, suggested by him, about Antony the Egyptian monk, whose name was very well known among Your servants, though up to that hour unknown to Alypius and me. When he discovered this he talked all the more about him, informing us and wondering at our ignorance of one so eminent. And we were amazed to hear of Your wonderful works so fully attested in times so recent — almost in our own time — and done in the true

Faith and Catholic
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he stared silently
forehead, cheeks,
words I uttered.

Faith and Catholic Church. All three of us were filled with wonder; we because the deeds were so great, and he because they had not reached us.

He spoke next of the flocks of men in the monasteries, of their holy ways full of the sweet fragrance of You, and of the fruitful deserts in the wilderness, about which we knew nothing. There was actually a monastery at Milan outside the walls, full of good brothers under the care of Ambrose, and we knew nothing of it. He went on speaking, and we listened in intense silence. He told us how one afternoon at Triers, when the emperor was at the chariot races in the Circus, he and three companions went for a walk in the gardens near the city walls. They happened to walk in pairs, one of the three going with him and the other two wandering off by themselves. As the latter two strolled along, they came upon a cottage inhabited by some of Your servants, *poor in spirit, of whom is the kingdom of heaven*, and there they found a little book containing the life of Antony. This one of them began to read. He became full of wonder and excitement, and as he read on he began to think of taking up such a life, giving up his secular service to serve You. For these two men were state officials called "agents for public affairs." Then, suddenly filled with a holy love and a sober shame, in anger with himself he turned to his friend and said: "Tell me now, what do we expect to attain by all these labors of ours? What do we aim at? Why do we serve the state? Can our hopes at court rise higher than to be the emperor's favorites? And is that not a difficult position to hold, and full of dangers? And how many dangers must we survive before we reach a position that is even more dangerous? And how long before we arrive there? But a friend of God, if I wish it, I can become now at once." So he spoke. And in pain with the birth of a new life, he turned his eyes again upon the book. He read on and was changed inwardly, where You alone could see; and his mind, it soon appeared, threw off the burden of the world. For as he read and the waves of his heart rolled up and down, he stormed at himself awhile, then saw the better course and chose it for his own. Being now Yours, he said to his friend, "Now I have broken loose from those hopes we had and have decided to serve God; and I begin this service at this moment, in this place. If you do not wish to imitate me, at least do not oppose me." The other answered that he would stay with him and be his comrade in so glorious a service and for so glorious a reward. . . . This was the story Ponticianus told us. . . .

"SICK AT HEART AND TORMENTED"

Then in this great tumult of my inner dwelling, which I had stirred up against my soul in the chamber of my heart, troubled in mind and countenance, I turned toward Alypius. "What ails us?" I exclaimed. "What is this that you have just heard? The unlearned rise up and take heaven by force, and we with all our learning wallow in flesh and blood! Are we ashamed to follow because others have gone before us? And do we feel no shame at not following?" Some such words I uttered, and then my feverish mind tore me away from him while he stared silently at me in astonishment. For it was not my usual voice; my forehead, cheeks, eyes, color, and tone of voice spoke my mind more than the words I uttered.

There was a garden next to our lodging, and we used it as well as the whole house; for the owner of the house, our landlord, did not live there. The tumult in my breast drove me into this garden, for there no one could intervene in this ardent suit I had brought against myself until it should end as You knew, but I did not. But there I was, going mad in order to become sane, dying in order to have life, knowing how evil I was, not knowing how good I was soon to become. I retired then into the garden, Alypius following my steps. . . .

Thus was I sick at heart and tormented, accusing myself much more bitterly than ever, rolling and turning in my chain till I could break free. I was held only slightly, but I was still held. . . . I kept saying within myself, "Let it be done now, let it be done now!" and as I spoke the words I began to do it. I almost made it, but not quite. . . .

Those toys and trifles and vanities of vanities, my old mistresses, held me back. They pulled at my garment of flesh and whispered softly: "Are you casting us off?" and "From this moment shall we be no more with you forever?" and "From this moment shall you not be allowed to do this or that forever?" . . . What defilements did they suggest! What shame! And now I only half heard them; they no longer openly showed themselves to contradict me, but they were muttering behind my back and stealthily pulling on me, as I departed, to make me look back at them. Yet they did retard me, so that I hesitated to tear myself free from them and leap in the direction I was called; and the strong force of habit kept saying to me, "Do you think you can live without them?" . . .

"ALL THE DARKNESS OF DOUBT VANISHED AWAY"

But when my searching thought had from the secret depths of my soul drawn up all my misery and heaped it in the sight of my heart, a mighty storm rose up within me, bringing a mighty shower of tears. I stood up and left Alypius so that I might weep and cry to my heart's content, solitude seeming more suited for the business of weeping. I moved away far enough so that his presence would not embarrass me. . . . Somehow I flung myself down under a fig tree and gave way to my tears. . . . And in my misery I kept crying, "How long shall I go on saying 'tomorrow, tomorrow'? Why not now? Why not make an end of my ugly sins at this moment?"

Such things I said, weeping all the while with the most bitter sorrow in my heart. Suddenly I heard the sing-song voice of a child in a nearby house. Whether it was the voice of a boy or a girl I cannot say, but again and again it repeated the refrain, "Take it and read, take it and read." Instantly I looked up, thinking hard whether there was any kind of game in which children chanted such words, but I could not remember ever hearing anything like it before. I checked my tears and stood up, telling myself that this could only be a command from God to open my book of Scripture and read the first passage I should find. For I had heard the story of Antony, and I remembered how he had entered a church during the reading of the Gospel and had taken it as an admonition addressed to him when he heard the words: *Go, sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come*

and follow me. And You. Eagerly then I had put down the opened it, and in rioting and drunken envying, but out of flesh, to fulfill the so. For instantly light of confidence ished away.

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Both for its Roman Empire private interests of all races appears comm supports the product of mun and the use of the terms on subversive to the religions. Acco persecuted the existed:

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and follow me. And by such an oracle he had been immediately converted to You. Eagerly then I returned to the place where Alypius was sitting, for there I had put down the volume of the Apostle Paul when I arose. I snatched it up, opened it, and in silence read the first passage on which my eyes fell: *Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying, but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof.* I had no wish to read more and no need to do so. For instantly, as I came to the end of that sentence, it was as though the light of confidence streamed into my heart, and all the darkness of doubt vanished away.

55

The Persecution of Christians

“Amid the ruins of a falling age, our spirit remains erect.” — Bishop Cyprian, 3rd century

Both for its subjects and for later ages the most attractive features of the Roman Empire and the Pax Romana were three: a law that stood above the private interests of individuals (see Selection 44C), a citizenship open to men of all races (see Selection 48A), and religious toleration. This last assertion appears contradicted by Roman persecution of the Christians; yet hindsight supports the conclusion that the clash could have been avoided, that it was the product of mutual misunderstandings which led to fear, hysteria, intransigence, and the use of force. As the Roman state saw it, the Christians failed to satisfy the terms on which toleration could be granted in that they appeared to be subversive of the moral, political, and social order and refused to tolerate other religions. According to Tacitus (*Annals* XV, 44), as early as 64 A.D., when Nero persecuted the Christians in Rome, a general fear and hatred of Christians existed:

Nero falsely shifted the guilt [for the great fire at Rome] on those people commonly called “Christians” who were hated for their abominations, and inflicted on them the most exquisite tortures. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their center and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of being haters of the human race.

Such hostility embittered the Christians and turned them away from the position announced by Jesus ("Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's") and Paul ("The powers that be are ordained by God"). But by keeping themselves aloof from pagan society the Christians contributed to the suspicion of subversion and treason.

◆ A ◆ PLINY, LETTERS

Trajan's enlightened policy

There is no evidence of an official state pronouncement regarding Christianity before the early second century A.D. Persecutions were sporadic and local, being the product of popular hostility and action. They were handled by provincial governors (with the exception of Nero's persecution at Rome), who based their action on the laws against secret societies and the refusal of the Christians to demonstrate their loyalty to the state by the purely political gesture of sacrificing to the emperor. This is referred to in the famous letter written about 112 A.D. by Pliny the Younger, Governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor, to the Emperor Trajan. Pliny asked for more definite instructions with regard to the Christians, and Trajan's reply established an official policy based upon precedents set by earlier governors. This policy, which placed the label of traitor upon convicted Christians but also protected them against both sporadic and systematic persecution, continued until the Empire began to disintegrate in the last half of the third century. Measures to wipe out Christianity as a danger to the unity and security of a troubled state culminated in the Great Persecution (303-311 A.D.) under Diocletian. When this failed, Constantine's proclamation of toleration in 313 A.D. became the established policy.

PLINY TO TRAJAN

It is my custom, my lord, to refer to you all things concerning which I am in doubt. For who can better guide my indecision or enlighten my ignorance?

I have never taken part in the trials of Christians; hence I do not know for what crime or to what extent it is customary to punish or investigate. I have been in no little doubt as to whether any consideration should be given to age, or should the treatment of the young differ from that of the old; whether pardon is granted in case of repentance, or should a man who was once a Christian gain nothing by having ceased to be one; whether the name itself without the proof of crimes, or only the crimes associated with the name, are to be punished.

Meanwhile I have followed this procedure in the case of those who have been brought before me as Christians. I asked them whether they were Christians; those who confessed I questioned a second and a third time, threatening them with punishment; those who persisted I ordered executed. For I did not doubt that, whatever it was that they had confessed, their stubbornness and

X, 96, 97; adapted from *Translations and Reprints from the Original Sources of European History*, Vol. IV, No. 1, eds. D. C. Munro and Edith Bramhall (Philadelphia, 1898.)

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inflexible obstinacy ought certainly to be punished. There were others of similar madness; but because they were Roman citizens, I signed an order sending them to Rome.

Soon, the crime spreading, as is usual when attention is called to it, more cases arose. An anonymous accusation, containing many names, was presented. Those who denied that they were or had been Christians, ought, I thought, to be dismissed since they repeated after me a prayer to the gods and made supplication with incense and wine to your image, which I had ordered to be brought for the purpose together with the statues of the gods, and since besides they cursed Christ, not one of which things they say those who are really Christians can be compelled to do. Others, accused by the informer, said that they were Christians and afterwards denied it; in fact, they had been but had ceased to be, some many years ago, some even twenty years before. They all worshipped your image and the statues of the gods, and cursed Christ. They maintained that the substance of their fault or error had been that on a fixed day they were accustomed to come together before daylight and sing by turns a hymn to Christ as though he were a god, and to bind themselves by oath, not for some crime, but not to commit robbery, theft, or adultery, nor to betray a trust or deny a deposit when called upon. After this it was customary to disperse and to come together again to partake of food of an ordinary and harmless kind. Even this they ceased to do after the publication of my edict in which, according to your orders, I had forbidden associations. Hence I believed it the more necessary to examine two female slaves, who were called deaconesses, in order to find out what was true, and to do it by torture. I found nothing but a vicious, extravagant superstition.

Consequently I postponed the examination and hastened to consult you. For it seemed to me that the subject would justify consultation, especially on account of the number of those involved. For many of all ages, of every rank, and even of both sexes are and will be endangered. The infection of this superstition has not only spread to the cities but also to the villages and country districts. But it seems possible to check it and cure it. It is plain enough that the temples, which had been almost deserted, have begun to be frequented again, that the sacred rites, which had been neglected for a long time, have begun to be restored, and that food for sacrifices, for which until now there was scarcely a purchaser, is sold. From this it is easy to imagine what a multitude of people can be reclaimed if repentance is permitted.

TRAJAN TO PLINY

You have followed the correct procedure, my dear Pliny, in conducting the cases of those who were accused before you as Christians, for no general rule can be laid down as a set form. They are not to be sought out; if they are brought before you and convicted, they ought to be punished, with the proviso that whoever denies that he is a Christian and proves it by worshipping our gods, even though he may have been under suspicion in the past, shall obtain pardon on repentance. In no case should attention be paid to anonymous charges, for they afford a bad precedent and are not worthy of our age.

◆ B ◆ TERTULLIAN, APOLOGY

The Christian view of the persecutions

Tertullian, Latin Christianity's first great writer and its outstanding opponent of classical thought (see Selection 54B), wrote an Apology (197 A.D.) for Christianity which is an eloquent defense against attacks by both the hostile provincial governments and the ill-informed populace. Mixing passion with irony, he attacks the illegality of judicial procedures where Christians are involved, castigates the unreasoning hatred shown them, and refutes the numerous charges, from treason to drunkenness, leveled at them. Indeed, "the Apology is one of those works which survive the circumstances which gave them birth and which enter into the common treasury of civilized nations. Nowhere shall we listen to more fervid demands for justice, tolerance, or the rights of an accused man; to more vivid protestations against the tyranny of unjust laws assumed to be irrevocable; lastly, to a more eloquent defense of Christianity [and] of its moral nobility. . . ." ¹

"LET THE TRUTH REACH YOUR EARS"

1. Magistrates of the Roman Empire, seated as you are before the eyes of all, in almost the highest position in the state to pronounce judgment: if you are not to conduct an open and public examination and inquiry as to what the real truth is with regard to the Christians; if, in this case alone your authority fears or blushes to conduct a public investigation with the diligence demanded by justice; if, in fine — as happened lately in the private courts — hatred of this group has been aroused to the extent that it actually blocks their defense, then let the truth reach your ears by the private and quiet avenue of literature.

Truth makes no appeal on her own behalf, because she does not wonder at her present condition. She knows that she plays the role of an alien on earth, that among strangers she readily discovers enemies, but she has her origin, abode, hope, recompense, and honor in heaven. Meanwhile, there is one thing for which she strives: that she be not condemned without a hearing. . . .

This, then, is the first grievance we lodge against you, the injustice of the hatred you have for the name of Christian. The motive which appears to excuse this injustice is precisely that which both aggravates and convicts it, namely, ignorance. For, what is more unjust than that men should hate what they do not know, even though the matter itself deserves hatred? Only when one knows whether a thing deserves hatred does it deserve it. But, when there is no knowledge of what is deserved, how is the justice of hatred defensible? Justice must be proved not by the fact of a thing's existence, but by knowledge of it. When

From Sister Emily Joseph Daly, C. S. J., tr., *Tertullian: Apologetical Works, and Minucius Felix Octavius* (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1950), Vol. X: *The Fathers of the Church*, Reprinted by permission of The Catholic University of America Press.

¹ P. de Labriolle, *History and Literature of Christianity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1924), p. 70.

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men hate because they are in ignorance of the nature of the object of their hatred, what is to prevent that object from being such that they ought not to hate it? Thus we counterbalance each attitude by its opposite: men remain in ignorance as long as they hate, and they hate unjustly as long as they remain in ignorance.

The proof of their ignorance, which condemns while it excuses their injustice, is this: In the case of all who formerly indulged in hatred [of Christianity] because of their ignorance of the nature of what they hated, their hatred comes to an end as soon as their ignorance ceases. From this group come the Christians, as a result, assuredly, of their personal experience. They begin now to hate what once they were and to profess what once they hated; and the Christians are really as numerous as you allege us to be. Men cry that the city is filled with Christians; they are in the country, in the villages, on the islands; men and women, of every age, of every state and rank of life, are transferring to this group, and this they lament as if it were some personal injury. . . .

2. If, then, it is decided that we are the most wicked of men, why do you treat us so differently from those who are on a par with us, that is, from all other criminals? The same treatment ought to be meted out for the same crime. When others are charged with the same crimes as we, they use their own lips and the hired eloquence of others to prove their innocence. There is full liberty given to answer the charge and to cross-question, since it is unlawful for men to be condemned without defense or without a hearing. Christians alone are permitted to say nothing that would clear their name, vindicate the truth, and aid the judge to come to a fair decision. One thing only is what they wait for; this is the only thing necessary to arouse public hatred: the confession of the name of Christian, not an investigation of the charge. Yet, suppose you are trying any other criminal. If he confesses to the crime of murder, sacrilege, incest, or treason — to particularize the indictments hurled against us — you are not satisfied to pass sentence immediately; you weigh the attendant circumstances, the character of the deed, the number of times it was committed, the time, the place, the witnesses, and the partners-in-crime. In our case there is nothing of this sort. No matter what false charge is made against us, we must be made to confess it; for example, how many murdered babies one has devoured, how many deeds of incest one has committed under cover of darkness, what cooks and what dogs were on hand. Oh, what glory for that governor who should have discovered someone who had already consumed a hundred infants!

TRAJAN'S LETTER: "HOW AMBIGUOUS WAS THAT DECISION!"

On the other hand, we find that it has been forbidden to search us out. For when Pliny the Younger was in charge of his province and had condemned certain Christians and had driven others from their established position, he was so disturbed because of the numbers involved that he consulted Trajan, emperor at the time, as to what he should do thereafter. He explained that, except for their obstinate refusal to offer sacrifice, he had learned nothing else about their religious rites except that they met before daybreak to sing to Christ and to God and to bind themselves by oath to a way of life which forbade murder,

adultery, dishonesty, treachery, and all other crimes. Trajan wrote back that men of this kind should not be sought out, but, when brought to court, they should be punished.

Oh, how unavoidably ambiguous was that decision! He says that they should not be sought — as though they were innocent; then prescribes that they should be punished — as though they were guilty! He spares them, yet vents his anger upon them; he pretends to close his eyes, yet directs attention toward them! Judgment, why do you thus ensnare yourself? If you condemn them, why not also search for them? If you do not search for them, why not also acquit them? Throughout the provinces troops of soldiers are assigned to track down robbers. Against traitors and public enemies each individual constitutes a soldier: the search is extended even to comrades and accomplices. Only the Christian may not be sought out — but he may be brought to court. As though a search were intended to bring about something else than his appearance in court! So, you condemn a man when he is brought into court, although no one wanted him to be sought out. He has earned punishment, I suppose, not on the ground that he is guilty, but because he was discovered for whom no search had to be made. . . .

“SUCH HATRED OF THE NAME”

3. What should one say of the fact that many shut their eyes and force themselves to such hatred of the name that, even when they speak favorably of someone, they insert some hateful remark about this name? “Caius Seius is a good man, except that he is a Christian.” Similarly, someone else says: “I am surprised that Lucius Titius, otherwise a man of sense, has suddenly become a Christian!” No one stops to think whether Caius is good and Lucius sensible because he is a Christian, or is a Christian because he is sensible and good! Men praise what they know and find fault with what they do not know. They contaminate their knowledge with their ignorance, although it would be more correct to form a preconceived idea with regard to what is unknown from what is known than to condemn beforehand what is known because of what is unknown.

Others censure those whom they knew in the past, before they acquired this name, as vagrant, good-for-nothing scoundrels, and they censure them in the very act of praising them. In the blindness of their hatred they stumble into favorable criticism. “That woman! How dissolute and frivolous she was! And that young man, how much more prodigal and debauched he used to be! They have become Christians.” Thus, the name which was responsible for their reformation is set down as a charge against them. Some, even, at the expense of their own advantage, bargain with their hatred, satisfied to suffer a personal loss, provided that their home be freed from the object of their hatred. A wife who has become chaste is cast out by her husband now that he is relieved of his jealous suspicions of her. A son, now docile, is disowned by a father who was patient with him in the past. A servant, now trustworthy, is banished from the sight of a master who was formerly indulgent. To the degree that one is re-

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"RUMOR ALONE IS THE WITNESS YOU BRING FORTH AGAINST US"

4. Now that I have set down these remarks as a preface, as it were, to stigmatize the injustice of the public hatred against us, I shall take the stand to defend our innocence. Not only shall I refute the charges which are brought against us, but I shall even hurl them back upon those who make them, so that men may thereby know that among the Christians those crimes do not exist which they are not unaware exist among themselves; and that, at the same time, they may blush when, as utter reprobates, they accuse — I do not say the most righteous of men — but, as they themselves would have it, their equals. We shall reply to each charge individually: to those which we are said to commit in secret, and to those which we are found to be committing before the eyes of all — charges on the basis of which we are held to be criminals, deceivers, reprobates, and objects of ridicule. . . .

7. We are spoken of as utter reprobates and are accused of having sworn to murder babies and to eat them and of committing adulterous acts after the repast. Dogs, you say, the pimps of darkness, overturn candles and procure license for our impious lusts. We are always spoken of in this way, yet you take no pains to bring into the light the charges which for so long a time have been made against us. Now, either bring them into the light, if you believe them, or stop believing them, inasmuch as you have not brought them to light! Because of your hypocrisy, the objection is made against you that the evil does not exist which you yourselves dare not bring to light. Far different is the duty you enjoin upon the executioner against the Christians, not to make them state what they do, but to make them deny what they are.

The origin of this religion, as we have already said, dates from the time of Tiberius. Truth and hatred came into existence simultaneously. As soon as the former appeared, the latter began its enmity. It has as many foes as there are outsiders, particularly among Jews because of their jealousy, among soldiers because of their blackmailing, and even among the very members of our own household because of corrupt human nature. Day by day we are besieged; day by day we are betrayed; oftentimes, in the very midst of our meetings and gatherings, we are surprised by an assault. Who has ever come upon a baby wailing, as the accusation has it? Who has ever kept for the judge's inspection the jaws of Cyclopes and Sirens, bloodstained as he had found them? Who has ever found any traces of impurity upon [Christian] wives? Who has discovered such crimes, yet concealed them or been bribed to keep them secret when dragging these men off to court? If we always keep under cover, whence the betrayal of our crimes?

Rather, who could have been the traitors? Certainly not the accused themselves, since the obligation of pledged silence is binding upon all mysteries by their very nature. The mysteries of Samothrace and of Eleusis are shrouded in silence; how much more such rites as these which, if they were made public,

would provoke at once the hatred of all mankind — while God's wrath is reserved for the future? If, then, Christians themselves are not the betrayers, it follows that outsiders are. Whence do outsiders get their knowledge, since even holy initiation rites always ban the uninitiated and are wary of witnesses? . . .

Rumor, a word designating uncertainty, has no place where there is certainty. But does anyone except the unthinking believe rumor? One who is wise surely does not heed uncertainty. Everyone can reflect that however great the zeal with which the tale has been spread, however strong the assertion with which it was fabricated, it necessarily started at some time or other from one source. Thence it creeps gradually along the grapevine of tongues and ears, and a defect in the tiny seedlings so overshadows the other details of the rumor that no one reflects whether the first mouth sowed the seed of falsehood, as often happens, from a spirit of envy or a suspicious thought or from the pleasure some derive from lying — a pleasure not new-born, but inborn.

It is well that time brings all things to light, as even your own proverbs and sayings testify, in accordance with the design of nature which has so ordained things that nothing remains a secret for long, even though rumor has not spread it abroad. Rightly, then, is rumor alone for so long a time aware of the crimes of Christians; this is the witness you bring forth against us. What it has sometime or other spread abroad and over such an interval of time hardened into a matter of opinion, it has not yet been able to prove, so that I call upon the steadfastness of nature itself against those who assume that such accusations are credible. . . .

“THE CHIEF ACCUSATION AGAINST US”

10. “You do not worship the gods,” you say, “and you do not offer sacrifice for the emperors.” It follows that we do not offer sacrifices for others for the same reason that we do not do it even for ourselves — it follows immediately from our not worshipping the gods. Consequently, we are considered guilty of sacrilege and treason. This is the chief accusation against us — in fact, it is the whole case — and it certainly deserves investigation, unless presumption and injustice dictate the decision, the one despairing of the truth, the other refusing it.

We cease worshipping your gods when we find out that they are non-existent. This, then, is what you ought to demand, that we prove that those gods are non-existent and for that reason should not be worshipped, because they ought to be worshipped only if they were actually gods. Then, too, the Christians ought to be punished if the fact were established that those gods do exist whom they will not worship because they consider them non-existent. “But, for us,” you say, “the gods do exist.” We object and appeal from you to your conscience. Let this pass judgment on us, let this condemn us, if it can deny that all those gods of yours have been mere men. But, if it should deny this, it will be refuted by its own documents of ancient times from which it has learned of the gods. Testimony is furnished to this very day by the cities in which they were born, and the regions in which they left traces of something they had done and in which it is pointed out that they were buried. . . .

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12. . . . As for your gods, then, I see in them merely the names of certain men long dead. I hear their stories and recognize the sacred rituals arising from these myths. As for their statues, I find no fault with them, except that the material used in them matches that in common pots and household utensils. Or if you will, they exchange their destiny, as it were, with those same pots and pans by being consecrated. The free hand of art transforms them and treats them thereby with utmost insult, adding sacrilege in the very act of transformation. Actually, for us who are beaten because of these very gods, it could be a particular source of comfort in our punishments that they themselves, in order to become gods, undergo the same harsh treatment as ourselves. . . .

28. . . . We have come, then, to the second charge alleged against us, that of offending a more august majesty. You pay your obeisance to Caesar with greater fear and craftier timidity than to Olympian Jupiter himself. And rightly so, if you but knew it! For, what living man — whoever he may be — is not more powerful than any of your dead ones? But you do this, not for any logical reason, but out of regard for his manifest and perceptible power. In this point, too, it will be seen that you are lacking in religious feeling towards your gods, since you show more fear to a human lord. Finally, one is more ready among you to take a false oath by all the gods together than by the lone genius of Caesar. . . .

“WE PRAY FOR THE WELFARE OF THE EMPERORS”

30. For, in our case, we pray for the welfare of the emperors to the eternal God, the true God, the living God, whom even the emperors themselves prefer to have propitious to them before all other gods. They know who has given them power; they know — for they are men — who has given them life; they feel that He is the only God in whose power alone they are, commencing with whom they are second, after whom they stand first, who is before all and above all gods. . . . Looking up to Him, we Christians — with hands extended, because they are harmless, with head bare because we are not ashamed, without a prayer leader because we pray from the heart — constantly beseech Him on behalf of all emperors. We ask for them long life, undisturbed power, security at home, brave armies, a faithful Senate, an upright people, a peaceful world, and everything for which a man or a Caesar prays. . . .

31. Well, now, we have been flattering the emperor and have lied about the prayers we said just to escape rough treatment! That ingenious idea of yours is certainly of advantage to us, for you permit us to prove whatever we allege in our defense. If you think that we have no interest in the emperor's welfare, look into our literature, the Word of God. We ourselves do not keep it concealed; in fact, many a chance hands it over to outsiders. Learn from this literature that it has been enjoined upon us, that our charity may more and more abound, to pray to God even for our enemies, and to beg for blessings for our persecutors. Now, who are any greater enemies and persecutors of Christians than those on whose account we are charged with the crime of treason? But it is clearly and expressly said: “Pray for kings, for princes and for rulers, that all may be peaceful for you!” For, when the empire is shaken, and its other mem-

bers are shaken, we, too, although we are considered outsiders by the crowd, are naturally involved in some part of the disaster.

32. There is also another, even greater, obligation for us to pray for the emperors; yes, even for the continuance of the empire in general and for Roman interests. We realize that the tremendous force which is hanging over the whole world, and the very end of the world with its threat of dreadful afflictions, is arrested for a time by the continued existence of the Roman Empire. This event we have no desire to experience, and, in praying that it may be deferred, we favor the continuance of Rome. . . .

"POLITICS AND PUBLIC SHOWS"

38. Accordingly, ought not this religion to be regarded with somewhat milder judgment among those societies which cannot legally exist? Its members commit no such crimes as are regularly feared from illegal associations. For, unless I am mistaken, the motive for prohibiting associations rests on the prudent care of public order, lest the state be split into parties, a situation which would easily disturb voting assemblies, council meetings, the Senate, mass meetings, and even public entertainments by the clash of rival interests, since by now men have even begun to make a business of their violence, offering it for sale at a price. But, for us who are indifferent to all burning desire for fame and honor, there is no need of banding together. There is nothing more unfamiliar to us than politics. There is only one state for all which we acknowledge — the universe.

Likewise, we renounce your public shows just as we do their origins which we know were begotten of superstition, while we are completely aloof from those matters with which they are concerned. Our tongues, our eyes, our ears have nothing to do with the madness of the circus, the shamelessness of the theater, the brutality of the arena, the vanity of the gymnasium. How, then, do we offend you? If we prefer different pleasures, if, in fine, we do not want to be amused, that is our loss — if loss there be — not yours. . . .

"THE PRACTICES OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH"

39. Now I myself will explain the practices of the Christian Church, that is, after having refuted the charges that they are evil, I myself will also point out that they are good. We form one body because of our religious convictions, and because of the divine origin of our way of life and the bond of common hope. We come together for a meeting and a congregation, in order to besiege God with prayers, like an army in battle formation. Such violence is pleasing to God. We pray, also, for the emperors, for their ministers and those in power, that their reign may continue, that the state may be in peace, and that the end of the world may be postponed. We assemble for the consideration of the Holy Scriptures, [to see] if the circumstances of the present times demand that we look ahead or reflect. Certainly, we nourish our faith with holy conversation, we uplift our hope, we strengthen our trust, intensifying our discipline at the same time by the inculcation of moral precepts. At the same occasion, there are words of encouragement, of correction, and holy censure. Then, too, judg-

ment is passed in the presence of the assembly. If anyone prays in assembly, who have been of character. For

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ment is passed which is very impressive, as it is before men who are certain of the presence of God, and it is a deeply affecting foretaste of the future judgment, if anyone has so sinned that he is dismissed from sharing a common prayer, assembly, and all holy intercourse. Certain approved elders preside, men who have obtained this honor not by money, but by the evidence of good character. For, nothing that pertains to God is to be had for money.

Even if there is some kind of treasury, it is not accumulated from a high initiation fee as if the religion were something bought and paid for. Each man deposits a small amount on a certain day of the month or whenever he wishes, and only on condition that he is willing and able to do so. No one is forced; each makes his contribution voluntarily. These are, so to speak, the deposits of piety. The money therefrom is spent not for banquets or drinking parties or good-for-nothing eating houses, but for the support and burial of the poor, for children who are without their parents and means of subsistence, for aged men who are confined to the house; likewise, for shipwrecked sailors, and for any in the mines, on islands or in prisons. Provided only it be for the sake of fellowship with God, they become entitled to loving and protective care for their confession. The practice of such a special love brands us in the eyes of some. "See," they say, "how they love one another" (for they hate one another), "and how ready they are to die for each other." (They themselves would be more ready to kill each other.)

Over the fact that we call ourselves brothers, they fall into a rage — for no other reason, I suppose, than because among them every term of kinship is only a hypocritical pretense of affection. But, we are your brothers, too, according to the law of nature, our common mother, although you are hardly men since you are evil brothers. But, with how much more right are they called brothers and considered such who have acknowledged one father, God, who have drunk one spirit of holiness, who in fear and wonder have come forth from the one womb of their common ignorance to the one light of truth! Perhaps this is why we are considered less legitimate brothers, because no tragic drama has our brotherhood as its theme, or because we are brothers who use the same family substance which, among you, as a rule, destroys brotherhood.

So, we who are united in mind and soul have no hesitation about sharing what we have. Everything is in common among us — except our wives. . . .

Why wonder, then, if such dear friends take their meals together? You attack our modest repasts — apart from saying that they are disgraced by crimes — as being extravagant. . . .

Our repast, by its very name, indicates its purpose. It is called by a name which to the Greeks means "love." Whatever it costs, it is gain to incur expense in the name of piety, since by this refreshment we comfort the needy, not as, among you, parasites contend for the glory of reducing their liberty to slavery for the price of filling their belly amidst insults, but as, before God, greater consideration is given to those of lower station. If the motive of our repast is honorable, then on the basis of that motive appraise the entire procedure of our discipline. What concerns the duty of religion tolerates no vulgarity, no immorality. No one sits down to table without first partaking of a prayer

to God. They eat as much as those who are hungry take; they drink as much as temperate people need. They satisfy themselves as men who remember that they must worship God even throughout the night; they converse as men who know that the Lord is listening. After this, the hands are washed and lamps are lit, and each one, according to his ability to do so, reads the Holy Scriptures or is invited into the center to sing a hymn to God. This is the test of how much he has drunk. Similarly, prayer puts an end to the meal. From here they depart, not to unite in bands for murder, or to run around in gangs, or for stealthy attacks of lewdness, but to observe the same regard for modesty and chastity as people do who have partaken not only of a repast but of a rule of life.

Such is the gathering of Christians. There is no question about it — it deserves to be called illegal, provided it is like those which are illegal; it deserves to be condemned, if any complaint is lodged against it on the same ground that complaints are made about other secret societies. But, for whose destruction have we ever held a meeting? We are the same when assembled as when separate; we are collectively the same as we are individually, doing no one any injury, causing no one any harm. When men who are upright and good assemble, when the pious and virtuous gather together, the meeting should be called not a secret society but a senate.

40. On the other hand, those men deserve the name of a secret society who band together in hatred of good and virtuous men, who cry out for the blood of the innocent, at the same time offering as a justification of their hatred the idle plea that they consider that the Christians are the cause of every public calamity and every misfortune of the people. If the Tiber rises as high as the city walls, if the Nile does not rise to the fields, if the weather will not change, if there is an earthquake, a famine, a plague — straightway the cry is heard: "Toss the Christians to the lion!" So many of them for just one beast?

56

The Reforms of Diocletian

*"By whose virtue and foreseeing care
all is being reshaped for the better"*

As we have seen, Augustus hoped that his settlement of Roman affairs would be permanent. It lasted for some two hundred years before collapsing in the third century and was perhaps as permanent as purely human institutions can

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