LACTANTIUS' REACTION TO CLASSICAL THOUGHT

STEPHEN CASEY

THE DIVINE INSTITUTES OF LACTANTIUS: A CHRISTIAN REACTION TO CLASSICAL THOUGHT

BY

Stephen Charles Casey

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Department of Classics,
McGill University,
Montreal.

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INTRODUCTION

In the early centuries of Christianity every Christian writer even from New Testament times attempted in his own way to come to terms with the apparent opposition inherent in the confrontation of Christianity and classical thought. The inspired word of God in Sacred Scripture revealed to man the way, the truth and the life of his salvation, to which he had no access except through this revelation which was to be gained only through faith. What need, then, was there that man possessing this faith should turn to pagan thought? Speculation, no matter how deeply concerned with the quest for truth, could add nothing to what God had already revealed. Had not Paul abrogated philosophy as a gateway to salvation when he declared: "Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?"[1] Yet the same Paul, addressing the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers in the Areopagus, presented Christian belief to them as the complete realization of all their speculations and the fulfilment of all their hopes, as the full answer to their incessant quest for truth and the true object of their mute worship. In the following four centuries Christian writers recognized and tried to solve

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[1] I Corinthians 1, 20.

the problem arising from these two contrary positions, namely the insistence, on the one hand, on the transcendence of faith in Christ and its unattainability by human reason, and on the other, the insistence on the possibility and even desirability of employing human speculation in the context of that transcendent faith.

With the conversion to Christianity in the second century of an increasing number of educated pagans, this problem became more sharply focused. Many of these converts, like Tertullian in the West and Tatian in the East, reacted violently, maintaining that any dialogue between the two cultures was impossible.[2] Others, however, like Origen in the East and, to some extent, Minucius Felix in the West, felt that a dialogue was not only possible but also desirable. To this group belonged L. Caecilius Firmianus Lactantius, native of North Africa, Latin rhetorician to the Emperor Diocletian, convert to Christianity.

There were several diverse factors that influenced Lactantius when he began his apologetic writing in the closing years of the third century. The implacable opposition of many

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[2] "Viderint, qui stoicum et platonicum et dialecticum Christianismum protulerunt. Nobis curiositate opus non est, post Christum Jesum; nec inquisitione, post Evangelium. Cum credimus, nihil desideramus ultra credere." Tertullian, Praescr. 7 (PL 2, 20B-21A).

Western apologists; the scorn of educated pagans for the simple style and naive doctrine of Christian literary works; the dearth of trained Christian writers - all militated against the reconciliation of the two cultures. Nevertheless, several factors favoured and even precipitated this reconciliation. The almost universal interest of contemporary pagans in religion; the increase in numbers of educated Christian converts; and more immediately, the presence of continuous persecutions, both physical and literary, against the Christians - all gave rise to the necessity of an articulate and comprehensive Christian apology.

After his conversion to Christianity Lactantius felt constrained to assume this apologetic role and to answer the charges contained in the polemical works of paganism. This he planned to accomplish but, inspired with a broader vision, he determined to do more. After a preliminary apologetic work on the providence of God, Lactantius set to work on a treatise that was designed not only to refute the errors of pagan polytheism and philosophy but also for the first time to present a synthesis of the whole of Christian doctrine. His purpose was to appeal to the educated pagan of his day by employing the style and arguments, not of Sacred Scripture, but of the classical authors of Greece and Rome. In this way he hoped to refute the errors of paganism, and by the very use

of the same classical authors to construct his own synthesis of Christian doctrine, thus incorporating into the Christian context the truths discovered in the philosophy of paganism.

After an introductory chapter on the life, times and works of Lactantius, this paper will trace in Chapter II the history of the confrontation of classical thought and Christianity. It will attempt to show the initial meeting in the writings of Paul and John in the New Testament, then proceed to indicate the reaction to this meeting of the Latin apologists who influenced Lactantius, and finish with an outline of the reaction of Lactantius himself in his major work, the Divine Institutes. The following two chapters, which encompass the first three books of this work, will deal with Lactantius' negative reaction to paganism. After a short introduction on the state of religion in Greece and Rome, Chapter III will consider Lactantius' refutation of polytheism by an appeal to the arguments of reason and the authority of the classical authors, and then it will consider his double explanation of the origin of paganism. Chapter IV will be concerned with Lactantius' criticism of philosophy and some of its problems, in the order he treated them, particularly in the schools of Epicureanism, Platonism and Stoicism, and finally it will treat the influence exercised by Cicero and Seneca. Chapter V will outline Lactantius' synthesis of Christian

philosophic and dogmatic doctrine. Drawn from the final four books of the Divine Institutes and constituting the pars construens of his work, it will consider under the three themes of God, Man and the Universe not only the signal debt Lactantius owed to pagan philosophy for the substance of his thought, but more importantly his positive reaction to that philosophy by its assimilation into the Christian context.

CHAPTER I

LIFE, TIMES AND WORKS OF LACTANTIUS

On a fertile plateau in Algeria, some fifty miles from the Mediterranean Sea, lies the city of Constantine, a departmental capital of northeastern Algeria. Situated above a deep gorge of the Rhumel River, this city of 100,000 inhabitants is the commercial and farm centre of the region. On this same site rose the ancient town of Cirta. Destroyed in 311 A.D. in the struggle that preceded the accession of Constantine, it was rebuilt by the Emperor himself, and to this day, it bears the name he assigned to it. It was in the region of this town that about 250 A.D. Lactantius was born.[1] Little is known of his youth except that he studied rhetoric under Arnobius[2] in Sicca-Veneria--the present-day Keff--one hundred miles to the south-east.

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[1] cf. P. Monceaux, Histoire Littéraire de l'Afrique Chrétienne (3 vols.; Paris: 1905), III, 289. Amann, however, contends that Lactantius' birth date is only conjecture, but finally making a judgment from Lactantius' works, he writes: "Comme la floraison de notre écrivain se place dans les premières années du IV^{e} siècle, it doit être né vers 260. E. Amann, "Lactance," Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique VIII.2 (Paris: 1925), col. 2425.

[2] Jerome, De Viris Inlustribus LXXX in Opera Omnia Lactanti, ed. S. Brandt and G. Laubmann (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, vols. XIX and XXVII, Vienna: 1890-1897), XXVII, Pars II, Fasciculus I, 1961-2.

Cirta fulfilled mainly the same function in Lactantius' time as it does today. It was a capital, of Numidia, which had only recently become a Roman province at the beginning of the third century, and it was, as now, an important market and industrial centre. Whereas in the first century the Romans had been interested in this region as a granary, with the advent of the large estates in the second century, wheat had taken second place to the olive and vine until the latter became the province's chief source of wealth.[3]

The towns of Africa were large and cosmopolitan and by the end of the second century the country had been well Romanized. Latin, and even Greek, were spoken freely in the towns along with the native Punic and Libyan. The old indigenous pagan religion had become eclectic and had assimilated the Roman deities, but it had at the same time retained many of the local tutelary deities. In the meanwhile, the Christians at this period were enjoying an unprecendented peace. In 260 Gallienus proclaimed an edict of toleration which put an end to the long and bloody persecution of Valerian. For the next forty years, the African Christian church was at peace: churches

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[3]Juvenal (Satires V. 86-91) had complained in the first century that Numidia's oil had a strong taste and odor. The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. XI, the Imperial Peace (1936), p. 485.

were restored, property loss was recompensed, liberty of action was permitted,[4] and, it may be noted, the first thirty of this span of forty years corresponds precisely to the time of the youth and early manhood of the pagan Lactantius.[5]

At this time there was a marked movement of the rural population from the countryside to the towns. The natives were anxious to move to the towns not only to obtain an easier way of life but also to pursue learning.[6] The schools of Carthage, some 200 miles away, were famous, and those of Cirta must have been adequate. Juvenal had termed Africa, "nutricula causidicorum."[7] One of the best classical writers of the second century, Fronto, was born in Cirta. Septimius Severus, grandfather to the future emperor, was born in Africa; as were Apuleius and Hadrian's great jurist, Salvius Julianus. So too probably were Florus and perhaps Aulus Gellius. In the reign of Titus, an inhabitant of Cirta became consul. It was in the

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[4] Monceaux, op. cit., p. 3.

[5] The reaction of this classical pagan to Christian thought is indicated in his later Christian writings, e.g., the Divine Institutes, V, 4, where he acknowledges the influence of two great African Christian writers, Tertullian and Cyprian.

[6] The natives originally were Berbers, and, at this time, were probably not negroid. Cam. Anc. Hist., vol. xi, p. 481.

[7] Juvenal, Satires VII, 148-149, Cam. Anc. Hist., vol. xi, p. 491.

third century, however, that this culture began to flourish most vigorously, namely in the Christian literature of the West, and it is Africa which leads the field.

Lactantius undoubtedly received his early education in Cirta. This would have been the standard training in grammar that persisted for many centuries throughout the Empire. The litterator took the child at seven and instructed him in the elements of reading, writing, calculation and especially in the exercise of memory through the learning of proverbs and selections from good literature.[8] At the age of twelve the boy went on to the grammaticus for further training in grammar, but particularly for study of the poets. Precedence was given to Homer, then to Hesiod and the dramatists, especially Euripides and Menander.[9] Vergil had priority among the Latin poets. Form in all its aspects was carefully studied, and imitation stressed, but above all, a general education was imparted in philosophy, astronomy, history and music, primarily through a study of the poets.

At sixteen a boy was ready for the study of rhetoric.

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[8]G. Ellspermann, The Attitude of the Early Christian Latin Writers Toward Pagan Literature and Learning, (Washington: 1949), p. 4.

[9]M. Laistner, Christianity and Pagan Culture, (Cornell: 1951), p. 11.

Probably at this age, Lactantius, who must have been a promising student, journeyed to Sicca-Veneria to study under the pagan rhetorician, Arnobius. The purpose of rhetoric was to equip boys for the vocation of public life in forensic and deliberative oratory. This was the aim of Roman education, the aim of Roman life, the art and practice of public speaking. Basically, the boy studied the great orators and historians primarily for their style. Then, as practice, he was assigned written exercises, discourses, panegyrics, etc., to make his faculties supple. The crown of his work was the declamation, classed as suasoriae, in which a particular course of action was debated, and controversiae, in which some point was affirmed or denied. Form was paramount, content, secondary. Often the declamations were direct imitations of classic prototypes, e.g., Socrates defends himself before his judges or Demosthenes counsels the Athenians to make war on Philip of Macedon. And the skilled sophist prided himself on arguing with equal force on both sides. Consequently, there was much artificiality and at times sterility, but the resulting nimbleness of mind, versatility of treatment and polish of speech fully justified the method.[10]

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[10] "When he left the rhetor, the young man had a good knowledge of some at least of the great authors of the past; he had been trained to express himself correctly and even elegantly in both speech and writing; and, concurrently, he had been trained to exchange ideas and maintain an argument with his fellows." Ibid., p. 16.

In this training, however, the inculcation of moral conduct was never lost sight of. All rhetoricians from Isocrates to Quintilian insisted on the priority of moral training and deprecated any belittling of its importance. As there were no Christian schools until the fifth century,[11] all students, pagan and Christian alike, underwent the same classical training, and it is quite clear that even the pagans who later professed Christianity did not abandon the intellectual disciplines acquired in the schools of the Empire.

After his studies with Arnobius, Lactantius took up the teaching of rhetoric and he must have enjoyed considerable success. Monceaux maintains: "... il (Lactance) dut recevoir une instruction très complète, et briller dans les écoles de rhéteurs."[12] Lactantius, himself, however, disparages his ability and acknowledges that he never appeared in the forum.[13] However, his reputation reached Rome, and towards 290, Diocletian declared his appointment as Professor of Latin Rhetoric in Nicomedia, his winter residence since 285. It is difficult to

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[11]Ellspermann, op. cit., p. 4.

[12]Monceaux, op. cit., p. 289.

[13]"Equidem tametsi operam dederim, ut quantulamque dicendi assequerer ... ne attigerim quidem." Div. Inst., III, 13.

say what were the immediate reasons for Diocletian's choice. Perhaps it was a family connection at court, perhaps a chance meeting, perhaps the letter of a Roman official, but more generally, it was probably the great reputation of the African masters for Latin style.[14] In any event, Lactantius left his native shores and began the arduous, thousand mile sea-voyage to Nicomedia, composing on his journey a poem entitled, Hodoeporicum, not now extant, an itinerary in dactylic hexameters.

Nicomedia, the capital of Bithynia in the Roman province of Pontus et Bithynia, was situated a few miles from the Propontis and thirty-five miles from Byzantium. From 27 B.C. to 165 A.D. it had been a proconsular province but in the latter year it had fallen under imperial control. The population at this time was largely Greek and Greek-speaking, but as early as Caesar's time, Roman colonists had been dispatched to increase the population depleted by the Mithridatic War. The climate of the region was salubrious, the soil fertile. Luxurious palaces and temples dotted the city. There was a temple of imperial cult dedicated to Rome and Augusta, but it was strangely entitled, 'the great common temple of the Mysteries.' Among the inhabitants, however, there existed many bitter

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[14]Monceaux, op. cit., p. 290.

factions. As early as Pliny's governorship in 111, Trajan had forbidden the formation of a fifty-man fire department for fear that this might form a nucleus dangerous to the peace of the province.[15] A great cleavage existed between rich and poor, and animosities were bitter among religious groups. There were many Christians in the city. Nicomedia had probably been evangelized by St. Peter, and it is said to have been very Christian at the beginning of the second century.[16]

Lactantius settled into this foreign milieu and began to teach Latin rhetoric. He was, however, unsuccessful from the start as he admits in his own words as quoted above.[17] Despite his elegant and balanced prose, Lactantius was probably a rhetorician of mediocre talent. At home in his youth he undoubtedly had made more of an impression, but here at a mature age among Greek strangers it was another matter. Besides, his pupils and their parents were predominantly Greek, admirers no doubt of Hellenism, with a faulty knowledge of Latin. Tertullian, in his position, would unquestionably have spoken Greek, as he often had at Carthage,[18] and by the dynamic force

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[15]Pliny. Ep. X, 33(42) and 34(43).

[16]E. Amann, The Church of the Early Centuries, trans. by E. Raybould (London: 1930), p. 18.

[17]Page 4. Monceau comments: "Chez un ancien rhéteur, même chrétien, ce langage est l'aveu d'un insuccès." Op. cit., p. 291.

[18]Ibid., p. 292.

of his personality, would have gathered a following around him. Lactantius, however, was no orator, and he probably knew little Greek. More than once, he regretted leaving his native Africa. He reproached the Greek town for its pandering to polytheism, its immodesty.[19] Small wonder that he had few pupils. He had a few, nevertheless, and to one, Demetrianus, he gratefully dedicated several books. This failure undoubtedly proved to be a blessing because, as Jerome cryptically puts it: "Penuria discipulorum ob graecam videlicet civitatem ad scribendum se contulit."[20] It is probably to Lactantius' failure as a rhetorician that he owes his reputation as a writer inasmuch as in his enforced leisure he consoled himself with the composition of his apologetic works.

Almost certainly Lactantius became a Christian at Nicomedia, probably before the persecution of Diocletian. He had long been a pagan and his itinerant poem, the Hodoeporicum, scarcely suggests the Christian moralist. Inasmuch as he was a Christian at the outset of the Diocletian persecution in Feb. 303,[21] his conversion took place between the years 290 and 303.

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[19] The Divine Institutes I, 15. Opera Omnia Lantanti, Pars I. Henceforth, The Divine Institutes will be abbreviated as Div. Inst. All quotations from the works of Lactantius, and all enumerations are taken from the Brandt-Laubmann edition of Lactantius.

[20] Jerome, De Viris Inlustribus LXXX.

[21] Div. Inst., V, 2, 2.

Monceaux assigns three reasons for his decision: his reflection on the contradictions of the philosophers; his personal need of a moral life; and a disillusionment with rhetoric.[22] In keeping with his equable temperament, Lactantius probably reached this decision gradually and quietly. Another indication of this is the graduated sense of Christianity in his works: the natural theology of the De Opificio Dei, his first work as a Christian, hardly resembles the Christian theology of the Epitome and the De Ira Dei, his last works.[23] Once convinced of the truth of Christianity, unlike Constantine, Lactantius was quickly baptized, and the conviction and joy of his conversion are manifest in all his works.

He continued to teach after his baptism, but the violent persecution of Diocletian had shattered his peace. Though he did not suffer physically, Lactantius endured hard times, lacking even the necessities of life. He watched with increasing dismay the persecution of his fellow Christians and he was particularly horrified at the burning of the church of Nicomedia. It is unknown where he sojourned for the next six years; possibly it was North Africa, his homeland, where the persecution ceased earlier.[24] In any case, Lactantius probably returned to

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[22] Monceaux, op. cit., p. 292.

[23] R. Pichon, Lactance (Paris: 1901), p. 4.

[24] Amann, D.T.C., col. 2425.

Nicomedia with Galerius' edict of tolerance in 311; he was certainly there for the great declaration of religious freedom, the Edict of Milan, in 313.[25]

With his victory over Maxentius in October 312, Constantine gained with Licinius a dual control of the Empire. Lactantius had known him when Constantine had been held hostage for several years in Nicomedia, and now the Emperor recalled his old friend to favour by appointing him Latin tutor to his eldest son, Crispus. This was probably in 316 - Crispus was born about 300 - but the tutorship lasted only four years because Crispus was completely engaged in military campaigns from 320 to his untimely death in 326. During these years, Lactantius, now in extrema senectute,[26] travelled with Crispus and Constantine in the latter's campaigns. After he completed this task, nothing certain is known of him. He probably died at Trèves[27] but this is conjecture. The date is unknown.

The full name of Lactantius generally reads, L. Caecilius Firmianus Lactantius. There has been much dispute about each one of these names, except the 'L', which all admit, of course, is Lucius, his first or given name. On his second

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[25] De Mortibus Persecutorum, 18, 10-11.

[26] Jerome, De Viris Inlustribus LXXX.

[27] P. deLabriolle, Literature of Christianity from Tertullian to Boethius, trans. by H. Wilson, (New York: 1925), p. 202.

name, manuscripts vary between Caecilius and Celius, but the former is generally used and is probably correct.[28] The name Firmianus, has given rise to speculation that Lactantius was born in Firmum in Piceno and that consequently he was not an African at all but an Italian. In such a case, the name would have been Firmanus and not Firmianus. In any event, all the known facts of Lactantius' youth, his oratorical education, his first works and even his familiar name, Lactantius, point to an African birth.[29] This last name, Lactantius, is no less than a familiar or favorite appellation, a nickname. It was first indicated in Jerome's life of the author,[30] and it too has inspired fervid speculation through the years. All that can be said with certitude is that the usage of this name has been attested to from the epitaph of a contemporary pagan found in Numidia, Lactantius' native province.

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"In the third century the Roman Empire had faced disintegration. It survived thanks to the strenuous efforts at

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[28] Ibid., p. 200.

[29] Monceaux, op. cit., p. 287.

[30] Jerome, De Viris Inlustribus LXXX.

reconstruction which are connected with the names of Claudius Gothicus, Diocletian and Constantine. The result was an organization founded upon compulsion."[31] For reasons not entirely clear, the economy based on money had collapsed; as a solution Constantine introduced the gold solidi, which became the standard for the next 800 years. The middle-class bourgeoisie, whose decline was in direct proportion to the prosperity of the few great landowners, emerged from the crisis impoverished and demoralized. Trade, which was sluggish, seems to have been concentrated in the hands of small minorities of Syrians and Jews. Civil servants were badly paid, and the barbarian invasions and civil wars had produced a shortage of manpower, and excessive taxation. The people began to drift away from the land, but the government retaliated by binding them to it. As the army was short of the 500,000 men required, it recruited among the barbarians, especially the Germans and Sarmatians, and uneconomically settled them throughout the Empire. The cost of operating two extravagant capitals in Rome and Constantinople was a further drain on the treasury.

Though by and large the lot of the people was difficult under these harsh measures, conditions ameliorated as the third century closed. Even in hard times, life was not

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[31] A. Momigliano, The Conflict Between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century, ed. A. Momigliano, (Oxford: 1963), p.7.

without its cheerful aspects. Lavish sums were spent by all emperors, pagan and Christian alike, on the circus, theatre, and athletic and gladiatorial shows for the amusement of the populace. With the establishment of Christianity as the state religion, the Christian bishops generally denounced these spectacles because of their pagan and moral connotations, but gladiatorial shows were not suppressed until 399, and despite ecclesiastical disapproval, the other spectacles continued with unabated enthusiasm.[32]

Christianity was a new religion not only in point of time but also in terms of character and spirit. It possessed the historical and personal focal point of the person of Jesus Christ, which was an inestimable advantage over all rival religions. The historical figure became the focal-point, the rallying ground for the intensive aspirations, the vast energies of the whole Graeco-Roman world. The move towards monotheism seen even in the syncretism of the time, the desire for a clear-cut and feasible moral code, the yearning for purification and redemption, all were realized in the teachings and life of Jesus Christ. Christianity was new too in the sense that it was unburdened by the past. Unlike other cults, it was hampered by no legalism, like the Jews; no necessity to allegorize absurd

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[32]Laistner, op. cit., p. 7-8.

myths, like the Stoics; no need to find new explanations for ancient, grotesque rites, like the Egyptians. Yet, despite its uniqueness and independence, Christianity borrowed the best from its milieu. It used and assimilated in varying degrees the ambient religious language, Jewish prophetism, Stoic ethics, Platonic philosophy, the authority of the Old Testament, the mysticism of the mystery religions and Neo-Platonism; finally it capitalized on the fervent religious spirit of the time and that extraordinary vehicle of communication, the koiné. It survived the moral crisis that occurred when the Parousia was delayed, and after early denouncing the exclusivism of Judaic Christianity, it evolved mainly through Paul's efforts into a sect of universal appeal. With great enthusiasm it met the forces of the old world in the social, spiritual, intellectual and political arenas, and eventually won in all four.[33]

Contrary to what is familiarly believed, the earliest Christians were not exclusively recruited from among the slaves and poorest classes.[34] Many possessed at least a modest competence, as is seen from the documents of their almsgiving. However, at least from Trajan's time, Christians were officially debarred from careers in the imperial or even in the municipal

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[33]S. Angus, The Religious Quests of the Graeco-Roman World (New York: 1929), pp. 93-106.

[34]Laistner, op. cit., p. 26.

services, a prohibition not maintained in practice. By and large, however, the bulk of the Christian enrolment came from the lower and middle classes, the manual workers and clerks, the shopkeepers and merchants. As yet, the higher classes generally despised the new sect. Their odium towards the barbaric style of the Christian sacred books, their reverence for the ancient traditions dearly gained through the aegis of their gods, were such that "the old senatorial families certainly remained predominantly pagan down to the latter part of the fourth century."[35]

Christianity was far stronger in the Greek-speaking East than in the West. It had early sent its missionaries to the West, but they had confined themselves largely to the Greek-speaking communities in the larger urban areas. In fact, the Roman church continued to use Greek until the third century, and perhaps even later.[36] Latin-speaking Christianity first emerged at Carthage at the end of the second century, and spread quickly so that the African Christian church towards the end of the third century became dominant even in the rural areas.[37] Thus, Africa and Egypt proved an exception in this

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[35]A.H.M. Jones, essay in The Conflict Between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century, ed. A. Momigliano, (Oxford: 1963), p. 21.

[36]Ibid., p. 17.

[37]This is the period of Lactantius' African days, his youth and early manhood.

regard inasmuch as the Western church was generally urban. Cleavage between town and country, the conservatism of the peasantry contributed to the country folk remaining pagani. On the other hand, in Africa, where at this time the great Cyprian had been succeeded by Lucianus as bishop of Carthage, the rustics proved to be staunch Christians. This is illustrated by their courageous stand in the Great Persecution of Diocletian, though the ferocity of that short-lived persecution did not attain the same intensity in the West as in the East.

In the third century, the Christian church had a three-fold organization, hierarchy, clergy and laymen. In apostolic times, one man had often exercised two functions, that of πρεσβύτερος, elder or priest, and that of ἐπίσκοπος, overseer or bishop, but gradually these responsibilities were vested in different persons. Carthage reigned as the mother church of Africa; Alexandria, of Egypt; Caeserea, of Palestine; Antioch, of Syria; and Rome, of Italy, but each church exercised considerable autonomy.[38] Preaching was a vital part of church life and drew from the Old and New Testament alike. Many of Origen's homilies delivered to the community at Caeserea are

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[38]"In the middle of the third century each one of the local churches with its bishop, its priests, deacons and inferior ministers formed a little centre of Christian life which, in case of necessity, sufficed to itself." E. Amann, The Church of the Early Christians, p. 56.

still preserved. The initiation rite, the Sacrament of Baptism was prepared for assiduously, and was reserved for adults. The Mass, the Eucharistic service, was much the same as it is today. Penances were severe, and at times the three capital sins, homicide, adultery and idolatry were unforgiven.

From apostolic times the life of the church had been buffeted and harassed by the doctrinal strifes of heresy. Though Lactantius always considered himself an orthodox Christian, his doctrines were certainly influenced by the swirl of conflicting positions, and he was occasionally tinged with them. Consequently, a short survey may be in order, of the prominent heresies of the time that more or less obviously influenced Lactantius when he assumed his apologetic rôle against the pagans. The most potent heresy of the early church, unquestionably, was Gnosticism. It sought to superimpose on the simplicity of the evangelical teaching a superior science or gnosis, and it attempted to expound the supposed more esoteric doctrines of Christianity. Gnosticism had begun in apostolic times; indeed, Paul in Ephesians, and Jude and Peter had warned against it in their epistles. It was also dualistic - Lactantius was a dualist - but with a kind of idée fixe on evil, above which their superior knowledge claimed to raise the faithful.

The most significant doctrinal heresy to influence Lactantius, however, was Trinitarianism. All Christians, of

course, believed that Christ was God, or at least god-like; but how was He God, as well as the Father and the Holy Spirit? At one end of the spectrum stood the Monarchists: there was no Trinity of Persons; at the other were the Tritheists: there were three Gods. The Adoptionists asserted that Christ became God. First He was the λόγος ἐνδιάθετος and then became the expressed λόγος προφορικός -- Stoic terms and ideas--in both cases inferior to the Father. Christ was a necessary intermediary between the Father and mankind, a God of second rank. So held Justin, Tertullian, Origen, Novatian - and Lactantius. Then there were the Modalists who claimed that the Father as creator, the Son as redeemer, were modalities of God. Finally, Arius denied Christ's divinity. Christ was a celestial creature, and there was a time when the Word did not exist - the famous ἦν ποτε ὅτε οὐκ ἦν. He was God because He created all, but He was God imperfectly. God adopted Him, but He did not participate in the divine nature. These controversies, in which the populace as well as the theologians, were engulfed emotionally, if not intellectually, occurred before the Council of Nicea in 325 - indeed they precipitated it - but the clarification effected there was probably lost on Lactantius who, if alive at all, had been in extrema senectute in 316.[39]

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[39]Ibid., pp. 77-1-5

The most formidable obstacle to the propagation of Christianity in the Empire was the persistent and obstinate resistance of the Roman government. "There can be no exaggeration in designing the first three centuries of Christian history as an era of persecution."[40] In Lactantius' early years as a pagan in Cirta, the African church enjoyed an uncommon period of peace, but shortly after his conversion in the East, the so-called Great Persecution of Diocletian erupted throughout the Empire. Lactantius suffered mentally and financially. This is evident from his works which contain frequent references to this anguishing event. It is with a shrill cry of triumph that he celebrates the victory of Christianity, dedicating an entire book, the De Mortibus Persecutorum, to the vindication of divine justice in the punishment of the long line of persecuting emperors.

What basically were the causes of the persecutions? The slightest opposition was enought to provoke scoundrels like Nero and Domitian, but how does one explain persecutions under just rulers like Marcus Aurelius and Diocletian? The more strongly an emperor believed in the traditions of Rome, the more apt he was to persecute cults which threatened to overthrow the old forms of worship and traditions. Sacrifice to

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[40] Ibid., p. 32.

the emperor came to symbolize reverence for the ancient traditions in Rome's glorious past. Sceptics like Hadrian and Commodus, however, did not persecute the Christians. The eastern cults of Isis, Serapis and Mithra were allowed freedom of practice, but the adherents of these cults did not scruple to offer incense to the emperor, as no Christian would do. Exclusiveness, lack of participation in the affairs of government, reports of odious rites and clandestine meetings - all contributed to increase the hostility of the authorities.

In the latter part of the first century, the persecutions were spontaneous, but at the beginning of the second the attacks against the Christians were regulated and restrained by imperial rescript. This procedure continued until the end of the Antonines. The spontaneous persecutions were those permitted by individual Roman officials, usually under the pressure of the local populace. These officials were acting through no special decree but merely through legal custom. Under Nero's persecution which was spontaneous, thousands of Christians, mostly slaves and freedmen, were herded together and murdered without trial. Legal proceedings probably began under the Flavians but there was greater justice under the Antonines. Trajan's edict to Pliny is as famous as it is clear-cut: don't search out the Christians, but if they are accused and found guilty, they must be punished. False denunciations

are to be guarded against, and pardon is to be granted to apostates. Later in 125 Hadrian forbade the magistrates to proceed ex officio against Christians, or to accept the accusations of the mob.

Planned and official persecutions began under Severus in 201 by means of imperial edict, but the persecutions under him, Maximian, Decius and Valerian, though violent, were short-lived. With Gallienus in 260 came the forty-year calm when the church "... assumes within the Roman Empire her characteristic physiognomy and fixes the broad lines of her organization."[41] In 303 began Diocletian's Great Persecution, the last great effort made by official paganism against the Christian church. A good administrator, Diocletian was a firm adherent of the old idea of the religious mission of the state, and egged on by Galerius, his eastern rival, he began with the army, ordering all ranks to sacrifice to the gods on pain of expulsion. Later that same year, he ordered all churches to be razed and books burned, and Christians to sacrifice under pain of civil degradation. The death penalty was introduced for clergy who refused, and extended to all Christians in 304. The Christians endured incredible sufferings, especially in the mines, and thousands were put to death. The end came in

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[41] Ibid., p. 50

the West in 307, and in the East in 308. After Constantine's vision and victory over Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge in October, 312, he published with Licinius the Edict of Milan in August, 313, which recognized a divinity and allowed freedom of religion to all.[42]

When Licinius began to persecute Christians in the East, probably through jealousy of his rival, Constantine rose up, and defeated and killed him in 323 to gain the full hegemony of the Empire. Lactantius had suffered in the persecution: he had witnessed the destruction of the church in Nicomedia on February 23, 303,[43] and the first edict posted the following day;[44] now, at its termination, he rejoiced, and congratulated the Emperor: "Suscepto imperio, Constantinus Augustus nihil egit prius quam Christianos cultui ac deo suo reddere. Haec fuit prima eius sanctio sanctae religionis restitutae."[45] The persecutions had failed, and now the political loyalty of

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[42]"The special character of this edict deserves notice. Emanating from two princes, of whom one was and would remain a pagan, while the other, Constantine, was not yet a Christian, this edict was founded on common justice and simple tolerance; a unique conception in the religious history of antiquity." Ibid., p. 112.

[43]Div. Inst., V. 22.

[44]De Mort. Pers., 13, 1.

[45]De Mort. Pers., 24, 9.

the Christians to the Emperor, which had really been the basic issue, was attested to not by sacrifice but by the simple prayer for the head of the state, for the ruling classes, and for the subjects of the Empire.[46]

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No Latin Christian work of distinction was written before the end of the second century. The majority of Christians had been Greek-speaking to this date; indeed the koiné was the lingua franca of the whole Mediterranean world. Earlier, Cicero had written: "Graeca leguntur in omnibus fere gentibus; latina suis finibus, exiguis sane, continentur";[47] even the Roman Emperors Claudian, Nero and Hadrian had been great Hellenists. Among the Christians, the Mass was conducted in Greek, as has been indicated, probably until the end of the third century in Rome. The early apologists, Justin and Irenaeus had written in Greek, and even the Latin Tertullian occasionally wrote and preached in Greek. The Scriptures were translated into Latin, however, at some time in the second century. Despite many Graecisms and Herbraisms, its style was

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[46]A. Alfoldi, The Conversion of Constantine and Pagan Rome (Oxford: 1948), p. 10.

[47]Pro Archia X, 23.

good, the translation, accurate and intelligible. Tertullian, writing at the end of the second century and early third, probably had a copy of the Latin Scripture, as well as the Greek, before him. Greek, however, did not suffer a sharp decline until the end of the third century, when Latin became the official language of the Christians of the West.[48]

None of Lactantius' three known works which he wrote as a pagan is extant. The first mentioned by Jerome[49] was entitled the Symposium, or Banquet, a favourite type of work in the schools, probably written in dialogue form like the Banquet of the Seven Wise Men.[50] Then Jerome mentions the Hodoeporicum, an itinerary in hexameter commemorating the voyage from Africa, probably written in Lactantius's first years in Nicomedia. Thirdly, a work entitled Grammaticus undoubtedly concerned itself with grammatical rules or metrics. Next came eight volumes of letters on a wide range of topics from philosophy to versification to geography. Two volumes--in which Lactantius denies the existence of the Holy Spirit--were dedicated to his friend, Demetrianus. Though the letters displayed considerable erudition, they failed in Lactantius' purpose of attempting to make learning more attractive. However, they perhaps fore-

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[48] deLabriolle, op. cit., p. 40.

[49] Jerome, De Viris Inlustribus LXXX.

[50] Monceaux, op. cit., p. 297.

shadow the technique of the later apologetic works, namely, the attempt to render the gospel message more attractive by clothing it in the style of the classical writers. Pope Damasus in a letter to Jerome pronounced the letters very wearisome and irrelevant: "Non libenter lego, quia et plurimae epistulae ejus usque ad mille spatia versuum tenduntur et raro de nostro dogmate disputant."[51]

Jerome goes on to mention most of Lactantius' extant works, first De Ira Dei, which he terms pulcherrimum; the Divine Institutes, in seven books, and an Epitome in one; another book, De Persecutione--undoubtedly the De Mortibus Persecutorum--and still another, De Opificio Dei vel Formatione Hominis. Extant too and attributed to Lactantius by many manuscripts but not mentioned by Jerome are several fragments and poems, De Motibus Animi, a fragment of a dozen lines on the passions; De Resurrectione; De Passione Domini; and finally De Ave Phoenice. Most scholars reject the authenticity of the first three.[52] But not so with The Phoenix. It is a beautiful poem in eighty-five elegiac distychs telling of the life of the phoenix in the East, its coming to the West, its death there on a funeral pyre, and then its resurrection and return

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[51]Quoted by Amann, D.T.C., Col. 2433.

[52]e.g. Amann, D.T.C., Col. 2433-2434; Pichon, op. cit., p. 463.

to the East. Though the story is told in Herodotus, since Clement of Rome the phoenix in the Christian mind was seen to symbolize the Christian resurrection and even to guarantee it. Three manuscripts have it and two attribute it to Lactantius. Though Pichon is undecided,[53] most scholars accept its authenticity.[54]

From early times, perhaps from the fifth century, four of Lactantius' works were grouped into an apologetic series.[55] His first work, the De Opificio Dei, a one-volume treatise on the providence of God, is really a preface to the Divine Institutes and announces it.[56] Next, his central and major work, the Divine Institutes, attempts to refute both pagan religions and pagan philosophers in the first three books, then expose the true religion and the true wisdom of Christianity in the ensuing four. The De Ira Dei in one volume expands on a point which the title indicates and which was treated cursorily in the Divine Institutes.[57] Finally, the Epitome is an

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[53] Pichon, op. cit., p. 465.

[54] e.g. Brandt-Laubmann, Pars II, Fasc. I, p. 135 sq.; and Amann, D.T.C., Col. 2433: "La Latinité très classique du morceau, le développement de la pensée, les idées essentielles sont d'accord avec ce que nous trouvons dans Lactance."

[55] Amann, ibid., Col. 2426.

[56] De Opificio Dei, 15, 5-6.

[57] Div. Inst., II, 17, 5.

abridgement of all previous works, particularly the Divine Institutes. Written some time later, it is worked out with great care. These four apologetic works were written in this order and they expound in their ten books the whole system of Lactantius' thought to form what might be termed a corpus apologeticum.[58]

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[58]Monceaux, op. cit., p. 324. The only critical edition of the works of Lactantius was produced over a seven year period, from 1890 to 1897, by two German scholars, Samuel Brandt and George Laubmann. It contains Lactantius' extant and authentic works and was published in two parts, forming Vols. XIX and XXVII in the monumental series, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum. This series was begun in 1866 under the auspices of the Imperial Academy of Sciences in Vienna, and its initiators ambitiously planned to publish all Latin ecclesiastical writers to the seventh century inclusively. They laid down three simple principles: establishment of the text after examination as complete as possible of the authority of the manuscript; no exegetical notes except to indicate sources of the authority; detailed indices. Cf. de Labriolle, op. cit., p. 35.

Brandt distinguished in a lengthy introduction (cf. Pars I, p. xiii-lviv) five families of manuscripts, and over the centuries more than one hundred editions have been published. Cf. Monceaux, op. cit., p. 287, n. 2) The first edition of Lactantius, Editio Sublacensis, the editio princeps, appeared in 1465, and contained The Divine Institutions, De Ira Dei and De Opificio Dei. A flood of editions, some containing the Epitome and the De Ave Phoenice, appeared in the 15th and 16th century Renaissance, which greatly admired the purity of Lactantius' style. After 1679, editions of the De Mortibus Persecutorum appeared, and after 1712, the complete text of the Epitome. There was a gradual decrease over the next two centuries until, with the exception of Migne who included Lactantius' works in vols. 6 and 7 in his 217 Patrologia Latina, only two appeared in the 19th, the last being the Brandt-Laubmann edition of the 1890's.

Many editions of individual works, both in Latin and in translation, have appeared over the years. A good edition of the Epitome in Latin and English, was put out by H. Blakeney in 1950 in the SPCK series. The De Mortibus Persecutorum has

In the first apologetic work written after his conversion, Lactantius indicates in the De Opificio Dei his desire to instruct his fellow Christian philosophers, "philosophi sectae nostrae,"[59] so that they may become more learned and appear so in the eyes of their pagan counterparts who now hold them in disdain. His material purpose is to vindicate the providence of God against the philosophical schools who deny providence in man, his soul and body. Consequently, here, for the first time, Lactantius confronts the Greek philosophers, in this case, the Epicureans. Cicero had undertaken this task before,[60] but, claims Lactantius, he had not fully grasped the problem. Man is not degraded but he has the power of language and reason to distinguish him from the beast. His faculties are perfectly adapted to their end, and in his soul, which is from God, and body, man reveals a wise and powerful providence.

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[58] seen many editions especially in recent years because of its historical importance. Perhaps for not the same reason, no less than five editions were turned out in the 1920's and 1930's by Italians alone under the Fascist regime, and in 1938 two Russians chose to edit the sixth book of the Divine Institutes which is entitled De Vero Cultu. Cf. de Labriolle, op. cit., p. 35.

[59] ... aliquid extundam quo philosophi sectae nostrae quam tuemur instructiores doctioresque in posterum fiant, quamvis nunc male audiant castigenturque vulgo." De Opificio Dei, 1, 2.

[60] De Natura Deorum, II, 47; De Finibus, III, 17.

This is Lactantius' argument from finality to prove monotheism. The work was composed after the beginning of the persecution of 303 inasmuch as it contains several references to the persecution.[61] With the persecution raging round him, Lactantius takes up his apologetic work with calm imperturbability. He dedicates it to his faithful disciple, Demetrianus, for fear he might be contaminated in his important public office.[62] But it contains little Christian dogma and no Scripture. Yet, in employing an abundance of references to classical and profane authors, viz., Aristotle, Varro and especially Cicero, to prove from reason a theological position, in this case, the providence of God, Lactantius foreshadows an important method of the Divine Institutes.

Lactantius squarely confronts his pagan adversaries, both polytheist and philosopher, in the Divine Institutes.[63] His method, however, is not exclusively apologetic or negative. In Books I to III, pars destruens, as Amann calls it,[64] he refutes their errors, but from Books IV to VII, pars construens, he becomes constructive, positive, universal, exposing in a

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[61] De Opificio Dei, I, 1 and 7.

[62] De Opificio Dei, 1, 5-6.

[63] The date, purpose, plan, etc., of the Divine Institutes will be treated in chapter 2.

[64] Amann, D.T.C., Col. 2428.

kind of summa theologica et moralis the doctrines of the early Christian church. Some of these doctrines, naturally, are not expounded fully there. Consequently, as a kind of supplement, Lactantius wrote a one-volume treatise in twenty-two brief chapters on the anger of God, De Ira Dei, a notion very fundamental with Lactantius, which was announced in the Divine Institutes.[65] The Christian notion of God of the Old and New Testament certainly connoted an aspect of divine retribution. "And I will execute great vengeance upon them in fury," Ezekiel, 25, 7. The philosophers, however, e.g., Cicero,[66] but especially the Epicureans, assigned to God the attribute of impassibility, ἀπάθεια. A few early Christian writers, like Arnobius in his Christian writings, agreed, but most Christians rejected this and held to the biblical notion. Lactantius considers it the essence of religion, for without it there is no punishment for evil, no reward for good, indeed, no God. "Sine ira Deum credentes dissolvunt omnem religionem."[67] Further, the divine anger is pure at its source: it is a holy indignation. De Ira Dei was written in 310 or at the beginning

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[65] Div. Inst. II, 17, 4-5.

[66] "Num iratum timemus Iovem? Ad hoc quidem commune est omnium philosophorum ... numquam nec irasci Deum nocere." De Officiis, 111, 102, quoted in deLabriolle, op. cit., p. 212.

[67] De Opificio Dei, 22, 2.

of 311,[68] and it is the counterpart of the goodness of God in His Providence, expounded in the other works: if God is pleased with goodness, then He must be angry with wickedness. De Ira Dei is fundamental to Lactantius' theology inasmuch as it completes his notion of providence, and though merely a supplement to the Divine Institutes it is "the only monograph on that subject left by the ancients."[69]

The Epitome, the last of the apologetical works, is a compendium of all previous works, particularly the Divine Institutes. Written long after the latter treatise,[70] it differs only slightly in plan, development, argument and style, but in eliminating repetitions and multiple quotations, it is far more compact and consequently more readable. Lactantius mentions a date of writing, 300 years after Christ,[71] but this is, undoubtedly, in Monceaux's words, "un chiffre rond."[72] It is mentioned only by Jerome and is complete in only one manuscript, the reason probably being that readers went to the

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[68]Monceaux, op. cit., p. 304.

[69]H. Hagendahl, Latin Fathers and the Classics (Göteborg: 1958), p. 70.

[70]"Quamquam Divinarum Institutionum libri, quos iam pridem ad inlustrandam veritatem religionemque conscripsimus ..." Preface to the Epitome.

[71]Epit. 38, 1.

[72]Monceaux, op. cit., p. 305.

expanded doctrine in the Institutes. A point of interest is that Lactantius is more concerned with Plato here than in the larger works, and Pichon maintains that Lactantius promised a book on him.[73] The Epitome, then, is a skeleton of the Divine Institutes, and in carefully working over the same ground, Lactantius produced a kind of second edition, a popular edition, of his great central work.

The last of Lactantius's works, the De Mortibus Persecutorum in no wise resembles any other of his works, even the De Ira Dei which is a quiet dissertation on the lawfulness of divine anger, and for this reason, until recent times, it had long been considered spurious. It is a vigorous and, at times, violent setting forth of the effects of divine anger, the providence of an angry God wreaking vengeance on the wickedness of a long line of evil pagan emperors.[74] It demonstrates that, though normally he was coolly rational and persuasive, Lactantius was not incapable of violence. With an almost savage cry of triumph, the book ends with the wife of Maximinus Daia being hurled into the Orontes: "Sic omnes impii

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[73]Pichon, op. cit., p. 156-158.

[74]"What he seeks to demonstrate is the manner in which the hand of God had lain heavy on those princes (Diocletian, Maximian, Galerius, etc.) who had done evil to the Christians, while it spared and favoured those who had seen fit to recognize the goodness of their cause." de Labriolle, op. cit., p. 215.

vero judicio Dei eadem quae fecerunt receperunt."[75]

The great argument against the authenticity of this work is literary, that is, it is written in so manifestly a different style that it could scarcely have come from the hand of Lactantius. However, what must be kept in mind is the great sense of triumph, of relief, of joy, and even bitterness the Christians experienced after the cessation of several hundred years of persecution in the Edict of Milan in 313. Nevertheless, most scholars doubted its authenticity until Pichon established it beyond doubt and won over even Brandt himself.

The De Mortibus Persecutorum is really an historical pamphlet. After briefly outlining the earlier persecutions and the inglorious deaths of the Emperors from Nero to Aurelius, Lactantius traces in detail ten years of the Empire's history from Diocletian and the tetrarchy in 303 to the death of Maximinus Daia. There is an extraordinary exactitude of facts, as is proved from the study of contemporary coinage, and this leads authors to believe that Lactantius must have had access to the imperial archives.[76] This little history is very effective in detail, style and historical sense, and though the interpretation is biased, the facts are correct. It is the

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[75] De Mort. Pers., 50, 7.

[76] Monceaux, op. cit., p. 348.

first Christian philosophy of history, and in so successfully introducing a new literary genre, it is, as Monceaux says, "L'un des chef d'oeuvres de la littérature chrétienne."[77]

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[77] Ibid., p. 352

CHAPTER II

THE DIVINE INSTITUTES AND CLASSICAL CULTURE

In 303 Lactantius looked about him in dismay. Christianity, the faith he had recently embraced, was being straitened on every side. The great persecution of Diocletian was consuming his fellow Christians by the thousands; pagan pamphleteers were pouring out their venemous and stinging attacks against the Christians; and the inadequacy of their response was appalling to one versed in the measured style and rational argument of the great Latin rhetoricians. It was true that Christianity had made progress, but its converts were generally drawn from the uneducated, lower classes. The educated, upper class despised the simple and barbarous style of the Christian writers, the naive and narrow presentation of their doctrine. Burning with the desire to vindicate his faith and to share the joy of his conversion with the educated pagans, Lactantius resolved to embark on a work that would appeal to this group hitherto neglected. First, his work would be written in the classical style of the masters. Second, his refutation of pagan error would employ, not the supra-rational arguments of the Scriptures, a book the pagans did not accept, but the rational and persuasive arguments of

their own fellow philosophers. Further, in exposing the error of pagan religion and philosophy, he would reveal the half-truth of their philosophy and later incorporate it into the Christian context. Finally, after this negative refutation, he would positively expound the whole of Christian doctrine, showing it to be not only the true religion but also the true philosophy. In this way, Lactantius hoped to confront pagan culture, to assimilate it as best he could, and consequently, to win over its adherents by meeting them on their own ground in a work he would call the Divine Institutes, a title taken from the language of Roman law.

To understand fully the novelty of Lactantius' method, this chapter will return to the times of the New Testament when the confrontation of these two cultures began and attempt to show the initial meeting in Paul and John. Then it will trace the works of the Latin apologists influencing Lactantius, those who, aroused by the persecutions, advanced somewhat further and met this problem more directly, either negatively or positively. Finally, it will show that this confrontation reached a kind of climax in Lactantius who met the problem more fully than any of his predecessors, and who, in being the last of the apologists, opened the way for the great fathers of the West.

In any study of the confrontation of classical

thought and Christianity, it would seem to be important to return to the earliest written documents of that religion and attempt to perceive any indications in these sacred books of the influence, either actual or potential, of the philosophies which not only had existed for many hundred years but which also at that very time had strongly affected the private and public life of the entire Empire. The recorders of Christ's message by and large wrote in Greek[1] and they employed not only the common language of the people, but, especially John and Paul, employed also some of the sophisticated terminology of current philosophy, especially Stoic. Yet did these earliest Christian writers use merely the terminology, or did they also borrow the concepts that were part of the mental make-up of every cultured man?

This problem has exercised the minds of countless theologians and biblical scholars for the last several hundred years, but it is only in recent years, particularly since the startling discovery of the Qumran Scrolls in the 1940's, that any kind of general consensus among scholars has been reached. Michel Spanneut in his ground-breaking Le Stoicisme des Pères de l'Eglise[2] attempts to reduce the enormous volume of litera-

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[1] Matthew is an exception. Scholars have concluded that he wrote in Aramiac, but the 'Aramaic Matthew' is lost, and what is left for posterity is a Greek translation which was done very early and perhaps by Matthew himself.

[2] M. Spanneut, Le Stoicisme des Pères de l'Eglise (Paris, 1957).

ture on the subject to two main approaches. First, he outlines the parallel approach, which indicates the growth of two great intellectual forces side by side. One sub-group, which includes French scholars like Gilson and Jolivet, stresses the originality in Christianity, while another, which includes German liberals like Bauer and Jentsch, views Christianity as a philosophical evolution. Secondly, Spanneut approaches the problem from the point of view of the history of religion. This approach includes, for example, the biblical scholar Rudolph Bultmann, who links Christianity with Judaism and maintains that it is only a secondary branch and outgrowth of Judaism. The problem, then, might be focused more sharply if, besides Hellenism, Judaism were considered, and the problem were re-stated to read simply, what was the predominant influence on Christianity, Hellenism or Judaism?

Though the Jews from the days of Alexander the Great had moved into closer contact with the intellectual, political and religious movements of the time, their strength basically lay with themselves and with their religion. Primary was their indomitable, personal faith in Jahweh, the Lord of all things and dispenser of all happenings in history. Coupled with this strong belief in monotheism was a virile morality which in promising a reward for good and punishment for evil contrasted strongly with the laxer morals of the pagans.

They propagated their robust theism with missionary zeal throughout what came to be known as the Diaspora, and their distinguished scholars of Alexandria translated their holy books into Greek, the language of the Mediterranean world in the second century before Christ. Their successful missionary work, scriptural translations and apologetic writings were harbingers of the later Christian method and achievement.

Despite their greatness, the Jews had many vulnerable weaknesses and these basically stemmed from their religion and its interpretation. Their strict monotheism engendered in them an intransigent attitude towards syncretism and the imperial cult, and in turn bred an anti-Semitism in their fellow man. Socially exclusive, they disdained many of the manners and rites of the pagans, and they in turn were scorned for their strict observance of the dietary laws, the Sabbath, and above all, circumcision. While their religion was primarily moral, that of the Greeks was, rather, philosophical. Philo had begun to bridge the gap, but when the Jews rejected Christianity they simultaneously rejected Hellenism inasmuch as the Greeks at this time had already begun to embrace the gospel of the Christians. Nevertheless, the Jews contributed enormously to Christianity: their code of morality; their insistence on authority and faith; their linear, as opposed to

the Greek cyclic, concept of history; and, particularly, their monotheistic belief in a personal and loving God are the basis and springboard for Christian doctrines and ethics.[3]

Concerning the New Testament, it is known that in Paul's time the Diaspora Jews had been Hellenized for at least a generation. Paul wrote and spoke to his Jewish Christians in Greek, and the seven deacons in Acts 6 all had Greek names, Timon, Phillipos, Stephanos, etc. In Acts 27, although it is not certain whether Paul's speech at the Areopagus in Athens to the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers was literally historical, what is clear is that Luke's intention was to show the struggle between Christianity and the intellectual classical world.[4] But was there in the New Testament a certain influence of Hellenism in the understanding of concepts? In the words of the modern biblical exegete, F.C. Grant: "The earliest Church had no acquaintance with Greek philosophy or its technical terminology; the only Greek literature the Church knew at first was the Greek Bible."[5] Grant later qualifies this rather strong statement in admitting the influence of circumambient

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[3]Angus, Religious Quests, p. 50-57.

[4]W. Jaeger, Early Christianity and Greek Paideia (Harvard, 1961), p. 11.

[5]F. Grant, Roman Hellenism and the New Testament (New York, 1962), p. 161.

Hellenism, but, asserting that it is more a question of language, he insists that the technical use of Hellenistic philosophical terminology and ideas comes later in the apologists of the second century. Christian virtue, for example, as outlined in the New Testament, might appear Stoic, but the ultimate conception of Christian virtue is far different. Stoic virtue is self-centred, independent and rather proud; Christian virtue, on the other hand, is God-centred, dependent and humble.[6]

The two sacred writers most studied for their Hellenistic influence are Paul and John. Paul had probably at least a nodding acquaintance with Stoicism. His native-city Tarsus in Cilicia was not merely a leading intellectual centre of the age but it had been the home of a number of Stoic philosophers, e.g. Anthenodoros and Antipater. Just as Philo had become acquainted with Hellenism through philosophers like the encyclopaedic figure, Posidonius, it can be easily imagined that the nimble mind of Paul did the same.[7] It is known, for instance, that the Jews possessed their own compilations of Stoicism and Platonism, and that rabbis discussed philosophical problems with their Greek contemporaries.[8]

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[6] C. Moule, The Birth of the New Testament (London, 1962) p. 141.

[7] N. Davies, Paul and Rabbinic Judaism (London, 1955), p. 180.

[8] Ibid., p. 6-7.

Nevertheless the common idea that Paul's argument for the knowledge of God from creation in Romans I, 19 ff. is Stoic, is incorrect; admittedly he uses Stoic terminology but he still remains within the rabbinic tradition in his treatment of sin in this passage.[9] The idea that man knows something about God by nature may recall the Stoic doctrine of the divine λόγος implanting a seed of itself in the soul, thus imparting a divine knowledge, but while the outward form of these verses is Hellenistic, their inner substance is Jewish. One of the important Christological passages in the New Testament, Colossians I, 15, where Christ is pictured as the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature, πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως, has been cited by many authors as Stoic in origin. Davies, however, also attributes this to Judaism which "... had ascribed to the figure of Wisdom a precosmic origin and a part in the creation of the world."[10] Consequently, though some of these texts display a Stoic colouring they can be adequately explained in the light of rabbinic usage.

Finally, is Paul's 'spirit,' spiritus, πνεῦμα, the Stoic anima mundi, πνεῦμα τοῦ κόσμου? Though

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[9] Ibid., p. 28.

[10] Ibid., p. 151.

his 'spirit' might possibly be conceived in a material, Stoic sense, Paul was concerned not with its materiality but with its essentially personal character. Further, whereas the Stoic spirit of man and God or the universe is one macrocosm, Paul always distinguishes them: "For what man knoweth the things of a man but the spirit of a man that is in him? So the things also that are of God no man knoweth, but the spirit of God."[11] Paul's 'spirit' of God assists, consoles, perfects but it always remains distinct, always transcends; consequently, it is clearly opposed to the immanence of the Stoic spirit. Nowhere in his epistles does Paul, or any other New Testament writer, employ the spirit in any cosmological context; he always confines it to the sphere of human activity. "When Paul, therefore, thinks of the Holy Spirit as concerned exclusively with man he is being true to the rabbinic outlook of his upbringing and is as far as possible removed from any Stoic conception of a πνεῦμα that penetrated the cosmos."[12]

The Gospel of John is even more pronounced in its Jewish origins. This has been clearly shown from the research on the Dead Sea Scrolls.[13] The light-darkness theme of John

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[11] I Corinthians 2, 11.

[12] Davies, op. cit., p. 190.

[13] "... one of the most important results of Qumran research has been to prove the Jewish origin of the Gospel of John conclusively." K. Schubert, The Dead Sea Community (New York, 1959), p. 151.

and his dualistic view of the world, for example, are largely traceable to the Essene community of Qumran. Though many authors[14] see a Hellenistic and particularly a strong Stoic influence in John, especially in his λόγος concept, most modern scholars[15] agree that John views Christianity in terms of the great traditional themes of the Old Testament, and that borrowing neither from Greek philosophy nor from Philo of Alexandria, he holds his Christianity directly from the mainstreams of the Old Testament and from his own experience of the historical Christ with whom he had lived for many years. It is incorrect, then, to suppose that there was an abrupt incursion into the New Testament through John of the philosophical notions of Hellenism. This came later beginning with the Gnostics and the apologists of the second century. Surveying the influence of Hellenism in the New Testament, especially in Paul, John and the author of Hebrews, C.H. Dodd concludes that while it is certain that the New Testament contains Hellenistic elements, "... its fundamental structure, on the

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[14]See, for instance, R. Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament (London, 1952), and Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting (New York, 1956), cf. Stoic references; and J. Giblet, Johannine Theology of the Logos, article in The World: Readings in Theology (New York, 1964).

[15]Cf. L. Cerfaux, The Four Gospels (Westminister, 1960), p. 87; L. Bouyer, The Fourth Gospel (Westminister, 1964), pp. 17, 35, 36.

other hand, is not Hellenistic but biblical, and this biblical substructure is so firmly bonded into the whole edifice that no amount of Hellenizing ever destroyed, or ever could destroy, its basic character."[16]

Approaching the confrontation of Hellenism and Christianity from a philosophical point of view, Etienne Gilson[17] maintains that since Christianity is not a philosophy but a religion, it must always so remain and thus it cannot become a religious philosophy. Philosophy can never become a constitutive element of faith but only a help towards conveying the religious message. John may use philosophic terms, like λόγος in John I, 1; Paul may use σοφία and δύναμις in I Corinthians I, 24, but the dogma expounded still remains essentially Christian. However, given this premiss, Christianity can become the source of theological and philosophical speculation because in Christianity the old terms assume a fuller meaning. When John, for example, wrote καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο, John I, 14, something happened to the notion λόγος - it became man. Again when Paul calls Christ σοφία, he is not reducing Christ to an

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[16] C. Dodd, According to the Scriptures (Digswell Place, 1952), p. 136.

[17] E. Gilson, History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages (London, 1955), p. 5-6.

abstract philosophical notion, but he is enriching and personalizing the notion by saying that Christ brings, and indeed is, the wisdom which the philosophers vainly expected. Thus this is not primarily a philosophical but a religious statement. Christianity, then, did not become a philosophy--if it had it would have perished--but though it employs and enriches philosophic terms and concepts, it always remains a religion, and indeed it helps not only to prevent the disintegration of philosophy but also to sponsor its development.

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Whereas the early Christian literature had turned inward to concern itself with matters of discipline and devotion, the eruption of the persecutions caused the Christians to look outward, to defend themselves and to address their writings to their fellow pagans. Christianity was obliged to refute a number of accusations: cannibalism because Christians ate and drank the body and blood of their God; atheism because they did not worship the gods of the state; and political subversion because they denied worship to the emperor. However, they dedicated many of their works, which came to be known as apologies, to the Emperor, not because they wished to flatter him but because they genuinely reverenced the goodness of emperors

like Hadrian, Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius.

Initially, their literary genre was graceless and didactic, but gradually they began to employ the classical forms, e.g. the dialogue form used by Justin in the dialogue with Trypho. They began also to use the arguments of philosophy in their refutation of the gods of the poets and popular religion, just as the philosophers had always done. Justin, for example, in the early second century, saw in Socrates a prototype of the suffering Christ. The λόγος, too, the Stoic divine principle which penetrated all matter, had assumed human form in the person of Christ. After examining and then rejecting all other philosophies, Justin embraced Christianity and called it the absolute philosophy.[18]

To the Greeks, the Jews were a philosophical race because they believed in monotheism which the Greeks themselves had arrived at only after centuries of discussion. Indeed, they considered that perhaps the Jews possessed the secret of what they respectfully termed the philosophy of the barbarians. In the second century Hellenism was ready for Christian monotheism not only because it had arrived at monotheism itself, but also because its philosophy had become largely theological. To the Greeks, Christianity was no

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[18]Jaeger, op. cit., p. 26-28.

different: it had a monotheism and a theology. Consequently, because of its theology, but also because of its ethics and cosmology, Christianity must be a philosophy. Galen, the pagan physician and philosopher, speaks of the Jews and the Christians as philosophers.

Tertullian, however, came on the scene to impede this rapprochement. He distinguished sharply between reason (philosophy) and faith (Christianity), and rejected reason as being inferior to supernatural faith. He was not original in this. As a Latin, he was following the distinction made by Cicero in the third book of the De Natura Deorum where as a sceptic Cicero rejected the rational arguments of the Stoics for the existence of the gods, but in his capacity as pontifex maximus, he accepted their existence on the authority of tradition, or on what Tertullian would have called, faith. In a grudging admission, however, Tertullian did permit the study of philosophy, but only as an avenue to the study of revealed theology. Jerome also displayed this intransigence frequently, but, in balance, his love of the classics is also revealed. Indeed, his inconsistent and equivocal reaction to the cultural legacy clearly shows the struggle and dichotomy in the minds of intelligent Christians. On the one hand, there is the uncompromising renunciation: "Quid facit cum psalterio Horatius? cum evangeliis Maro? cum apostolo Cicero?"[19] and on the other,

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[19]Jerome, Epistula 22, 29, 7, quoted in Hagendahl, op. cit., p. 310.

his love of the pagan classics, and at times a zealous attempt, along with Lactantius, to go beyond the faithful and win over pagan men of culture. Nevertheless, the prejudice against pagan culture waxed strong in the Roman West and for a time even in the East in Greek Christians, e.g. Tatian. Lactantius proved to be a marked exception among the Latins.

Tertullian and his fideists apart, the message of Christ began to be translated to the faithful in a more sophisticated, classical form. The early oral and written Aramaic had already passed through the stage of being translated into Greek. The historian Luke had advanced a step further by arranging his material in a more classical style. Then the apologists especially in the East felt it imperative to give meaning to the gospel message not only to the Christians but to the educated pagans as well. At first their method was negative, halting and parochial, their interpretation, in the restrictive categories of Judaism. Gradually, however, particularly with the coming in the third century of the great minds of the Alexandrian school of theology, Clement and his pupil, Origen, the Christian message became admirably adapted for transmission to the Greek world through the incorporation of the forms and concepts of the long classical tradition. It is the thesis of Jaeger in Early Christianity and Greek Paideia[20]

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[20]Jaeger, op. cit., p. 62-63.

that the merging of Christianity and the Greek intellectual heritage was effected through the common denominator of Greek paideia. He further contends that the resistance to Christianity was precisely and mainly due to the supposed lack of paideia in Christianity and that consequently the problem of the confrontation of the two forces was basically not religious but cultural.[21] Both worlds had much to offer: on its part, Christianity for example, renewed and enriched the philosophical concepts of Hellenism, while Hellenism offered with its rich culture, which the Christians had long repudiated, a universality which Christianity claimed as a mark of its church. Soon an assimilation of the best of both systems was, in the East at least, achieved. "The dream of Alexander when he founded the city that bears his name was now to be realized: two universal systems, Greek culture and the Christian church, were to be united in the mighty superstructure of Alexandrian theology."[22]

There is a line of four Latin apologists who exerted an influence on Lactantius. The first is Arnobius, his tutor, a teacher of rhetoric in Sicca-Veneria. Converted to Christianity at sixty years of age, he attempted to prove the sin-

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[21] Ibid., p. 70-71.

[22] Ibid., p. 40.

cerity of his conversion by writing an apology of Christianity in seven--the magical number--books, entitled Adversus Nationes. The work aims at confounding pagan mythology, and it presents only incidentally a Christian theology which is crude and elementary. God, for example, lives in Epicurean imperturbability; the soul is material because it does not proceed from the perfect God. His copious use of pagan authors, among whom he praises Cicero, Varro and the Platonists, presages Lactantius' method. He likes the Stoics "... who do not chatter merely because their humour leads them!"[23] He accepts the Euhemeristic doctrine--the gods were heroes canonized by posterity--as does his pupil. Though he criticizes the rhetorical style and advocates simplicity, he is tedious and verbose. Though shaped by him in his early years, Lactantius does not mention Arnobius in any of his writings. Probably Lactantius had departed for Nicomedia before his teacher's conversion and he subsequently remained unaware of it.

Minucius Felix is one of the three apologists mentioned by Lactantius as exerting influence on him.[24] He writes a pure Latin, and the perfection of his expression and

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[23]Arnobius, Adversus Nationes, 3, 34, quoted in Ellspermann, op. cit., p. 59.

[24]Div. Inst. V, 1.

development makes his only work, the Octavius, a masterpiece.[25] Like Arnobius, he takes his place ahead of Lactantius in using human evidences, the philosophers, historians, poets, for apologetic reasons, that is, to criticize pagan beliefs and justify Christianity. He identifies philosophy with Christianity, as Lactantius will identify it, though somewhat differently. He praises Plato, calling the Timaeus heavenly, but like Lactantius, he asserts that philosophers possess only half the truth. And finally, like Lactantius, he employs Scripture sparingly and instead turns the arguments of the pagan philosophers, historians and poets against themselves. Apart from their classical style, however, Minucius and Arnobius display little influence from pagan culture, and their praise of it is less.

The antithesis to Lactantius in almost every respect is the greatest of the Latin apologists, Tertullian. He is delineated crisply and accurately by Lactantius himself in the fifth book of the Divine Institutes: "Septimius quoque Tertullianus fuit omni genere litterarum peritus, sed in eloquendo parum facilis et minus comptus et multum obscurus fuit."[26] This tempestuous genius was born a pagan but with his conversion

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[25]F. Cayré, Manual of Patrology (Paris, 1935), p. 137.

[26]Div. Inst. V, 1, 23.

he became uncompromisingly severe in his doctrine and morality, and in his animosity towards the pagans, an attitude quite foreign to the mild and persuasive manner of Lactantius. To Tertullian, since all truth flowed from revelation, the regula fidei was sufficient: "Adversum regulam nihil scire, omnia scire."[27] Even the philosophers gleaned the truth they possessed from revelation, and their error stemmed from perverting that truth through pride. Philosophy is dangerous to the regula fidei because it is based on the independence of the intellect, whereas with faith, all is certain. He excoriates the philosophers, especially the Gnostic philosophers, and labelling them patriarchs of heresy, rejects absolutely a philosophical religion.[28] He maintains that it is impossible to show agreement between Christianity and philosophy by quoting the pagans because the pagans do not accept their own arguments - a recommendation Lactantius did not heed. Truth is to be looked for not in the head but in the heart. The final antithesis to Lactantius lies in Tertullian's style which is crabbed, obscure and impetuous. Says Pichon of him: "C'est à la fois un écrivain de décadence et un écrivain

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[27]Tertullian, Praescriptum 14 (PL 2, 27 B) quoted in Ellspermann, op. cit., p. 24.

[28]Ellspermann, op. cit., p. 31, footnote 32.

personnel: comme tel il est doublement loin de l'art classique."[29]

The fourth African apologist to exert an influence on Lactantius was the kindly and prudent bishop of Carthage, Cyprian. He resembles Lactantius in character and style, but he too had shortcomings in his dealings with the pagans. After praising his admirable style, Lactantius concludes: "Hic tamen placere ultra verba sacramentum ignorantibus non potest, quoniam mystica sunt quae locutus est et ad id praeparata, ut a solis fidelibus audiantur: denique a doctis huius saeculi, quibus forte scripta eius innotuerunt, derideri solet."[30] Cyprian, primarily a pastor and moralist, never quotes a pagan author in all his writings. Though he occasionally criticizes the pride and false wisdom of the philosophers, he never, like Lactantius, uses them in refutation. What Lactantius owes to him principally is his knowledge of scripture which he obtained almost entirely from the Testimonia of Cyprian.[31]

Arnobius, Minucius Felix and Tertullian wrote their apologies with a kind of missionary zeal. This, claims Jaeger,

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[29]Pichon, op. cit., p. 180.

[30]Div. Inst. V, 1, 26.

[31]Pichon, op. cit., p. 202.

is the προτρέψις or zealous persuading which the Christians borrowed from Hellenism.[32] Schools of philosophy were wont to recommend their dogma as the sole road to happiness. It was seen first in the Greek sophists, then in Socrates and Plato. The Platonic word, μετάνοια, conversion, meant not only adopting a new philosophy but a change of life. The Christian προτρέψις and μετάνοια came to mean largely the same thing.

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To each of the apologists Lactantius owes an individual debt. To Arnobius he owes his taste for metaphysical discussion; to Minucius his idea of an alliance between philosophy and religion; even to Tertullian, his arguments against mythology; to Cyprian, his knowledge of Scripture. All, however, have shortcomings: Arnobius endangers religion itself by his strong attack against the human intelligence; Minucius suggests only vaguely the fusion of human wisdom and divine revelation; Tertullian, swamped in detail, is too aggressive and severe; Cyprian, in relying solely on Scripture and rejecting reason, appeals only to the faithful. Lactantius

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[32] Jaeger, op. cit., p. 10.

realizes that he must return to the philosophic method of Minucius, but in a manner more integrated and detailed.[33]

Circumstances, however, were now different. Tertullian had addressed government officials and the pagan crowd, Cyprian, the Christians, and Arnobius only incidentally the educated pagan class. Now at the beginning of the fourth century not only were the Christians more lettered, but the educated pagans were displaying an interest in Christianity stemming from their own philosophic beliefs which had earlier reached monotheism. Without forgetting his fellow Christians nor the simple pagans, Lactantius will write primarily for the educated pagan class, the philosophers, the rhetoricians, the magistrates who either do not know or who misunderstand Christianity. They have been neglected in the past; with them as believers, the Christian victory will be complete. To win over his educated readers, however, Lactantius, must invest his religion in a classical form.

To effect this imaginative change of direction in apologetic writing, Lactantius introduced three innovations. To present Christianity as a philosophy, Christian doctrine must be exposed, not piecemeal, but as an integrated whole.[34]

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[33]Pichon, op. cit., p. 55.

[34]Div. Inst. V,4,3: "... aliut est accusantibus respondere, quod in defensione aut negatione sola positum est, aliut instituere, quod nos facimus, in quo necesse est doctrinae totius substantiam contineri..."

Secondly, since the work is to be directed primarily to the educated pagans, and not to the Christians and popular masses, rational discussion and arguments, not texts of Scripture and litanies of miracles, must be employed.[35] Further, a comparison must be initiated between Christianity and the great systems of philosophy, to indicate that Christianity has answered all the questions which both Stoic and Platonic metaphysicians and moralists have posed, and that Christianity is not only the true philosophy but also the true religion.[36] Lactantius, then, uses no arguments which predicate faith, but eschewing Scripture which his cultivated readers consider vain and barbarous, he appeals to the testimony of the philosophers, historians, poets and oracles, and employs the proofs, not of supernatural faith, but of human authority and reason.[37]

It is in the course of his treatise, De Opificio Dei, that Lactantius declares his intention of engaging in a full-scale dispute with the philosophers.[38] In the epilogue

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[35] Div. Inst. V, 4, 4: "Qua materia non est usus ut debuit: non enim scripturae testimoniis, quam ille utique vanam fictam commenticiam putabat, sed argumentis et ratione fuerat refellendus."

[36] Div. Inst. I, 1, 7: "Ut et docti ad veram sapientiam dirigantur et indocti ad veram religionem."

[37] Pichon, op. cit., p. 57.

[38] De Opificio Dei 15, 6: "Sed erit nobis contra philosophos integra disputatio."

of the same work, he clearly exposes his design. He intends to devote against the philosophers an entire work on the life of happiness. He will combat these vigorous adversaries especially with their own weapons. He realizes the difficulties of such a task but he hopes to live long enough to bring it to fruition, concluding piously: "Quo perfecto satis me vixisse arbitrabor et officium hominis inplesse, si labor meus aliquos homines ab erroribus liberatos ad iter caeleste direxerit."[39] The character of the work, then, will be both polemical and doctrinal.

The immediate occasion of writing the Divine Institutes was the anti-Christian attacks of two pagan writers.[40] The first was a self-styled champion of philosophy who wrote a polemic in three books. His effort, however, was singularly unsuccessful not only among the Christians who mocked his ignorance of Christian doctrine and his weakness of argument, but also among the pagans who censured his time-serving in undertaking a polemic against a sect already much harassed by the persecution of the Emperor.[41] Though Porphyry has often been identified as the writer of this tract, it could not have

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[39] De Opificio Dei 20, 9.

[40] Div. Inst. V, 2, 2; 4, 1.

[41] Div. Inst. V, 2, 4-11.

been he.[42] The second was, in the words of Lactantius, a judex, "... e numero judicum"[43] that is, in the administrative language of the times, a governor of a province, and it seems quite clear that this second polemicist was Hierocles, then Governor of Bithynia.[44] He contests the authenticity of the Scriptures, berates the Apostles, labels them a band of brigands, and opposes Christ's miracles with those of Apollonius of Tynus.[45] While listening to the harangue of these men, Lactantius conceived the idea of his apology, the Divine Institutes, in the spring of 303.[46] After collating material for several years, Lactantius seems to have written the first book of the Institutes in 307 and completed the work in 311.[47]

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[42]Porphyry would have been dead by 303. Further, he resided not in Nicomedia, but in Rome, and he always had been considered, not an impotent, but a redoubtable adversary by the fourth century Christians. Monceaux, op. cit., p. 311.

[43]Div. Inst. V, 2, 12: "... e numero judicum."

[44]Monceaux, op. cit., p. 311.

[45]Div. Inst. V, 2 and 3.

[46]Div. Inst. V, 4, 1; V, 2, 2.

[47]Monceaux reasons that the Divine Institutes was written between these dates, 307, the beginning of Galerius' persecution, and 311, his edict of toleration, inasmuch as every book contains apparently eye-witness references to the persecution. Op. cit., p. 303-304. Pichon extends these dates from 306 to 313. Op. cit., p. 30.

Lactantius' primary object in writing the Divine Institutes is apologetic for he terms the pagans "... ii contra quos agimus."[48] However, he will not confine himself to the two adversaries of Nicomedia but he intends to refute systematically and completely all adversaries of Christianity.[49] Further, advancing from the apologetic to the dogmatic, from the defensive to the offensive, he will expose the whole of Christian doctrine[50] which he will address to cultivated pagans and Christians alike.[51] To the latter he will prove that Christianity is the true philosophy, to the former, that it is the true religion, "... ut et docti ad veram sapientiam dirigantur, et indocti ad veram religionem."[52] To convince the pagans, he will use only human evidences, that is, reason and the testimonies of the philosophers and historians; and he will use Scripture only later after he has won them over, in order to confirm the truth of Christianity.[53] Finally, he will employ in the true classical style every resource of

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[48] Div. Inst. I, 6, 6.

[49] Div. Inst. V, 4, 1-2.

[50] Div. Inst. V, 4, 3.

[51] Div. Inst. V, 1, 8-9.

[52] Div. Inst. I, 1, 7.

[53] Div. Inst. V, 4, 4-7.

eloquence at his command to help convince his cultivated readers who are wont to mock the ignorance and stupidity of Christians,[54] by showing them that a man need not be ignorant or uncouth in embracing Christianity. As Monceaux concludes: "Ainsi compris le plaidoyer en faveur du christianisme sera une belle oeuvre littéraire à la mode classique, en même temps qu'une Apologie complète et un traité doctrinal."[55]

The title, Divine Institutes, is borrowed from the terminology of the law. Institutiones designates a treatise on the principles of the law; the Divinae Institutiones is a treatise on the principles of religion.[56] Each book will be an institutio, a treatise, an instruction, each with its proper name, "... vel quod tantummodo instituendi nobis homines erunt hoc est ab errore quo sunt implicati ad rectiorem viam revocandi."[57]

The Divine Institutes is remarkably well planned. At the outset Lactantius indicates that it will be written in seven books,[58] and though he occasionally sends a reader on to

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[54] Div. Inst. III, 30, 9.

[55] Monceaux, op. cit., p. 314.

[56] Div. Inst. I, 1, 12.

[57] Div. Inst. I, 1, 21.

[58] Div. Inst. I, 1, 20.

other books, his orderly plan is ever in mind.[59] The first three books attempt to refute the adversaries of Christianity; the fourth exposes Christian doctrine; the last three expound moral applications of this doctrine.

The first book, De Falsa Religione, is directed against polytheism. It proves the providence and unity of God, then exposes the absurdity of polytheism. Book Two, De Origine Erroris, establishes the necessity of a religion, mocks the inconsistency of various pagan ideas, then attempts to explain the error of idolatry by attributing it to the demons. Lactantius treats the philosophers in the third book. He points out the weakness and contradictions of their metaphysics and ethics, and refutes the doctrines of their principal systems. Book Four, De Vera Sapientia, traces Christian doctrine in broad outline. It indicates the marks of the true religion and the true philosophy, then proceeds to show that Christianity alone possesses them. Finally, he answers various objections. In the fifth book, De Justitia, after a comparison of his work with those of other apologists, Lactantius exposes Christian morality and coincidentally refers frequently to the persecutions. Book Six, De Vero Cultu, defines virtue, reviews the duties of Christians, their duties of piety,

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[59] Monceaux, op. cit., p. 315.

justice and charity. Then Lactantius discourses on the passions, the pleasures of sense and finally on the true concept of worship. In Book Seven, De Vita Beata, he develops his ideas on the next life and the end of the world and finishes his work with a moving moral exhortation on the life of virtue and its celestial reward. Lactantius is the first Latin apologist to expound the complete doctrine of Christianity. "Here we have no vague spiritual metaphysics: a whole history of religion is unfolded, a complete moral system is stated, and an entire philosophy is offered for acceptance, dominated by the doctrine of a Providence."[60]

The authenticity of the two dedications to Constantine in the Divine Institutes, in Book I, 1, 13-16 and in Book VII, 27, 11-17, has been much discussed by critics. The first promises to Constantine a victory over his enemies, the persecutors of Christianity; the second celebrates his victory as a fait accompli. Critics such as Brandt and Monceaux doubted their authenticity, claiming that the triumphant tone of these passages is wholly inconsonant with that of the work as a whole, in which "... the suffering anger of an oppressed man is plainly visible."[61] Monceaux, for example, argues as follows:

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[60] de Labriolle, op. cit., p. 204.

[61] Ibid., p. 188.

he first establishes the point that because the dedications are connected to other passages in which Lactantius manifests a dualism of Gnostic flavoring,[62] inasmuch as both are contained in the same manuscripts, both must be accepted or rejected together.[63] After offering three solutions, he rejects the first two possibilities and chooses the third, maintaining that the dualist passages are interpolations which were probably introduced by a Manichean at a later date. Thus he simultaneously rejects both the dualist passages and the dedications. Even Brandt in his fine critical edition of the 1890's considers the dedications spurious. However, after a lengthy study of the manuscripts, Pichon[64] in 1901 argues forcefully for the authenticity of the dedications, and eventually by his arguments here and in subsequent articles, he has succeeded in convincing most patristic scholars, even Brandt himself.[65]

Having viewed the scene with studied concern, Lactantius understood the mentality both of Christianity and Hellenism. On the one hand, he realized that the existing Christian literature was simple, negative and parochial; he

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[62]The dualism of Lactantius will be treated in chapter 5.

[63]Monceaux, op. cit., p. 301.

[64]Pichon, op. cit., pp. 5-30.

[65]de Labriolle, op. cit., p. 188.

realized that Christian doctrine was uneasy about the principle of intellectual independence, and Christian asceticism, about the principle of pleasure; he realized too that the Christian disdain for the dilettantism of contemporary pagan writers[66] extended on the part of some to a rejection of all pagan literature,[67] and at times to Hellenistic civilization itself. Had not Paul called the wisdom of the world foolishness, and had not the wisdom which the Greeks offered been borrowed from the Scripture itself? On the other hand, Lactantius' classical training and pagan upbringing enabled him to grasp the mentality of the cultivated pagan. He realized that they utterly scorned the barbarity of style in the Christian writings; he realized that they suspected the loyalty of Christians towards the Roman authorities; he realized too that they had not grasped nor appreciated the gospel message either in the uncouth style of the New Testament or in the parochial presentation of apologetic doctrine. It was embarrassing to be called wool-carders, cobblers and fullers, as Celsus had termed them, and be accused of lowering one's intelligence in accepting Christianity. The pagans must be met on their own ground.

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[66] Somewhat earlier Frontonius had written panegyrics on smoke, on dust, on carelessness. cf. de Labriolle, op. cit., p. 9.

[67] Clement of Alexandria maintained that these 'intransigents' formed a majority of the Christians even in that great city of scholarship. cf. de Labriolle, op. cit., p. 17.

The truth and beauty of Christianity must be expressed with sound argument and in graceful style to appeal to the philosophers, the rhetoricians, the magistrates. Even Tertullian had permitted at least the reading of profane literature, and many had admitted that truth in some form was scattered throughout pagan thought. However, no Christian had yet gathered it to give it sense and direction. The absurdity of pagan mythology must be revealed and the error of pagan philosophy pointed out, but the truth of philosophy must also be shown and indeed incorporated into the context of Christian doctrine, to be clothed in the classical style of the masters. This Lactantius attempted to do.

> "... his purpose was to win over the men of letters, stubbornly unconvinced as yet, whose intellectual contempt caused him so much suffering; he inaugurated a method of apologetics which was more objective and more scientific, and in full view of the doctrines of the philosophers, he arrayed a real summa of Christian doctrine."[68]

Consequently, though rejecting the error of the pagans, Lactantius accepted their truth, and employing a formal and polished style, he incorporated that truth into the context of Christianity. Thus be became the first Christian Latin writer truly and fully to vindicate secular learning, and in so doing he not only opened the door for the constructive work of the

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[68] Ibid., p. 9-10.

great Latin Fathers, Jerome and Augustine, but he also initiated in the West the Christian-Hellenistic synthesis in which Christianity harmonized, completed and crowned the wisdom of the ancients.

CHAPTER III

LACTANTIUS AND POLYTHEISM

In the early centuries of Christianity, there existed in the Graeco-Roman world a profound interest in religion and all that religion could bring. While Christianity satisfied the religious needs of its followers, an eclectic Greek philosophy and the many syncretic religions attempted to satisfy the desires and yearnings of the teeming millions who had not yet embraced the Christian faith. Throughout the Empire men searched for a religion of redemption that carried with it a reasonable theology and a satisfying worship. The problems that beset them were basic:

> "The themes which most engaged the minds of men were the nature and unity of the divine, the origin of evil, the relation of Fate and Fortune to Providence, the nature of the soul and the problem of immortality, the possibility of purification from moral stains, the means of union with God, and spiritual support for the individual life."[1]

This religious sentiment was proclaimed strongly in pagan literature of the period. Persius and Juvenal wrote treatises on prayer, and the classical moralists, Cicero--somewhat earlier--Seneca, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, Porphyry and

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[1]Angus, The Mystery Religions and Christianity, p. 5.

Plotinus expressed their thoughts and feelings on the subject, often in beautiful and moving language.[2] However, the rise of religion and the increase of belief in the gods were accompanied by a wave of superstitious practices. Superstitions even became confused and identified with religion, and it is religion perverted into superstition that Lucretius had denounced in the De Rerum Natura:

"tantum religio potuit suadere malorum."[3]

His cure for the terror animi tenebraeque is naturae species ratioque, that is rational and objective human reason. For his part, Cicero had sharply distinguished between religion, deorum cultus pius and superstition, timor inanis deorum,[4] but later, Seneca and Plutarch still felt the need to write treatises against superstition. However, by 300 A.D., though the ancient religions were in decay, the religious spirit of the people, both among the uneducated classes in their practices of superstition, and among the cultivated circles in their refined notions of monotheism, was still strong. Syncretism in religion had largely superseded belief in the classical, literary gods, and it was gradually leading to a religious unity

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[2] Ibid.

[3] Lucretius, De Rerum Natura, I, 101.

[4] Cicero, De Natura Deorum, I, 47, 117.

which found expression in two widely divergent spiritual forces, the worship of Sol-Invictus, Sun Worship, which official Roman policy had already tried to exalt as dominus imperii Romani, and Christianity.[5]

Religion, consequently, was now far removed from its primitive expression in the early gods of Greece and Rome: "The main features of the old Homeric faith were pantheistic polytheism and anthropomorphism which made religion rich in humanized personalities."[6] This idyllic and elemental religion, however, had soon suffered a decline in Greece for two reasons: because it was singularly non-ethical, it did not satisfy the growing moral consciousness of the Greeks; secondly, because it was non-rational, it did not keep pace with the increasing rationalism that was from early times questioning the very basis of polytheism itself. Consequently, the rational spirit of the Greeks that expressed itself in philosophy, in its demand for a religion that was both moral and rational, soon repudiated the classical polytheistic myths as fables, or at least compromised and interpreted them through the Stoics as religious allegories.[7]

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[5]Alfoldi, op. cit., p. 5.

[6]Angus, The Mystery Religions and Christianity, p. 10.

[7]Ibid., p. 111.

Rome had early come into contact with Greek civilization, first in Magna Graecia, and then, in the early second century after the conquest of Greece, with the Greek mainland, but Roman religion had been peculiarly indigenous. It was a simple, stolid religion that fostered the basic family and state virtues of piety and loyalty.[8] Unable to adjust to the changing needs of Rome, it displayed a certain rigidity of form and worship, and the attempt of conservatives to return to the old and simple ways was an unrealistic as it was unsuccessful.

There were in reality three religions in Rome, a religion of the state, of the educated, and of the populace. The first was cold and formal, and its rites were only perfunctorily administered by officials who increasingly doubted their efficacy. As early as 217 B.C., C. Flaminius, consul for that year, neglected the customary observances before taking the field. Caesar did not even mention divinatio in his Gallic commentaries, and Cato wondered how two haruspices could pass each other without laughing inwardly about the absurdity of their profession.[9] The religious sentiments of the educated class were generally determined by their philosophy, which often treated polytheism with scepticism, and the populace, having

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[8] Ibid., p. 31.

[9] Cicero, De Divinatione, II, 24, 51.

lost faith in their gods, turned increasingly to superstition and the mystery religions of the East to satisfy their yearnings. This situation obtained in the second century, so that "When the Romans went forth to conquer the earth, the Roman gods remained at home."[10] Having lost faith, the ignorant turned to superstition and syncretism, and the learned, to the philosophies of Greece.

However, the main strength of Roman religion resided in its patriotic affiliation and association with the state. The gods, it was sentimentally felt, had granted to Rome her far-flung Empire, and her security and fortune depended on the continuance of the old forms of worship. This was the theme of many of Cicero's speeches, and the same sentiments were shared by many conservative senators and later by several emperors, viz., Augustus and Tiberius. The argument for a return to the ancient religion was based on tradition and patriotism, and as such, its appeal would have been strong to conservative Romans.[11] Lactantius well understood the depth of this respect and vener-

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[10]Angus, The Mystery Religions and Christianity, p. 35.

[11]"... its appeal was one to which many would respond, but it could not stand up against rational argument or spritual conviction, and Roman religion suffered the fate which probably awaits any religion, however long-lived and venerated it may be, which is nothing more than the expression of national sentiment." Clarke, op. cit., p. 123.

ation for a religion so intimately bound up, in Roman eyes, with the prosperity and security of the state, and though the majority of the educated classes in his time had long repudiated in their minds the classical forms of polytheistic belief and worship, their hearts and feelings still clung to the ancient traditions. This sentiment reappears in the dying days of paganism when Symmachus in his Relatio expresses an appeal on behalf of the Victory Altar. In the form of a prosopopaeia, he makes Rome say:

> "Emperors, most excellent of men, fathers of the country, respect my old age: I have attained it thanks to my pious rites. Let me perform the ancestral ceremonies, for I have no reason to regret them. Let me live according to my custom, for I am free. This religion has subjected the universe to my laws, these sacrifices drove Hannibal from my walls and the Senonians from the Capitol. Was I saved only for reproaches in my great age?"[12]

It is not surprising, then, that Lactantius chose to treat in the first two books of the Divine Institutes Roman polytheism in its classical and literary form, and to consider it as the formal and official adversary of the Christian faith.

Consequently, in Lactantius' attempt to prove the superiority of Christianity, the first adversary he considered was Graeco-Roman polytheism. It was not in fact the most formidable opponent of Christianity, but officially and for-

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[12]Momigliano, op. cit., p. 157.

mally it held first place, and in name at least the educated pagans considered themselves adherents of the cult of Mount Olympus. Consequently, Lactantius considered it not unimportant to begin his apology with a refutation of the errors of pagan polytheism.[13]

There is little originality in Lactantius' treating the subject of pagan mythology. Christian apologists had assailed polytheism on numerous occasions in the past, and before them it had been the favorite pastime of many Greek and Roman philosophers to inveigh against the gods of official and popular worship.[14] Lactantius, then, was simply in a long tradition of criticism of polytheism. His treatment of the absurdity and immorality of polytheism, the quarrels among the gods, their adventures and love affairs, was faithfully patterned on Cicero and Seneca, and before them, on Xenophon and Parmenides.[15] Among Christian apologists, Tertullian and Arnobius had also assailed pagan mythology, but they had addressed their work in general to the common people. Tertullian's

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[13]The refutation of paganism occupies Book I; chapters 1-7 of Book II; and chapters 1 and 2 of Book VI. The remainder of Book II in considering the origin of paganism is also a strong but indirect attack against polytheism.

[14]Jaeger, op. cit., p. 123.

[15]Pichon, op. cit., p. 74.

style was ironical, indignant, highly personal; Arnobius', florid, redundant, tedious. Also, the latter had expounded not only on the religions of Greece and Rome but on those of the East as well. Lactantius' method, however, is different. As the Divine Institutes was directed to the educated class, the gods Lactantius treated are the gods of classical religion, Jupiter, Saturn, Hercules, Venus, literary gods, one might say, from the pages of Homer and Vergil. Eschewing the impassioned style of Tertullian, he employed the balanced and didactic style of Cicero inasmuch as he wished to speak first to the reason, and not to the heart, of his readers. However, he appealed not only to logic but also to what the pagans held in high esteem, namely the books of their own philosophers, historians and poets, and using them as his main weapon of refutation, he exposed the basic errors of pagan religion, that is, its polytheism, its anthropomorphism, and its immorality.[16]

On the first point, Lactantius presented a dilemma by showing that a plurality of gods is contradictory. Either the gods have a power that is limited, and then they are not gods;[17] or the gods have a power that is infinite, and then there will ensue interminable conflicts.[18] The first hypo-

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[16] Ibid., p. 75.

[17] Div. Inst. I, 3, 7.

[18] Div. Inst. I, 3, 16.

thesis is destroyed by the metaphysical notion of perfection, that is, polytheism by the very word bespeaks imperfection, or limited power, inasmuch as there can be only one perfection, or one unlimited power; the second hypothesis is destroyed by the concept of order and unity, that is, order and unity are impossible if there exists a multiplicity of gods. This last argument is typically Roman, and to reinforce its appeal to a people who greatly admired order and unity, Lactantius employed the military comparison between the government of the world and the command of an army, in which the obedience and subordination of all ranks to the commander is imperative.[19] Then he went on in Book I of the Institutes to ascribe the blame of polytheism to the Greeks. "Quod malum a Graecis ortum est, quorum levitas, instructa dicendi facultate et copia, incredibile est quantas mendaciorum nebulas excitaverit."[20] Could this be interpreted as a political stroke on Lactantius' part, to please his Latin readers? Perhaps. Nevertheless, it is true that after his failure in his school of rhetoric at Nicomedia, Lactantius entertained little love for the Greeks. It is also true that although the Greeks in their philosophy had attained a kind of monotheism, they had always retained in

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[19] Div. Inst. I, 3, 19.

[20] Div. Inst. I, 15, 14.

politics, in temperament, and in popular religion a marked individualism which was conducive to polytheism and which offered at the same time a sharp contrast to the order and unity early evident in the thought and government of Rome.

Then Lactantius examined the nature of the gods. He first attacked three gods, Hercules, Jupiter and Saturn, the most popular deity, the most powerful and the most ancient. The first two had particular pertinence at the time inasmuch as Diocletian, in adding the title Iovius to his name, and Maximian, Herculius, had in a manner consecrated to them the destiny of the Empire.[21] Lactantius lashed out at Hercules, condemning his immodesty and belittling his feats of strength.[22] As for Jupiter, he scorned his double title of Optimus Maximus with the double charge of parricide and impurity on the one hand, and timidity and impotency on the other.[23] Saturn is neither the most ancient since creation existed before him, nor the most just since he perpetrated the murder of his own children.[24] The other gods Lactantius treated briefly, indicating their vices and misfortunes, which served only to illustrate

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[21] Pichon, op. cit., p. 76.

[22] Div. Inst. I, 9.

[23] Div. Inst. I, 10, 10-14.

[24] Div. Inst. I, 11, 50-65.

the humanity of their condition. However, he singled out for further treatment the special goddesses of Rome and their immodest legends, for example, Lupa, Flora and Venus Calva.[25] Finally, Rome's belief in abstract gods like Pavor, Honor, Virtus, though it suggested a certain degree of mental reflection, was not worthy of the majesty of God.[26] Although there was nothing novel in Lactantius' exposition of Roman mythology, he did present a clear and sober resume of classical polytheism in a manner that is quite removed from the tedium of Arnobius and the impetuosity of Tertullian.

In his treatment of the immorality of the gods, Lactantius displayed more emotion. It really was foolish of Cicero to charge Verres with adultery, for Jupiter, whom Verres worshipped, had committed the same crime; or to charge Clodius with the incest of his sister, for the same woman was both wife and sister to Jupiter Optimus and Maximus.[27] He even flung insinuations at the purity of the virgin goddesses, Minerva and Diana, whose images adorned the gymnasia.[28] The exploits of Hercules were puny in comparison with the true strength of self-

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[25] Div. Inst., I, 20, 1-5(Lupa); I, 20, 6-11(Flora); I, 20, 20-27(Venus Calva).

[26] Div. Inst. I, 20, 11-26.

[27] Div. Inst. I, 10, 14.

[28] Div. Inst. I, 20, 11-17.

restraint required in the control of anger and passion,[29] and trivial were the honourable titles of Ceres, Bacchus and Vulcan, gained through the invention of agriculture, etc., in comparison with the great benefits of God the Creator.[30] Lactantius scorned the brutality of the pagan ideal of conquering heroes,[31] but it was against pagan worship that he inveighed most vehemently. Their cult was foolish because it expected that by the offering of incense, the sacrifice of animals and the recitation of mechanical formulas, the gods would be appeased and the devotee blessed, whether he were an adulterer or a parricide.[32] It was brutish too in that it demanded on occasion human sacrifice and mutilation.[33] Because of the sensitivity of his readers, Lactantius spared them the copiousness of grotesque detail found in Arnobius, but what he did insist on strongly, was the impotency of pagan religion to furnish a code of practical conduct. In the eyes of Lactantius the greatest blight of paganism was not polytheism nor anthropomorphism but the divorce between mechanical worship and moral conduct.[34]

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[29] Div. Inst. I, 9, 2.

[30] Div. Inst. I, 18, 18-25.

[31] Div. Inst. I, 18, 8.

[32] Div. Inst. VI, 2, 10.

[33] Div. Inst. I, 21, 1-19.

[34] Div. Inst. IV, 3,1. "No one before Lactantius had better

To these proofs of reason, Lactantius joined the testimony of pagan literature. He did not appeal to the testimony of Jewish or Christian historians for fear of repeating what he had reproached in Cyprian, and consequently of weakening his argument with his pagan readers: "Sed omittamus sane testimonia prophetarum, ne minus idonea probatio videatur esse de his quibus omnino non creditur."[35] In the systematic ordering of profane testimony in order to refute his pagan adversaries, Lactantius stands alone among the Christian apologists of the Latin West.[36] At the beginning of the first book of his work he dwelt for a moment on the existence of a divine power, but only long enough to recall that the Stoics and Cicero also held this position.[37] Then coming to the question of polytheism and monotheism, he cited as strong proof for the unity of God, first the poets, Orpheus, Ovid and Vergil,[38] for

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[34] grasped the difference between the two religions, Christian and pagan, the one consisting principally in the reform of the will by adhesion to certain doctrines bound together and entirely dependent on a God conceived as Father and as Master (Div. Inst. IV, 3); the other resting wellnigh solely on rites in which the 'fingers' alone had a part (IV, 3), and which exacted neither purity of heart, assent of the intelligence, nor a right intention." De Labriolle, op. cit., p. 208.

[35] Div. Inst. I, 5, 1.

[36] Pichon, op. cit., p. 79.

[37] Div. Inst. I, 2, 2-6.

[38] Div. Inst. I, 5, 1-14.

example, the sixth book of the Aeneid:

> "principio caelum ac terras camposque liquentis
> lucentemque globum lunae Titaniaque astra
> spiritus intus alit totamque infusa per artus
> mens agitat molem et magno se corpore miscet."[39]

Then Lactantius called upon the philosophers, those dedicated to truth, Thales, Pythagoras, Zeno, Plato, Cicero, Seneca, etc.;[40] and lastly, as clinching proof, in the sixth and seventh chapters of Book I, the revered and weighty testimony of the ten Sibyls, the Oracle of Apollo and Hermes Trismegistus -- all spurious, but accepted by Lactantius with as much sincerity as gullibility.

Lactantius applied the proofs of the philosophers easily. He had no difficulty in seeing in the Mind of Thales and Anaxagoras, or in the Divine Law of Chrysippus and Zeno, the equivalent of the God of the Christians.[41] He applied the testimonies of the poets and Sibyls no less easily but far less surely for he used the spurious Orpheus as well as Vergil and Ovid, and he did not doubt for an instant the authenticity of the Sibylline books whose strong monotheistic prejudice alone provided sufficient grounds for doubt. However, Lactantius cannot be blamed for his gullibility in accepting these authors

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[39] Aeneid VI, 724-727.

[40] Div. Inst. I, 5, 15 ff.

[41] Div. Inst. I, 5.

as authentic. Like others of his time, he relied for the authenticity of the Sibylline literature on the authority of the poet, Varro, "... quo nemo omnium doctior ne apud Graecos quidem vixit."[42]

After the refutation of polytheism through the testimony of pagan literature, Lactantius went on to confound pagan anthropomorphism and worship by the same method. He cited Tarquitius and Cicero on the humanity of Aesculapius, son of Apollo,[43] and Homer on the death of the twins, Castor and Pollux.[44] Still convinced of the authority of pagan literature, he quoted Lucretius, Persius and Seneca in further passages directed against pagan worship. Commenting on the absurdity of pagan cult and in particular of the piety of Furius Bibaculus,[45] Lactantius quoted the famous lines of Lucretius:

> "o stultas hominum mentes, o pectora caeca!
> qualibus in tenebris vitae quantisque periclis
> degitur hoc aevi quodcumque est!"[46]

Then he appealed to the less biased testimonies of Varro, Ovid and Germanicus on the rites of human sacrifice to be observed

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[42] Div. Inst. I, 6, 7.

[43] Div. Inst. I, 10, 1 and 2.

[44] Div. Inst. I, 10, 6.

[45] Div. Inst. I, 21, 48.

[46] Lucretius, De Rerum Natura II, 14-16.

in the worship of Rome and Carthage.[47] There is not the air of improvisation in the citing of these profane texts that can be observed in other apologists like Tertullian; Lactantius, though gullible, is accurate and balanced, and it is with this kind of restrained presentation that he appealed to his cultivated readers.[48]

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The copious use of pagan authors in the refutation of polytheism in Books I and II of the Divine Institutes raises the question of the content, purpose and authenticity of Lactantius' source material. Inasmuch as his first-hand philosophical material from the classical authors was largely confined to three writers, Lucretius, Varro and Cicero,[49] a detailed study of all classical pagan writers influencing Lactantius will be undertaken in the following chapters. For the present, another source will be considered, the religious pagan literature, the apocryphal theological writings, half pagan and half Jewish, which developed generally in the East from the time of Alexander to the reign of Constantine. Considering them

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[47] Div. Inst. I, 21 passim.

[48] Pichon, op. cit., p. 82.

[49] Monceaux, op. cit., p. 318. Most of Vergil's 100 citations are not used philosophically.

divina testimonia like Scripture itself, Lactantius drew heavily from the following four sources: The Oracles of Apollo; the poems of Orpheus; the books of Hermes Trismegistus; and above all the Sibylline Oracles. He felt that these works would have powerful authority with his pagan readers, and to justify himself in their use, he rationalized that the influence of the pagan divinities on the oracles contained in the books was minimized by the truth and power of the God of the Christians.

The Oracles of Apollo were highly regarded by the classical world, and of his many oracular shrines, Delphi was considered the greatest.[50] The source of these oracles for Lactantius was the Latin poet, Varro.[51] In one reference in the Divine Institutes, Apollo was employed to show that the pagan gods had on occasion required the sacrifice of human beings.[52] Another revealed the unity of God,[53] and another, the

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[50]Apollo, son of Zeus and Leto, and twin to his sister Artemis, was the most Greek of all the gods. He was the ideal type of young manly beauty, and his functions ranged over music, archery, prophecy, medicine and the tending of flocks. He was often associated with the higher developments of civilization, morality, philosophy, religion and politics.

Divination was by possession, the medium, generally a female, being filled with the inspiration of the god. Apollo came to be associated as the adviser and inspirer of every myth which contained a prophet or prediction, and his Delphic oracles commanded great authority and respect in the ancient world.

[51]Pichon, op. cit., p. 207. [52]Div. Inst. I, 21, 7.

[53]Div. Inst. I, 7, 1 and 13.

immortality of the soul.[54] These texts were uncritically used because their resemblance to Christian concepts are slight; however, Lactantius' most uncritical use of the Apollo Oracles is the text in which the oracle calls the pagan gods, daemones,[55] that is, in Lactantius' mind, devils. It did not occur to him to investigate further and attempt to ascertain whether Apollo's meaning of the Greek δαίμονες might have had a meaning vastly different from his own.

His second religious source, the poems of Orpheus, carried considerable authority with Lactantius, as well as with the pagan world. Though Orpheus is a mythical personage, it is possible that he may have had a real existence as the author of very ancient religious hymns. The extant poems that bear his name are the forgeries of Christian grammarians and philosophers of the Alexandrian school, and it is probably from Theophilus of Antioch that Lactantius knew them;[56] however, among the fragments, which form a part of the collection, are some genuine remains of that Orphic poetry which Plato knew and which must be assigned to the sixth century or even earlier. Jaeger thinks that a terminological influence of the Orphic

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[54] Div. Inst. VII, 13, 6.

[55] Div. Inst. I, 7, 9 and 10.

[56] Monceaux, op. cit., p. 319.

hymns can be seen in early Christian literature. St. James, for example, uses the orphic phrase, "wheel of birth" in his Epistle, 3,6.[57] To Lactantius, Orpheus had an antiquity that was quite beyond human compass: "Orpheus, qui est vetustissimus poetarum et aequalis ipsorum deorum;"[58] he also possessed an incomparable authority, especially because of his fine treatment of the unity of God, "... quod ante ipsum nihil sit genitum, sed ab ipso sint cuncta generata,"[59] and lastly because of his exposure of the real and human life of the god, Saturn.[60]

Lactantius' third pagan source was the religious philosophy of Hermes Trismegistus and his disciples, a bizarre potpourri of philosophy, theology, astrology, medicine and alchemy, all collated in a book entitled Corpus Hermeticum.[61]

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[57] Jaeger, op. cit., p. 8.

[58] Div. Inst. I, 5, 4.

[59] Div. Inst. I, 5, 4.

[60] Div. Inst. I, 13, 11.

[61] "Le Corpus (Hermeticum) rassemblé sous le nom d'Hermès Trismegiste et composé entre 100 et 300, bien qu'il soit essentiellement réligieux et secondairement philosophique, est un témoin excellent de ce grand imbroglio de systèmes. On y trouve de parcelles de toutes les philosophies. On y est tour à tour optimiste et pessimiste, moniste et dualiste. Les différents discours ne s'accordent aucunement entre eux, ce qui encore comprehensible, mais même a l'interieur d'un discours unique des elements contradictoires ont pénétré. L'idée d'un système homogène est passée nettement au second plan." Spanneut, op. cit., p. 39.

Hermeticism, as it came to be known, was a cosmocentric religion of three terms, God, the Cosmos and Man, and in its speculative aspect it resembled Gnosticism. Lactantius considered it more than a human philosophy and recalled that it was adored in Egypt under the name of Mercury.[62] In several of the multifarious doctrines of Hermes and his main disciple, Asclepius, Lactantius saw a denunciation of polytheism and a confirmation of Christianity: for example, the world is the work of God alone;[63] this God has neither a father nor mother;[64] he is a pure spirit;[65] he has no name;[66] he has a son like himself as his adviser and helper;[67] and many more.[68]

In his refutation of polytheism, it is the Sibylline Books, however, from which Lactantius drew most heavily and on which he most strongly relied. The first Sibylline Books had been destroyed by fire in the burning of the Capitol in 83,

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[62] Div. Inst. VII, 13, 4.

[63] Div. Inst. II, 8, 48.

[64] Div. Inst. I, 7, 2.

[65] Div. Inst. II, 8, 68.

[66] Div. Inst. I, 6, 4.

[67] Div. Inst. IV, 6, 4.

[68] Pichon, op. cit., p. 209.

B.C.[69] Various attempts were made to replace them, and numerous forgeries were fabricated under Judaic-Hellenistic, and later, under Christian influence. One of these forgeries written in post-Christian times, probably in handbook form, was in Lactantius' hand when he wrote the Institutes. Along with all of his predecessors with the exception of Irenaeus and Origen,[70] Lactantius uncritically believed that the Sibylline literature had been written before the time of Christ. It is true that the Corpus Hermeticum had been written by pagans; however, not before Christ, but from 100 to 300 A.D. Lactantius hoped that since the Hermetic doctrines were admirably realized in Christianity, the books would carry considerable weight with his cultivated readers as with himself. Consequently, he invoked the Sibyls to confirm many of his positions against polytheism. He employed them to illustrate, for example, the human origin of the gods;[71] the vanity of magic and astrology;[72] the human adventures of the gods;[73]

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[69]The Sibyl was a female prophet of great authority and antiquity in the classical world. She early became pluralized until in time there came to be as many as ten different Sibyls, with the consequence that the name became generic. The utterances or oracles of the Sibyls were in early times reduced to writing in Greek hexameter verse.

[70]De Labriolle, op. cit., p. 206.

[71]Div. Inst. I, 8, 3.

[72]Div. Inst. II, 16.

[73]Div. Inst. I, 11, 47.

the unity of God.[74] Lactantius' use of the Sibyls is much more extensive in Books IV and VII of the Divine Institutes, but as a detailed study of his Christian doctrines will be treated in chapter five, the influence of the Sibylline Books on those doctrines will also be discussed there.[75]

Lactantius made use of pagan religious literature because he believed that it would command greater authority with his pagan readers than the Sacred Scriptures. Knowing little Scripture himself, he felt that the Sibylline Books and the other oracles would be more suitably adapted not only to his readers, but also to himself inasmuch as they were written in the classical form he knew so well. The ideas, in fact, were clearer, their development more ample and orderly, the terms more philosophical, and the images less strange. While the inspiration was Jewish, the style was Hellenic, somewhat in the form of the hymns of Cleanthes and other philosophic poets.[76] Consequently, however severely Lactantius might be criticized for his gullible acceptance of these literary fic-

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[74] Div. Inst. I, 6, 15-16.

[75] Book IV traces through an analogy between Scripture and the Sibylline literature a historical outline of Christianity, the birth, life, passion, death and Resurrection of Christ; Book VII describes mainly through Sibylline eyes the apocalyptic happenings at the end of the world and the second coming of Christ.

[76] Pichon, op. cit., p. 213.

tions as authentic,[77] and his uncritical and copious use of them in the refutation of paganism, three extenuating factors must be kept in mind: most Christian writers before him had accepted their authenticity; Lactantius himself felt more at ease when considering works written in the classical form; and finally, the cultivated pagan reader of Rome or Athens would be more inclined to accept known and generally respected works, written by their fellow pagans in the familiar and traditional style of the classics.

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Lactantius was not content merely to offer a refutation of paganism through human reason and testimony; he also wanted to reveal the very genesis and basis of paganism: "... ne qua dubitatio relinquatur, his secundus liber fontem ipsum patefaciet errorum."[78] Desirous of confounding paganism completely and definitely, he devoted his entire second book, accurately entitled De Origine Erroris, to ascertain the how and why of ancient polytheism.

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[77]"Il est à peine utile de rappeler que tous les oracles si clairs sont le fruit d'une fiction littéraire qui n'a même pas la verité de la vraisemblance." Amann, D.T.C., col. 2428.

[78]Div. Inst. II, 1, 1.

There were two classical explanations of the genesis of paganism. The first interpreted it through allegory, holding that the gods were the personification of natural forces, a position proposed by the Stoics. The second explained paganism through a study of history, maintaining that the gods were redoubtable heroes, kings, conquerors and rulers who were apotheosized after their death in recognition of their great deeds.[79] Euhemerus was the first to elaborate this theory; Ennius introduced it into Rome with his translations of Euhemerus; the Epicureans generally adhered to it; and the majority of the historians more or less consciously followed it in their endeavour to seek historical truth beneath the poetical myths of literature.[80]

The allegorical explanation of the Stoics was more favorable to mythology in that it offered an intelligent interpretation of its existence, as well as discovering there a reasonable explanation of all natural truth. The Stoics were also satisfied with this explanation inasmuch as they wished to live in harmony with the popular religion which clung to

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[79]"The fundamental conception which Euhemerus had put forth in his famous romance, the Ἱερὰ Ἀναγραφή may be summed up as follows: 'The gods were originally powerful kings whom their subjects, from gratitude or from flattery, deified after their death.'" De Labriolle, op. cit., p. 196.

[80]Pichon, op. cit., p. 83.

the old mythology. Lactantius, however, rejected the allegorical explanation of the gods for fear that it might become an intellectual refuge for obstinate pagans; with Cicero[81] he felt that the allegories could not be reconciled with the truth which the human and precise details of the lives of the gods conveyed.[82]

On the other hand, Lactantius accepted Euhemerism because in 'humanising' polytheism, it tended to render it prosaic and reduce it to the commonplace of sinful, human existence. The shower of gold in Danai's lap was, in truth, Jupiter's payment for his immodest outrage.[83] The eagle of Ganymede was only the carved symbol of the ship on which Jupiter sinfully bore him off.[84] Again, Prometheus was but a vulgar craftsman who happened to be the first to mould the figures of humans.[85] To confirm the Euhemerist position, Lactantius characteristically fortified his own arguments with the testimony of the pagan writers, especially Cicero and the Sibyls.[86] He even cited Cornelius Nepos, Cassius and Varro,[87]

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[81] Cicero, De Natura Deorum II, 28, 70.

[82] Div. Inst. I, 17, 2.

[83] Div. Inst. I, 11, 18.

[84] Div. Inst. I, 11, 19.

[85] Div. Inst. II, 10, 12.

[86] Div. Inst. I, 15, 5. Here Lactantius quoted Cicero's Euhemerism twice, De Natura Deorum II, 24, 62 and III, 19, 50.

[87] Div. Inst. I, 13, 8 and 11.

and especially the Sacred History of Ennius, from which he transcribed entire pages, for example, the life, death and burial of Jupiter, and the infanticides of Saturn.[88] Though Lactantius shared the gullibility of his age in accepting Euhemerism, he displayed a certain subtlety in divining the motives that originally inspired this doctrine. At times he attributed the apotheosis to fear and flattery: "In adulationem praesentis potentiae,"[89] but generally to sincere motives of admiration, respect and devotion;[90] their genesis he considered to come from the family or local tribe before their worship spread abroad.[91]

In his analysis of paganism Lactantius encountered the difficulty of what explanation to assign to the miracles and prodigies in which paganism abounded. If paganism were utterly false, then the gods possessed no power to perform the miraculous events that filled the pages of Roman History. Lactantius reverently and honestly catalogued them in the seventh chapter--tediously long--of Book II: the miracle of the augur, Attus Naevius, and King Tarquin the Proud; the

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[88] Div. Inst. I, 11, 35 and 45-46; I, 14, 2-4.

[89] Div. Inst. I, 15, 2.

[90] Div. Inst. I, 15, 2 ff.

[91] Div. Inst. I, 15, 8.

Temple of Castor and Pollux mysteriously opening its doors of its own accord; statues uttering strange sounds in the temple; the vestal Claudia miraculously freeing her ship from the shallows of the Tiber, and many more. Then Lactantius offered the simple solution that these miracles were performed through the instrumentality, not of the gods, but of the demons or what he considered evil spirits. This doctrine was not new. Plato and the Neo-Platonists had seen the demons as intermediaries between God and man, but they had been beneficent spirits. The early Christian apologists had taken a step further and confined demons to the single role of purveyors of evil. Lactantius' method of treating the matter, however, was new, for in support of his position he again enlisted his pagan adversaries by slyly quoting Hesiod, Socrates and Plato on the existence of the demons,[92] and Hermes and Asclepius on the demon's power, and hatred for man.[93]

The explanation of pagan miracles through the power of the evil spirits is Lactantius' point de départ for beginning the outline of his own Christian doctrine of evil.[94] From chapters eight to sixteen of Book II he traced in broad outline

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[92] Div. Inst. II, 14, 7, and 9.

[93] Div. Inst. II, 15, 6-8.

[94] Pichon, op. cit., p. 85.

the great events of creation, the fall of Adam and the corruption of man, the passage from monotheism to polytheism, and then once again the evil demons and their prodigies revealed through the pagan gods. Consequently, Lactantius has ingeniously linked the Euhemerist doctrine with the theory of the demons by superimposing one on the other: the demons cause the dead kings to be worshipped as gods, or rather cause themselves to be worshipped under the names of the gods.[95] Paganism has been rendered not only ridiculous by his Euhemerist explanation, but also odious inasmuch as the pagan gods are in reality only cover-names for the evil demons.

Lactantius has suceeded in his refutation of polytheism. By the Euhemerist doctrine, namely, that the classical gods are merely glorified kings and heroes, he has exposed the falsity of the genesis of polytheism, but anxious to deal a final and a crippling blow to the blight of pagan mythology, he has added his theory of the demons, namely, that the gods and all their prodigies are the machinations of the evil spirits, thereby demonstrating to his pagan readers that polytheism is not only absurd, but inasmuch as it is engendered by evil demons, is despicable as well. In summary, then, Lactantius has in the first two books of his Divine Institutes

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[95] Div. Inst. II, 16, 3.

employed four points in his refutation of polytheism, with no one point novel except that the second and fourth are, in application, both novel and ingenious: first, the argument of reason, second, the testimony of pagan authors, religious and classical; third, the doctrine of Euhemerus; and fourth, the theory that polytheism was a pernicious contrivance of the wicked demons.

CHAPTER IV

LACTANTIUS AND CLASSICAL PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy in the classical world traditionally encompassed in the minds of pagan and Christian alike the totality of human knowledge. It expressed a meaning that might be termed totalitarian inasmuch as its formal function was to treat all questions that were of ultimate concern to man: the nature of the universe, the gods and man, and the resulting relations between each of them. To have found the right answer to these questions was σοφία or wisdom, while the quest or search for the answer was φιλοσοφία or the love of wisdom. The schools of philosophy that developed over the centuries tended to form into something like religious communities, often practising a strict asceticism in the hope that by this break from the world they would undergo a complete μετάνοια or conversion.[1] Though speculative activity began with the Ionian Greeks, it grew mainly in these schools and developed gradually and logically into the triple division of physics, ethics and logic. Physics was theoretical science and covered the broadest compass to include

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[1] Armstrong-Markus, op. cit., p. 150.

theology, mathematics, natural science and psychology. Its theology was what today is termed natural theology, and being speculative in nature was quite divorced from the popular theology or religion of the people. The second branch was ethics, a practical science that included ethics proper or the rules of moral conduct, economics and politics. It is interesting to note that the ethics of Hellenism did not arise from the religion of the Greeks but from their philosophy.[2] Logic, the third division of philosophy, consisted in a critical examination of the instrument of human knowledge and its modus operandi through demonstration, induction and argumentation. Those who affirmed this tripartite division were the dogmatists, that is, the Stoics and Epicureans; those who denied it were the Sceptics, that is, the Academics.[3]

Although the spirit of rationalization among the Greeks reached a climax in the great schools of Plato and Aristotle,[4]

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[2]"The Olympian religion was never conspicuously ethical; the morals of the Greek gods did not keep pace with the developing ethical consciousness of the Hellenes. It was not from their cults, but from their philosophy that moral ideals came to the Greeks." Angus, The Mystery Religions and Christianity, p. 11.

[3]Cochrane, op. cit., p. 164.

[4]"The evolution of the Greek mind from the earliest time reveals, after an initial period of mythological thinking, a growing tendency toward rationalization of all forms of human activity and thought. As its supreme manifestation it produced philosophy, the most characteristic and unique form of the Greek genius and one of its foremost titles to historical greatness." Jaeger, op. cit., p. 41.

with the Epicureans and Stoics who followed it gradually suffered a decline. Philosophy began to lose its tradition of free and spontaneous enquiry and tended to become a canon of rigid and explicit dogmas that were designed primarily as a guide for a moral and not an intellectual life. Consequently, it took on a religious nature, and this can be clearly seen in the current literature, for example, in the deeply religious hymn of the early Stoic Cleanthes, and also in another way in the enthusiastic praise of Lucretius for his master, Epicurus. Though the large philosophical schools at one point joined forces in an effort to combat the threat of Scepticism, they became concerned ever increasingly with religion as their predominant theme. Retaining at the same time the old cult religion and interpreting the myths as physical allegories, they also became interested in the religion of the barbarians, whereas in their metaphysics they tended to the esoteric which was confined to a handful of learned commentators. In the first century B.C., Cicero complained that there was no Greek philosopher who could understand Aristotle.[5]

In the early centuries of Christianity, Musonius, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius and Plutarch also felt obliged to choose religious subjects, and in public life religion had

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[5]Cicero, Topica I, 3, Quoted in Jaeger, op. cit., p. 124.

largely superseded politics, as in Isocrates' time, as the fit subject for rhetorical declamation. The so-called Middle Platonism of the second century A.D. saw Plato as the supreme theological authority,[6] while the early Christian Platonists interpreted his ideas as the thoughts of God. Neo-Platonism, founded by Plotinus, also tended to the religious and mystical. In this kind of religio-philosophic atmosphere the founders of Christian philosophy, Origen and Clement of Alexendria, initiated the Christian tradition which Lactantius was soon to adopt in the West, of bringing pagan philosophy to bear in support of the Christian religion.

The pagan philosophy at the time of Lactantius, then, was punctuated with theology and mysticism. Since little creative thought existed in the pagan world with the exception of Plotinus and Porphyry, the educated class often looked to the past and found their satisfaction in Cicero, who combined their ideals of rhetoric and religious philosophy. "Ils ont trouvé refuge dans sa vaste synthèse philosophique,"[7] or frequently they placed their credence in one of the current works

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[6]By including Plato in the religious philosophy of the age, Hellenism, thinks Jaeger, was saved: "No mere formal classicism could save that old civilization. The reason for its survival as a whole was the fact that it possessed Plato; had it not been for him, the rest of Hellenic culture might have died along with the old Olympian gods." Jaeger, op. cit., p. 144.

[7]Spanneut, op. cit., p. 37.

of religious philosophy that proliferated at this time, a classic example of which was the collection of Hermes Trismegistus, an amalgam of all known intellectual disciplines. At this time, too, was spawned the Sibylline literature, an essentially religious collection of Judaism, Hellenism and Hermeticism. The world was not studied for itself, but as a means to go to God, who had to be experienced at all cost. This mystical striving generally took two forms: either it was man who acted by the power of his divine reason, or it was God himself who acted by offering salvation to man. The Gnostics with their esoteric, privileged knowledge belonged to the former category, and it is largely Gnosticism which the early Christian writers, Irenaeus, Tertullian and Hippolytus continued to denounce, until at length Clement of Alexandria succeeded in laying hold of it and baptizing it under the form of a Christian gnosticism.

Against the pessimistic transcendence of the Gnostics,[8] however, stood the optimistic immanence of the Stoics: God is in man and the universe and all is right with the world. Though the Stoics in the early Christian era underwent a certain eclecticism, they remained fundamentally faithful to their basic doctrine. They invaded the popular, and indeed all,

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[8]"L'homme est un Dieu tombé qui se souvient des cieux." Ibid., p. 43.

levels of society; it was impossible to speak about God, creation, providence, the passions, without using Stoic terminology. This condition obtained to the mid-third century when the Stoics suffered a sudden and dramatic decline, until in Augustine's time only their ashes survived. It was into this controversial and uncertain atmosphere that the early Christian writers intruded as they strove to dispel the uncertainty and propound the truth of the Christianity they had recently embraced.

With the completion of the first two books of the Divine Institutes, Lactantius felt that his task was only just begun. His refutation of polytheism was, after all, not original except for a few innovations of technique. Besides, he knew that his cultivated readers retained only a sentimental affiliation towards the Olympic gods, and that consequently his treatment of polytheism had been no more than a formal repetition of the traditional criticism of the Christian apologists. In the encounter with his new adversaries, the pagan philosophers, Lactantius realized that his task was considerably more onerous. Apart from the sporadic and generally ineffectual attacks of the apologists, no Christian before him had embarked on such an awesome undertaking. Besides, the knowledge and eloquence of his opponents were more formidable.[9] Even if his cultivated readers reasonably rejected

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[9] Div. Inst. II, 19, 2.

polytheism, they would rest content in the rational explanations of Zeno and Plato, systems that provided satisfaction to the mind and solace for the heart. Lactantius' duty, then, was to demonstrate the absolute superiority of Christianity over philosophy, as he had demonstrated earlier its superiority over polytheism.

He was not, however, irreconciliable in his opposition to the philosophers. Although he did not hesitate to point out their faults and question their virtues, he pitied their ignorance more than he blamed their pride, and he criticised more the system that produced the error than the individual who submitted to it. In fact, seeing truth scattered thoughout the pages of the various systems, he felt that it was his task to collect these grains of truth and work them into the leaven of the full truth of Christianity.

In his criticism of philosophy, moreover, Lactantius generally attacked the classical position of the various schools. In this he was following the tradition of doxography maintained by the Christian apologists and earlier laid down by the secular literature of the ancient world, namely that in a polemic against an opposing school the author traced the formal and original exposition of a particular doctrine and then proceeded logically to reveal its error. Lactantius, then, was only in the stream of this tradition,

and consequently since he had in mind only the classical doctrines of the ancient philosophers, no justifiable inference can be drawn from his writings about the current state of the four great schools of philosophy.[10] In his refutation of a particular position, he employed not only his own reasoning but also more particularly the reasoning of other schools. As it suited him, he used one in refutation of the other: Plato and Epicurus--strange bedfellows--were invoked to prove against Aristotle that the world had a beginning, and Epicurus again, to demonstrate against Aristotle and Plato that the world had an end. On the subject of creation he enlisted Plato against the Epicureans, the Stoics against Democritus, Aristotle against Aristippus, and so forth. No preference was given to any one system; one reference in combination with that of another school was selected to defend or refute a particular position. No school was entirely right; none entirely wrong. Truth was to be discovered indiscriminately, some here, some there. Ever keeping in mind the authority of the pagan philosophers in the eyes of his learned readers, Lactantius' guiding principle was, that while half the truth lay dispersed through the different systems of the philosophers, the whole truth resided in the true philosophy, Christianity.

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[10] Hagendahl, op. cit., p. 82.

Pressing to the attack, Lactantius displays an uncharacteristic spirit of ridicule. Citing the inadequacy of the philosophers by their own admission,[11] he mocked them with epithets of caeci, inepti, deliri,[12] and then recounting anecdotes from Cicero and Seneca, he retailed the philosophers' vices: "Si quis mores eorum diligenter inquirat, inveniet iracundos, cupidos, libidinosos, adrogantes, protervos, et sub obtentu sapientiae sua vitia celantes."[13] Even their virtues he called into question, condemning the vanity of Cato's suicide,[14] and even passing judgment on the eloquence of Cicero.[15] Occasionally he erroneously attributed a doctrine to a philosopher, as when he alluded to the atheism of Plato.[16] The most grievous fault of the philosophers, however, was their pride; the pagan worshippers really were wiser in their ignorance because, cognizant of their condition, they did not seek what

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[11] Div. Inst. III, 28, 11.

[12] Div. Inst. II, 5, 10.

[13] Div. Inst. III, 15, 8 ff.

[14] "Cato qui fuit in omni sua vita stoicae vanitatis imitator." Div. Inst. III, 18, 5.

[15] Div. Inst. III, 14, 12.

[16] Div. Inst. II, 4, 26.

was beyond them.[17]

The hostility of Lactantius' polemic against the philosophers is considerably tempered by the generosity of his praise. He rendered homage to the lofty geniuses of Socrates and Plato, "Tot ac tanta ingenia,"[18] and termed them the kings of the philosophers.[19] Cicero, however, was accorded the most fulsome praise. He was not only the most distinguished of the orators, but also the most princely of the Roman philosophers.[20] How nobly he treated the sublime themes of God and conscience,[21] and if he erred, the fault ought not to be assigned to him, but to his sect.[22] Frequently his doctrine paralleled that enunciated by Sacred Scripture itself,[23] and he spoke of the law of God with such unction as to excel even the inspired utterances of pious Christians.[24] Seneca, for his part, was generously euologized as the most astute of the Stoics[25] and

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[17] Div. Inst. III, 5, 4.

[18] Div. Inst. III, 30, 2.

[19] Div. Inst. III, 17, 29.

[20] Div. Inst. I, 17, 3.

[21] Div. Inst. VI, 24, 18.

[22] "Haec non Ciceronis est culpa, sed sectae." Div. Inst. II, 8, 53.

[23] Div. Inst. II, 11, 15.

[24] Div. Inst. VI, 8, 6.

[25] Div. Inst. I, 5, 26.

the most Christian of the philosophers.[26] Though Lactantius generally rejected Epicurean doctrines, he often enlisted Lucretius in the refutation of paganism.[27] The philosophers, then, were frequently treated with benevolence. Lactantius realized that though the truth lay scattered particulatim[28] through their works, they were unable to attain the full truth simply because, unaware of the necessity of God's revelation, they relied solely on reason, and yet he felt that they deserved to attain it because they yearned with such persistent and passionate desire to know it above all else.[29] Consequently, Lactantius did not reject philosophy but the error in philosophy, and respecting the sincerity of their motivation and the truth in their doctrine he endeavoured to integrate both into the full truth of Christianity.[30]

Since it is clear that Lactantius made copious use of citations from the classical authors in his refutation of paganism and defence of Christianity, it would seem to be appropriate to indicate in detail the debt he owed to particular

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[26] Div. Inst. VI, 24, 13.

[27] Div. Inst. II, 3, 12.

[28] Div. Inst. VII, 7, 7.

[29] Div. Inst. I, 1, 3.

[30] Div. Inst. VI, 2, 17.

writers in terms of the number of directly traceable quotations. The Latin writers, especially Cicero, Vergil and Lucretius, predominate by a considerable margin over the Greeks. It is uncertain, as has been pointed out in chapter one, how much Greek Lactantius knew; at any rate, it is probable that most of his Greek sources came to him through Cicero, Varro and handbook translations.[31] Cicero, his great model and inspiration, stands out as Lactantius' most abundant source, for he provided for the extant opera omnia of Lactantius more than two hundred and fifty quotations, by far the greatest number of discernible citations.[32] The bulk of these were culled from Cicero's philosophical works: over sixty from De Natura Deorum alone, especially Books I and II, in which are outlined the Epicurean and Stoic positions; and many from De Republica, De Officiis, The Tusculan Disputations, De Legibus and Academica. Many other works are referred to, though De Finibus is a strange exception.[33] An indication of Lactantius' command of Cicero's works is his use of the same reference in different books and works, e.g. De Natura Deorum II, 56, 140 in

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[31]Pichon, op. cit., p. 222 ff.

[32]The material for these paragraphs has been taken from the Index Auctorum of Brandt-Laubmann's Opera Omnia Lactanti, vol. xxvii, Pars II, Fasc. II, p. 241 - 269.

[33]Brandt-Laubmann does not mention De Finibus. However, there is at least an indirect reference to De Finibus V, 28 in Div. Inst. III, 8, 32.

Div. Inst. II, 1, 14-19; III, 10, 10; and in De Opificio Dei 8, 2.

There are almost a hundred citations of Vergil from all books of the Aeneid, especially Book VI, and several as well from the Bucolics and Georgics. Lucretius supplies sixty-two citations, with many used in several places, from all six books of the De Rerum Natura, particularly Books I, II and V. Epicurus is quoted thirty-eight times; Seneca has thirty-three quotations, mostly from the Exhortations; Plato twenty-four, with five references from the Republic; and Varro at least twenty-four. The majority of the remaining classical authors, both Latin and Greek, are referred to at least once.[34] The pagan and Christian religious writers, finally, are assiduously cited: The Sibylline Books have over eighty quotations, Cyprian thirty-six, Mincius Felix twenty-four, Tertullian fifteen, the Orphic Poems five, Arnobius four and Irenaeus one.

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Lactantius confronted in the first six chapters of his polemic against the philosophers the age-old philosophic

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[34]Sallust 13; Quintilian 10; Terence 8; Horace 8; Persius 7, mostly from Satire II; Aristotle 4; Livy 4; Chrysippus 4; Euripides 3; Hesiod 3; Homer 3; Lucan 3; Plutarch 2; Propertius 1; Tacitus 1; Zeno 1; Naevius 1; Juvenal 1; Nepos 1; Catullus 1; Cleanthes 1.

problem of the theory of knowledge. First of all, he claimed, in philosophy there are only two subjects: knowledge and conjecture and no other,[35] and if either is impossible, then philosophy is destroyed. The Academics maintained that because nothing certain can be known about anything, knowledge is impossible through the instrumentality of reason and therefore should be confined to the province of the diviners. For their part, the natural philosophers, that is, the Stoics, asserted that because not everything can be known with certainty, then conjecture is impossible also.[36] Thus, concluded Lactantius, the whole of philosophy is destroyed. "Ergo si neque sciri quidquam potest, ut Socrates docuit, neque opinari oportet, ut Zenon, tota philosophia sublata est."[37]

Lactantius' second criticism of the philosophers was directed against the numerous contradictions and discords he discovered in their works. Indeed he often expressed no opinion of his own but merely manipulated the texts of his adversaries with such deftness that they often contradicted and consequently destroyed each other. Plato and Epicurus were invoked, as has been pointed out above, to prove against

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[35] Div. Inst. III, 3, 1.

[36] Div. Inst. III, 3; III, 4; III, 6.

[37] Div. Inst. III, 4, 1.

Aristotle that the world had a beginning; and Epicurus to prove against Aristotle and Plato that it had an end.[38] At times their fight was so bitter that in destroying their opponents, as though they carried a sword but no shield, they destroyed themselves.[39]

Lactantius then proceeded to investigate the formal cause of morality, and in so doing, he gradually unfolded, in the very refutation of pagan philosophy, his own Christian position. Practical Latin as he was, he held that the pursuit of morality far outweighted in importance the study of physics and logic. The latter were indeed rather useless inasmuch as they did not furnish happiness.[40] True value lay in morality, whereas "... in illa physica sola oblectatio est."[41] Rejecting all the philosophical schools as erroneous or inadequate, he placed the solution for the dichotomy between happiness and virtue in religion. Then he went on to the concept of God and finally to the immortality of the soul, refuting all the while the false notions of the philosophers. However, as the remainder of these general philosophical problems which in Book III Lactantius encountered in his polemic against

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[38] Div. Inst. II, 10, 25.

[39] Div. Inst. III, 4, 9.

[40] Div. Inst. III, 13, 6.

[41] Div. Inst. III, 7, 1.

the philosophers, are intimately connected with the formulation of his own position, a detailed treatment will be deferred until the fifth chapter, where Lactantius' dogmatic and moral position will be developed at greater length.

By and large Lactantius restricted himself to dealing with the three great classical schools of philosophy, Epicureanism, Platonism and Stoicism. The remainder of this chapter will be concerned with Lactantius' criticism of each one of these schools in detail, then a brief summary of the influence of Cicero and Seneca, and finally a short resume of Lactantius' general judgment on pagan philosophy as a whole.[42]

"Like Arnobius, Lactantius made use of Lucretius in his apologetic works to an extent unparalleled in Latin literature."[43] Lucretius' denial of divine providence and his claim to deliver mankind from the fear of the gods made him the main target of apologists holding adamantly to the notion of a benign and beneficent God who was solicitous for the needs and cares of all men. Whereas Arnobius never quoted Lucretius directly, Lactantius, besides mentioning Lucretius by name some twenty times and paraphrasing him in another forty passages,

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[42]Because Lactantius was more concerned with the errors of Epicureanism than those of any other system and consequently refuted them first, the same order will be followed in this chapter. Then follow chronologically: Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, the Stoics, Cicero and Seneca.

[43]Hagendahl, op. cit. p. 48.

quoted him directly in no less than twenty-one passages, amounting to some fifty-seven lines of text. Lactantius also had a keen eye and ear for the beauty of the poetry of the De Rerum Natura, and although he could well have exposed the arguments of Lucretius by paraphrase, he chose to quote him literally, with the result that Lactantius is credited with including in his prose works more literal quotations of the poet than any writer since Cicero.[44] Concludes Hagendahl:

> "It is not until 350 years after the lifetime of the poet that we shall meet two Latin authors who seriously occupied themselves with his way of thinking, and made extensive use of his work in their writings. They are the apologists Arnobius and Lactantius."[45]

Some authors have maintained that Lactantius and his master Arnobius were Epicureans before their conversion to Christianity.[46] This seems unlikely in the light of Lactantius' generally harsh treatment of Lucretius, for after a cryptic summary of the whole of Lucretius' philosophy, he concluded

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[44] Ibid., p. 86. Hagendahl feels, however, that the influence of Lucretius on Latin literature in general bears no proportion to his merits as a poet and a thinker. Admitting the influence on Vergil and a fine tribute in the second book of the Georgics, and also the admiration of Ovid, he wonders at the silence of Cicero who ignored him in all his philosophical works. So too Seneca, Pliny the Elder, Quintilian and others. Even Horace was interested only in his ethics.

[45] Hagendahl, op. cit., p. 11.

[46] Ibid., p. 49.

sarcastically: "Est plane cur quispiam putet hanc vocem viri esse sapientis, quae potest latronibus aptissime commodari."[47] It would not be unreasonable to assume that since Lucretius was among the authors read and commented on in the schools and since this tradition was particularly strong in the schools of Africa, Lactantius learned his Lucretius from his master Arnobius.[48] Further, Lactantius' knowledge of Epicurus was undoubtedly based on Lucretius or on Cicero because he probably knew little Greek. Lactantius did not distinguish in his arguments between the philosopher and the poet, and he resorted to Lucretius only to combat the philosophy, not of Epicurus nor of Lucretius, but of Epicureanism.

The following passage, which is a summary of Lactantius' knowledge of Epicurean doctrine, explains Lactantius' strong antipathy towards Epicureanism:

> "Deos nihil curare; non ira, non gratia tangi; inferorum poenas non esse metuendas, quod animae post mortem occidant nec ulli omnino sint inferi; voluptatem esse maximum bonum; nullam esse humanam societatem; sibi quemque consulere; neminem esse qui alterum diligat nisi sua causa; mortem non esse metuendam forti viro nec ullum dolorem, qui etiamsi torqueatur, si uratur, nihil curare se dicat."[49]

Although a positive influence can be seen, for example, in

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[47] Div. Inst. III, 17, 43.

[48] Hagendahl, op. cit., p. 87.

[49] Div. Inst. III, 17, 42.

Lactantius' view of primitive man in Book VI of the Institutes and in his accepting Epicurus as an ally in the refutation of pagan worship,[50] Lactantius could not tolerate Epicurean atheism and hedonism, and in fact it was the philosophy of Epicureanism that epitomized the pagan spirit to which Lactantius and indeed all Christians were so violently opposed. He originally resisted it in his first philosophic work, De Opificio Dei, which dealt primarily with the providence that Epicureanism denied. He rejected it outright, and in a later work, De Ira Dei, basing his argument on the Epicurean concept of god,[51] Lactantius went on to argue that since the Epicurean god dwelt in idle immobility it could not possibly enjoy either beatitude nor, consequently, possess divinity.

It is, however, in the Divine Institutes that Lucretius suffered, because of his atheism, atomism and materialism, his most vigorous and extensive condemnation. By flattering the base instincts of man[52] and by attempting to remove

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[50] Div. Inst. II, 3, 10. The Epicureans were wiser than the pagan worshippers because they saw through the folly of polytheism. However, Lactantius chastised them for their atheism.

[51] "'Ex hoc,' inquit (sc. Epicurus), 'beatus est et incorruptus (sc. deus), quia nihil curat, neque ipse habet negotium neque atteri exhibet.' " De Ira Dei 4, 2. This idea Lactantius took from Cicero's first book of De Natura Deorum; in general he sided with Cotta, Cicero's spokesman for the Academics. Hagendahl, op. cit., p. 71.

[52] Div. Inst. III, 17, 2.

fear from the hearts of men, he destroyed religion itself and thus deprived man of the singular good that was proper to him alone.[53] Epicurus was not a philosopher, but an upstart, a fool, a mad man.[54] Although he had demolished polytheism through ridicule, he had not concluded from this that one god exists, but in refuting polytheism, he destroyed monotheism and the true God of Christianity.[55] The occasional austerity of Epicurean morality[56] was really hypocrisy; indeed it opened the door to a tacit permission for all sins.[57]

Lucretius' atomic theory was not only contradictory but also illogical.

> "Cum tam minuta esse dicantur... quomodo hamos aut angulos habent? quos, quia extant, necesse posse divelli. ... Si sensu carent, nec coire tam disposite possunt, quia non potest quidquam rationale efficere nisi ratio."[58]

Finally, the Epicurean view of death, mors nihil ad nos, was completely false. It was not the state of death that men feared but the act of dying; besides, the Epicureans assumed

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[53] Div. Inst. III, 10, 9.

[54] Div. Inst. II, 8, 49; III, 17, 18.

[55] Div. Inst. VII, 3, 26.

[56] Div. Inst. III, 27, 5.

[57] Div. Inst. III, 17, 3.

[58] Div. Inst. III, 17, 26-27.

quite gratuitously that souls also perish with the death of the body.[59] The denial of providence and the afterlife granted carte blanche to make merry, to rob, to kill.[60] No more effective stimulus could be granted to a band of robbers than to read them a resume of Epicurean philosophy.[61] Lactantius was perhaps somewhat severe here, but he pronounced judgment after making as assessment in typically Roman fashion, not of the metaphysical first principles of its founder, but of the practical consequences he witnessed, and consequently he did not hesitate to condemn the irreligion and materialism of a philosophy that stood as an antithesis to all he held as a Christian.

The Pythagoreans, along with the Stoics, are praised for their belief in the immortality of the soul, but chided for a false inference they draw, namely metempsychosis.[62] Socrates is eulogized for his scorn of the overly ambitious speculations of the metaphysicians, but criticized for his carrying this to the point of despising all earthly occurrences,[63] and lastly for failing to break completely with atheistic superstitions.[64]

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[59] Div. Inst. III, 17, 33.

[60] Div. Inst. III, 17, 36.

[61] Div. Inst. III, 17, 41.

[62] Div. Inst. III, 19, 19.

[63] Div. Inst. III, 20, 11.

[64] Div. Inst. III, 20, 15.

Plato's errors are more serious because they tend to destroy the whole fabric of society.[65] In his most original and eloquent criticism of classical thought, Lactantius severely condemned the communism outlined in the Republic. Though a collectivity of property is not impossible, it would demand an extraordinary indifference to money.[66] Collectivity of wives, however, would deteriorate into pure bestiality[67] and the absolute neglect of conjugal love, while communal living of children would result in the complete abandonment of filial and paternal love.[68] Lactantius claimed that this attempt of Plato at equality stemmed from an erroneous notion of justice. He felt that justice could not be effected by law and external decree. It should, on the contrary, emanate from the interior, from the heart of man.[69] If man is to be on an equality with his fellow man, property and family are not to be abolished, but selfishness and pride. The true equality, the true justice is spiritual and resides only in religion.[70] Besides Plato's collectivism, Lactantius also

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[65]Pichon thinks that Lactantius' knowledge of Plato came generally through Cicero. Lactantius usually paraphrased Plato's ideas, although he often quoted from the Timaeus, which Cicero had translated into Latin. Pichon, op. cit., p. 222.

[66]"Concedamus ut possit fieri: omnes enim sapientes erunt et pecuniam contemnent." Div. Inst. III, 21, 3.

[67]Div. Inst. II, 21, 4.

[68]Div. Inst. III, 21, 8 ff.

[69]Div. Inst. III, 22, 2.

[70]Div. Inst. III, 22, 3 ff.

condemned his position on the eternity of the world,[71] as well as his proof for the immortality of the soul from the pre-existent forms which the soul quickly grasped as though it recalled and remembered them.[72]

Lactantius dealt rather severely with what he considered the errors of Plato, but he always maintained great respect for the philosopher whom together with Aristotle he termed "Qui velut reges habentur philosophorum."[73] Although the full impact of Plato's thought through Neo-Platonism was not felt in the West until after Lactantius' time, his influence on the doctrines of Lactantius, viz. his notions of God, providence, the λόγος, creation, dualism and finally heavenly beatitude, which are to be treated in the next chapter, was still considerable. Platonism was the most influential philosophy in fourth century Latin Christianity:[74] practically every dogmatic and moral doctrine of the Christians with the exception of the Resurrection and the notions of forgiveness and asceticism were strongly influenced by Plato and

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[71] Div. Inst. VII, 1, 6.

[72] Div. Inst. VII, 22, 19 cf. Meno 85 C and Phaedo 72 E; also Cicero. Tusculans I, 24, 57 ff and De Senectute 21, 78.

[73] Div. Inst. III, 17, 29

[74] Clarke, op. cit., p. 148.

the Neo-Platonism he inspired.[75]

Turning his attention to the Stoics, Lactantius eulogized them for their belief in providence and the immortality of the soul, but at the same time he warned that even in presenting the truth, they had erred: "In eo ipso quod recte sentiebant, aliquid errarunt."[76] The philosophy of Stoicism, until the resurgence of Platonism in the middle of the third century, had been the predominant way of thought in the classical world for some five hundred years.[77] Although in the course of its long career it had retained many of the basic doctrines of its founders, there were in the early centuries of Christianity three forms of Stoicism: what might be termed an official Stoicism, as expressed by writers like Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius and which had become largely concerned with the problems of morality; a scholastic Stoicism, as taught in the schools, for the most part in its original state; and a popular Stoicism, as interpreted by the common people, with a predominantly moral flavour.[78] The Christian writers, for example Justin and Minucius Felix, in the first

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[75]Momigliano, op. cit., p. 163.

[76]Div. Inst. III, 18, 1.

[77]Spanneut, op. cit., p. 25.

[78]Ibid., p. 70.

two and a half centuries of Christianity, were also dominated by the influence of Stoicism more than by any other philosophy. In the East it was Clement of Alexandria in the third century who marked the passage from the Stoic epoch to the Platonic, and in the West Lactantius stood at the end of the Stoic era. He was influenced by Stoicism considerably in his notions of God, providence, Christ, the immortality of the soul and the virtues, all of which will be treated in the following chapter. Here will be considered briefly only his negative reaction to Stoicism, the refutation of what he thought inconsonant with Christian dogma and morality.

Lactantius strongly reprimanded the Stoics for their approval of suicide. Drawing the parallel with homicide, he cried: "Si homicida nefarius est, quia hominis extinctor est, eidem sceleri obstrictus est qui se necat, quia hominem necat."[79] The Stoics were erroneously persuaded that death was always and essentially a blessing, while in fact it could be either a blessing, that is, if it followed a virtuous life and consequently it would lead to an eternal reward, or it could be a curse, if it followed a sinful life and thus would lead to eternal damnation.[80] He went on to condemn their considering

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[79] Div. Inst. III, 18, 6.

[80] Div. Inst. III, 19, 9.

all faults, trivial or grave, of the same serious nature, but he chided them especially for their placing among the vices, the beautiful and distinctively human virtue of pity, "... qui plane vocatur humanitas qua mosmet invicem tueremur."[81]

Before the close of this chapter on Lactantius' reaction to pagan philosophy, it would seem appropriate to say a few words on two individual philosophers, Cicero and Seneca, who greatly influenced not only Lactantius but also the cultivated readers to whom Lactantius directed his work. "Quos (Lactanti) libros si legere volueris, dialogorum Ciceronis epitomen reperies."[82] This sentence of Jerome is an indication of the influence of Cicero, both in content and in style, not only on Lactantius but on all the Christian writers of the West. Just as Cicero accommodated the great doctrines of Greek thought to the political and social needs of the Roman state, so did Lactantius, by following the same eclectic method, attempt to accommodate these same doctrines to the fundamental dogmas of Christianity. Though the influence of Cicero will be treated in detail in the following chapter, it would seem appropriate in this chapter which is concerned with the pagan philosophers to comment briefly on the man who in

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[81] Div. Inst. III, 23, 8.

[82] Jerome. Ep. LVIII, 10, quoted in deLabriolle, op. cit. p. 21.

Pichon's words, "... est à lui seul (i.e. Cicéron) pour Lactance une source aussi importante que tous les autres écrivains réunis."[83]

Lactantius copied Cicero without scruple on almost every page. He borrowed facts, references and arguments of all kinds and when he neglected to cite him, his thoughts were the same. So often had he read and re-read the works of Cicero that he had captured the same spirit, the same eclecticism, the same vocabulary, almost the same style.[84] Lactantius has been called the Christian Cicero not only because of his style but because his knowledge of pagan philosophy was drawn almost entirely from Cicero.[85] Jerome too owed much of his knowledge of the philosophers to the same source, and even Augustine later owed a considerable debt to Cicero. Cicero was, in effect, the intermediary between Greek philosophy and the Latin Fathers. His De Officiis, for example, linked the Stoic Περὶ τοῦ καθήκοντος of Panaetius and Ambrose's De Officiis,[86] but of all his works, it was the De Natura Deorum, Book II that exercised the most profound

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[83]Pichon, op. cit., p. 246.

[84]Div. Inst. I, 9, 3 ff; I, 15, 16 ff; I, 17, 1 ff.

[85]Hagendahl, op. cit., p. 348.

[86]Ibid., p. 346.

influence on Christian writers of the western world.[87]

Although he reprimanded Seneca for his Stoic pride in exaggerating the benefits of philosophy,[88] Lactantius generally admired the first century Stoic philosopher. He served as a staunch ally of the Christians in Lactantius' attack against the pagan worshippers, for example, against those who adored idols and yet contemned the maker,[89] but especially against the Epicureans in their morality of pleasure, in a passage which recalls Seneca's De Vita Beata.[90] However, Seneca's influence is seen particularly in his role as a religious and moral writer, for example, in Lactantius' concepts of the greatness of God, providence, evil, justice, purity of soul and the sociability of man.[91] Further, the De Ira of Seneca served as a model for the De Ira Dei of Lactantius not merely in title but even in the description of the physical effects of anger and its dire consequences for society.[92]

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[87] Clarke, op. cit., p. 150.

[88] Div. Inst. III, 15, 1; cf. Seneca, fragment 17 (ed. Hease).

[89] Div. Inst. II, 2, 14.

[90] Div. Inst. III, 11, 6; cf. Seneca. De Vita Beata 10, 3.

[91] cf. Div. Inst. VI, 25, 3. This passage, which states that true worship consists in justice and purity of soul, was taken, according to Pichon, from Seneca, frag. 123. Pichon, op. cit., p. 234.

[92] De Ira Dei 5, 4; cf. Seneca De Ira I, 2, 1.

In his final general appraisal of the philosophers, Lactantius lamented their exclusiveness, for, eschewing the multitudo, they appealed only to pauci judices.[93] The barbarians, slaves, women, workers, peasants, occupied with the necessities of life, did not have the opportunity nor the training to approach the sophisticated schools, but they too should be called to wisdom for they too were men, capable of reason and the pursuit of truth.[94] Another weakness of philosophy lay in its lack of certitude. Being merely of human origin, it displayed no unity, no authority, and consequently the noble precepts expressed by the various schools were often contradictory, and so ineffective.[95] Cicero himself admitted that philosophy's main purpose was not to teach but to divert.[96] Since philosophers disagreed as to the basis of human beatitude, supernatural religion must show that it resided not in pleasure, nor in virtue alone, but in the immortality of the virtuous soul which only faith could promise.[97]

Moreover, philosophy was inept because it was in-

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[93] Div. Inst. III, 25, 2; cf. Tusculans II, 1, 14.

[94] Div. Inst. III, 25, 5.

[95] Div. Inst. III, 15, 5.

[96] Div. Inst. III, 16, 6.

[97] Div. Inst. III, 27, 13.

complete. Its notion of God, for example, was inadequate because it attempted to explain occurrences in the world, not by the power of God, but by Nature or by Fortune, which, said Lactantius, "... per se nihil est; ... est accidentium rerum subitus atque inopinatus eventus."[98] Confusing God and Nature, philosophers conceived Nature as a creative power, as an abstract law, or as the Universe, but surely God, and not Nature, was responsible for the functions which these notions implied.[99]

This final criticism of Lactantius was directed primarliy at Cicero and Seneca, the pagan philosophers most highly regarded in the early fourth century by Lactantius' cultivated readers. The philosophy of these distinguished pagans, though sincere and partially true, was, if not irreligious, at least indifferent and basically naturalistic. Further, to achieve an appeal as universal as possible, it should have been less a meditation and a preparation for action, and more a precise and practical code of conduct for action itself. Philosophy had not furnished complete wisdom because only God through religion could fulfill that function. Lactantius felt that true wisdom consisted not in pleasure, as the Epicureans maintained, nor in virtue and its consequence, glory, which in reality often was lacking, as the Stoics said,

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[98] Div. Inst. III, 29, 1.

[99] Div. Inst. III, 28, 5.

but resided in the religion of Christianity, that is, in the knowledge of God, in his worship, and finally in a life of virtue fortified with the hope of immortality and the joys of an everlasting life with God.[100] Philosophy had sought increasingly, from the time of Cicero to that of Seneca, from Epictetus to Marcus Aurelius, to achieve a religious and moral ideal, but it was the Christian religion that alone could satisfy and complete that ideal. The merit of Lactantius was to have seen, in Pichon's words, "... que le christianisme réalisait plus complètement et plus nettement cet idéal, et de l'avoir fait comprehendre aux clients habituels de la philosophie. Il leur a fait faire le dernier pas."[101]

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[100] Div. Inst. III, 26-30.

[101] Pichon, op. cit., p. 110.

CHAPTER V

THE PHILOSOPHICAL AND DOGMATIC DOCTRINES OF LACTANTIUS

It has been suggested that the distinguishing feature of the doctrine of Lactantius lies in the various degrees of knowledge he considered necessary in man's ascent to truth: the knowledge, first, of the falsity of polytheism; next, of the unity of God and his providence; of the insufficiency of philosophy; then, of the necessity of religion; and finally, of the full truth of Christianity.[1] Having attained the first three degrees of knowledge in his refutation of the two bulwarks of paganism, polytheism and philosophy, and in the exposition at the same time of monotheism and providence, Lactantius ascended to a still higher degree, the knowledge of the necessity of religion, and lastly, in the final four books of the Divine Institutes, to the highest degree, the knowledge of the complete truth in the doctrines of Christianity. Inasmuch as polytheism of its own possessed no intellectual and moral substance, and philosophy of itself tended to neglect the true God,[2] Christianity could reconcile these opposites[3]

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[1] Monceaux, op. cit., p. 324.

[2] Div. Inst. IV, 3, 1 ff.

[3] Div. Inst. I, 1, 25.

by supplying what was lacking in each, and at once dispel the doubts of philosophy and the absurdity of polytheism. Insufficient of itself, each would find fulfilment in the true religion, for unlike paganism which reduced and restricted man to the existence of the present life,[4] religion alone could satisfy and complete man's aspirations which ever looked heavenwards, as even the posture of man suggested.[5] Man needed religion and indeed was made for it; it was his consolation in evil, his solace in suffering.[6] Whereas philosophy was like a father in that it taught man that God granted him life and all that he possessed, religion was like a master in that it warned that God, though parens indulgentissimus,[7] could and would punish man's transgressions.[8]

"Cette religion, telle que la conçoit Lactance, est une philosophie spiritualiste, completée par quelques dogmes."[9] This statement, while rather severe on Lactantius, carries

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[4]Div. Inst. VII, 6, 3.

[5]Div. Inst. II, 1, 17.

[6]Div. Inst. II, 1, 9.

[7]Div. Inst. V, 7, 1.

[8]Div. Inst. IV, 3, 14 ff. The allusion to the patria potestas, taken from the vocabulary of Roman law, would have pleased Lactantius' readers.

[9]Monceaux, op. cit., p. 328.

considerable truth. Lactantius' grand concepts of God, Man and the Universe, with which this chapter will deal, are, in reality, primarily philosophical rather than religious or dogmatic. It is true that he did treat the doctrines of Christ, the Resurrection, the Judgment, the Messiah, but even the doctrine of the Judgment is confused in the curious millenarianism of the final book, and the doctrine of the Messiah is more concerned with the virtue of justice than that of mercy or charity. There is little on the sacraments and less on the church and the communities of the time, and even religious cult plays little part in Lactantius' largely spiritual worship of God. Lactantius, in fact, was not able to reconcile completely faith and reason simply because his argumentation rested on a self-imposed contradiction: truth could be obtained only through divine revelation, yet he insisted on employing the arguments of reason and human testimony not only in the refutation of paganism but even in the exposition of Christian doctrine, to attain that truth. Reason, then, was used to establish and confirm the faith, and at the same time summarily dismissed as inadequate in the ascent towards the truth of that faith.

The great merit of Lactantius, however, lay in his system of morality. The first Christian to enunciate a complete synthesis of ethics,[10] he based his morality on the

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[10] Ibid., p. 333.

certainty of the existence of a sovereign God, the term of man's life, eternal happiness, and the means man possessed to attain that end. From this certitude flowed the virtues, justice, charity, chastity and that virtue either ignored or considered dangerous by the philosophers, repentance. Lactantius considered ethics as the most vital and practical branch of philosophy and in his treatment of it he distinguished himself not only as a Christian apologist but also as a profane philosopher.[11]

Despite the superficiality of his religious doctrines, Lactantius did elaborate a kind of synthesis of the Christian faith. The majority of his doctrines, though cursorily and, occasionally, erroneously treated, are contained in the Divine Institutes. By means of the prophetic argument, not of Sacred Scripture, but of the Sibylline literature, he demonstrated that Christ was God, the summum bonum, the great truth who would lead his pagan readers out of their ignorance and incertitude into the vita beata of the next life. Admittedly he stressed the exterior role of Christ in his capacity as master of truth and morality, as opposed to the interior role of sanctification, but in this Lactantius was undoubtedly considering the tastes and attitudes of his pagan readers.

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[11]Pichon, op. cit., p. 130.

In a summa contra gentes can one expect a summa theologica?[12] Finally, he does not deserve the scorn that has been heaped upon him over the years for the extraordinary eschatology he developed in the seventh book. This criticism originally emanated in great measure from the theologians of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries who were largely ignorant of the curious eschatological ideas current in Lactantius' time. Consequently, their biased appraisal is in these days quite inadmissible.

The polemic against pagan polytheism and philosophy in chapters three and four of this paper has emphasized almost exclusively the negative aspect of Lactantius' reaction to classical thought. This chapter, in outlining Lactantius' system of Christian doctrine, will, on the other hand, stress the positive reaction of Lactantius to this thought, and attempt to show the beneficent influence of pagan philosophy in the elaboration of his doctrine contained in the last four books of the Divine Institutes. The themes of God, Man and the Universe, therefore, have been chosen as the subject matter of this chapter for the following reasons: first, these themes constituted the burden of religious thinking at the time of Lactantius;[13] they incorporate the main body of

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[12]Amann, D.T.C., col. 2434.

[13]Spanneut, op. cit., p. 73.

Lactantius' system of thought; and lastly, they manifest the considerable influence of classical thought on both his philosophical and dogmatic doctrines. Under the theme of God will be treated the notions of providence and the λόγος. The second section on Man will deal with the immortality of the soul, and particularly Lactantius' system of morality. Lastly, the third theme, the Universe, will concern itself with Lactantius' doctrines of creation and eschatology.

For his concept of God, Lactantius borrowed the basic notions from the various schools of philosophy, corrected them and then wove them into the context of the Christian theology of his time. With the Stoics he admired the order of the world and the regularity of the stars, but he did not conclude from this, as they did, that the stars were divine. On the contrary, since they did not possess freedom of the will, they could not be divine.[14] Indeed he reduced Stoic pantheism ad absurdum, saying that if the world were divine, then all creatures of the world would also have to be divine, even frogs, gnats and ants.[15] Shocked at this extreme prospect, Lactantius insisted on the distinction between creature and creator, on the existence, not of an immanent, but of a tran-

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[14] Div. Inst. II, 5, 14.

[15] Div. Inst. II, 5, 36.

scendent God,[16] a position close to that of Plato and Cicero. God, indeed, was sovereign, one and incomprehensible, as Plato stated in the Timaeus,[17] and in his proof of monotheism, Lactantius employed the enumeration of Greek doctrines on the divinity which Cicero used in the De Natura Deorum.[18]

The notion, however, that Lactantius was most concerned in establishing in all his apologetic and philosophical treatises was the divine attribute of providence. This concept was important in Greek philosophy, and though denied by the Epicureans, it played a notable part in the systems of Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics and Cicero. Lactantius admitted the influence of the Stoics and Cicero in the very first pages of the Divine Institutes, and, indeed, referring to them, he asserted that there was little reason for him to refute those who rejected providence because "... providentiam tollentibus satis responsum videtur ab hominibus argutis et eloquentibus."[19] The influence of the Stoic Seneca can also be seen in Seneca's declaration of confidence in a providence which permitted innocent men to suffer. Lactantius recalled this theory of manly endurance in order to absolve God of the charge of

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[16] Div. Inst. II, 5, 37.

[17] Div. Inst. I, 8, 1; IV, 4, 6; cf. Timaeus 28 C.

[18] Div. Inst. I, 5, 16-23; cf. De Natura Deorum I, 10-15, 25-39. The aim of Cicero here, however, was not to establish monotheism, but to expose the contradictions of the different schools. cf. Pichon, op. cit., p. 252.

[19] Div. Inst. I, 2, 6.

severity, and to explain the sufferings of Christians.[20] He wrote his first work, De Opificio Dei, to illustrate that the provident hand of God operated in the human organism down to the minutest detail;[21] with all its physiological details, this little work had one definite aim, to assert what was to its author the substance of Christianity, the existence and wisdom of divine providence.[22]

In the Divine Institutes Lactantius enriched his notion of providence. In a moving and eloquent passage in chapter two of the first book, he asked whether there could possibly be anyone so uncouth as to deny the existence of providence when he raised his eyes to heaven:

> "Nemo est enim tam rudis, tam feris moribus quin oculos suos in caelum tollens, tametsi nesciat cuius dei providentia regatur hoc omne quod cernitur, aliquam tamen esse intellegat ex ipsa rerum magnitudine motu dispositione constantia utilitate pulchritudine temperatione nec posse fieri quin id quod mirabili ratione constat consilio maiore aliquo sit instructum."[23]

In the fourth book he took a step further, maintaining that

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[20] Div. Inst. III, 29, 16; cf. Seneca, De Providentia 2, 4; 2, 7; 4, 16.

[21] De Opificio Dei 2 ff.

[22] "La description du corps humain n'est que le cadre; le fond c'est une demonstration de dogme de la providence." Pichon, op. cit., p. 64.

[23] Div. Inst. I, 2, 5.

if man should prove ungrateful for the incredibilis beneficentia of providence, he would be in danger of losing his sense of piety, and Lactantius concluded that this was certainly not the part of a wise man.[24] He then went on to picture God, now operating not only in living creatures as seen in De Opificio Dei, but present and operating in the whole world, always acting for men, watching over his loved ones, sustaining them, submitting them to trial, and finally granting them the reward of heaven. Then, since the idea of a reward for the just implied necessarily that of a punishment for the wicked, Lactantius devoted his next work, De Ira Dei, entirely to the theme of divine retribution, and finally to complete the notion of providence, he viewed God in his last work, De Mortibus Persecutorum, as protecting the just and punishing the wicked not in abstracto but in the very real context of actual history which depicted the hideous deaths of the great persecutors of Christianity.

The second point of Lactantius' idea of God deals with his notion of the λόγος, which because of its christological application was treated by all Christian writers of the early centuries. Christians, of course, believed in Christ's divinity, as they did in the Father's, but similarly they strongly opposed pagan polytheism. Their problem

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[24] Div. Inst. IV, 3, 3 ff.

was to try to explain to the pagans--and to themselves--how Christ was God as well as his Father, and at the same time to avoid the pagan countercharge of Christian belief in the divinity of more than one than God, or in other words, a Christian polytheism. To grasp fully Lactantius' Christian concept of the λόγος, it might be profitable first to trace its origin in Greek philosophy.

The intellectual forms of Plato which played such an important role in his philosophy exerted a considerable influence on the Christian doctrine of the λόγος.[25] The Wisdom literature of the Old Testament, written mainly in the second century before Christ, had revealed this influence in their concept of Sapientia, a principle seemingly distinct from God whom the Father employed in his act of creation. Philo, the Jewish philosopher whose life came into the Christian era, seems to be the first to have used the term λόγος in a Jewish theological sense. The Stoics had adapted their own notion of it, and when the New Testament writer, John, used it, it had assumed the meaning of the person, Christ. Later, a distinctive feature of the Platonism of the second and third centuries was its hierarchy of divinities. In Albinus of the second century there were two, the contemplative,

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[25]Armstrong-Markus, op. cit., p. 16 ff.

transcendent divine Mind and the active divine Mind which formed and ruled the universe. In Plotinus in the following century there were three: the transcendent One, who was the source of being, from which proceeded the first Mind; the contemplative Soul or Mind which contained the Platonic forms; and third, the intelligent Soul of the universe. The Christian Origen adapted this triple hierarchy to the context of the Christian Trinity. His notion of Father corresponded to that of the transcendent One; the logos-Son, who was inferior to the Father, was the divine Mind; and the Holy Spirit, also inferior, faintly resembled Plotinus' universal Soul. Lactantius with his own peculiar variations fell blamelessly into a similar, but less serious, Subordinationism which only after his death the Councils of Nicea and Constantinople corrected and clarified.

In Lactantius' mind, when God decided to create the world, he generated a Son like himself, to be the instrument of creation with the same power as himself.[26] Thus the Son, the λόγος, or spiritus similis Patri, as Lactantius called him, was not eternal but was created in the timeless interval between eternity and the eve of creation. Avoiding the Stoic distinction between λόγος ἐνδιάθετος and

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[26] Div. Inst. II, 8, 3.

λόγος προφορικός Lactantius used terms like produxit and creatus est[27] in order to express the spiritual birth of the Son. Was this, then, the generation of a creature and not of a God that was to be found in Tertullian? To express clearly the idea that the Son derived his essence from the Father and consequently that he was divine and not a creature, Lactantius discreetly used words like genuit and progenuit as well, and thus dispelled further ambiguity: "Antequam praeclarum hoc opus mundi adoriretur, sanctum et incorruptibilem spiritum genuit, quem Filium nuncuparet."[28]

Christ was perhaps at one time capable of moral failing but he became dear to his Father through perseverance in good. Though divine, he was what Lactantius called in a quotation from Hermes Trismegistus, δεύτερος θεός,[29] a kind of second-place God. Having spent two books in refuting polytheism, Lactantius had no intention of conveying the impression that he had altered his stand and succumbed to a Christian ditheism. Yet he realized that Christ must be shown to be divine just in the same way the Father was. To resolve the difficulty he devoted an entire chapter in Book IV to the topic and showed by means of an original reasoning and a so-

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[27] Epitome 38, 9.

[28] Div. Inst. IV, 6, 1; Epitome 37, 1.

[29] Div. Inst. IV, 6, 4.

phisticated terminology that was to be canonized in later councils of the church, that the Father could not exist without the Son nor be separated from Him, and that both were joined in an indivisible unity of mind, spirit and substance.[30] In this way, Lactantius judiciously preserved both the divinity of Christ and the monotheism of Christianity.

Lactantius made no mention of a third person of the Trinity. There was really no place for the Paraclete in his system of doctrine because the Spirit he often mentioned was always that of the Son, working not only in creation, but forever locked in mortal struggle with his counterpart, the Spirit of Evil.

After God had generated his Son, Lactantius contended that he then created another Spirit endowed with signal virtues and powers like the Son, but who, unlike the Son, did not persevere in the innocent state in which he had been created.[31] This Spirit sinned through envy of the Son, his antecessor, and henceforward became the source of evil in the world. How did God allow this evil? Just as the contrary

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[30]"Cum dicimus deum patrem et deum filium, non diversum dicimus nec utrumque secernimus, quia nec pater a filio potest nec filius a patre secerni, siquidem nec pater sine filio nuncupari nec filius potest sine patre generari. Cum igitur et pater filium faciat et filius patrem, una utrique mens, unus spiritus, una substantia est." Div. Inst. IV, 29, 3-4.

[31]Div. Inst. II, 8, 4.

elements in the physical universe eventually harmonized, so did the contrary elements in moral life, good and evil, after a bitter struggle, finally harmonize, with justice gaining the victory. Evil, then, concluded Lactantius, was necessary for the existence of good, "... ut posset esset virtus."[32]

Was God, therefore, the ultimate author of evil? As this was impossible,[33] Lactantius tried to explain the existence of evil, not as the later Christian theologians did through the consequent and permissive will of God, but through his antecedent and absolute will: "... illum constituit malorum inventorem, quem cum faceret dedit illi ad mala excogitanda ingenium et astutiam, ut in eo esset et voluntas prava et perfecta nequitia."[34] This explanation, which is distinctive to Lactantius, has the merit, if not of satisfying the intellect, surely of dramatizing the power of evil in its role as the bracchium sinistrum of God.

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[32] Div. Inst. II, 8, 7; V, 7; VI, 15.

[33] "... fas non erat ut a Deo proficisceretur malum." This excerpt is taken from the first of the three disputed dualistic passages, Div. Inst. II, 8, 7; VII, 5, 27; and De Opificio Dei 19, 8, which, as has been pointed out in chapter 1, are now generally accepted as authentic.

[34] Div. Inst. II, 8, 7. Furthermore, although with the fall of man God gave him the help of the angels, some of these angels fell, and subsequently married the daughters of men. Though they remained in heaven, their sons became, along with the Evil Spirit, the source of all evil on earth, particularly as the propagators of polytheism.

Lactantius' theory that evil existed to exercise and perfect virtue is distinctly Stoic and the influence of Seneca on this point has already been shown in the previous chapter. This theory explained not only why the good suffered evil and the wicked enjoyed benefits,[35] but why, indeed, the presence of evil was a very necessity for the exercise of virtue.[36] The fundamental concept underlying this theory, however, was what is known as Dualism, that is, there exists a basic opposition between sense and spirit. Dualism was essentially, not Stoic, but Platonic,[37] and in the Christian era it was expressed in an exaggerated form in Manicheanism, which consisted of two omnipotent and independent principles, good and evil. Lactantius veered towards this popular doctrine but was saved from it by placing the creation of evil in the hands of God.

Turning from the problem of Dualism to the historical life of Christ, Lactantius set about attempting to prove his divinity through the testimony of pagan religious literature, and only after he felt that it had been firmly established, did he enlist the authority of Sacred Scripture. He maintained that the miracles of Christ proved him divine but that they served a further function, to express a meaning that

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[35] Div. Inst. V, 22 and 23.

[36] Div. Inst. VI, 15.

[37] Spanneut, op. cit., p. 29.

was both symbolic and moral. Jesus gave sight to the blind, but this also meant that all nations were now to see the light; he restored hearing to the deaf, but this meant too that all would hear the truth; he caused the mute to speak: this symbolized that all men would speak his truth; he cured the lepers: this meant that sinners were to be cleansed of their crimes; he raised the dead: this presaged the awakening of the infidels to the religion of Christ.[38] Christ, indeed, instructed man in all his actions for he was not only the great teacher of wisdom, but also the model of virtue, who alone could raise man to God because he united both God and man in himself.[39] Although man had still to suffer in this life, he always had the example of Christ before him. Revealing a predilection for the classical writers even to the final chapter of the Divine Institutes, in a last tribute to his model and guide, Lactantius applied to Christ in his peroration, the moving lines, not of Sacred Scripture, nor of the Sibylline Books, but of the pagan Lucretius in the panegyric of his model and guide, Epicurus:

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[38] Div. Inst. IV, 26, 4 ff.

[39] Div. Inst. IV, 25, 5.

"veridicis hominum purgavit pectora dictis
et finem statuit cuppedinis atque timoris
exposuit bonum summum, quo tendimus omnes,
quid foret, atque viam monstravit, limite parvo
qua possemus ad id recto contendere cursu."[40]

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The Dualism Lactantius saw in the universe, the eternal struggle between good and evil, between God and the Devil, is also to be found in his concept of Man. Man was united to God and to heaven by means of his soul, but to the Devil and to the earth, by his body. He was indeed a combination of light and darkeness, life and death.[41] He stood midway between God and the beast, between complete knowledge and absolute ignorance.[42] Through his soul he tended to goodness, through his body, to sin, and constantly he was harassed and tried by the attacks of Satan.[43] In part, then, he was a divine being,[44] and he was such because his soul was

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[40]Lucretius, De Rerum Natura VI, 24-28; quoted in Div. Inst. VII, 27, 6.

[41]Div. Inst. II, 12, 3 and 7.

[42]Div. Inst. III, 6, 2-4.

[43]Div. Inst. III, 29, 13-17.

[44]Div. Inst. IV, 3, 1.

composed of the celestial fire which emanated from heaven,[45] a doctrine Lactantius very clearly obtained from the Stoics. Man, consequently, should learn about himself[46] but above all he should learn about God and worship him. Because God created the world for man and man lived for God, religion was the unifying and basic reason for the existence both of the world and of man.[47]

As to the origin of the human soul Lactantius insisted on its immediate creation by God alone. Resisting the influence of Tertullian who held a "... théorie beaucoup plus grossière de l'origine de l'âme,"[48] Lactantius maintained that the human soul could emanate neither from the bodies of father or mother, nor from both, nor even from their soul, "... de animis anima non potest (nasci)," but entirely "... ab uno eodemque omnium deo patre qui legem rationemque nascendi tenet solus, siquidem solus efficit."[49] Lactantius did not indicate at what precise moment God created the soul but he did severely condemn the sin of abortion: "... ad vitam enim deus inspirat

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[45] Div. Inst. II, 9, 25-26.

[46] Div. Inst. III, 9, 5.

[47] Div. Inst. VII, 5, 3-4.

[48] Amann, D.T.C., col. 2442.

[49] De Opificio Dei 19.

animas, non ad mortem."[50]

On the immortality of the soul Lactantius carefully outlined the arguments of Plato but he judged them insufficient.[51] The argument based on the nature of motion he rejected on the grounds that it granted immortality to animals as well as to man; another, drawn from the extraordinary faculties of the mind, he maintained was inconclusive. There were more cogent proofs to be drawn, for instance, from the existence of God. Just as the invisible God existed eternally, so too must the invisible soul after the body's death.[52] With Cicero[53] he argued that the soul must be immortal since man alone of all the creatures of the universe had a knowledge of God. Furthermore, a life of virtue was foolish unless the soul received an immortal reward. The fact of the temporality of vice as well as the permanency of virtue also proved the soul's immortality.[54] Just as the fruit of vice was immediate and passing, so the reward of virtue was not immediate, but eternal. Cicero agreed with this position though with hesitation, that the chief good did not come to

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[50] Div. Inst. VI, 20, 18.

[51] Div. Inst. VII, 8, 2.

[52] Div. Inst. VII, 9.

[53] Cicero, De Legibus I, 8.

[54] Div. Inst. VII, 10.

man except after death.[55] There were, in reality, two deaths, of the body at the termination of life, and of the soul, in the punishment of hell. So too there were two lives, of the body, and of the soul in heaven.

Since the body was solid and formed from the earth, and the soul light and free of material, as Plato held,[56] after death the body would return to earth, and the soul to heaven. Even Lucretius, oblitus quid adsereret, admitted this in an unguarded moment.[57] In heaven, the just soul would enjoy the immortal rewards of his virtue and noble deeds, and the wicked would suffer the eternal recompense for his wickedness and impiety.[58] On the question, therefore, of the nature and destiny of the human soul, Lactantius has insisted, with definite influence from the classical authors on both the spirituality--if not the immateriality--and the immortality of the soul, the latter being, indeed, the greatest good of man's existence: "Unum est igitur summum bonum immortalitatis, ad quam capiendam et formati a principio et nati sumus."[59]

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[55] Cicero, Tusculans I, 46; cf. Div. Inst. VII, 10, 9.

[56] Plato, Phaedo 80 D; Phaedrus 245 C ff.

[57] Lucretius, De Rerum Natura II, 999-1001.

[58] Div. Inst. IV, 11.

[59] Div. Inst. VII, 8, 1.

It was the moral theory of Lactantius, however, that played the most important role in his thinking. It formed the substance of the final three books of the Divine Institutes, and at times Lactantius seems to reduce all religion to morality.[60] This is the most original part of his writing but its originality consists not in any one moral principle or application, but in the harmonious and complete synthesis of all principles and applications.[61] Earlier apologists, like Tertullian and Cyprian, had confined their writing, which was intended as edification for the Christian faithful, to a consideration of a particular case of conscience, the solution to which generally lay in the citing of a text from Sacred Scripture. Lactantius was the first apologist to have constructed a moral synthesis, and to have attempted a reconciliation between the doctrines of the philosophers and those of Christianity by recourse, not to the authority of the Bible, but to that of the classical authors themselves.

In Lactantius' mind Christian morality did not oppose that of the moral philosophers: it harmonised and completed it. Christianity established as morality's solid base the knowledge of God, and as its sovereign good, religion, without

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[60]"Servire autem Deo nihil aliut est quam bonis operibus tueri et conservare iustitiam." Div. Inst. III, 19, 15.

[61]Monceaux, op. cit., p. 333.

which morality was like a body without a head,[62] but once so fortified, morality had nothing to fear, and consequently it could borrow freely any truth the philosophers could offer.[63] Sensible, for example, were the words of Cicero that the man who followed nature could not harm his fellow man;[64] so were the reflections of Seneca on the omniscience of God,[65] and the words of Plato on true worship which was both interior and moral;[66] and acceptable too was a verse from the impious Lucretius on the fraternity of man.[67] Consequently, says Pichon, "Il (Lactance) est souvent plus près du De Officiis ou du De Beneficiis, que des petits traités de Tertullien et de saint Cyprien."[68]

Yet, for all its virtues Lactantius considered the morality of the philosophers too naturalistic. He felt that it tended to neglect God and therefore to pervert the notion of virtue.[69] Indeed he criticised not only the Epicureans who

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[62] Div. Inst. VI, 9, 9.

[63] Div. Inst. VI, 2, 16-17.

[64] De Officiis III, 5, 25; cf. Div. Inst. VI, 11, 2.

[65] Seneca, Exhortationes, Fragment 24; cf. Div. Inst. VI, 24, 12.

[66] Plato, Laws XII, p. 956a; cf. Div. Inst. VI, 25, 1 ff.

[67] Lucretius, De Rerum Natura II, 991; cf. Div. Inst. VI, 1, 7.

[68] Pichon, op. cit., p. 132.

[69] Div. Inst. VI, 5, 1.

rendered the life of man supervacua, but he even blamed Cicero for his errors and contradictions.[70] Maintaining that Cicero obtained the matter for his De Officiis from Lucilius, he attacked the latter's definition of morality in verse on three grounds: that it neglected the faculty of the will in claiming that virtue resided only in knowledge; that it was too idealistic in advising complete restraint in the pursuit of wordly goods; and lastly that it was incomplete in advocating patriotism--which presupposed discord among nations--as the pre-eminent virtue.[71]

Lactantius also criticised on the grounds of naturalism the pagan concept of the Two Ways. This allegory, which was well known in the classical world, envisaged one road in life as leading to unhappiness through sin, the other, to happiness through virtue. Lactantius admitted that the pagan interpretation was ingenious, but erroneous because it represented both roads as terrestrial. The two ways began, indeed, in this life but they did not end with death but continued eternally in the next,[72] the way of virtue being presided over by Christ, the dux immortalis, the way of wickedness,

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[70]"Haec quam falsa sint mox videbimus." Div. Inst. VI, 5, 4.

[71]Div. Inst. VI, 6, 18.

[72]Div. Inst. VI, 3, 9.

by Satan.[73]

It was true that these and similar notions partially formed the pagan man of good will, but Christian morality undertook to set him on the road to perfection by introducing him to a higher and purer wisdom.[74] This the pagans did not grasp, but spelled out, it meant that God dominated all things. He was the source of all goodness and truth, and his supreme law defined all other law and gave meaning to all virtue.[75] Virtue without piety had no meaning, and, as this was true, so was its converse, religion without morality: "Omni populo ... cuius omnis religio est sine scelere as sine macula vivere."[76] Consequently, for Lactantius morality and religion were as indissolubly linked as the head and body of the human organism.[77]

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[73]In ancient times the allegory had been represented by the letter Y to symbolize the cross-road at which man was called upon to decide which route in life to take, the good or the bad. The moral lesson emanating from this allegory had been preached by Pythagoras and used by Hesiod, Persius and Ausonius. It was incorporated into Christianity, and its earliest Christian use is to be seen in the oldest extant Christian catechism, The Didache of the Twelve Apostles, which holds that the Two Ways are the essence of Christian doctrine. Jaeger, op. cit., p. 8-9.

[74]Div. Inst. VI, 2, 16 ff.

[75]Div. Inst. VI, 17, 29.

[76]Div. Inst. V, 9, 21.

[77]Div. Inst. VI, 9, 9.

From this basis of an intimate union between morality and religion, Lactantius approached the pagan discussion of virtue, particularly the virtue of justice: "Quae aut ipsa est summa virtus aut fons est ipse virtutis."[78] In order to fashion his own Christian concept of justice, Lactantius began with the famous dilemma of Carneades between justice and wisdom. Carneades argued that justice interfered not only with the interests but even with the safety of man. He presented two contradictions: in the selling of a wicked slave or an unhealthy house, the wise man would conceal the faults, while the just man would reveal them and thus suffer a loss; more seriously, if in a storm there was a plank that could carry the weight of only one man, the wise man would save himself at the expense of the other, while the just man would prefer to die.[79] Lactantius was shocked at Carneades' immorality, as other philosophers had been, but he acutely suggested that perhaps the case was a typical trick of the Sceptics to point out the uncertainty that existed in all intellectual questions.[80] Even the reply of Cicero was unsatisfactory.[81] He really

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[78] Div. Inst. V, 5, 1.

[79] Div. Inst. V, 14 and 16.

[80] Div. Inst. V, 17, 9.

[81] Div. Inst. V, 16, 13.

missed the point by invoking a particular kind of justice; besides, he frequently contradicted himself. From the human point of view, admitted Lactantius, Carneades was right in judging the honest man foolish.[82] However, the practical judgment of the philosopher was not wisdom but astuteness inasmuch as wisdom did not consist in self-interest but in the knowledge of good and evil based on the existence of God and the hope of an eternal reward. Outside a religious context, the philosophers were incapable of formulating a true and complete concept of justice.[83]

Justice, then, had no human genesis. It could not emanate basically from human laws because they rested on self-interest,[84] to be obeyed not through a sense of duty but of fear. Human laws, continued Lactantius, possessed only a relative and changing authority,[85] and, indeed, gave authorisation to much injustice and crime. In fact, all the injustice in the world's history stemmed from this concept of justice that lacked a religious orientation.

In this context of religion, Lactantius then out-

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[82] Div. Inst. V, 14, 2.

[83] Div. Inst. V, 18, 1.

[84] Div. Inst. V, 9, 2 ff.

[85] Div. Inst. VI, 9, 6 ff.

lined the history of mankind. First there was the era of the reign of Saturn, the Golden Age, the age of innocence and monotheism.[86] The overthrow of Saturn signalled the second era of violence, polytheism and inequality, in which all the base instincts of man were unleashed and cynical laws were enacted to condone his rapine and avarice.[87] Though Lactantius obtained this description from the classical authors, his explanation that the world's evil and injustice began with the loss of monotheism was a novelty which even earlier Christian writers had failed to perceive.

The remedy for this reign of injustice was simple, a return both to the worship of the one God, common father of humanity, and to the simple life of purity and frugality.[88] If all men were sons of the same father and all were called to an eternal life with him, then all were equal in this life, all were brothers in his sight.[89] Slave and master, rich and poor no longer existed. This external equality, however, had to be accompanied by the internal virtue of humility, that is, the interior recognition of the equality of one's fellow man.

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[86] Div. Inst. V, 5, 3.

[87] Div. Inst. V, 6, 3.

[88] Div. Inst. V, 5, 5.

[89] Div. Inst. V, 14, 16.

In this way, through the charity of the rich and the resignation of the poor in the Christian community, want and covetousness, war and violence would disappear.[90] Indeed, man would then recover his state of pristine innocence.

Thus, the cycle of human justice was complete. The primeval age of monotheism, innocence and justice was again recaptured with the advent of full Christianity. This broad view of human history influenced Augustine's City of God, but Lactantius was more concerned with the practical rather than with the metaphysical order, and his merit lay in formulating a precise and demanding concept of justice that would affect the day-to-day relations of his fellow Christians, and ultimately the relations among nations at large.[91]

A corollary to this idea of justice was charity. The pagan philosophers, however, not understanding it, considered pity a weakness, if not a vice.[92] Though they did admit that they should help a neighbor in danger of death, they refused to help one in want.[93] Though they recommended caring for the sick, they disdained burying the dead. They

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[90] Div. Inst. V, 8, 6 ff.

[91] Pichon, op. cit., p. 139.

[92] Div. Inst. VI, 10, 11 ff.

[93] Div. Inst. VI, 11, 6.

stopped half-way, explained Lactantius, because they were uncertain of their principles; they did not grasp that charity, the brotherhood of man and, indeed, all virtues had their basis in religion. All men came from God, as they would eventually return to him, and thus linked by the common bonds of origin and humanity, they owed one another help in all needs and sufferings.[94] Sacrificing patriotism to universal brotherhood, he forbade military service and killing under any pretext,[95] but these were the only excesses in an otherwise balanced yet idealistic formulation of the virtue of charity.

Lactantius' most important moral application was his consideration of the human emotions. First, he found the Stoic position, which had been criticised by Cicero in the De Finibus, untenable. The suppression of human emotions was contrary to nature.[96] If the passions were connected in some way with the organs of the human body, as physiologists maintained, they could not be destroyed except at the expense of those organs.[97] Furthermore, the passions were an essential

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[94] Div. Inst. VI, 10, 3-4.

[95] Div. Inst. VI, 20, 17.

[96] Div. Inst. VI, 18, 33.

[97] Div. Inst. VI, 15, 4.

condition for the exercise of virtue in the struggle against sin. Desire, pleasure and fear were not evil, but in moderation could be virtuous. This the Peripatetics held,[98] but even they were in error because there could be no question of moderation in vice: "Carendum est vitiis etiam mediocribus."[99] Since it was impossible to suppress the passions and insufficient to moderate them, the solution, in Lactantius' mind, lay in directing them to the goal determined by God.[100] As they were created by God, the human passions in themselves were good, whether they were anger,desire or love. It was man's task to direct them in view of the end intended by their creator. Aristotle and Zeno had erred in considering the passions in themselves, as phenomenon of human activity; Lactantius, on the contrary, felt that the proper use of the passions could be ascertained only after determining the reason of their existence, and examining them in the light of their eternal end.[101]

In general Lactantius avoided exaggeration and excess. He admitted degrees in virtue and justice: for example,

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[98] Div. Inst. VI, 15, 2.

[99] Div. Inst. VI, 16, 1.

[100] Div. Inst. VI, 17, 9.

[101] Pichon, op. cit., p. 148.

justice was adequate if it refrained from evil actions, it was perfect if it abstained from evil words, and divine, if it avoided evil thoughts.[102] He knew how to distinguish between precept and counsel: chasity was not an obligation but a crown of virtue.[103] He tried to temper the formality of the Stoics and the intransigence of Tertullian, to present a practical morality realisable by all in a compromise that stood midway between the real and the ideal. However, in the presentation of this practical morality, the first synthesis of Christian times, Lactantius' intention ever remained to reconcile the morality of the philosophers with that of Christianity. By rejecting the error and incorporating the truth of pagan morality, he effected a synthesis of both that opened the way for the great moral systems of Ambrose and Augustine.[104]

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The third section of this chapter on Lactantius' philosophical and dogmatic thought is concerned with his ideas

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[102] Div. Inst. VI, 13, 6 ff.

[103] Div. Inst. VI, 23, 38 ff.

[104] Monceaux, op. cit., p. 134.

of the universe, first with his concept of creation, and secondly with his doctrine of eschatology. Although he disagreed with them on many points, Lactantius was greatly influenced in his concept of creation by the ideas of the classical philosophers. He maintained with the Platonists and the Stoics that God was responsible for creation; with the Stoics that there existed a divine finality in all created things of the universe; and with the Epicureans that the world had a limited existence. He held with Plato and Cicero against the Stoics that the creator and the creature were separate and that God was not immanent in the universe but transcendent.[105] However, he disagreed with Plato in his belief that matter was uncreated and only organised by God at the beginning of the world. This would be unworthy of the majesty of God and reduce him to the level of a human craftsman supplied with the materials of labor.[106] Matter would then become an absolute, challenging the power of God and the unity of the world, but matter could never become an absolute because it did not possess, as God did, the power of thought; thus, since matter was passive, perishable and unthinking, it must be created ex nihilo.[107] Furthermore, not only did matter have a begin-

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[105] Div. Inst. II, 5, 37.

[106] Div. Inst. II, 8, 16.

[107] Div. Inst. II, 8, 38 ff.

ning, it also had an end. Plato was wrong, as was Aristotle too, in asserting the eternity of the universe; they were both deceived in thinking that material things could endure forever.[108]

Though the Epicureans correctly considered the universe temporal, their system effectually denied both the existence of God and his providence. The former they implicitly denied in explaining the universe through a chance combination of atoms, the latter in maintaining an essential pessimism in the world. Atoms of themselves, explained Lactantius in De Opificio Dei, had no power to create or organise, nor could man be spontaneously generated. As to the Epicurean pessimistic view of the world, Lactantius could not understand their dissatisfaction with creation. With Stoic optimism he conceived the universe as a city efficiently and hierarchically run in which both animals and the world existed for the sake of man, just as man existed for God.[109] Continuing to manifest a Stoic influence, he claimed that the animals were created to feed, clothe and serve man and that his own body was an extraordinary mechanism designed for beauty as for utility, to enjoy, under God, all the marvels of the universe.[110]

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[108] Div. Inst. VII, 1, 8.

[109] Div. Inst. VII, 6, 1.

[110] Div. Inst. VII, 3, 25.

Basically, then, Lactantius drew his creation concept from the pagan philosophers. He believed in creation, as did the Platonists and Stoics, without the Platonic dogma of the eternity of matter; he believed in the finality of the world like the Stoics without their pantheism; and he believed in the temporality of the world like the Epicureans without their atomism and pessimism. The principle and rule governing his choice of pagan doctrine always remained constant, the notion of God creating, ruling, providing; thus Lactantius' creation theory could be termed an eclecticism directed and controlled by religion.[111]

"Il n'y a qu'une partie de son oeuvre où il soit fort difficile de retrouver son (Lactance) esprit habituel, c'est celle où il expose les predictions relatives aux derniers temps du monde."[112] This was the seventh book of the Divine Institutes, in which Lactantius unfolded the bizarre eschatology that distinguished it so radically from the rest of his work. However, Lactantius was only expressing ideas that had been current since the apocalyptic writings of Daniel and Ezechiel in late Old Testament times, and although it seems incredible that he thought that this kind of writing

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[111] Pichon, op. cit., p. 101.

[112] Ibid., p. 127.

would appeal to sophisticated Romans, at this time similar works in pagan literature, for example, the Sibylline Books, engaged the attention of the pagan world. The fall of Rome, strange phenomena in the heavens and on earth, wars and plagues, the hegemony of a mighty king, the mission of a great prophet, the coming of the Antichrist, his subsequent defeat by Christ, the resurrection of the dead, the millenium of peace in the Holy City, the return of Satan at the end of this period, and finally the definitive victory of the Messiah and complete restoration of the universe:- the lurid description of these catastrophes which Lactantius included in the seventh book hardly suggests the disciple of Cicero and Seneca.

The main source for this eschatological material was the Sibylline literature. Still eschewing the more balanced and inspired rendition of the last days expressed in Holy Scripture, Lactantius held to the conviction that the authority of secular literature carried more weight with his cultivated readers. He occasionally invoked the classical authors when, for example, he cited the authority of Chrysippus on the resurrection,[113] and when he quoted the beautiful lines of the Eclogues on the new golden age,[114] but almost exclusively the

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[113]Chrysippus, Chrysippea, Fragment 14; cf. Div. Inst. VII, 23, 3.

[114]Vergil, Eclogues IV, 38-41; cf. Div. Inst. VII, 24, 11.

Sibylline Books were his most ample source.

The thought of Lactantius has been presented in this chapter to reveal not only the main lines of his basic concepts but also to demonstrate the influence of the pagan philosophers of the classical schools. In the three general areas chosen for consideration, God, Man and the Universe, the positive and material influence of pagan philosophical thinking that has been discovered stands in sharp contrast to Lactantius' negative reaction to this thinking considered in earlier chapters. In the first division, Lactantius' notion of providence has revealed the influence of Platonism and Stoicism; and his notion of the λόγος, the influence of Platonism. In the second division of Man, Platonism and Cicero were seen to have shaped his concept of the immortality of the soul; and Stoicism and especially Cicero, his doctrine of morality. Then in the third section, his concept of creation was observed to have been borrowed from Platonism, Stoicism and even Epicureanism; and his eschatology, to have been formed largely from the Sibylline literature. Consequently, in the four last books of the Divine Institutes, the pars construens of his apologetic work, Lactantius' great merit lay not only in formulating the first Christian synthesis of dogmatic and moral thought, but more particularly in incorporating into this new and broad Christian context the traditional and ageless truths of pagan philosophy.

CONCLUSION

This paper is an attempt to trace the reaction of Lactantius, a late third century Christian writer, to the religious and philosophical thought of the classical Graeco-Roman world, as revealed in his major apologetic work, the Divine Institutes. In Chapter I, which deals with the life, times and works of Lactantius, several factors were indicated as shaping the man who was later to write so positively in defence of Christianity. It was pointed out that Lactantius was born of pagan parents in North Africa about the year 250 A.D., studied under the renowned rhetorician, Arnobius, and then went on to distinguish himself as a professor of rhetoric in the North African schools. His reputation caught the attention of Diocletian who summoned him to his winter capital in Nicomedia to assume the role of Professor of Latin Rhetoric to the Emperor. Then came his conversion to Christianity and the beginning of his apologetic writing. With the outbreak of the great Diocletian persecution in 303 Lactantius began his important work, the Divine Institutes, a treatise in seven books written to win the educated Roman to Christianity by proving its superiority to pagan polytheism and philosophy.

Chapter II traced the confrontation of Christianity and classical culture from its earliest meeting in the New

Testament to the time of Lactantius in the early fourth century. It was pointed out that although Paul and John used terminology of the currently predominant Stoic philosophy, the essential character of their writings remained basically Judaic rather than Hellenistic, linked as they were to the currents of Old Testament moral and dogmatic thought. The Christian apologists of the early centuries were then seen to have attempted to come to terms with this confrontation either in a negative or positive fashion. In the West, Tertullian and Cyprian rejected classical culture, Tertullian violently, Cyprian mildly. Arnobius and Minucius Felix, however, reacted positively to classical thought, but all four, each in his own way, prepared for the coming of Lactantius. To Arnobius, Lactantius owed his taste for metaphysical debate; to Minucius, his use of the classical authors as proof of his arguments; to Cyprian, his knowledge of Sacred Scripture; and even to Tertullian, his arguments against mythology.

The writings of these men, limited in scope and purpose, had been mocked by pagan polemicists because of their uncouth style and naive doctrine. Lactantius determined to produce a work, which he called the Divine Institutes, a title he took from the language of Roman law, that contained several important innovations: it was to be comprehensive in scope; it was to be directed primarily to cultured pagans and written

in the classical style;[1] it was to employ as proof not Sacred Scripture but exhaustive texts from pagan writers; and finally it was not only to elaborate a detailed rejection of classical polytheism and philosophy, but also to unfold a complete system of Christian doctrine in order to reveal the superiority of Christianity and thus to prove it to be the true religion and the true philosophy.

After an introductory section on the state of religion in contemporary Greece and Rome, Chapter III dealt with the traditional adversary of Christianity, polytheism. Though the majority of the cultivated Romans to whom Lactantius directed his work had already repudiated in their minds polytheistic belief and worship, their hearts and feelings still clung to the ancient traditions. They sentimentally believed that the classical gods had granted to Rome her great Empire and that her security and fortune depended on the continuance of the old forms of worship. Lactantius understood the depth of this veneration for the ancient religion, and therefore it is not surprising that he chose to treat in the first two books

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[1]Lactantius' fluent, classical style, patterned purposely on that of Cicero, was to be an important instrument in his appeal to the educated Roman reader. Though it would be possible to trace the numerous rhetorical devices Lactantius employed throughout his apologetic works, an adequate treatment of the style of the Christian Cicero is beyond the compass of this paper.

of the Divine Institutes polytheism in its classical and literary form, and to consider it as the formal and official adversary of the Christian faith.

In his refutation Lactantius employed two basic proofs, the argument of reason and the authority of non-Christian literary works. Deliberately avoiding the use of Sacred Scripture, he appealed tirelessly and ingeniously to a multitude of pagan classical and non-classical authors, whose authority he felt his cultured readers would willingly accept, to testify to the absurdity of polytheism and to the truth of monotheism. Although he gullibly accepted the authenticity of much spurious religious literature, his use of individual texts, classical and non-classical, is both careful and accurate. At the end of the first book he hoped to leave his reader convinced of the error and absurdity of pagan polytheism.

Nevertheless, desirous of confounding paganism completely and definitively, Lactantius devoted his entire second book to ascertain the genesis of ancient polytheism. He quickly rejected the first explanation, the natural allegory of the Stoics, that the gods were the personification of natural forces, on the rather weak grounds that it might become an intellectual refuge for obstinate pagans. On the other hand, he accepted the explanation of Euhemerus, that the gods were redoubtable heroes and kings who were apotheosized after their

death in recognition of their deeds, on the grounds that it humanized polytheism and reduced it to the commonplace of sinful, human existence. Therefore, by revealing that the classical gods were merely glorified kings or heroes, Lactantius further emphasized the absurdity of polytheism.

However, anxious to dispose even more irretrievably of the blight of polytheism, Lactantius added his theory of the demons, that the gods and all their miracles were merely insidious machinations of the evil spirits, thereby demonstrating to his pagan readers that polytheism was not only absurd, but insofar as it was engendered by evil demons, odious as well. Lactantius' application of the theory of demons is the only original feature of his refutation of polytheism. However, he was the first apologist to organize and document his proofs with accuracy and care. The welter of cogent material he gathered in the refutation of polytheism leaves little doubt as to the vigor of his reaction against an important constituent of classical culture, but it also reveals the extent of the influence of the classical and non-classical writers in the content of that very refutation.

In Chapter IV it was pointed out that Lactantius realized that his task of demonstrating the superiority of Christianity over pagan philosophy would be more difficult than the refutation of polytheism, not only because his adversaries

were more formidable but especially because no Christian writer had yet attempted a critique of the whole body of pagan philosophy. Employing as before the classical authors as his proof, Lactantius attacked the classic positions of the various schools. First, his treatment of several philosophical problems was discussed, for example, his rejection of the Platonic and Stoic theory of knowledge and his criticism of philosophy for its numerous discords and contradictions. The main burden of the chapter dealt with Lactantius' attack on the three classical schools of philosophy, Epicureanism, Platonism and Stoicism in the order dictated by him. The Epicureans were assailed first because their doctrine of atheism and pessimism was most antipathetic to Christianity. In his decisive refutation of Epicureanism, Lactantius quoted the disciple, Lucretius, more frequently than any other writer up to that time, and except for an agreement with him on the temporality of the world, he saw nothing compatible in his thought with Christian doctrine. Though Plato is depicted as a king of the philosophers, Lactantius brings him to task especially for the collectivism found in the Republic. Here Lactantius displays an eloquence in style and a cogency in argument. The Stoics are praised for their position on the immortality of the soul and the providence of God but vigorously denounced for their stand on suicide and the equalizing of the virtues.

Then the influence of Cicero and Seneca was discussed. Cicero's influence on Lactantius was enormous, more than all other classical and non-classical authors combined, amounting to some two hundred and fifty directly traceable references, but also permeating the thought and style of every page. Lactantius has been called the Christian Cicero because not only his style but also his knowledge of pagan philosophy were drawn almost entirely from the pages of Rome's greatest philosopher, to the extent that the phrase of Jerome is almost literally true, that in reading Lactantius, one discovers an epitome of Cicero. The influence of Seneca, the first century A.D. Stoic, was observed primarily through his role as a religious and moral writer in Lactantius' concepts of God, providence and justice.

In his final appraisal, Lactantius criticized philosophy on several scores: it was too aristocratic in restricting itself only to subtle minds; it was too incomplete, too discordant, too contradictory; it was too impractical in not spelling out the details of everyday virtuous action; and especially it was too naturalistic in belittling the value of religion. The happiness that philosophy promised did not reside in Epicurean pleasure, nor in Stoic virtue and glory, but in the immortality of a virtuous soul which only religious faith could bring. Cicero and Seneca offered a noble ideal,

but Lactantius felt that Christianity alone could satisfy and complete that ideal.

It must be remembered that Lactantius made this assessment in the light of his Christian faith. He did not really grasp the idea that faith and philosophy belong to two different realms, the supernatural and the natural. Christian faith and religion for him was really only a glorified form of philosophy, and although he did admit that the whole truth could proceed only from God, his synthesis of Christian doctrine in the latter books of the Divine Institutes reveals that the substance of this doctrine was drawn from the schools of classical philosophy, and that even his own corrections and refinements were based not on the religious authority of Sacred Scripture, but on the speculations of his own intelligence. Consequently, it must be admitted that even the great religious synthesis of Lactantius is largely philosophical in content and inspiration.

In assessing philosophy, Lactantius' guiding principle always remained that truth lay scattered particulatim in the pages of the philosophers, although the whole truth resided alone in Christianity. This is a distinct change of direction from his attitude on polytheism. For Lactantius, there was no truth in the pagan religion; it had to be utterly and irrevocably abandoned. Philosophy, however, contained considerable truth which was not only to be utilized in the refutation of

contrary opinions but above all it was to be woven into the fabric of what Lactantius considered the full truth of Christianity. This is Lactantius' great discovery and merit, his recognition of the truth of pagan philosophy and his assimilation of that truth into the whole Christian structure.

The philosophers, then, were observed to have been, in general, treated more benevolently than the polytheists. Lactantius realized that they were unable to attain the full truth simply because, unaware of the necessity of God's revelation, they relied solely on reason, and yet he believed that they deserved to attain it because they yearned to know it above all else. Therefore, he did not reject philosophy but the error of philosophy, and respecting the sincerity of the philosophers' motivation and the truth in their doctrine he strove to integrate that truth into Christianity.

The extent to which Lactantius assimilated classical culture into Christianity is best observed in the final books of the Divine Institutes where his synthesis of Christian doctrine is unfolded. This is the subject matter of Chapter V. Here there is no question of the negative refutation of polytheistic and philosophic error, but of the positive construction of a whole system of Christian thought. Lactantius' negative reaction to pagan error has changed to one of positive acceptance and the desire to assimilate the truth of pagan philosophy

into the Christian context.

This synthesis of Lactantius' philosophic and dogmatic thought was considered under the three general themes of God, Man and the Universe. These classical categories were chosen not only because they encompass the substance of Lactantius' doctrine, but also because they reveal the extent of the influence of the classical philosophers on that doctrine. It was seen that Lactantius' general concept of God was largely shaped by Plato and Cicero. His notion of providence was formed from the Stoics and Cicero to refute the atheism and pessimism of the Epicureans. He considered the benign love of God towards his creatures, his reward for their virtue and his punishment for their sins, to be the very essence of Christianity. This attitude is easily understood in the light of Lactantius' insistence on the indissoluble link between religion and morality, and also, one might add, in the light of his Roman sense of practicality.

Lactantius obtained his notion of the λόγος mediately from Plato, but more directly through Plotinus, and he applied it to the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ. In this question and in another emanating from it, the problem of evil, Lactantius displays an originality and an unwonted theological subtlety. In the first he achieved what many early Christian theologians were unable to achieve, a preservation of

both the divinity of Christ and the monotheism of Christianity. In the second he attributed the existence of evil to the antecedent and absolute will of God, a less happy theological explanation, but one which has the merit, if not of satisfying the intellect, at least of underscoring the power of evil. His complete disregard of the Holy Spirit is a further indication of the superficiality of his knowledge of Christian dogma, and also, it might be added, of his reliance on the classical authors. The Stoic influence is seen clearly in his explanation of evil as a necessary exercise for virtue. Even in his stirring panegyric of Christ as model and guide, he reflects the classical influence by concluding with the verses of the disciple, Lucretius, in praise of his master, Epicurus.

Chapter V's second theme, Man, revealed the almost complete dependence of Lactantius on the classical philosophers. Lactantius' conception of the dualistic nature of man is traceable to Plato, and the make-up and origin of the human soul as celestial fire is distinctly Stoic. Though he dismissed Plato's proofs for the soul's immortality as inadequate, he relied heavily on the arguments of Cicero.

It is the moral theory of Lactantius, however, that plays the most important role in his thinking. It forms the substance of the final three books of the Divine Institutes and at times Lactantius seems to reduce all religion to morality.

He is the first apologist to have constructed a Christian moral synthesis and to have attempted a reconciliation between the doctrines of the philosophers and those of Christianity. He maintained that pagan morality was noble but that Christian morality harmonized and completed it. As its basic weakness was naturalism, Lactantius insisted on the religious basis of all morality. Even in tracing the history of man, he attributed the inception of evil to the loss of the early monotheism, and he signals the end of it by a return to the worship of the one God of Christianity. He also rejected the Stoic suppression of the passions as erroneous and the Platonic moderation of them as incomplete, inasmuch as their proper use could be determined only in the light of God and their eternal end. Lactantius' intention, however, always remained to reconcile pagan morality with that of Christianity. Consequently, after rejecting its error, he incorporated its truth into Christian morality and thus constructed a balanced and practical synthesis that opened the way for the great moral systems of the Christian West.

The third and final theme of Chapter V treated Lactantius' concept of the universe under the headings of creation and eschatology. His notion of creation was seen to have been built up from the ideas of the three schools. He believed in creation as did the Platonists and Stoics, yet denied the

Platonic eternity of matter; he held to the finality of the world with the Stoics, yet avoided their pantheism; he maintained the temporality of the world with the Epicureans, yet rejected their atheism and pessimism. Lactantius' eschatology, on the other hand, was drawn almost entirely from the non-classical Sibylline Books which he still believed were highly esteemed by his readers. As lurid renditions of the world's last days abounded at this time both in the Christian and pagan world, Lactantius can hardly be reproved for his account which is contained in the seventh and final book of the Divine Institutes. Furthermore, he believed as a Christian that the consummation of the world, the Last Judgment and the reward of the just were the culmination and realization of all his hopes.

In Chapter V, then, Lactantius' synthesis of Christian doctrine has revealed the considerable influence of ancient and, especially, classical authors, but more importantly the extent to which he had reconciled these authors to Christianity and assimilated them into the whole Christian system.

The direct influence of Lactantius on his own age is difficult to determine. It is immpossible to say what pagans, if any, read or were influenced by his works. All that is known is that educated pagans were entering the Christian church in large numbers at this time. His influence on later ages can be seen in the writings of Isidore of Seville in the

sixth century, but particularly in the Renaissance which, enamoured of his style, produced countless editions of his works, commencing with the mid-fifteenth century.

Over the centuries Christian theologians have harshly criticizedLactantius for his crude and unsophisticated theology. Jerome initiated this criticism as early as the fifth century with his wish that Lactantius had been able to prove Christian doctrine with as much facility as he had demolished pagan error, and this censure continued to the present century until finally the full historical background of Lactantius' life and writing came to light: that Lactantius lived in times which possessed no systematic theology in the West before the Council of Nicea--which in fact he influenced--and that Lactantius was writing a full century before Jerome and Augustine.

Many modern authors, however, reprove Lactantius for his apparent transformation of the Christian religion into a religious philosophy. Undoubtedly Lactantius would reply that since his primary intention was to win over the educated Roman reader, he deliberately avoided the use of Scripture and appealed in his argumentation to those classical authorities which he felt his readers would accept. It is impossible to say how successful Lactantius was in the fulfilment of this intention, but what he did succeed in achieving was to weave much of the truth which the classical philosophers had attained after centuries of

diligent speculation into the fabric of Christian thought. No Christian writer had ever before achieved this, much less attempted it. Although his prime intention in using the classical writers was to justify and fortify the Christian position in a manner persuasive to the cultured pagan, it would seem that in the execution of that intention he also fully intended to bring to bear for the first time the full weight and authority of classical thought in the speculative thinking of Christianity.

Perhaps Lactantius placed too great a stress on the value of philosophy. Nevertheless, as has been pointed out, his readers were to have been the educated pagans, not the pious Christians. Furthermore, most of the apologists had over-estimated the value of faith in their rejection of human speculation. Lactantius, indeed, performed a remarkable service for Christianity. He marks the end of the negative approach to classical culture of Christian thinking in which fides sola sufficed, and the beginning of the era in which ratiocinatio played an important part in the formulation of Christian dogma.

In conclusion, it has been observed in the course of this paper that in his reaction to classical polytheism and philosophy Lactantius initiated several notable and imaginative innovations in western Christian thought that were unknown to the earlier apologists of the Roman West. His Divine Institutes was

the first apologetic treatise directed specifically to the cultured pagans; it was the first comprehensive critique of classical polytheism and philosophy; it elaborated the first synthesis of Christian doctrine; it was the first to employ as proof the classical authors in so systematic and exhaustive a fashion; and lastly it was the first to effect a reconciliation of Christianity and classicism by assimilating the truth of pagan philosophy into the very fabric of Christian thought. Consequently, it might be said with some truth that Lactantius made a not inconsiderable contribution to the development and progress of Christian thought in the western world.

By means of these significant innovations Lactantius not only contributed another milestone in the advance of western thought but also he has revealed how favourably and positively an educated Christian of the fourth century could react to the confrontation of Christianity and classical thought. Although Lactantius reacted negatively to classical polytheism and to what he considered the errors in pagan philosophy and rejected them as vigorously as his fellow apologists, he not only accepted the truth of that philosophy, but more notably he incorporated it into the context of Christianity, thereby opening the way for the great Christian intellectual systems of Augustine and Thomas. This is Lactantius' great merit, that he not only formulated the first Christian synthesis of dogmatic and moral thought but that

he also assimilated into this new and broader Christian context the ageless truths of the pagan philosophers. Truly, then, has Lactantius acknowledged himself, as had Paul three centuries earlier, a debtor both to Greeks and barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.[2]

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[2]Romans 1, 14.

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