THE CHRISTIAN MAGISTERIUM OF LACTANTIUS

by

Stephen C. Casey
ABSTRACT

In the year 290 A.D. the North African rhetorician, L. Caecilius Firmianus Lactantius, was summoned by the Emperor Diocletian to occupy the chair of Latin Rhetoric at the imperial winter capital in Nicomedia. After becoming a Christian, Lactantius wrote many treatises not only to reject what he felt were the errors of pagan religion and philosophy but also to present the positive doctrines of Christianity. The purpose of this study is to show Lactantius as a Christian magister anxious to transmit his version of the Christian message to educated pagans and Christians. The Christian magisterium of Lactantius is concerned with the distinctive methods Lactantius used in the transmission of this message. By the use mainly of classical rhetoric and pagan philosophy, Lactantius tried to prove that Christianity, the philosophical religion and religious philosophy, was the true wisdom which in his mind pagan religion and philosophy had failed to offer mankind.

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L. CAECILIUS FIRMIANUS LACTANTIUS

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In the early centuries of Christianity, many Christian writers, known as apologists, attempted to defend their religion against the charges of pagan officials and authors. Eventually, however, they also began in a more positive way to explain the doctrines of their faith. The first Latin Christian writer to attempt this in a systematic way was the North African rhetorician, L. Caecilius Firmianus Lactantius.

Although there were many works written on Lactantius in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in the present century he is the subject of only about fifteen full-length studies. The most important of these is a work by R. Pichon in 1901 which considers Lactantius principally as a classical philosopher and rhetorician.\(^1\) Another noteworthy work of recent years is the study in 1960 of the Gnosticism in Lactantius by A. Wlosok. The following authors have treated other aspects of Lactantius' thought: J. Siegert (1933): Lactantius and Stoicism; E. F. Micka (1943): the concept of divine anger in Arnobius and Lactantius; E. Schneweis (1944): angels and demons in Lactantius; J. Nicolosi (1945): the influence of Lucretius on Lactantius; J.R. Laurin (1954): the similarity between Lactantius and the other apologists; H.J. Kunick (1955): the notion of patientia in Lactantius; H. Hrosa (1955): the fifth book of the Divine Institutes, De iustitia; H. Kraft and A. Wlosok (1957): the De ira Dei of Lactantius; J. Dammig (1957): Lactantius and the Epitome;

\(^1\)The titles and full publishing details of the books and articles mentioned in this preface will be found in the bibliography.


Survey studies on early Christian thought contain only a cursory treatment of Lactantius. Some recent authors, however, that are useful for general background are the following: J. Quasten, Patrology, 3 vols. 1950-60; C.N. Cochrane, Christianity and Classical Culture, 1957; H. Hagendahl, Latin Fathers and the Classics, 1958; H. von Campenhagen, The Fathers of the Greek Church, 1959, and The Fathers of the

¹For convenience sake the periodical section in the bibliography has been separated from the other secondary literature.

None of the works mentioned above has treated in detail what is planned in this study. Unlike them, what is intended here is to present Lactantius as a Christian pedagogue, magister doctrinae Dei, eager to transmit the Christian message to educated Latin-speaking pagans and Christians. The Christian magisterium of Lactantius is his understanding of the Christian good news and the unique methods he employs to convey it to his readers. The introductory chapter will outline the life and works of Lactantius and treat in detail his role and aim as a Christian teacher. Chapter II will deal with the most important instrument he uses in the presentation of his message, rhetoric. It will show that this rhetoric is mainly classical. However, contrary to the opinion of Wojtczak, Lactantius' rhetoric includes many Christian and contemporary elements; and contrary to Pichon, many of its allegedly classical techniques do not reflect the tradition of Cicero. Chapter III will treat another important constituent of his magisterium, the rejection of what he considers the errors of pagan mythology and philosophy. It will point out that this is principally an ingenious device of rhetoric rather than a

1It is for this reason that most of the references in the thesis will be made to primary sources: to the works of Lactantius, to the other apologists with whom he can be compared, or to the classical authors by whom he was influenced.

2As was just mentioned, however, the pedagogy of Lactantius is touched upon in the article by G. Forti.
current defence against paganism. The final two chapters will present
briefly Lactantius' positive Christian magisterium, his metaphysical and
ethical teaching. Unlike the works of previous authors, these chapters
will relate Lactantius' doctrines not only to classical but also to Chris­tian sources and influences. They will also outline a synthesis of his
teaching, and in conclusion point out the originality and achievement
of his magisterium: for example, his precise formulation of the con­stituents of wisdom; his virtual identification of worship with virtue;
and above all his concept of Christianity as the religious philosophy and
the philosophical religion.

In the presentation, K. L. Turabian's A Manual for Writers of
Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations, 3rd. ed. revised (Chicago and
London, 1967) is followed wherever possible. Titles already mentioned,
for example, are referred to not by op. cit. etc., but in a shortened
form without publishing details. The abbreviations of classical and
Christian works listed in the Oxford Classical Dictionary or G.W.H.
Lampe's A Patristic Greek Lexicon are also followed as far as possible.
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LIFE AND WORKS OF LACTANTIUS

LIFE IN NORTH AFRICA AND NICOMEDIA

On a fertile plateau in northeastern Algeria, some fifty miles from the Mediterranean Sea, lies the city of Constantine, a departmental capital of modern Algeria. Situated above a deep gorge of the Rummel River, this city of 225,000 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 his name. It was probably in the region of this town that about 250 A.D. L. Caecilius Firmianus Lactantius was born. 1

Nothing definite is known of his youth except that he studied rhetoric under Arnobius, 2 possibly in Sicca-Veneria—the present-day Kef—one hundred miles to the southeast.

After his studies Lactantius took up the teaching of rhetoric, and although he disparages his ability and admits that he never appeared

1 Two epitaphs found near and in Cirta indicate the usage of these names in the area. The first gives the subject's personal surname or nickname, "qui et Lactantius," C.I.L. VIII, 17767; the second, a pagan's reads "L. Caecilius Firmianus," C.I.L. VIII, 7241. The date of Lactantius' birth is an approximation taken from a phrase in Jerome's life that Lactantius was extrema senectute when he was tutor to Crispus, son of Constantine, about 315. Ieron. De vir. ill. 80.

2 Ieron. De vir. ill. 80: "Arnobii discipulus."
in the forum, he must have enjoyed considerable success at least as a teacher. His reputation reached Rome, and towards 290, Diocletian announced his appointment as Professor of Latin Rhetoric in Nicomedia, the imperial winter residence since 285. 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 hexameter.

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 it then had fallen under imperial control. The population at this time was largely Greek or Greek-speaking. The climate of the region was salubrious, the soil fertile. Luxurious palaces and temples dotted the city. There was even a temple of the imperial cult dedicated to Roma and Augusta. Among the inhabitants, however, there existed many bitter factions. A great cleavage existed

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1 Div. inst. 3.13.12. "Equidem tametsi operam dederim ut quantulumcumque dicendi adsequerer facultatem propter studium docendi, tamen eloquens numquam fui, quippe qui forum ne adtigerim quidem."

2 Ieron. De vir. ill. 80; Div. inst. 5.22.

3 "hodoeporicum Africa usque Nicomediam hexametris scriptum versibus." Ieron. De vir. ill. 80.

4 As early as Caesar's time, Roman colonists had been sent to increase the population depleted by the Mithridatic War, but by this period most citizens would be Greek-speaking. cf. B. Levick, *Roman Colonies in Southern Asia Minor* (Oxford, 1967).

5 In his intention to make of Nicomedia a second Rome—De mort. pers. 7.8—Diocletian built palaces, a hippodrome, a mint and even an arsenal.

6 As early as Pliny's governorship in 111, Trajan had forbidden the formation of a 150-man fire department for fear that this might form a nucleus dangerous to the peace of the province. Plin. Ep. 10.33-34.
between rich and poor, and animosities were also strong among religious groups. Nicomedia had probably been evangelized by St. Peter, and by this time there were many Christians in the city.

Lactantius settled into this new milieu about the age of forty and began to teach Latin rhetoric. Here, however, in the East, he was probably an unsuccessful teacher as he had few pupils. 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, with a faulty knowledge of Latin. Tertullian, in his position, would probably have spoken Greek, and by the force of his dynamic personality, would have gathered a following around him. Lactantius, however, was no orator as he himself admits. More than once he regretted leaving his native Africa. He reproached the Greek town for its pandering to polytheism, its immodesty. It is small wonder that he had few pupils.

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1 Paul and Timothy, however, had deliberately bypassed Bithynia. Act. Apost. 16.7.

2 Ieron. De vir. ill. 80: "penuria discipulorum."

3 Div. inst. 3.13.12: "Tamen eloquens numquam fui."

4 Div. inst. 1.15.13-15; 1.20.15-16.

5 To one, Demetrianus, he gratefully dedicated several books, e.g., De opificio Dei and two volumes of letters.
There is little doubt that Lactantius was born a pagan and remained so for many years of his teaching career. It is uncertain, however, whether he was converted to Christianity during his teaching years in North Africa or after his appointment to the teaching post in Nicomedia between 290 and 303. All that can be said with assurance is that he was a Christian at the outbreak of the Diocletian persecution in Nicomedia, February 303, and also that he was aware of the conditions in the North African Church.

When the persecution began, Lactantius probably lost his teaching chair, and after that, his pupils. However, it was primarily the persecution that moved him to write what he felt was to be a final and substantial defence of Christianity which he felt his predecessors had failed to achieve. Though he did not suffer violence, Lactantius endured hard times, lacking even the necessities of life. He watched

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1 Div. inst. 1.1.18: "Illa oratoria in qua dui uersati non ad uirtutem, sed plane ad argutam malitiam iuuenes erudiebamus"; De ira Dei 2. 2; Augustine refers to his conversion, De doctrina christiana 2.61.

2 Div. inst. 5. 2. 2.

3 e.g., his references to the African Christians, Minucius Felix, Tertullian and Cyprian, Div. inst. 5. 1. 22-28. Furthermore, his description of the true church as one of confession and penitence suggests the African Church. Div. inst. 4. 30. 13.

4 De mort. pers. 13. 1.

5 Div. inst. 5. 1. 21-28; 5. 2. 1-8. Jerome, however, claims that the reason was: "Penuria discipulorum ob graecam uidelicet ciuitatem ad scribendum se contulit." De vir. ill. 80.

6 Jerome is probably referring to Lactantius' condition in the persecution when he says: "sed adeo in hac uita pauper ut plerumque etiam necessariis indiguerit." Chronic. ad a. Abr. 2333.
with increasing dismay the persecution of his fellow Christians and he
was particularly horrified at the destruction of the church of Nicomedia
and other acts of violence and cruelty.\(^1\) However, he remained in
Bithynia for more than two years after the persecution began until 305,\(^2\)
but it is not clear where he spent the next six years. His intimate
acquaintance with the political situation in the East after 310 which he
describes in the \textit{De mortibus persecutorum} undoubtedly places Lactantius
in Nicomedia at least by 311 A.D., the year of Galerius' edict of
toleration.\(^3\)

With his victory over Maxentius, son of Maximian, at the Milvian
Bridge on October 28, 312, Constantine gained with Licinius a dual con-
trol of the Empire. Lactantius had perhaps known him when Constantine
had been held hostage for several years in Nicomedia, and now the
Emperor recalled him to favour by appointing him tutor to his eldest
son, Crispus.\(^4\) During these teaching years, Lactantius, now \textit{extrema}

\(^1\)\textit{Div. inst.} 5.2.2; \textit{De mort. pers.} 12 and 15; \textit{Div. inst.} 5.11.10.

\(^2\)\textit{Div. inst.} 5.11.15.

\(^3\)Quoted in chapter 34 of \textit{De mort. pers.} Granted by Galerius on
his deathbed, this edict granted official freedom of worship to the Chris-
tians. The later edict of toleration of Licinius on June 13, 313, the
so-called Edict of Milan in the East, which Lactantius quotes in \textit{De mort.}
pers. 48, merely confirmed the Galerian edict. So, concludes Lactantius,
who was certainly present at its promulgation: "His litteris propositis
etiam verbo [Licinius] hortatus est, ut conventica ad statum pristinum
redderentur. Sic ab euersa ecclesia usque ad restitutum fuerunt anni
decem, menses plus minus quattuor." \textit{De mort. pers.} 48.13.

\(^4\)Ieron. \textit{Chronic. ad a. Abr.} 2333 and \textit{De vir. ill.} 80. This was
around 316.
senectute,¹ travelled with Crispus and Constantine in the latter's campaigns. After he completed this task, nothing certain, even the date or place of his death, is known.

WORKS

No Christian work of distinction was written in Latin before the end of the second century. As the majority of early Christians spoke Greek, the first apologists had written in Greek, which among Christians did not suffer a sharp decline until the end of the third century when Latin became the official language of the Christian Church in the West.² The Scriptures were translated into Latin, however, at some time in the second century. It was Tertullian, writing at the end of the second century and early third, who was the first to write a major Christian work in Latin.

None of the known works of Lactantius written before the persecution of Diocletian is extant. The first mentioned by Jerome³ was entitled the Symposium, or Banquet, a favourite type of work among pagans and Christians alike, probably written in dialogue form. Then Jerome mentions the Hodoeporicum, an itinerary in hexameter commemorating the voyage from Africa. Thirdly, a work entitled Grammaticus

¹Ieron. De vir. ill. 80.

²P. de Labriolle, History and Literature of Christianity from Tertullian to Boethius, trans. by Herbert Wilson (New York, 1925), pp. 40-3.

³Ieron. De vir. ill. 80.
probably was concerned with the rules of grammar or metrics. Next came eight volumes of letters on a wide range of topics including philosophy, versification and geography.\textsuperscript{1} Two volumes—in which Lactantius denies the existence of the Holy Spirit—\textsuperscript{2} were dedicated to his pupil and friend, Demetrianus, and fragments of the \textit{Epistulae ad Probum}, in four books, are extant in the works of Jerome and Rufinus.\textsuperscript{3} The letters are important in that they were written in an elegant style and perhaps foreshadow 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. Yet for all their erudition, they apparently made hard reading as Pope Damasus declares in a letter to Jerome: "Non libenter lego, quia et plurimae epistulae ejus usque ad mille spatia versuum tenduntur et raro de nostro dogmate disputant, quo fit ut et legenti fastidium generet longitudo."\textsuperscript{4}

Jerome mentions most of Lactantius' extant works,\textsuperscript{5} first, \textit{De ira Dei}, which he calls pulcherrimum; \textit{Institutiones Divinæ}, in seven books, and an \textit{Epitome} in one; another book, \textit{De persecutione}—probably the \textit{De mortibus persecutorum}—and still another, \textit{De opificio Dei vel formatione hominis}. Extant too and attributed to Lactantius by many

\textsuperscript{1}\textit{Ieron. Ep. 35. 1.}
\textsuperscript{2}\textit{Hieron. Comment. in Epist. ad Galat. 2.4; Ep. 84. 7.}
\textsuperscript{3}\textit{Rufin. Comment. in metra Terentii; Hieron. Comment. in Epist. ad Galat. 2.}
\textsuperscript{4}\textit{Hieron. Ep. 35 — Damasus ad Hieronymum.}
\textsuperscript{5}\textit{Ieron. De vir. ill. 80.}
manuscripts but not mentioned by Jerome are several fragments and poems, *De motibus animi*, a fragment of a dozen lines on the affections; *De resurrectione; De passione Domini;* and *De ave Phoenice*. Most scholars reject the authenticity of the first three.\(^1\) The Phoenix is a beautiful poem in eighty-five elegiac distylics telling of the life of the phoenix in the East, its coming to Syria, its death there on a funeral pyre, and then its resurrection and ascent to the heavens. The story was often told by the pagan writers,\(^2\) and since Clement of Rome, the phoenix in the Christian mind was thought to symbolize the Christian resurrection and even to guarantee it.\(^3\) Three manuscripts have it and two attribute it to Lactantius; today most scholars accept its authenticity.\(^4\)

From early times, perhaps from the fifth century, four of Lactantius' works were grouped into a single unit.\(^5\) His first work, the *De opificio Dei*, a one-volume treatise on the providence of God, defends that notion against the pagan philosophers who deny it, mainly the Epicureans. It is really a preface to the *Divine Institutes* and

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2 Hes. fr. 171. 4; Hdt. 2. 73; Ovid. *Met.* 15. 392-407.


5 Amann, *D.T.C.*, Col. 2426.
announces it. His major work, the Divine Institutes, attempts to refute both pagan religions and pagan philosophers in the first three books, then to expose what Lactantius considered the true religion and the true wisdom of Christianity in the remaining four. The De ira Dei in one volume enlarges on the theology of God's anger which had been treated cursorily in the Divine Institutes. Lastly, the Epitome is a compendium of all previous works, especially the Divine Institutes.

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1 De opif. Dei 15. 6: "Sed erit nobis contra philosophos integra disputatio."

2 Div. inst. 2. 17. 5: "Sed seponatur interim nobis hic locus de ira dei disserendi, quod uberior est materia et opere proprio latius exequenda."

3 A critical edition of the works of Lactantius was published between the years 1890 and 1897 by two German scholars, Samuel Brandt and George Laubmann. It contains Lactantius' extant and authentic works and was published in three parts, forming volumes XIX and XXVII in the series, Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum Latinorum. Brandt distinguishes in a lengthy introduction (cf. Pars I, pp. xiii-lxiv) five families of manuscripts, and over the centuries more than one hundred editions have been published. 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. Numerous 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 the 19th when only a few editions appeared, one being Vols. 6 and 7 of Migne's Patrologia Latina, another the Brandt-Laubmann edition of the 1890's. Lactantius' works have been translated into English by W. Fletcher in 1886, and recently by M. McDonald. 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 W.H. Blakeney in 1950 in the SPCK series. The De mortibus persecutorum has had many editions in recent years because of its historical importance. Cf. especially J. Moreau, De la mort des persécuteurs, Num. 39, Sources chrétiennes, 2 Vols. (Paris, 1954).
In his first apologetic work, De opificio Dei, Lactantius indicates his desire to instruct his fellow Christian philosophers, "philosophi sectae nostrae,"\(^1\) so that they may become more learned and appear so in the eyes of their pagan counterparts who now hold them in disdain. His main purpose is to vindicate the providence of God against the philosophical schools who deny providence in man, both soul and body.\(^2\) Here, for the first time, Lactantius confronts the Greek philosophers, in this case, the Epicureans.\(^3\) Cicero had undertaken this task before,\(^4\) 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 both in his soul, which is from God, and in his body, which is from the earth, man reveals a wise and powerful providence.\(^5\) This is Lactantius' argument from finality which he uses to prove monotheism. The work was composed after the beginning of the persecution of 303 for it contains references to the persecution.\(^6\) With the persecution raging round him, Lactantius takes up his apologetic work calmly. He dedicates it to his faithful disciple, Demetrianus, for fear he might be contaminated in the carrying out of his public office.\(^7\) But it contains little Christian

\(^{1}\)De opif. Dei 1. 2.
\(^{2}\)De opif. Dei 1. 11.
\(^{3}\)De opif. Dei 6. 1.
\(^{4}\)Nat. d. 2. 47; Fin. 3. 17.
\(^{5}\)De opif. Dei 1. 16.
\(^{6}\)De opif. Dei 1. 1 and 7.
\(^{7}\)De opif. Dei 1. 5-6.
dogma and no Scripture. Yet, in employing many references to pagan classical authors, e.g., Aristotle, Varro and especially Cicero, to prove a theological position, in this case, the providence of God, Lactantius foreshadows an important method of his later works.

Lactantius squarely confronts his pagan adversaries, both polytheists and philosophers, in the Divine Institutes. His method, however, is not exclusively apologetic or negative. In Books 1 to 3, pars destruens, as Amann calls it, he refutes their errors, but from Books 4 to 7, pars construens, he attempts to describe his conception of Christian theology.

The immediate occasion of writing the Divine Institutes was the anti-Christian attacks of two pagan writers. The first was a self-styled champion of philosophy who wrote a polemic in three books. His effort, however, was apparently unsuccessful not only among the Christians who mocked his ignorance of Christian doctrine and weakness of argument, but also among the pagans who censured his meanness in undertaking a polemic against a sect already harassed by the persecution of the Emperor. The second was, in the words of Lactantius, a judex, "e numero iudicum," and it seems that this second adversary was

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2Amann, D. T. C., Col. 2428.

3Div. inst. 5. 2. 2; 5. 4. 1.

4Div. inst. 5. 2. 4-11.

5Div. inst. 5. 2. 12. In the later Empire iudex meant any imperial official who had any jurisdiction. Iudices was a collective term for all administrative functionaries of the Empire. cf. A. Berger, Encyclopedia of Roman Law (Philadelphia, 1953), p. 518.
Hierocles, then Governor of Bithynia. 1 He contests the authenticity of the Scriptures, berates the Apostles, calling them a band of brigands, and opposes Christ's miracles with those of Apollonius of Tyana. 2

While listening to the harangue of these men, Lactantius conceived the idea of his apology, the Divine Institutes, in the spring of 303. 3

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2 Div. inst. 5.2 and 3. cf. F. Baur, Apollonius von Tyana und Christus (Hildesheim, 1966).

3 The dating of the Divine Institutes is difficult, and as yet unsolved. Monceaux holds that it was written between the dates 307, the beginning of Galerius' persecution, and 311, his edict of toleration. H.L.A.C. III, pp. 303-4. Pichon extends these dates from 306 to 313. Lactance, p. 30. Moreau, writing a half century later in 1954, says 305-313. Mort des pers. I, p. 20. Stevenson, in 1955, thinks that Lactantius did the bulk of the work on his 'Tract for the Times' after he left Bithynia, that is, around 316. J. Stevenson, "The Life and Literary Activity of Lactantius," Studia Patristica, I (1955), 673. My own opinion is that the Divine Institutes was written before 316. For my reasons cf. p. 31.

The problem of dating the Divine Institutes is complicated by the question of the authenticity of two dedications to Constantine the Emperor in Books 1 and 7. The first, in Div. inst. 1. 1. 13-16, promises Constantine a victory over his enemies, the persecutors of Christianity; the second, in Div. inst. 7. 27. 11-17, celebrates his victory as a fait accompli. Moreau, p. 19, thinks that the first refers to a declaration of war with Licinius between 321 and 323, and the second, to a time after the defeat but before the death of Licinius in 324. Stevenson, however, p. 672, maintains that the first dedication was written before 312 and refers to the period of persecution between 305 and 311, and the second, written in 313, refers to the time when the persecutors, Maximian and Maxentius, were handed over into Constantine's hands and the campaign against Maximinus Daia was planned in 313. Stevenson's dating of the first dedication would seem too early to refer reasonably to Constantine. Moreau's dating and explanation of the dedications—cf. also end of footnote—seem more plausible.

Critics such as Brandt and Monceaux doubted the authenticity of the dedications, claiming that the triumphant tone of these passages is wholly inconsonant with that of the work as a whole. Monceaux, for example, argues as follows: he first proves that because the dedications are connected to other passages in which Lactantius manifests a Gnostic dualism, since both are contained in the same manuscripts, both must
Lactantius' object in writing the Divine Institutes appears to be apologetic, for he terms the pagans "ii contra quos agimus." He will not confine himself to the two adversaries of Nicomedia but he intends to refute systematically and completely all adversaries of Christianity. However, moving from the apologetic to the dogmatic, from the defensive to the offensive, he will also expose the substance of Christian doctrine and he will address it to cultivated pagans and Christians alike. He claims that the pagans, especially the learned, but also the unlearned, are to be his concern. To the former he will prove that Christianity is the true philosophy, to the latter, that it is the true be accepted or rejected together. Monceaux, H.L.A.C., p. 301. After offering three solutions, a. introduction by Lactantius in a second edition; b. suppression by a later editor; c. interpolation, 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 considered the dedications spurious. However, after a lengthy study of the manuscripts, Pichon—Lactance, pp. 5-30—in 1901 argued forcefully for the authenticity of the dedications, and eventually by his arguments here and in subsequent articles, he succeeded in convincing most patristic scholars, even Brandt himself. cf. de Labriolle, Hist. and Lit. of Christianity, p. 188. Thus the dedications are now accepted as an authentic and integral part of the text of the Divine Institutes of Lactantius. They were either, in Stevenson's view, included in Lactantius' original writing, or, as I think more likely, according to Moreau, added somewhat later by Lactantius during his association with Constantine, and then probably removed at a still later date "par l'action d'un éditeur, qui, sous Constance par exemple, ne tenait pas à célébrer Constantin comme le premier empereur chrétien." Mort des pers. I, p. 21.

1 Div. inst. 1. 6. 6.
2 Div. inst. 5. 4. 1-2.
3 Div. inst. 5. 4. 3.
4 Div. inst. 5. 1. 8-9. This question is treated at length on pp. 26-31.
religion, "ut et docti ad ueram sapientiam dirigantur, et indocti ad ueram religionem."¹ To convince his educated readers he will use only human evidence, 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.² Finally, he will employ in the true classical style every resource of eloquence at his command to help convince his cultivated readers who are wont to mock the ignorance and stupidity of Christians³ that a man need not be ignorant or uncouth in embracing Christianity.

The title, Divine Institutes, is borrowed from the terminology of law. It is probably based on the Institutes of Ulpian—d. 228 A.D.—or similar law manuals.⁴ Institutiones designates a treatise on the principles of law, the Divinae institutiones, a treatise on the principles of religion.⁵ Each book will be an institutio, a treatise, an instruction, each with its proper name. In the first chapter of Book One Lactantius refers to "skillful men and arbiters of justice" who publish institutions of civil law and deal with legal disputes in order to assuage the strifes and contentions of citizens. How much more justified, he says, is he

¹Div. inst. 1. 1. 7.

²Div. inst. 5. 4. 4-7.

³Div. inst. 3. 30. 9.

⁴The most famous work of this kind was the Institutiones of Gaius in 161 A.D. cf. C. Ferrini, Storia della fonti del diritto romano e della giurisprudenza romana (Milan, 1885).

⁵Div. inst. 1. 1. 12.
in writing institutes of divine law dealing not with trivia like rain
damage or the preferring of claims, but with hope, salvation and God,
thereby settling matters far more important than those of his civil
counterparts!

The *Divine Institutes* is well planned. At the outset Lactantius
states that it will be written in seven books,¹ and though he occasionally
sends a reader on to other books, his orderly plan is always in mind.²
The first three books attempt to refute the adversaries of Christianity;
the fourth outlines 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, *De falsa sapientia*.
He points out the weakness and contradictions of their metaphysics and
ethics, and refutes the doctrines of their principal systems. Book Four,
*De uera sapientia et religione*, states that the true religion ought to unite
philosophy and religion. He then traces Christian doctrine in broad out-
line and answers various objections against the church. In the fifth book,
*De iustitia*, after a comparison of his work with those of other apologists,

¹ *Div. inst.* 1. 1. 20.

² *Div. inst.* 2. 3. 25; 3. 13, 3 etc.
Lactantius combines the theory and practice of justice. He treats the history of justice from the Golden Age to the Christian persecutions, then discusses the notion of justice, its value, and in the final chapters analyzes the causes and results of persecutions. Book Six, De uero cultu, is an orderly discourse on Christian morality. It defines virtue, reviews the duties of Christians, their duties of piety, justice and charity, and then discourses on the passions, the pleasures of sense and the concept of worship. Book Seven, De uita beata, the reward of a virtuous life, is a sequel to Book Six, in which Lactantius develops his ideas on the destiny of man and the world, the next life and the end of the world, and he finishes his work with a moving exhortation on the life of virtue and its celestial reward. In the Divine Institutes, therefore, Lactantius attempts to present a broader, if not a more comprehensive, view of Christianity, than any previous Christian writer in the West.¹

Many of Lactantius' doctrines are not treated fully in the Divine Institutes. As a kind of supplement, he wrote a one-volume treatise in twenty-two brief chapters on the anger of God, De ira Dei, a notion very fundamental to Lactantius, which was announced in the Divine Institutes.²

¹Since his main work best reveals the principal orientation of Lactantius' Christian teaching, this thesis will be concerned largely with the Divine Institutes. The four other extant prose works, which are quite short and really satellites to the Institutes, either explicitly preface it (De opificio Dei) or simply expand or summarize its contents (De ira Dei and the Epitome).

Some philosophers, however, e.g., Cicero,¹ and especially the Epicureans, assigned to God the attribute of impassibility.² A few Christian writers, like Arnobius, agreed,³ 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 dissoluant omnen religionem."⁴ Furthermore, the divine anger is pure at its source; it is a holy indignation. It is the counterpart of the goodness of God and his providence treated in the De opificio Dei and Divine Institutes: 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."⁵

The Epitome, the last of the apologetic works, is a compendium of all previous works, particularly the Divine Institutes, and is dedicated to an unknown Pentadius.⁶ Written some time after the Institutes,⁷

¹"Num iratum timemus Iovem? Ad hoc quidem commune est omnium philosophorum . . . numquam nec irasci Deum, nec nocere." De officiis 3. 102.
²De ira Dei 4. 1-3. cf. also Div. inst. 5. 20. 14; Epit. 50. 3; Epic. frg. 243.
⁴De ira Dei 22. 2.
⁵H. Hagendahl, Latin Fathers and the Classics (Göteborg, 1958), p. 70.
⁶Epit. praefat. 1.
it differs only slightly in plan, development, argument and style, but as it eliminates repetitions and multiple quotations, it is far more compact and readable. One eighth the length of the Divine Institutes, it was probably directed only to western readers, as all Greek quotations are translated. Its aim is the same as that of the Divine Institutes, "ad inlustrandam veritatem religionemque." As a member of Constantine's retinue in 317, Lactantius tactfully omits the account in Book Seven of the Institutes of the end of the world in 200 years and the fall of Rome. The Epitome contains some new references from Scripture and from the classical authors, especially from Plato's Timaeus, which was popular among the Christians at that time, and also from Hermes Trismegistus. Lactantius mentions a date of writing, 300 years after Christ, but this is, certainly, in Monceaux' words, "un chiffre rond." As it is mentioned only by Jerome and is complete in only one manuscript, it would seem that readers usually went directly to the expanded doctrine in the

Epitomes played an important part in the fourth century Empire. Their purpose was to provide succinct accounts of Roman history to barbarians wishing to be Romanized. Cyprian's Testimonia, a compendium of Bible quotations, was a kind of Christian epitome and served as the principal source of Scripture for Lactantius. cf. M. Galdi, L'epitome nella letteratura latina (Naples, 1922).

Epit. praeafat. 1; Div. inst. 4. 5. 2.

3cf. Brandt II, 2, Index auctorum.

4Epit. 38. 1.

5Monceaux, H.L.A.C. III, p. 305.

Institutes. The Epitome, then, is a skeleton of the Divine Institutes, and in carefully working over the same ground, Lactantius produced a kind of abridged and popular edition of his great central work.

The last of Lactantius' works, the De mortibus persecutorum,\textsuperscript{1} differs greatly from all his other 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 been considered spurious. Written between 317 and 319 while Lactantius was in Constantine's court,\textsuperscript{2} 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 long line of wicked emperors. Fittingly dedicated to Donatus, his friend, who had suffered greatly in the persecutions, it demonstrates that, though normally he was restrained, 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 uero iudicio Dei eadem quae fecerunt receperunt."\textsuperscript{3} Characteristic of apologetic writing was the attempt to reply to the pagan charges that the Christian God, if He really existed, could not permit His people to suffer, and also that public calamities were caused by the anger of pagan gods displeased by the disrespect of Christians.\textsuperscript{4} As a complete vindication of Christianity, Lactantius vividly describes the

\textsuperscript{1}Preserved in only one manuscript, the Colbertinus.


\textsuperscript{3}De mort. pers. 50. 7.

complete destruction of the enemies of Christianity and the triumphant re-establishment of the church. He thanks God for His justice, and he prays that He would grant eternal peace to His people and church "ut omnes insidias atque impetus diaboli a populo suo arceat, ut florescentis ecclesiae perpetuam quietem custodiat."¹

The main argument against the authenticity of this work is literary, that is, it is written in a style so clearly different that it can scarcely have come from the pen of Lactantius. However, what must be kept in mind is the great sense of triumph, of relief, of joy, and even bitterness which the Christians experienced with the cessation of several hundred years of persecution in the edict of toleration of Licinius in 313. Nevertheless, its authenticity was denied until the present century when it is now accepted by most commentators.²

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 305 to the death of Maximinus Daia in 313. There is a great exactitude in facts, as is proved from the study of contemporary coinage,³ and this leads authors to believe that Lactantius must have had access to the imperial archives.⁴

¹De mort. pers. 52.5.


³For example, Lactantius' physical descriptions of Maximian and Galerius found in De mort. pers. 8 and 9 are confirmed from their images on the imperial coins. cf. J.M.C. Toynbee, Roman Medallions, Plates 3, 4 and 8 (New York, 1944).

⁴Monceaux, H.L.A.C. III, p. 348; Moreau, Mort des pers. I, p. 44.
In the West there are four Latin apologists, all North Africans, who preceded and affected Lactantius. Minucius Felix is the first of these mentioned by the author.\(^1\) Like Lactantius he writes a pure Latin, and he displays a perfection of style and development that makes his only work, the Octavius, a masterpiece. Like Arnobius, he takes his place ahead of Lactantius in using human evidence, the philosophers, historians and poets, for apologetic reasons, that is, in order to criticize pagan beliefs and justify Christianity. He identifies philosophy with Christianity,\(^2\) as Lactantius will identify it later. He praises Plato, calling the Timaeus heavenly,\(^3\) but like Lactantius, he asserts that philosophers possess only half the truth.\(^4\) Also, like Lactantius, he employs Scripture sparingly and instead turns the arguments of the pagan philosophers, historians and poets against themselves.

The antithesis to Lactantius in almost every respect is the greatest of the Latin apologists, Tertullian. He is briefly described 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."\(^5\) Tertullian was born a pagan but with his conversion he became uncompromising in

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\(^1\) *Div. inst.* 5. 1. 22.

\(^2\) *Octav.* 20.

\(^3\) *Octav.* 19. 4.

\(^4\) *Octav.* 34. 5.

\(^5\) *Div. inst.* 5. 1. 23.
his doctrine and morality, and also in his animosity towards pagan culture,\textsuperscript{1} an attitude which was to be quite foreign to the mild-tempered Lactantius. To Tertullian, since all truth flowed from tradition, the \textit{regula fidei} was sufficient: "Adversum regulam nihil scire, omnia scire."\textsuperscript{2} Even the philosophers obtained the truth they possessed from revelation, and their error stemmed from perverting that truth through pride.\textsuperscript{3} Philosophy is dangerous to the \textit{regula fidei} because it is based on the independence of the intellect, whereas with faith, all is certain.\textsuperscript{4} He excoriates the philosophers, that is especially the Gnostics, and calls them patriarchs of heresy.\textsuperscript{5} Unlike Lactantius 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.\textsuperscript{6} Truth is not to be looked for in the head but in the heart.\textsuperscript{7} However, like Lactantius, he admits the need of studying pagan literature as a training in life and an avenue to divine learning, but he will not

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item De praes. haer. 7. 9. "Quid ergo Athenis et Hierosolymis? Quid academiae et ecclesiae?"
\item De praes. haer. 14.
\item Test. anim. 5.
\item Apol. 46. 7.
\item Praescr. 7.
\item Test. anim. 1.
\item Test. anim. 1.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
permit the teaching of it. Unlike the style of Lactantius, Tertullian's is crabbed and obscure. Dominated by Tertullian, the prejudice at this time against pagan culture became strong in the Roman West and for a time even in the East among Greek Christians like Tatian. In this, Lactantius was to prove a marked exception among the early Latin Christians.

The third African apologist to precede Lactantius was the kindly and prudent bishop of Carthage, Cyprian. He resembles Lactantius in character and style, but, according to Lactantius, he had shortcomings in his dealings with the pagans. After praising his style, Lactantius concludes:

Hic tamen placere ultra uerba 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.  

Cyprian, primarily a pastor and moralist, never quotes a pagan author in all his writings. He also abstains from expressly attacking them:

"There is a great difference between Christians and philosophers," he says Pichon of him: "C'est à la fois un écrivain de décadence et un écrivain personnel: comme tel il est doublement loin de l'art classique." Lactance, p. 180.

1 Idol. 10. Jerome also displays an equivocal reaction to pagan culture, which 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 evangeliiis Maro? cum apostolo Cicero?" Ieron. Ep. 22. 29, and on the other, his ardent love of the pagan classics: "Ciceronianus es, non Christianus." Ieron. Ep. 22. 30.

2 Div. inst. 5. 1. 26.
What Lactantius owes to him principally is his knowledge of Scripture, which he obtained mainly from the Testimonia of Cyprian.

Arnobius is the fourth Latin apologist to influence Lactantius, at least as his teacher of rhetoric in Sicca-Veneria, when he was tutor to Lactantius in his pagan youth. Converted to Christianity at sixty years of age, he attempted to prove the sincerity of his conversion by writing an apology of Christianity in seven books, entitled Adversus nationes. The work aims at refuting anti-Christian calumny and 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, foreshadows the method of Lactantius. He accepts the Euhemeristic doctrine—the gods were heroes canonized by posterity—as does his pupil. He criticizes the rhetorical style and advocates simplicity, but his own style is florid. Though trained in style and method by him in his early years, Lactantius, however, does

1 Cupr. Ep. 16. 55.
2 Pichon, Lactance, p. 202. This will be treated in greater detail in Chapter II.
3 Adv. nat. 6. 2; 7. 5 etc.
5 Adv. nat. 4. 29. For Lactantius' treatment of Euhemerism, cf. Chapter II.
6 Adv. nat. 2. 5-6.
not mention Arnobius in any of his writings. Perhaps Lactantius had
departed for Nicomedia before his teacher's conversion and he subse­
quently remained unaware of it. ¹

ROLE AND AIM OF LACTANTIUS

Though Lactantius is indebted to his fellow African apologists, ²
he is conscious of their shortcomings. He praises the Octavius of
Minucius Felix for its method, but he criticizes its incompleteness. ³
Tertullian, though learned, is lacking in eloquence, polish and clarity. ⁴
More serious is the criticism of Tertullian's Apologeticum: "Aliut est
accusantibus respondere, quod in defensione aut negatione positum est,
aliut instituere, quod nos facimus, in quo necesse est doctrinae totius
substantiam contineri." ⁵ While rejecting Tertullian's apology of nega-
tion and defence, Lactantius here hints at his own method, namely the
positive teaching of his conception of the substance of Christian doctrine.
It is not to be a negative apology or defence but an institutio, a treatise,
an instruction. Cyprian also failed because, in his apology, Ad
Demetrianum, although eloquent, he presented no synthesis and used
Scripture instead of rational arguments, ⁶ which are necessary, claims

¹G. McCracken, Arnobius of Sicca: the Case Against the Pagans

²e.g., to Tertullian for his arguments against mythology; to
Cyprian for his knowledge of Scripture.

³Div. inst. 5. 1. 22.

⁴Div. inst. 5. 1. 23.

⁵Div. inst. 5. 4. 3.

⁶Div. inst. 5. 4. 3-4.
Lactantius, for one ignorant of the truth, in order that he might be shown "paulatim lucis principia ... ne toto lumine obiecto caligaret."\(^1\) Continuing to digress on his own method, Lactantius concludes this chapter with the pious wish that through his exhortation—hortatu nostro—other learned men might follow in his footsteps of using humana testimonia in the field of truth. He also rejects other Christian apologies by unlearned men who, he feels, regard eloquence as an enemy of the naked truth, and as a vain and conceited servant of worldly wisdom.\(^2\) He hopes that by the use of classical literary forms, his apology will both supply the shortcomings of learned and unlearned apologists and offset the seductive attraction of pagan literature.\(^3\) However, a further purpose, he states, will be to persuade, to instruct, to teach the pagans that Christianity is the true religion and the true wisdom: "omnibus persuasum cum hanc solam religionem, tum etiam solam ueram esse sapientiam."\(^4\)

**Excursus**

Although it does not affect the basic nature of Lactantius' method, the question arises as to whom in fact Lactantius directed his works, to the Christians or to the pagans. While the question is difficult and

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\(^1\) Div. inst. 5. 4. 5.

\(^2\) Div. inst. 5. 1. 18-21; 5. 1. 28, etc.

\(^3\) Div. inst. 5. 1. 11.

\(^4\) Div. inst. 5. 4. 8.
perhaps ultimately impossible to answer, it merits a short discussion because in many instances Lactantius states expressly the group for whom he is presenting his teaching. Are the clear and repeated statements of Lactantius to be doubted? In general, although Christian apologists usually addressed their works formally to the pagans, this form of dedication was at times a literary convention. In fact, the apologists often had a Christian public principally in mind in order to vindicate Christianity and to console and encourage them in their trials and persecutions. With Lactantius, however, my opinion is that in at least his principal work, the Divine Institutes, he wrote both for the educated Christian and for the educated pagan.

It is in the prefaces to his works that Lactantius identifies his proposed readers. In his first extant work, the De opificio Dei,\(^1\) he declares that he is addressing his work to Demetrianus, a fellow Christian and an educated man, to instruct and encourage him in his faith. He also implies that he is writing to justify his own Christianity to his co-religionists. Then he expressly states that he has in mind the educated Christian, "philosophi sectae nostrae." He hopes to instruct them so that they may improve intellectually and morally. In the same paragraph he states that he is writing "ut nos ipsos simul et ceteros instruam." From the context nos ipsos seems to be referring to Lactantius, as the next sentence indicates. Ceteros, although it could conceivably mean pagans, probably refers to the Christian philosophers whom he just men-

\(^1\)De opif. Dei 1. 1-3.
tioned. Thus in the preface of *De opificio Dei* there is no specific mention of pagans at all. What is reasonably clear is that Lactantius is writing not simply for Christians but for educated Christians.

The *De ira Dei* is expressly addressed to Donatus, a fellow Christian, lest he be deceived by the false doctrines, especially of the Epicureans, concerning God's goodness and anger.\(^1\) The preface of Lactantius' final work, *De mortibus persecutorum*,\(^2\) clearly states that this work was written for the consolation of the Christians and the tenor of the entire work strongly supports this statement. Thus from his expressed statements there is no reason to assume that Lactantius was writing in this work and in the *De ira Dei* for any other group except Christians.

It is only in the *Divine Institutes* that Lactantius clearly and expressly introduces the prospective pagan reader. Even the *Epitome* is explicitly dedicated to his Christian friend Pentadius upon his request for a shortened form of the *Institutes*.\(^3\) It is quite probable that Lactantius had Christian readers in mind when he wrote the *Epitome* as it was probably written after 316 when Lactantius was in the Latin West traveling in the retinue of Constantine. In the preface of the *Institutes*,\(^4\) however, Lactantius clearly is speaking not of the Christians but only

\(^1\) *De ira Dei* 1. 2.

\(^2\) *De mort. pers.* 1. 1 and 7.

\(^3\) *Epit. praef.* 1.

\(^4\) *Div. inst.* 1. 1. 6-7.
of the pagans, both learned and the unlearned, but especially the former, that the truth, not of the philosophers, but of God, which he hopes to describe, will free them from their error and lead them to immortality. Later in the preface he is still evidently speaking only of pagans, who, hardening themselves against the truth, must be helped to free themselves of their errors. It is only in the fifth book that he brings in the Christians and here only in a subordinate way. In the first chapter he claims that he has in mind principally the persecutors of Christianity. However, he explicitly states that if these pagans refuse to listen to the truth, he still entertains the hope that he will be able to strengthen and instruct fellow Christians, not so much the unlearned, but especially those who are acquainted with literature, or as he calls them in the same paragraph, studiosi. It is clear from the context that studiosi means the learned Christians. Finally, even if this purpose fails, he hopes to console himself or perhaps to justify even to himself the claims of Christianity.

In the final statement, the fourth chapter of Book Five, referring explicitly to the purpose of the Divine Institutes, Lactantius says that he is writing to silence once and for all not only the few contemporary

1 Div. inst. 1. 1. 23-4.
2 Div. inst. 5. 1. 5-8.
3 Div. inst. 5. 1. 9-11: "Nutant enim plurimi ac maxime qui litterarum aliquid attigerunt. Nam et in hoc philosophi et oratores et poetae perniciosi sunt, quod incautos animos facile inretire possunt suauitate sermonis et carminum dulci modulatione currentium. Ob eamque causam uolui sapientiam cum religione coniungere, ne quid studiosis inanis illa doctrina possit officere."
4 Div. inst. 5. 1. 12.
critics of Christianity but all those past, present and future.\(^1\) Although he does not say so, this purpose, of course, could be simply for Christian support and comfort. Lastly Lactantius states that by his method he hopes to encourage other Christians to write in the same way.\(^2\)

Consequently it seems that from his stated purpose Lactantius was writing for educated Christians in four of his works, and for educated Christians and pagans in his main work, the *Divine Institutes*. Is there any reason to doubt Lactantius’ expressed purpose? All his works, relying as they do so heavily on countless references to classical philosophers and poets, would have been quite incomprehensible to the uneducated man. But was he writing for the Christian or pagan? This cannot be decided definitively. On the one hand, there is the long tradition of apologies, which, although formally addressed to pagan officials, in fact often were directed to fellow Christians. There is also in the works of Lactantius a considerable number of specifically Christian words, like *resurrectio*, *confessio*, *sacramentum* etc., which pagan readers would not understand. On the other hand, a pagan orientation seems probable at least in the *Divine Institutes* not only because of Lactantius’ clear affirmation but also from internal evidence. The constant referring in all seven books to the hope of drawing those in error to the path of true wisdom and religion would seem rather inappropriate if the work were directed only to Christians. The uncertainty of the dating adds to the

\(^1\) *Div. inst.* 5. 4. 1-2.

\(^2\) *Div. inst.* 5. 4. 7: "Ut ego facerem et simul ut uiam ceteris ad imitandum pararem."

difficulty. If the Institutes were written before 316 in Nicomedia, which is an opinion held by many,¹ it seems most unlikely that the work would be directed only to the few educated Christians in that Greek city who could read Latin. But if it were written after that date when it could be distributed among Christians in the West, the Institutes could conceivably be directed to Christians alone. The difficulty with this alternative is the probable inability of Western Christians in Gaul to understand the many Greek quotations. If it were written then, Lactantius would have translated the Greek, as, in fact, he did translate it in the later Epitome. My own opinion is that the Institutes was written before Lactantius left Nicomedia in 316 and that it was directed to the educated reader, both Christian and pagan.

In brief, then, it seems clear that Lactantius wrote for the educated man. What cannot yet be decided definitively is whether he wrote for the educated pagan or Christian. My own view is that, at least in the Divine Institutes, he wrote for both.

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To achieve his planned change of direction in apologetic writing, Lactantius proposes three innovations. To present Christianity as a philosophy he hopes to explain it, not piecemeal, but in terms of the essence of its entire doctrine.² Secondly, since the work is to be

¹cf. p. 12, ftnt. 3.

²Div. inst. 5.4.3: "aliut instituere, quod nos facimus, in quo necesse est doctrinae totius substantiam contineri." Lactantius' doctrine may scarcely be called a system as its philosophy and theology are both so tenuous, but it is the first concerted attempt in the Christian West to organize at least the author's version of Christian dogma and morality.
directed mainly to the educated reader, both pagan and Christian, and not to the popular masses, rational discussion and arguments, not texts of Scripture and litanies of miracles, must be used. 1 Thirdly, Lactantius thinks that a comparison must be initiated between Christianity and the great systems of philosophy, to prove that Christianity has answered all the questions which both Stoic and Platonic metaphysicians and moralists have posed, and that, consequently, Christianity is not only the true philosophy but also the true religion. 2 Lactantius, then, will use no arguments which predicate faith, but avoiding Scripture he will appeal to the testimony of the philosophers, historians, poets and oracles, and employ the proofs, not of supernatural faith, but of human authority and reason. In this way he expects to appeal both to the educated pagan who rejects the authority of Scripture and to the educated Christian who will have another compelling proof for the validity of his faith.

Lactantius understood the mentality both of Christianity and classical paganism. On the one hand, he realized that much Christian literature was, in the eyes of the educated, simple, negative and parochial; he realized too that the Christian disdain for contemporary pagan writers extended on the part of some to a rejection of all pagan literature, and at times to classical civilization itself. On the other hand, his classical training and pagan upbringing enabled him to grasp the mentality of the

1Criticizing Cyprian, Lactantius states: "Qua materia non est usus ut debit; non enim scripturae testimoniiis, quam ille utique unam fictam commenticiam putabat, sed argumentis et ratione fuerat refellendus." Div. inst. 5. 4. 4.

2Div. inst. 1. 1. 7.
cultivated pagans. He realized that they scorned the barbarous style of 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 clothed as it was in the rough form of the New Testament or in the negative style of the apologies. It was embarrassing to be called wool-carders, cobblers and fullers, as Celsus had termed them,\(^1\) and be accused of lowering one's intelligence in accepting Christianity. The pagans must be met on their own ground. The truth and beauty of Christianity must be expressed by 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,\(^2\) and many had admitted that truth in some form was scattered throughout pagan thought. However, he felt that no Christian in the West had yet gathered it to give it sense and direction. The absurdity of pagan mythology and the error of pagan philosophy must be pointed out, but the truth of philosophy must also be shown, incorporated into the context of Christian doctrine, and clothed in the classical style of the masters. This the teacher Lactantius felt he could do.

The role and purpose of Lactantius are clear from the beginning of his first apologetic work, the De opificio Dei. He sets down his new role in the first verse of chapter one as the praecceptor, the instructor,

\(^1\)Origen. C. Cels. 3. 55.
\(^2\)Tert. Idol. 10.
the teacher of a nobler subject and higher system.\textsuperscript{1} From the outset Lactantius is to be a teacher, a teacher no longer of rhetoric but of the new philosophy which combines and unifies religion and philosophy in Christianity. Later in this work he declares his intention of writing another treatise and engaging in a full-scale dispute with the philosophers.\textsuperscript{2} In the epilogue he clearly exposes his plan, saying that he intends to devote against the philosophers an entire work on the life of happiness and he will combat these vigorous opponents mainly with their own weapons. He outlines the difficulties of such a task but he hopes to live long enough to bring it to fruition.\textsuperscript{3}

The first chapter of the \textit{Divine Institutes} elaborates Lactantius' purpose. It is to teach not human but divine wisdom by using the power of eloquence, so that the truth may flow \textit{potenti\ae} into the minds of his readers. He begins by praising philosophers who have dedicated their lives not to pleasure but to the pursuit of truth. However, they did not obtain wisdom because they could not through their own intelligence and perception. Only God can grant wisdom, for He opens our eyes, reveals the weakness of human wisdom and points the way to true, that is, divine, wisdom and so to immortality. True wisdom is known

\textsuperscript{1} \textit{De opif. Dei} 1. 1: "tibi praeceptor etiam nunc sed honestioris rei meliorisque doctrinae."

\textsuperscript{2} \textit{De opif. Dei} 15. 6: "Sed erit nobis contra philosophos integra disputatio."

\textsuperscript{3} \textit{De opif. Dei} 20. 9: "Quo perfecto satis me uixisse arbitrabor et officium hominis inplesse, si labor meus aliquos homines ab erroribus liberatos ad iter caeleste direxerit."
only to a few because it lies hidden. It is usually despised by the learned because it has no suitable defenders, or it is despised by the unlearned because it is difficult, for virtue, moralizes Lactantius, is tinged with bitterness and evil with pleasure. Lactantius will try to dispel both errors, "ut et docti ad ueram sapientiam dirigantur et indocti ad ueram religionem."¹ His vocation to lead men to the truth and so to the worship of God, he feels, is far more useful and glorious than the profession of oratory which trains men not to virtue but "ad argutam malitiam."² A teacher is much more deserving if he teaches man to live in innocence and piety than to speak with eloquence. The philosophers of Greece justifiably were esteemed more highly than the orators because they were "recte uiuendi doctores."³ Yet oratory can help in that, though truth can be defended without eloquence, it should be explained in clear and elegant speech so that the truth "potentius in animos influat et ui sua instructa et luce orationis ornata."⁴ Lactantius, then, intends to discuss religion and divine things. As other men have composed civil institutes to assuage civil strife and discord, all the more justified is he in writing divine institutes or treatises that deal with hope, immortality and God.⁵ He will leave aside authors of earthly philosophy—terranae

¹ Div. inst. 1. 1. 7. cf. Chapters III to V.
² Div. inst. 1. 1. 8.
³ Div. inst. 1. 1. 9.
⁴ Div. inst. 1. 1. 10.
⁵ Div. inst. 1. 1. 12.
huiusce philosophiae—because they bring forward nothing certain. Rather he will expound the truth revealed by God, for God is the true doctor sapientiae and dux uirtutis.\textsuperscript{1} God, then, as well as Lactantius, is to be a teacher, in fact the important teacher of this new knowledge. Through this instruction, man will be recalled from the error in which he has been entangled, to enjoy a better life and the extraordinary knowledge which Lactantius describes in the conclusion of the chapter: "Cuius scientiae summam breuiter circumscribo, ut neque religio ualla sine sapientia suscipienda sit nec ualla sine religione probanda sapientia."\textsuperscript{2}

The teacher's role is again expressed in the early chapters of Book Five of the Institutes. Lactantius intends to refute the present-day critics of Nicomedia, Hierocles, and the unknown philosopher who "tres libros euomuit contra religionem nomenque Christianum,"\textsuperscript{3} but also all other adversaries, past and future.\textsuperscript{4} He will not so much defend as instruct and present his own doctrine, "totius doctrinae substantiam,"\textsuperscript{5} not through denial and defence, like Tertullian, or through Sacred Scripture, like Cyprian,\textsuperscript{6} but through arguments and reason, in order that men may attain at first the beginning of light and then at length the whole splendor

\textsuperscript{1}Div. inst. 1. 1. 19.
\textsuperscript{2}Div. inst. 1. 1. 25.
\textsuperscript{3}Div. inst. 5. 2. 4.
\textsuperscript{4}Div. inst. 5. 4. 2.
\textsuperscript{5}Div. inst. 5. 4. 3.
\textsuperscript{6}Div. inst. 5. 4. 3. and 4.
of the truth. In brief, Lactantius' role and purpose as a Christian teacher are epitomized by a sentence from the preface of the Divine Institutes: "Sed nos idcirco breuiter omnia colligemus ... quod tantummodo instituendi nobis homines erunt hoc est ab errore quo sunt implicati ad rectiorem uiam revocandi." His role, then, is to teach, and his purpose to lead men to a higher life.

Other apologists also considered their works as pedagogical and missionary literature. Aristides, for example, declares: "... I believed strongly in the things that are to come. That is why I felt obliged to announce the truth to those who want it and who look for the future life." He then speaks of the apostolic role of the Christians "who pity the pagans as men lacking the knowledge of the truth and who offer prayers for them in order to convert them from their error." In his apology Justin too has a missionary purpose: "It is our task, therefore, to afford to all an opportunity of inspecting our life and teachings"; and later in the same work: "We pray for our enemies and we strive to persuade those who persecute us unjustly to live according to the good precepts of Christ, so that they may become partakers with us of

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1 Div. inst. 5. 4. 6.
2 Div. inst. 1. 1. 21.
3 Arist. Apol. 16.5.
4 Arist. Apol. 17.3-4; cf. also 17.8.
5 Just. I Apol. 3. 4.
the same joyful hope of a reward from God, the ruler of all."¹

The term in the text of Lactantius that expresses this pedagogical
and spiritual method is magisterium. Used by the author in the sense
of authoritative and spiritual pedagogy, magisterium means variously the
office of teaching, the body of instruction, and guidance or example.²
In the Institutes Lactantius speaks of Christ the pedagogue teaching His
message and fulfilling by word and example the teaching office enjoined
on Him by His Father: "uenit in terram . . . ut eam doceret hominemque
formaret. Quo magisterio ac dei legatione perfunctus ob eam ipsam
uirtutem, quam simul et docuit et fecit...."³ In the third book of the
Institutes he criticizes the Cynics for failing to provide in their system
any instruction or guidance in virtue.⁴ In the Epitome, speaking of the

¹Just. I Apol. 14. 3; I Apol. 57. 1; Thphl. Autol. 1.14; Clem. Alex.
Strom. 1. 17, 87. 2; 1. 20. 98. 4. cf. J. Daniélou, Message évangélique
et culture hellénistique aux IIe et IIIe siècles (Paris-Tournai, 1961);
J.R. Laurin, Orientations maîtresses des apologistes chrétiens de 270
à 361 (Rome, 1956).

²Magisterium is a derivative of magister, magis-tero-s, which
has been traced to the Etruscan, macstr (na), macstrev (a), meaning
master or leader. Used first in the language of law and religion,
magister was later used in a wide sense, e.g., m. vicorum, m. convivii,
m. ludi. The latter was then reduced to magister, and meant master of
a school or simply a professor who teaches. A. Ernout and A. Meillet,
Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine (Paris, 1951). In the Latin
authors, its derivative, magisterium, meant not only chief, leader, super-
tendent, etc., but also, as in Lactantius, the office of tutor or instruc-
tor, e.g., Plaut. Bacch. 1. 2. 44: "Iam excessit mi aetas ex magisterio
tuo"; teaching, instruction, advice, e.g., Plaut. Most. 1. 1. 32: "virtute
id factum, et magisterio tuo," Tib. 1. 4. 84: "vana magisteria"; and
method, e.g., Cels. 5. 27. 2: "novum magisterium." Lewis-Short.

³Div. inst. 4. 16. 4; Div. inst. 4. 10. 1: "cum magisterio functus
fuisset."

⁴Div. inst. 3. 15. 21: "Nullum igitur in hac disciplina magisterium
uirtutis est."
mediatorship of Christ between God and man, he states that by means of His teaching and example Christ leads man to God.\(^1\) Describing his own pedagogical role, Lactantius proclaims that by virtue of God's instruction and guidance he is the teacher of virtue and truth: "Quaecumque nos dei magisterio de uirtute ac ueritate disserimus."\(^2\) Thus Lactantius sees himself as a Christian pedagogue, a magister doctrinae Dei, preaching the Christian message to his fellow man. There is in his works a consuming and urgent desire, underlying and motivating all his writing, to persuade especially his educated readers to reject false philosophy and polytheism and accept his concept of Christian doctrine. Lactantius' magisterium is his understanding of this doctrine and the pedagogical methods he zealously employs in the rejection of paganism and in the presentation of his Christian message.

\(^1\) Epit. 39. 7; cf. also Div. inst. 4. 26. 23; Div. inst. 6. 8. 12.

\(^2\) Div. inst. 7. 1. 22.
CHAPTER II

THE FUNCTION OF RHETORIC IN THE
MAGISTERIUM OF LACTANTIUS

PURPOSE OF LACTANTIUS' RHETORIC

In the opening chapter of the Divine Institutes Lactantius declares his intention of using the techniques of oratory in his defence of Christian truth. Though he admits the dangers and limitations of oratory that can lead men "non ad uirtutem sed plane ad argutam malitiam," he laments that the cause of truth has been in the past an object of contempt to learned men "quia idoneis adsertoribus eget." He resolves therefore to employ in his writing, which he will direct mainly to educated Romans, the practice of oratory "ut nunc maiore copia et facultate dicendi causam ueritatis peroremus." Although he admits that truth may be defended without eloquence, as he adds dryly, "est a multis saepe defensa," he states that Christian truth ought to be explained and defended with clarity and elegance of speech, "ut potentius in animos influat et ui sua instructa et luce orationis ornata." To this end, as distinguished Latin Rhetorician to the Emperor's court but also now as Christian teacher to pagan and

1Div. inst. 1.1.8.
2Div. inst. 1.1.7.
3Div. inst. 1.1.10.
4Div. inst. 1.1.10.
5Div. inst. 1.1.10.
Christian alike, Lactantius will draw on all the forces of oratory developed and practised over the past eight hundred years in the Graeco-Roman world, in order to enhance the presentation of his Christian magisterium.¹

With the conversion to Christianity of an increasing number of educated pagans, the art of rhetoric began to be used seriously in the service of the new religion. The works of the early Fathers of the Church show that they had learned well the art of persuasion and self-expression in the pagan rhetorical schools, and had in many cases taught rhetoric themselves.²

¹Classical rhetoric, "bene dicendi scientia," (Quint. Inst. 2.15; cf. also Cic. De or. 1.31), was divided into five parts: a. εις εικες, inventio, came first and was concerned with the subject matter, with finding out or discovering the appropriate arguments and material to use in proof and refutations. As it was concerned with a system or method of finding persuasive arguments, it also underlay all the other divisions of rhetoric.

b. τάκεις, dispositio, was the organization and development of the arguments.

c. λέξις, elocutio, usually dealt with choice and use of words.

d. μνήμη, memoria, was concerned with devices of memory, and

e. ἐξόπλοιος, actio, was the delivery. As memoria and actio are concerned mainly with oral delivery, this chapter will deal principally with the first, second and third parts of Lactantius' rhetoric, namely, his inventio, dispositio and elocutio. cf. G. Kennedy, The Art of Persuasion in Greece (Princeton, 1963); D.L. Clark, Rhetoric in Greco-Roman Education (New York, 1957); E. Corbett, Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student (New York, 1965), espec. chs. 2 and 3; H. I. Marrou, A History of Education in Antiquity, trans. by G. Lamb (London and New York, 1950), espec. pp. 84–7, 267–81, 283–4.

It should be pointed out that what is being attempted in this chapter is not a complete analysis of Lactantius' rhetoric—for that would entail a new and long thesis in itself—but a short examination and assessment of the main techniques Lactantius uses in keeping with his pedagogical purpose, which is to convey his conception of the Christian message to educated readers.

²Although Augustine in the Confessions 9.2.2 deplored many features of his early education and stated that rhetoric was mendacious folly, and oratory wordy and polished falsehood, he outlined in the fourth book of De doctrina Christiana a theory of rhetoric that has more in common with the classics than with Christianity. He follows Cicero, for example, in linking the three purposes of the orator—to instruct, move and charm—with the three styles, the plain, the middle and the grand. August. De doctr. Christ. 4.17.34; cf. Cic. Orat. 29.101. "The rules of rhetoric," he says, "are none the less true, although they can be used in the interests of falsehood; but because they can also be used in the interests of truth, rhetorical skill is not in itself to be blamed, but rather the perversity of those who misuse it." De doctr. Christ. 2.36.54.
The pagan schools of rhetoric flourished unchanged until they were destroyed by the barbarians many centuries later, but in the meantime pagans and Christians alike in pursuit of an education attended the same schools side by side. ¹

Perhaps more than any Latin Christian writer Lactantius was imbued with the spirit of Greek and Roman rhetoric. He realized that with his pagan readers style was more important than truth: "Adeo nihil uerum putant nisi quod auditu suave est, nihil credibile nisi quod potest incutere uoluptatem: nemo rem ueritate ponderat, sed ornatu."² Therefore he resolved to avoid the inadequacy and mistakes of his Christian predecessors, the unfulfilled promise of Minucius Felix,³ the offensive style of Tertullian⁴ and the impractical use of Christian terminology by Cyprian.⁵ Because of the pagan disdain for Christian writing, especially for the Bible, which was written, they felt, in common and simple speech,⁶ he knows that he will find difficulty in persuading his readers...

¹There was no attempt by Christians to reform the schools from within. Julian's objection to the Christian rhetoricians was that they did not believe what they taught inasmuch as they did not honour the gods honoured by the authors they expounded. Julian, Ep. 36 (Wright); 42 (Hertlein). "Thus rhetoric remained part of the cultural background of the educated Christian, and not only of nominal Christians like Ausonius but even of those who adopted the new faith without reserve." M. L. Clarke, Rhetoric at Rome (London, 1953), p. 154.

²Div. inst. 5.1.17.
³Div. inst. 5.1.22.
⁴Div. inst. 5.4.3 re Tertullian's Apologeticum.
⁵Div. inst. 5.1.26.
⁶Div. inst. 5.1.15: "communi et simplici sermone."
even to read his work and not with a curse to fling it aside unread. Consequently, like Lucretius he will sweeten his message with celestial honey, and then perhaps he will succeed in attracting at least some of his readers to the truth, for to him it is above all the dearth of persuasive Christian rhetoricians that results in the disrepute of Christianity.

His predecessor, Tertullian, had criticized rhetoric, but Lactantius, the wise teacher, realizes the importance of form to a learned reader in the appreciation and acceptance of a body of doctrine. Thus, his purpose in using rhetoric is to be pedagogical. Rhetoric for him is to be the pedagogical instrument, first, perhaps, for converting the educated pagans by presenting Christianity in an appealing and persuasive manner, but secondly, and more profoundly, it is to be for an educated Christian, that is, a person already "in uirtutibus instructior, in ueritate sapientior," the instrument for joining pagan culture and the Christian religion: "Volui sapientiam cum religione coniungere." Rhetoric, then, is apparently to

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1 Div. inst. 5.1.1: "Insectetur etiam maledictis et uix lecto fortasse principio adfligat proiciat exsecretur."

2 Div. inst. 5.1.14: "caelesti melle"; cf. Lucr. 1.936.

3 Div. inst. 5.2.1: "Ergo quia defuerunt apud nos idonei peritique doctores, qui uehementer, qui acriter errores publicos redarguerent, qui causam omnem ueritatis ornate copioseque defenderent, prouocauit quosdam haec ipsa penuria, ut auderent scribere contra ignotam sibi ueritatem."

4 Tert. An. 2.1.2.

5 All that men need is some instruction: "quod tantummodo instituendi nobis homines erunt." Div. inst. 1.1.21.

6 Div. inst. 5.1.11. By sapientia, Lactantius here means the works of all pagan writers, i.e., philosophers, orators and poets—Div. inst. 5.1.10—in brief, pagan wisdom or culture. This method of the propaedeutic use of rhetoric is the same as that employed by the pagan as well as the Christian schools of philosophy which used rhetoric as a propaedeutic to philosophy. cf. Sen. Ep. 88, Clem. Alex. Strom. 1.6.9; Eus. H.E. 6.18.2-4. Lactantius himself explicitly states it: "Multis artibus opus est, ut ad philosophiam possit accedi." Div. inst. 3.25.9.
have a dual role: it is to be an instrument of instruction, avowedly at any rate, to win over to Christianity the educated pagan, "hoc est ab errore quo sunt implicati ad rectiorem uiam reuocandi,"¹ but its purpose is also to join for the educated Christian in the doctrine of Lactantius the religion of Christianity and the philosophy of paganism, with the result that henceforth the study of pagan literature may be, for a Christian reader, not only not dangerous to religion and virtue but even greatly profitable: "ut iam scientia litterarum non modo nihil noceat religioni atque iustitiae, sed etiam prosit quam plurimum."²

INVENTIO: DISCOVERY OF MATERIAL

The first and most important division of rhetoric is inventio, the discovery, or "invention" of arguments and material in order to persuade the reader or listener.³ Aristotle defined rhetoric as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion.⁴ To Lactantius one of the most effective means of persuading his particular audience, the educated reader, was to use what they understood best and respected most, namely the classical authors of Greece and Rome. Con-

¹ Div. inst. 1.1.21.
² Div. inst. 5.1.11.
³ Cic. De or. 2.24: "Hoc ei primum præcipiæmus, quascumque causas erit tracturus, ut eas diligenter penitusque cognoscat." cf. also Quint. Inst. 2.21.
⁴ Arist. Rh. 1.2.1: "ἐστω δη ῥητορικη δύναμις περὶ ἕκαστον τοῦ θεωρῆσαι τὸ ἐνδεχόμενον πιθανόν."
sequently, Lactantius draws material from these authors carefully and tirelessly so that it forms for him the most important element of his use of the rhetorical category of \textit{inventio}. Of course, the notion of \textit{inventio} is much wider than the use of material from another author, for \textit{inventio} not only includes the Topics, but in fact it underlies all the other categories of rhetoric. However, because of the importance to Lactantius of the use mainly of classical authors to persuade his educated readers, the discussion of his \textit{inventio} will be restricted to his use of the authors from whom he drew arguments and material for his own works.

Lactantius' use of classical authors may be looked upon either as \textit{inventio} or as \textit{dispositio}. As \textit{inventio} it looks to the discovery and apt selection of the texts. As \textit{dispositio} it looks to the actual application of the texts and their arrangement in the buildup of a specific argument. As such it becomes \textit{amplificatio}, another aspect of one of Lactantius' most important rhetorical techniques which will be treated in the next section. The classical \textit{inventio} is divided into \textit{loci intrinseci}, that is, the Topics,\footnote{Cic. \textit{De part. orat.} 2.7; \textit{De or.} 2.39-40; Quint. \textit{Inst.} 5.10.32-94.} and \textit{loci extrinseci}, which, in turn, is divided into \textit{testimonia} and \textit{exempla}.\footnote{Quint. \textit{Inst.} 5.11; Cic. \textit{Orat.} 34.} Lactantius' citation of classical authors falls under the category of \textit{testimonia}, or as Quintilian calls them in his definition, \textit{auctoritates}:

\begin{quote}
Adhibetur extrinsecus in causam et auctoritas... Si quid ita visum gentibus, populis, sapientibus viris, claris civibus, illustribus...
\end{quote}
poetis referri potest."¹ Thus citations are not intrinsic but only extrinsic loci or topics. They are divided into divina, i.e., sacrae litterae, and humana, and the author cited must possess authority not only in himself but also with his readers. Adverse testimonia are rejected by denying the consequence, opposing another authority, or, what Lactantius usually does, applying reason or impugning the authority itself. The successful exercise of inventio, according to Cicero, depends on ratio, that is theory, on diligentia, and above all else, on what he terms, acumen.²

Use of Citation

The ability to cite aptly from the works of one's predecessors in order to persuade and move one's readers or listeners was an important attribute of the classical rhetorician. The facility to select the exact quotation or idea from the storehouse of matter and argument, in order tellingly to prove a point or refute an adversary was a quality highly admired in the books and speeches of classical rhetoricians. This method of citation was used not only by classical but also by many early Christian writers.³ The practice of citing the thoughts of another author, whether

¹Quint. Inst. 5.11.
²Cic. De or. 2.30 and 35.
³The doxographical survey of opinions of the philosophers and poets, for example, was taken over by Christian apologetic writers from the beginning. H. Hagendahl, "Methods of Citation in Postclassical Latin Prose," Eranos, XLV (1947), 117. On Tertullian see A.D. Nock, "Greek Philosophy and Christianity," Vigiliae Christianae, IV (1950), 129-141. In the third chapter of Book Three of the Institutes Lactantius discusses subjects treated by philosophers, the size of the sun, the shape of the moon, the course of the stars, etc. R.M. Grant maintains that the influence of the doxographers can be seen here. According to him Lactantius probably through Varro uses the Placita of Aetius as source material of this passage. cf. R.M. Grant, "Lactantius and Irenaeus," Vigiliae Christianae, III (1949), 225-229.
doxographer, philosopher, poet or rhetorician, for use in one's own arguments, formed an integral part of the literary equipment of every writer in the classical tradition of rhetoric. As there was then no copyright law a writer's work was considered publica materies. Besides, what was admired most by rhetorical writers was not originality of content but of form; what was important was not so much the idea but how that idea was used to persuade the readers by appealing to their reason or emotions, or by revealing the credibility of the writer (ethical argument).

There were two main methods of citation, the paraphrase and the literal quotation. A frequent technique in the paraphrase method was to efface the verse rhythm and remodel it according to the rules of prose rhythm, using synonyms, alternate word arrangements, etc. Though Lactantius generally quotes verbatim he also uses this method. For example, he paraphrases the lines from Persius' second satire:

Conpositum ius fasque animo sanctoque recessus
mentis et incoctum generoso pectus honesto.

as follows: "Sentiebat uidelicet non carne opus esse ad placandam caelestem maiestatem, sed mente sancta et iusto animo et pectore, ut ipse ait, quod naturali sit honestate generosum." Again, Lactantius' doxographical review of monotheism in philosophy in the Institutes 1.5 is a paraphrase of chapter 19 of Minucius Felix's Octavius, which, in turn, looks to the first book of the De natura deorum of Cicero. However, Lactantius prefers the second method of citation, the direct quotation. Even in the passage just mentioned, the two quotations of Virgil:


2Pers. Sat. 2.74-75; Div. inst. 6.2.12.

3Aen. 6.724 sq. and G. 4.221 sq.
used by Minucius are given more fully by Lactantius, and in one instance he corrects a mistake of his predecessor. His verbatim quotations are mainly from Latin authors, although the Greek religious oracles are also generally quoted literally. Because of his preference for literal quotations, many fragments of lost works have been preserved, e.g., fragments from Euhemerus' Historia Sacra in Ennius' translation, Cicero's Consolatio and Hortensius, Seneca's Exhortationes and Moralis philosophia, Lucilius and the Sibyline Books. The poets especially are cited, and often long quotations, for example, from Lucilius, are analyzed line by line. The habit of quoting literally, particularly from the poets, Lactantius took from classical writers, especially Cicero and Seneca, who themselves followed the method of the Platonic and Stoic schools of philosophy. In the use, then, of this dual method of paraphrase and literal quotation which he employs to instruct his pagan and Christian readers Lactantius relies directly on his classical models.

Numerical Survey of Authors

Lactantius made use of countless citations from the classical and religious authors in his refutation of paganism and defence of

1 e.g., Div. inst. 2.16.1; cf. Orac. Sib. 3.228. Div. inst. 7.16.11; cf. Orac. Sib. 8.234; Div. inst. 7.19.9; cf. Orac. Sib. 8.224.

2 Div. inst. 6.5; Lucil. ex libr. incert. frg. 1.

3 In the Tusculans 2.11.26, Cicero says that he patterned himself in this regard after the philosophical schools of Athens where Academics and Stoics often inserted lines of verse in their lectures: "Versus ab iis admisceri orationi." Seneca often speaks of the power of quoted verse in the instructions of a philosopher. Sen. Ep. 108.9 ff. What is said in prose, he continues, is less striking, but compressed in the form of poetry it has the force of a weapon launched by a strong hand, "velut lacerto excussiore."
Christianity.¹ The Latin writers, especially Cicero, Virgil and Lucretius, predominate by a considerable margin over the Greeks.² Cicero, his great model and inspiration, stands out as Lactantius' most abundant source, for he provided for the extant works of Lactantius more than two hundred and fifty quotations, by far the greatest number of discernible citations. The majority of these was taken from Cicero's philosophical works: over sixty from De natura deorum alone, especially Books 1 and 2,

¹The material for these paragraphs has been taken from the Index auctorum of Brandt-Laubmann's Opera omnia Lactantii, Pars 2, Fasc. 2, pp. 241-69. Figures are given in terms of the number of directly traceable quotations.

²This is natural, as Lactantius was a Roman rhetorician writing in Latin. The question arises, however, about Lactantius' knowledge of Greek and as to whether he obtained his sources directly from the Greek authors and compilations, or from Latin translations. Many think that most of Lactantius' Greek sources came to him through Cicero, Varro and handbook translations. Pichon, Lactance, p. 222 sq. Monceaux says: "Lactance lisait les philosophes chez les compilateurs latins." H.L.A.C., 292. If he had known Greek, Lactantius should have known the Christian Greek theologians like Clement and Origen, but, except for a few instances, there is no strong evidence of this. Furthermore, in the Institutes 7.2.10, he speaks of Plato's Apology as known explicitly through Cicero—probably Tusc. 1.41.

However, I think that it is inconceivable for an educated man living in a Greek city not to have possessed a considerable knowledge of Greek. Lactantius would have been in Nicomedia for about fifteen years by the time of his writing the Divine Institutes. Most of his pupils would have been Greek-speaking, and his circle of friends included Greeks. Those to whom he addressed his works, De opificio Dei and the Epitome, had Greek names, Demetrianus and Pentadius. In the Divine Institutes his use of Greek quotations is facile. The Sibylline citations, for example, which form the bulk of the Greek references, he weaves smoothly, although formally, into his Latin text. Of the twenty-one references to Plato in which his name is explicitly stated, only ten can be traced to Latin sources, seven to Cicero, two to Minucius Felix, and one to Seneca. Where did Lactantius obtain the material for the other eleven? Although he always paraphrases Plato's thought in Latin, with a knowledge of Greek Lactantius would have consulted either the original text—all citations are identifiable—or a Greek philosophy handbook. The only other classical Greek author whom Lactantius often cites is Epicurus. Though much of Epicurus is traceable to Lucretius, the other source could well have been the Greek text. Thus, it seems likely that Lactantius knew Greek, and so there is no need to posit or identify Latin handbook translations.
in which are outlined the Epicurean and Stoic positions; and many from De republica, De officis, Tusculanæ disputationes, De legibus and Academica. Many other works are referred to, though De finibus is a strange exception. An indication of Lactantius' agility in the application of Cicero's works is his use of the same reference in different books and works. Although Sacred Scripture is used in a relatively sparing way, there are all told some 150 references to most books of the Bible. The Psalms, Isaias and Matthew are used most frequently, while Mark and Romans are quoted only once, and the Epistles of Peter and John are neglected. There are almost a hundred citations of Virgil from all books of the Aeneid, especially Book 6, twenty from the Georgics and a few from the Bucolics. Lucretius supplies sixty-two citations, with many used in several places, from all six books of the De rerum natura, particularly Books 1, 2 and 5. Epicurus has thirty-eight different references, Seneca thirty-three, many of them from fragments, Plato twenty-four, with five references from the Republic, Varro at least twenty-four and Ennius seventeen. The pagan and Christian religious writers, are also frequently cited. The Sibylline Books have over eighty quotations,

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1 Brandt-Laubmann do not mention De finibus. However, there is at least an indirect reference to De finibus 5.28 in Div. inst. 3.8.32.

2 e.g., Cic. Nat. d. 2.56.140 in Div. inst. 2.1.14-19; 3.10.10, and in De opif. Dei 8.2.

3 The sources of Lactantius' use of Scripture will be discussed later in the chapter.

4 Many other classical authors, both Latin and Greek, are referred to at least once.
Cyprian thirty-six, Minucius Felix twenty-four, Tertullian fifteen, the Orphic Poems five, Arnobius four and Irenaeus one.

Classical Material

Although, as will be shown in Chapter III, Lactantius deals rather severely with what he considers the errors of Plato, he always maintains great respect for the philosopher whom, together with Aristotle, he calls, "uelut reges philosophorum."\(^1\) He cites many of his arguments in the formation or confirmation of many of his own doctrines.\(^2\)

With respect to the Stoics, Lactantius eulogizes them for their belief in providence and the immortality of the soul, but at the same time he warns that even in presenting the truth, they erred: "In eo ipso quod recte sentiebant, aliquid errarunt."\(^3\) However, he was considerably influenced by Stoic authors, whom he liberally cites, in his notions of God, providence, Christ, the immortality of the soul and the virtues, all of which will also be treated in the following chapters.

The third great school of philosophy of antiquity, Epicureanism, Lactantius knew probably through the Greek or through its most ardent Roman disciple, Lucretius, whose denial of divine providence and claim to deliver mankind from the fear of the gods made him a favorite target of Christian apologists. Lactantius generally quotes him in order vigor-

\(^{1}\)Div. inst. 3.17.29.

\(^{2}\)e.g., God, providence, creation; dualism which are to be treated in the following chapters.

\(^{3}\)Div. inst. 3.18.1.
ously to refute him, but while Arnobius, Lactantius' teacher who also made great use of Lucretius, never quotes him directly, Lactantius, besides mentioning Lucretius by name some twenty times and paraphrasing him in another forty passages, quotes him directly in no fewer than twenty-one passages, amounting to some fifty-seven lines of text. Though he rejects its doctrine, Lactantius in his choice of texts often has 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 chooses 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. In so doing Lactantius makes

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1 Lucr. 2.1101 sq: "Tum fulmina mittat et aedis
Ipse suas disturbet et in deserta recedens
Saeviat exercens telum, quod saepe nocentes
Praeterit examinatque indignos inque merentes."

Cf. Div. inst. 3.17.10.

Lucr. 3. 1041: "Sponte sua leto caput obvius optulit ipse."

Cf. Div. inst. 3.18.6.

Lucr. 3. 1043 sq: "Qui genus humanum ingenio superauit et omnes
restinxit, stellas exortus et aetherius sol."

Cf. Div. inst. 3.17.28.

2 H. Hagendahl, Latin Fathers and The Classics (Göteborg, 1958), p. 86. Some authors have maintained that Lactantius and his master Arnobius were Epicureans before their conversion to Christianity. E.g., Hagendahl, Latin Fathers and The Classics, p. 49. This seems unlikely. I agree with Buffano, who claims that Lactantius was interested in Lucretius only to support his own doctrine, and not as a philosopher. A. Buffano, "Lucrezio in Lattanzio." Giornale italiano di filologia, IV (1951), 335-49. Stevenson maintains that Lactantius did not even truly understand Lucretius. Stevenson, "Lactantius and the Classics," 501. However, Lactantius does seem to understand his doctrine, but also to dislike him to the extent that he probably never was his disciple, as can be seen in his almost universally harsh treatment of Lucretius. After a summary of Lucretius' philosophy, for example, he concludes sarcastically: "Est plane cur quispiam putet hanc uocem uiri esse sapientis, quae potest latronibus aptissime commodari." Div. inst. 3.17.43. It would be reasonable to assume that since Lucretius was among the authors read and commented on in the Latin schools, whatever the opinions of either before conversion to Christianity, Lactantius
his refutation of Lucretius' doctrine more authentic, and, in most cases, more successful.

Though the influence of Cicero's doctrine on Lactantius will also be treated in the following chapters, an examination of Lactantius' inventio must include the man who in Pichon's words, "est à lui seul pour Lactance une source aussi importante que tous les autres écrivains réunis." The sentence of Jerome, "Quos [Lactani] libros si legere volueris, dialogorum Ciceronis in eis ἔριτρωμεν reperies," is an indication of the influence of Cicero, both in content and in literary form, not only on Lactantius but also on all the early Christian writers of the West. Just as Cicero accommodated Greek thought to the political and social needs of the Roman state, so did Lactantius attempt to accommodate this same thought to the fundamental dogmas of Christianity. In Lactantius' mind Cicero was the supreme representative of the best in paganism: "Quis enim ueram uiam teneret errante Cicerone?" He was not only the perfect orator but also the greatest philosopher: "At ille idem perfectus orator, idem summus philosophus," an object of respectful veneration and constant imita-

1 This will also be treated in the next chapter.
2 Pichon, Lactance, p. 246.
3 Ieron, Ep. 70.5.
4 Div. inst. 3.15.1.
5 Div. inst. 3.14.7.
Yet ultimately Cicero was a failure, Lactantius felt, because he could not denounce a religion he knew to be false, nor could he through philosophy find a way of enduring the blows of fortune to the end nor discover principles that would ultimately save him from ruin and death.

Lactantius copied Cicero on almost every page. He borrowed facts, references and arguments of all kinds and when he neglected to cite him, his thoughts were often 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, but he has been called the Christian Cicero not only because his rhetoric resembles that of Cicero but also because his knowledge of pagan philosophers was drawn greatly from the works of Cicero.

1 However, while Lactantius admires Cicero as rhetorician and usually as philosopher, he disapproves of him in the role of lawyer and politician. *Div. inst.* 2.3.4-5: "Qui saepe etiam malas causas copiose ac fortiter defendisti. . . . Erat multo pulchrius ut ob benedicta potius quam ob maledicta morerere."

2 *Div. inst.* 2.3.1-7.

3 *Div. inst.* 3.28.9.


5 Later Christian writers like Jerome also owed much of their knowledge of pagan philosophy to the same source, and even Augustine too owed a great 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 καθήκωντος of Panaetius with the *De officiis* of Ambrose. cf. Hagendahl, *Latin Fathers*, p. 346. Of all his works, it was the *De natura deorum*, Book 2 that exercised the greatest influence on Christian writers of the western world. Clarke, *Roman Mind*, p. 150.
A comparison of texts of Cicero and Lactantius illustrates the scope of Cicero's influence. In the *De republica* Cicero praises Socrates for his condemnation of the search for the mysterious that is either impossible or useless to know: "Sapientiorem Socratem soleo judicare, qui ... ea quae de natura quaeerentur aut maiora quam hominum ratio consecui possit, aut nihil omnino ad vitam hominum admire dixerit."¹ Lactantius follows exactly the same line of argument, that is, criticising the pursuit of what is beyond or not relevant to man:

Nam causas naturalium rerum disquirere aut scire uelle ... haec inquam disputando et coniecturis uelle comprehenderere tale est profecto, quale si disserere uelimus, qualem esse arbitremur cuiuspiam remotissimae gentis urbem, quam numquam uidimus cuiusque nihil aliut quam nomen audiuius.²

The eclecticism of Cicero is a further point of comparison. Just as Cicero sees a certain unity in all the diversity of the philosophers,³ so too Lactantius uses this same eclectic principle in proclaiming from the evidence of all the philosophers the unity of God.⁴ Cicero's practical concern for providence and morality⁵ is matched by Lactantius' thorough

¹Cic. *Rep.* 1.10.15.
²*Div. inst.* 3.3.4-5.
³Cic. *Acad. post.* 1.4.17: "Una et consentiens duobus vocabulis philosophiae forma instituta est, Academicorum et Peripateticorum." Also *Tusc.* 4.3.6: "Idem alio modo dicentibus Stoicis."
⁴*Div. inst.* 1.5.21: "Horum omnium sententia quamuis sit incerta, eodem tamen spectat, ut prouidentiam unam esse consentiunt. Siue enim nota siue aether siue ratio siue mens siue fatalis necessitas siue diuina lex siue quid aliut dixeris, idem est quod a nobis dicitur deus. Nec obstat appellationum diuersitas, cum ipsa significatione ad unum omnia reuoluantur."
⁵Cic. *Nat. d.* 1.1.2: "Quod vero maxime rem causamque continet, utrum nihil agant (dii), nihil moliantur, ... an contra ab iis et a principio omnia facta et constituta sint et ad infinitum tempus reguntur et move-
treatment of providence in Books One, Two and Seven of the Institutes, and of morality throughout Book Six, which is really a kind of Christian De officiis. Lactantius also follows Cicero to a great extent in his outline of the history of philosophy and pagan religion. The survey of Greek doctrines on divinity in Books One and Two of the Institutes is taken from the De natura deorum and the influence of Cicero can be clearly discerned in Lactantius' treatment of mythology in Book One of the Institutes. In Book Three of the Institutes Lactantius relies heavily on Cicero for his survey of Greek philosophical doctrines. Lactantius' system of morality in Book Six relies strongly, as was just stated, on the moral doctrines of Cicero, and Book Seven, De vita beata, traces through Cicero, for example, the notions of Plato and Aristotle on the eternity of the world and the Platonic proofs for the future life.

1. e.g., Div. inst. 6.5.4 on Panaetius the Stoic; cf. Cic. Off. 2.17.60 etc. However, many of Cicero's other works also influenced Lactantius in Book Six. e.g., Div. inst. 6.14.7; 15.2 and 19.1 on the Stoic and Platonic theories of the passions; cf. Cic. Tusc. 4.6.11-12 etc.; Acad. pr. 2.44.137.


4. Div. inst. 3.7.7 on the different opinions of the sovereign good; cf. Acad. pr. 2.42.129-131 and Tusc. 5.30.84 ff. Div. inst. 3.28.12, 17 and 20 for the admission of ignorance of Anaxagoras, Socrates and Aristotle; cf. Acad. post. 1.12.44-45 and Tusc. 3.28.69.

5. Div. inst. 7.1.6-7 and 3.16; cf. Acad. pr. 2.37.118 and 38.119.

6. Div. inst. 7.8.4-5; cf. Tusc. 1.23.57 and 27.66.
Lactantius' later works, De ira Dei and the Epitome, also contain many classical references obtained from Cicero. In summary, a good deal of what Lactantius knew and wrote of Greek philosophy came to him through the clear and orderly medium of Cicero.

In his outline in the De opificio Dei of the relationship between animal and man, Lactantius is directly influenced by Cicero; the body is a vessel enclosing the soul; the physical weakness of man; his superiority among the animals; the comparison of the soul with a divine fire. Cicero also greatly influences Lactantius' notion of God as a unique and supreme being, and in his attacks against anthropomorphism and abstract divinities. His notion of man as a religious person in the third book of the Institutes is also Ciceronian. His morality, as has been seen, in general stemmed largely from Cicero. He quotes with approval Cicero's statement in the Hortensius that morality is the essential part

1 De ira Dei 10.36 on Chrysippus' notion of creation; cf. Nat. d. 2.6.16.
3 De opif. Dei 3.1-2; cf. Rep. 3.1.2.
4 De opif. Dei 3.11-12; cf. Nat. d. 2.56.140.
5 De opif. Dei 8.5; cf. Rep. 3.1.1.
6 Div. inst. 1.5.24-25; cf. Leg. 1.7.22; 2.30.77.
7 Div. inst. 1.19.6; cf. Nat. d. 1.16.42.
8 Div. inst. 1.20.19; cf. Leg. 2.8.19.
9 Div. inst. 3.10.6-10; cf. Leg. 1.7.22 and 8.24 etc.
of philosophy. He discourses eloquently on the importance of the soul, the sovereignty of conscience and the divine law engraved on our hearts.

In justice too he follows Cicero. He reflects Cicero in his definition of justice and equality and in his declaration that man is born for justice.

More surprisingly, in his treatment of justice he quotes Cicero, for example, in his praise of kindness, and in his opinion of the love of man which he prefers even to patriotism. In the De ira Dei further noteworthy influences of Cicero can be seen in Lactantius' description

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1 Div. inst. 6.2.15: "Aput Ciceronem Catulus in Hortensio philosophiam rebus omnibus praeferens malle se dicit vel unum parvum de officio libellum quam longam orationem pro seditioso homine Cornelio. Quae sententia non utique Catuli, qui illut fortasse non dixit, sed Ciceronis est putanda, qui scripsit, credo ut libros quos de officiis erat scripturus commendaret: in quibus ipsis nihil esse testatur in omni philosophia melius et fructuosius quam praecepta uita dare." cf. Hort. frg. 47 and Off. 1.2.4; 3.2.5.

2 Div. inst. 6.6.9; Off. 3.5.24.

3 Div. inst. 6.24.18-20; cf. Off. 3.10.44 etc.

4 Div. inst. 6.24.29; cf. Leg. 1.6.18.

5 Div. inst. 5.14.15: "Altera est iustitiae pars aequitas: aequitatem dico non utique bene iudicandi, quod et ipsum laudabile est in homine iusto, sed se cum ceteris coaequandi, quam Cicero aequabilitatem uocat." cf. Off. 1.25.88; Rep. 1.27.43.

6 Div. inst. 6.11.2; cf. Off. 3.5.25.

7 Div. inst. 6.11.25: "Nihil est enim, ut ait orator, opere et manu factum quod non conficiat et consumat uetustas. At haec iustitia et lenitas florescet cottidie magis." cf. Pro Marc. 4.11-12.

8 Div. inst. 6.6.19 ff: "commoda praeterea patria prima putare. ... qui autem ciuium rationem dicit habendum, externorum negant, dirimunt hi communen humani generis societatem, qua sublata beneficentia liberalitas bonitas iustitia funditus tollitur." cf. Rep. 3.12, 21; Off. 3.6.28.
of anger,¹ his distinction between just and unjust anger² and especially the relationship between religion and morality.³

In the other divisions of Lactantius' rhetoric, that is, dispositio and elocutio, Lactantius is also the pupil of Cicero. Like Cicero Lactantius introduces his book with a preamble in order to prepare his readers and reddere benevolos,⁴ and again like his mentor he ends with a moving and practical exhortation, the peroration: "Restat ut more Ciceronis utamur epilogo ad perorandum."⁵ Like Cicero too, in the arrangement and development of his arguments he uses clarity and order, and rhetorical devices like irony and pathos.⁶ To Lactantius Cicero represents the ideal, the happy combination of eximius orator and summus philosophus who adapts with consummate skill the pure oratorical form to philosophical thought, and in so doing provides suitable and ample

¹De ira Dei 5.4; cf. Rep. 2.41.68.
²De ira Dei 17.9. cf. Catil. 4.6.1.
³De ira Dei 8.2 and 3: "Si enim deus nihil cuiquam boni tribuit, si colentis obsequio nullam gratiam refert, quid tam uanum, tam stultum quam templa aedificare, sacrificia facere, dona conferre, rem familiarem minuere, ut nihil adsequamur? At enim naturam excellentem honorari oportet. Quis honos deberi potest nihil curanti et ingrato? An aliqua ratione obstricti esse possumus ei qui nihil habeat commune nobiscum? Deus, inquit Cicero, si talis est ut nulla gratia, nulla nomenim caritate teneatur, ualeat. Quid enim dicam 'propitius sit'? Esse enim propitius potest nemini." cf. Nat. d. 1.41.115-116; 44.124; 30.85 etc.
⁴cf. the introductions of all his works.
⁵De ira Dei 22.2.
⁶Many examples of these and other rhetorical techniques which Lactantius learned from Cicero and other classical authors will, of course, be treated in detail later in the chapter under the headings, dispositio and elocutio.
material for Lactantius in his task of persuading his readers to accept his doctrine. With Cicero as his "eloquentiae ipsius unicum exemplar,"¹ it is small wonder that a century later Jerome refers to Lactantius as "quasi quidam fluvius eloquentiae Tullianae."² It is a weakness in Lactantius to rely on Cicero so heavily, but because he knew and understood Cicero better than he knew and understood any other author, Lactantius made use of his citations with great skill and, for the most part, with considerable effect. The result was that though Lactantius bestowed a distinctively Christian direction on his doctrine, his magisterium, both in content and style, was in truth largely drawn from the pages of Cicero.

Turning to Seneca, although Lactantius reprimands him for his Stoic pride in exaggerating the benefits of philosophy,³ he generally admires the first century Stoic philosopher.⁴ Seneca serves 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 craftsman,⁵ and especially against the Epicureans with their morality of pleasure.⁶ Seneca's influence is seen particularly in his role as a

¹De opif. Dei 20.5.
²Hieron. Ep. 58.10.
³Div. inst. 3.15.1; cf. Sen. frg. 17.
⁴Div. inst. 1.5.26: "acerrimus Stoicus"; Div. inst. 1.7.13: "homo acutus."
⁵Div. inst. 2.2.14; cf. Sen. Mor. phil. frg. 120. After quoting from the De uita beata, frg. 24; cf. Div. inst. 6.24.12, Lactantius says of him: "Quid uerius dici potuit ab eo qui deum nosset quam dictum est ab homine uerae religionis ignaro?"
⁶Div. inst. 3.11.6; cf. Sen. Vit. beat. 10.3.
religious and moral writer, for example, in Lactantius' concepts of the
greatness of God, providence, evil, justice, purity of soul and the soci­
ability of man. ¹ Furthermore, the De ira of Seneca served as a model
for the De ira Dei of Lactantius not merely in title but also in the de­
scription of the physical effects of anger and its dire consequences for
society. ²

The influence of the material of many other classical authors can
also be discerned in the writings of Lactantius. Of the Latin authors
Varro ranks next to Cicero in the importance of his influences. Lactantius
has great respect for him, calling him: "quo nemo umquam doctior, ne
apud Graecos quidem uixit."³ The chief source for the physiology of
man in the De opifício Dei appears to be Varro, for example, the treat­
ment of man's conception, and the definition of the soul.⁴ In the Institutes
Varro's ideas can be traced in Lactantius' treatment of the sacred value
of fire and water,⁵ of the longevity of early man,⁶ and of the properties
of the number ⁷ Lactantius seems to follow Sallust not only in certain
details but also in interpretation, for example, in his explanation of the
myth of Jupiter.⁸ Livy's influence can be seen in Lactantius' treatment

¹ e.g., Div. inst. 6.25.3 quoting Seneca, frg. 123, states that
true worship consists in justice and purity of soul.

² De ira Dei 5.3-4; cf. Sen. De ira 1.1.4; 1.2.1.

³ Div. inst. 1.6.7.

⁴ De opif. Dei 12.4 and 17.5; cf. Varr. Tub.

⁵ Div. inst. 2.9.21; cf. Varr. De ling. lat. 5.61.


of the early history of Rome, for instance, in the foundation of Rome\(^1\) and the deification of Romulus.\(^2\) In many instances Lactantius seems to draw from Quintilian when he speaks, for example, in the Institutes, of Cicero as the imitator of Plato\(^3\) or of the poet-philosophers, Empedocles, Lucretius and Varro.\(^4\)

In his use of the doctrine and even the style of the Latin poets, Lactantius also reveals his inventio. Ennius furnishes many details on Rome's religious and secular history, for example, the invocation of the Romans to Romulus\(^5\) and the epitaph of Scipio,\(^6\) as well as colourful expressions like imbres ferreas, or pellitur e medio sapientia, ui geritur res.\(^7\) The moral doctrine of the satirist Lucilius can be seen, for instance, in Lactantius' description of the selfish struggle among men,\(^8\) and that of the Latin comedians in maxims like, "ueritas odium parit"\(^9\) or

Itan conparatam esse hominum naturam omnium, aliena ut melius uideant et diiudicent quam sua.\(^10\)

Among the poets Lactantius ranks Virgil in first place.\(^11\) Both in ideas

\(^1\) Div. inst. 2.6.13, cf. Liv. 1.8.
\(^2\) Div. inst. 1.15.32; cf. Liv. 1.8.
\(^3\) Div. inst. 1.15.16; cf. Quint. Inst. 10.1.123.
\(^4\) Div. inst. 2.12.4; cf. Quint. Inst. 1.4.4.
\(^6\) Div. inst. 1.18.11; cf. Enn. Epigr. 3.9.
\(^7\) Div. inst. 1.11.18; cf. Enn. Ann. 287; and Div. inst. 5.1.5; cf. Enn. Ann. 272.
\(^8\) Div. inst. 5.9.20; cf. Lucil. frg. inc. 4.
\(^9\) Div. inst. 5.9.6; cf. Terent. Andr. 1.1.41.
\(^10\) Div. inst. 3.4.7; cf. Terent. Heaut. 3.1.94 ff.
\(^11\) Div. inst. 2.4.4: "poeta maximus"; Div. inst. 3.8.27: "Summus poeta."
and style Virgil's influence can be seen in all the works of Lactantius. In his Euhemerist explanation of mythology, Lactantius often refers to details drawn from the Aeneid, for instance, on Saturn\(^1\) or on Juno;\(^2\) he regrets with Virgil the loss of the charm and innocence of the Golden Age,\(^3\) and he also describes the return of a new age of peace and happiness.\(^4\) He seems to share Virgil's vision of a better world which, unlike that of other pagans, is not in the past but in the future. Although, as will be shown later in the chapter, Lactantius at times cites Virgil as upholding the contrary to his own position, he seems to have a keen appreciation for the beauty of his poetry, as he has for poetry in general, and to be less formal and stilted in the selection of texts, even to the extent of assimilating many of Virgil's points of style into his own. For example, he borrows words, turns of phrase, metaphors, investing, as it were, new Christian ideas in the classical style of Virgil. The devil is "caput horum et causa malorum";\(^5\) the prophecies on the end of the world are: "uatum praedita piorum";\(^6\) and Christ walking on the water is like the giant Orion, "umero supereminet undas."\(^7\)

Some moral reflections

\(^1\)Div. inst. 1.13.9, 15; cf. Aen. 8, 321, 324 etc.
\(^3\)Div. inst. 5.5.5, 9 and 10; cf. G. 1. 126. – 127; Aen. 8.320, 327.
\(^4\)Div. inst. 7.24.11; cf. Buc. 4. 28. ff.
\(^5\)Div. inst. 2.8.2; cf. Aen. 11. 361.
\(^6\)Div. inst. 2.17.2; cf. Aen. 4.464.
\(^7\)Div. inst. 4.15.21; cf. Aen. 10.764.
of Horace can be seen in literal citations like: "Virtus est uitium fugere et sapientia prima,"\(^1\) or "Integer uitae scelerisque purus...."\(^2\) Ovid supplies Lactantius with both facts and arguments against polytheism, for example, the unflattering references to the gods of Latium\(^3\) and of Greece.\(^4\) More positively, Lactantius sees in Ovid suggestions of monotheism, for he remarks that the *Metamorphoses* speaks of a single god and a single creator.\(^5\) From the Stoic Persius he cites the poet's mockery of pagans who believe they have purchased the favours of the gods from the entrails of animals or from golden offerings,\(^6\) and he paraphrases his definition of worship, "incoctum generoso pectus honesto"\(^7\) in the sixth book of the *Institutes*.\(^8\) To some extent in his *inventio* but particularly in his *dispositio* of the texts from the poets, especially Virgil, Lactantius seems to be more at home, more natural than in his selection of the prose authors, with the exception of Cicero. In this he is being not so much one of the *rhetores* as the *grammatici*, one of whose functions was, according to Cicero, *poetarum explanatores*.\(^9\)

\(^1\) *Div. inst.* 6.5.12; cf. *Hor. Epist.* 1.1.41.
\(^3\) *Div. inst.* 1.20 and 21; cf. Ovid. *Fast.* 5.195 ff; 6. 349-394 etc.
\(^5\) *Div. inst.* 1.5.13; cf. *Metam.* 1.57.79.
\(^7\) *Pers.* 2.74.
\(^8\) *Div. inst.* 6.2.12.
Thus, it is clear that Lactantius made considerable use in his works both by citation and paraphrase of the arguments and ideas of classical poets and philosophers. These authors, especially Cicero, provided religious and philosophical material from which he chose arguments for persuading his educated readers, thereby demonstrating his skillful use of the classical inventio.

Religious Material

Non-classical pagan authors

Another example of Lactantius' inventio was his considerable use of non-classical religious literature, the apocryphal theological writings, partly pagan, partly Jewish, partly Christian, that emerged in the East from the time of Alexander to the reign of Constantine. Considering them divina testimonia\(^1\) like Scripture itself, Lactantius drew from the following four sources: The Oracles of Apollo, the poems of Orpheus, the books of Hermes Trismegistus, and above all the Sibylline Oracles.\(^2\) Believing that they were all written by pagans before the time of Christ, Lactantius felt that these works would have powerful authority with his readers, and he eagerly cites them to prove that the pagan writers and oracles had themselves foretold the collapse of polytheism and the advent of the religion of Christ.

Lactantius joins the Greek and Roman world in its regard for the Oracles of Apollo: "Apollo enim, quem praeter ceteros diuinum

\(^1\)Div. inst. 1.6-1.

maximeque fatidicum existimant...."1 In one reference in the Divine Institutes, Apollo's authority is invoked as disapproving of the pagan gods who had on occasion required the sacrifice of human beings.2 Another text reveals the unity of God,3 and another, the immortality of the soul.4 Even though the theology of these oracles is crude, Lactantius diligently selects these sacred texts to fortify his argument and so provide still another proof for his readers.

His second religious source, the poems of Orpheus, carries considerable authority with Lactantius.5 To him Orpheus has an antiquity that is beyond the human: "Orpheus, qui est uetustissimus poetarum et aequalis ipsorum deorum";6 he also possesses great authority and wisdom, as can be seen, Lactantius thinks, in his treatment of the unity of God, "quod ante ipsum nihil sit genitum, sed ab ipso sint cuncta generata,"7 or in his exposure of the humanity of the god, Saturn.8


2 Div. inst. 1.21.7. Lactantius gives Varro as his source but the reference is "ex libris incertis." Op. omn. Lact. 2.2. p. 266.

3 Div. inst. 1.7.1 and 13.

4 Div. inst. 7.13.6.


6 Div. inst. 1.5.4.

7 Div. inst. 1.5.4.

8 Div. inst. 1.13.11.
Lactantius' third and more abundant source is the religious philosophy of Hermes Trismegistus and his disciples, a strange medley of philosophy, theology, astrology, medicine and alchemy, written and collated in a book entitled Corpus Hermeticum between 100 and 300 A.D.¹ Lactantius considers Hermeticism more than a human philosophy and recalls that it was adored in Egypt under the name of Mercury.² In several of its doctrines he sees a denunciation of polytheism and a confirmation of Christianity: for example, the world is the work of God alone;³ this God has neither a father nor mother;⁴ he is a pure spirit;⁵ he has a son like himself as his adviser and helper.⁶

In his refutation of polytheism, however, it is the Sibylline Books from which Lactantius draws most heavily and on which he most strongly relies. The first Sibylline Books had been destroyed by fire in the burning of the Capitol in Rome in 83 B.C. Various attempts were made to replace them, and numerous forgeries were made, one category under Judaic-Christian, and the other under Christian authorship. The Judaic-Christian collection was written in Greek hexameters and deals with


²Div. inst. 7.13.4.

³Div. inst. 2.8.48.

⁴Div. inst. 1.7.2.

⁵Div. inst. 2.8.68.

⁶Div. inst. 4.6.4.
historical, religious and political arguments. The Christian category is a collection of fourteen books written from the second to the fourth century A.D. by Christians living in the East who made use of earlier Jewish, and perhaps some pagan, sources.¹ One of these Greek collections, probably in handbook form, was used by Lactantius when he wrote the Institutes. Along with his Christian predecessors with the exception of Irenaeus and Origen² Lactantius believed that the Sibylline literature, like the Corpus Hermeticum, had been written by pagans before the time of Christ. He hoped that since for him the Hermetic doctrines strongly supported Christian dogma, the Sibylline Books would also carry considerable weight with his cultivated readers. Consequently, he invokes the Sibyls to confirm many of his positions against polytheism. Quoting the Greek texts which he handles easily, he employs them to illustrate, for example, the human origin of the gods,³ the vanity of magic and astrology,⁴ the human adventures of the gods,⁵ the unity of God.⁶ His use of the Sibyls is even more extensive in Books Four and Seven of the Divine Institutes. Book Four traces by an analogy between Scripture


²De Labriolle, History and Literature of Christianity, p. 206.

³Div. inst. 1.8.3; cf. Orac. Sib. frg. 2.1.

⁴Div. inst. 2.16.1; cf. Orac. Sib. 3.228.

⁵Div. inst. 1.11.47; cf. Orac. Sib. 8.47.

and the Sibylline literature an historical outline of Christianity, the
birth, life, passion, death and Resurrection of Christ; Book Seven de-
scribes mainly through Sibylline eyes the apocalyptic happenings at the
end of the world and the second coming of Christ.

Lactantius made use of this religious literature because he be-
lieved that since it was written by pagan writers before the coming of
Christ it would command considerable authority with his educated readers.
He also felt that the Sibylline Books and the other oracles would be more
readily acceptable to his readers because they were written in the classical
form they knew so well. Consequently, although along with his con-
temporaries he might be criticized for the acceptance of these literary
fictions, the point is that he perceived the great use he could make of
this material as an effective rhetorical technique in the presentation of
his Christian message. He understood very well that the cultivated
reader would be persuaded to accept known and generally respected works,
written, as far as they knew, by educated pagans before the time of Christ
in the familiar and traditional style of the classics.

Christian authors

Although he explicitly criticizes them in his works, Lactantius
also to some extent drew material from his Christian Latin predecessors,
the North Africans, Minucius Felix, Tertullian and Cyprian.² He refers

¹Div. inst. 5.1.
²Numerous references can be found in the Brandt-Laubmann
directly to Cyprian's work, *Ad Demetrianum*\(^1\) and he hopes to complete Cyprian's refutation of Demetrianus, "barking and roaring" against the truth.\(^2\) References that reflect the influence of his fellow Christians may be seen in many of Lactantius' Christian passages. In the *De mortibus*, for example, he speaks of the risen Christ: "Et diebus quadraginta cum his \(\text{scil.} \) discipulis commoratus apparuit corda eorum etc."\(^3\) The *Idola* of Cyprian reads: \(^4\) "Ad dies quadraginta remoratus est etc.," while the *Apologeticum* of Tertullian\(^5\) has: "Ad dies quadraginta egit docens eos etc."\(^6\)

His references to Sacred Scripture, which for pedagogical reasons he uses chiefly only in the dogmatic Book Four of the *Institutes*,\(^7\) are drawn from a variety of sources. Of the seventy-five quotations,\(^8\) two-thirds are from the *Testimonia* of Cyprian, but the other third seems to

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\(^1\) *Div. inst.* 5.4.3.  
\(^3\) *De mort. pers.* 2.2.  
\(^4\) *Cupr. Idola* 14.  
\(^5\) *Tert. Apol.* 1.  
\(^6\) Compare also Lactantius' treatment of angels in *Div. inst.* 2.14.1 with that of Cyprian's in *Idola* 6 and of Minucius Felix's in *Octavian* 26.7.  
\(^7\) There are, however, approximately 150 direct or indirect references to Scripture used by Lactantius in one or more passages of his work.  
\(^8\) This sparing use of Scripture by Lactantius was in direct contrast to most of the other apologists who incessantly made use of what they held to be the important and basic source of Christian truth. cf. *Clem. Alex. Strom.* 7.16.93; *Origen De prin.* 1. praef; 10.1.5; *C. Cels.* 3.15; *Cyril Ierus. Cat.* 4.17.
come not from Cyprian or Tertullian but from other Christian and pagan sources. The description of Christ's life, his miracles, passion and Resurrection follows the same pattern as that found in the Sibyline Oracles.¹ Usually Lactantius combines the Sibyl's testimony with that of one or more of the Prophets from the Old Testament.² These citations he obtained from a Sibylline handbook and probably from his own reading of the Bible. An apocryphal quotation from the Book of Esdras on the prophecy of Christ's passion, which does not appear in Cyprian, Lactantius could have taken from Justin's Dialogue With Trypho.³ He also quotes the apocryphal Ode 19 of Solomon, which is neither in Cyprian nor in the Bible, to prove the virgin birth.⁴ As Lactantius was probably in Nicomedia at the time of writing the Institutes, his source for these scriptural and other theological citations might have been the Greek—semi-pagan and possibly the Christian—theology of his Eastern contemporaries.⁵ In general, however, apart from most of his Scriptural references, Lactantius drew the material for his works and arguments not from Christian but from pagan sources, both classical and non-classical. His debt to Christian writers was, as will be shown shortly, mainly in the realm of

¹ Div. inst. 4.15-19; cf. Orac. Sib. 8.256 ff.
² Div. inst. 4.15.13 ff; cf. Orac. Sib. 8. 205 ff; Is. 35.3-6; Div. inst. 4.18.13 ff; cf. Orac. Sib. 8. 287 ff; Is. 50. 5 ff; Ps. 34. 15 ff.
³ Div. inst. 4.18.22; cf. Just. Dial. 72. 1.
⁴ Div. inst. 4.12.3.
⁵ cf. A. Wlosok, "Zur Bedeutung die nichtcyprianischen Bibelzitate bei Laktanz," Studia Patristica, IV (1959), 234-250. Granted Lactantius' knowledge of Greek, and the availability of the material in Nicomedia, this Eastern source seems probable. Why, then, did he not make more use of these Christian authors? He did not use them for the same reason that he deliberately and explicitly did not use the Christian Latin authors whom he certainly knew, e.g., Tertullian and Cyprian.
elocutio. Consequently, Lactantius' practice of the classical inventio, the discovery of material for argument, which formed such an important part of his rhetorical technique, was exercised generally on pagan sources, both religious and classical.

In his selection of citations from classical and religious writers, Lactantius was simply in the pagan and Christian tradition of quoting auctores authentici, that is, solid authors, to buttress his arguments, and as such it formed only an extrinsic proof, that is, the loci extrinseci outlined by the classical rhetoricians. As a Christian writer who believed that Christianity was the complete truth which came from God, he cited any pagan author who might represent part of the truth and so help to fill out the argument he was attempting to construct. This spoliatio Aegyptiorum was formally enunciated later by Augustine\(^1\) and was used by most Christian writers until the end of the Middle Ages, but no one in the West up to Lactantius' time had exercised it so thoroughly. Though Lactantius perhaps relies too strongly on Cicero, no other Christian apologist has assembled such a vast array of classical and religious citations in the refutation of paganism and defence of Christianity. He shows a wider knowledge of and above all a deeper sympathy for the pagan classical writers than all other Latin apologists. In the selection of poetry, especially Virgil, Lactantius is particularly sensitive, while with prose, he appears, except in the case of Cicero, more standardized.

The actual application that he makes of the citations in his own text,

\(^1\)August. De doctr. Christ. 2. 60.
i.e., dispositio, will be treated next but what can be said of his inventio is that in discovering this great armory of auctoritates which forms such an important part of his rhetorical technique, Lactantius exercised shrewd judgment and notably advanced his cause of instructing and persuading his learned readers.

DISPOSITIO: ARRANGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF IDEAS

A prominent feature of Lactantius' writing is the rhetorical technique, dispositio, the orderly and clear arrangement and development of ideas. In this he follows the classical tradition, especially that of Cicero and to some extent a few of his Christian predecessors, namely Minucius Felix and Cyprian. Cicero considered dispositio of extreme importance: "Tantum potest in dicendo, ut ad vincendum nulla plus possit." He divides it into two: dispositio naturalis, which consists of the divisions that all speeches possess, that is, exordium, narratio, confirmatio, peroratio; and one that depends on the judgment and prudence of the speaker. He states that the best arguments should be brought in early in the speech but also that some be reserved for the peroratio. Commenting on the second division, Quintilian maintains that because of its great complexity and variety, advice in this matter must necessarily be general, and he suggests that the speaker must rely not on rules

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1Lactantius considers Cyprian's clarity his greatest quality: "Erat enim ingenio facili, copioso, suavi, et quae sermonis maxima est virtus, aperto." Div. inst. 5.1.25.
2Cic. De or. 2.42.
3Cic. De or. 2.76.
4Cic. De or. 2.77.
but principally on his own judgment. ¹

All Lactantius’ works have a unity of design, each one directed against the various opponents of Christianity. De opificio Dei opposes the Epicureans; the Divine Institutes, polytheism and false philosophy; De ira Dei, the Epicureans again and the Stoics; and planned but not written were books against the errors of the Jews, another against the heretics, ² and perhaps even one against Platonism. ³ There are occasional digressions, for example, on the arrogant philosophers in Book Three of the Institutes or the Christian persecutors in Book Five, but Lactantius is always aware of them, and gently and consciously he brings the reader back to the main subject: "Sed euagatus sum longius quam volebam."⁴ Every topic is carefully introduced, then afterwards neatly summarized. Chapter 17 of Book Two of the Institutes, for example, reviews the arguments of the first two books, and at the beginning of Book Five the discussion against polytheism and philosophy of the previous books is summed up in a single sentence: "Euanituras brevi religiones falsas et occasuram esse omnem philosophiam nemo dubitauerit."⁵ The transitions to succeeding chapters or new matter are smooth and succinct. Book Five of

¹ Quint. Inst. 7. praef.

² Div. inst. 7.1.26: "sed erit nobis contra Iudaeos separata materia, in qua illos erroris et sceleris reuincemus"; 4.30.14: "Postea plenius et uberius contra omnes mendaciorum sectas proprio separatoque opere pugnabimus."

³ Epit. 33.5: "Sed haec alias latius."

⁴ Div. inst. 5.4.8.

⁵ Div. inst. 5.4.8.
the Institutes, for example, ends with an exhortation to true justice, i.e.,
virtue, which will be the subject of Book Six.¹ Consider also the easy
transition from polemic to dogma: "Nunc, quoniam refutauimus eos qui
de mundo et factore eius Deo aliter sentiunt quam ueritas habet, ad
diuinam mundi fabricam reuertamur,"² or from mythology to philosophy:
"Nunc uero maior nobis ac difficilior cum philosophis proposita luctatio
est."³ The general plan of Lactantius' works is also carefully worked
out. The Divine Institutes, for example, has seven books divided into
three polemic, one dogmatic and three moral or practical, each book
treating a distinct topic.

Besides the orderliness of the general planning, Lactantius'
oratorical skill is also manifest in the clear and forceful presentation
of his ideas, that is, in his development. One of the instruments he
uses to this end is the rules of logic.⁴ Arguments based on false prem­
ises, he says, always lead to wrong conclusions.⁵ Also, one must
proceed from the certain to the uncertain and not the inverse,⁶ and one

¹ Div. inst. 5.23.5.
² Div. inst. 2.9.1.
³ Div. inst. 2.19.2.
⁴ The examples of logic given here are mainly Aristotelian. How­
ever, Lactantius also made considerable use of Stoic logic, as will be
shown in the next chapter.
⁵ Div. inst. 2.5.36: "Ita semper argumenta ex falsa petita ineptos
et absurdos exitus habent." Also Div. inst. 3.24.2.
⁶ De ira Dei 5.17: "Absurdum est ex incerto certum uelle sub­
uertere, cum sit promptius de certis incerta firmare." Also Div. inst.
2.8.47.
must judge the truth or falsity of a principle by its consequences. He likes to confute the arguments of polytheism by spotting weaknesses in their syllogisms: "Propositiones quidem ueræ sunt, ... sed adsumptiones falsae quibus argumenta concludunt"; or to ensnare his opponents in a dilemma: "Siue intereunt animae siue in aeternum manent, quam rationem continet cultus deorum?" or in a contradiction, for example, the Stoics who, he thinks, claim virtue both as a means and as an end: "Summum bonum non potest esse id per quod necesse est ad aliud peruenire." At times he bases his reasoning on a simple definition of terms, at other times on a strict syllogism. Occasionally he will use sophistry, as when he says that suicide is a greater crime than homicide because it can be punished only by God, or perhaps dishonesty as when he seems

1 Div. inst. 3.24.3: "Cum debeant prima illa utrumque uera sint an falsa ex consequentibus iudicare."

2 Div. inst. 2.5.31.

3 Div. inst. 7.6.7; Div. inst. 3.27.6; Epit. 48.10-11.

4 Div. inst. 3.8.36; De opif. Dei 4.4; Div. inst. 2.5.38.

5 Div. inst. 3.29.16: "Quae (uirtus) nisi agitetur ... non potest esse perfecta, si quidem uirtus est perferendorum malorum fortis atque inuicta patientia;" Div. inst. 5.17.33-34: "Sapientia uero in hominem cadit. Sapientia est enim intellegentia;" Div. inst. 5.22.3: "Patientia enim est malorum ... cum aequanimitate perlatico."

6 Div. inst. 1.3.9: "Quidquid capit diuisionem, et interitum capiat necesse est: si autem interitus procul est a Deo ... , consequens est ut diuidi potestas diuina non possit;" Div. inst. 7.10.8: "Virtus cum finita est, merces eius insequitur; uirtus autem numquam nisi morte finitur: ergo praemium uirtutis post mortem est;" Div. inst. 6.18.25: "Qui referre iniuriam nititur, eum ipsum a quo laesus est gestit imitari; ita qui malum imitatur bonus esse nullo pacto potest."

7 Div. inst. 3.18.7; Div. inst. 6.20.23.
to change the thought of his opponent. Generally, however, he is honest and precise. He tries either to present all aspects of his opponents' viewpoint: "A quo et quomodo et quibus et quae ob facta et quo tempore immortalitas tribuatur," or to express it by a fine distinction of words: "Non est Deus natura, sed Dei opus," or perhaps by an antithesis: "Ut et docti ad veram sapientiam dirigantur et indocti ad ueram religionem."

Another rhetorical device that Lactantius uses in the development of the argument is amplificatio. Logic is not sufficient to convince his readers: he must also expand and develop his arguments: "Quamuis, ipso religionum capite destructo universas sustulerim, libet tamen persequi cetera et redarguere plenius inueteratam persuasionem, ut tandem homines suorum pudeat ac paeniteat errorum." Amplificatio is a technique that is designed to stir the emotions and as such it falls under the third category of persuasion.

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1 Epit. 28.5; Div. inst. 6.11.12.

2 Div. inst. 3.18.10; Div. inst. 6.3.5; Div. inst. 6.16.7.

3 Div. inst. 3.28.5; Div. inst. 6.5.11: "Sicut uirtus non est bonum ac malum scire, ita uirtus est bonum facere, malum non facere"; Div. inst. 3.8.32: "Non enim uirtus ipsa est summum bonum, sed effectrix et mater est summi boni."

4 Div. inst. 1.1.7; Div. inst. 1.17.4: "falsa se intellegere, uera nescire"; Div. inst. 7.4.14: "non foris, sed intus, non in corpore, sed in corde."

5 Div. inst. 1.16.2.

6 Cic. De part. orat. 15: "gravior quaedam affirmatio, quae motu animorum conciliat in dicendo fidem."

7 Cic. De or. 2.77.
both by the nature of the language used and of the facts adduced, and is to be used at the beginning, especially at the end, but really in any part of the speech where the speaker's point is to be confirmed.  

Amplificatio verborum or ἀγγελεῖς is an accumulation of various expressions of the same thought and deals with one and the same thing by means of different words, precepts, figures, etc. Amplificatio rerum, διευκρινίζεις, on the other hand, consists in accumulating kindred but different thoughts and arranging them in a climactic form to heighten the original idea. Quintilian states that there are not two but four ways to amplify a statement: "Quattuor tamen maxime generibus video constare amplificationem, incremento, comparatione, ratiocinatione, congerie."  

By incrementum, he means using steps to proceed to a higher stage. Comparatio means the comparison and contrast with others of the thing extolled or criticized. The third method, ratiocinatio, achieves its effect by the reasoned inference of the listener or reader. Congeries is an accumulation of words and sentences identical in meaning, and its effect is achieved not by a series of steps but by the mere piling up of words, phrases, etc.

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1 Cic. De part. orat. 15: "Ea et verborum genere conficitur et rerum."
2 Cic. De part. orat. 8.
3 Quint. Inst. 8.4.3.
4 Quint. Inst. 8.4.15.
5 Quint. Inst. 8.4.26.
One of Lactantius' most common uses of *amplificatio* is the citation of pagan authors. Following the four divisions of *amplificatio* as set down by Quintilian, I have selected forty citations, mainly from the *Divine Institutes*, and tried to determine whether in this particular use of *amplificatio* there is any pattern or characteristic to Lactantius' citation of classical authors. I have chosen representative texts from the four authors of whom he makes most use, two Greek and two Latin, with a prose writer and a poet in each category. They are Plato and Epicurus; and Cicero and Virgil.

The first column gives the classical text; the second, the reference in Lactantius; the third indicates the subject of the argument in the text of Lactantius; the fourth locates the citation in the body of the argument, that is, 1. *exordium* and *narratio*, 2. *confirmatio* and *refutatio*, 3. *peroratio*; and the fifth identifies the type of *amplificatio* used, that is, 1. *incrementum*, 2. *comparatio*, 3. *ratiocinatio*, 4. *congeries*. ¹

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¹All examples of *comparatio* are *contraria* or *dissimilia*. *Congeries* includes a few citations which are not really an accumulation but stand alone as illustrative of Lactantius' argument.
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<td>Ti. 28C</td>
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<td>10.139</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Frag. 227A</td>
<td>Div. inst. 3.25.4 sq.</td>
<td>Pursuit of Philosophy</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>Rep. 1.27.43</td>
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<td>Rep. 3.16.26</td>
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<td>Tusc. 1.11.23</td>
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<td>Immortality of Soul</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Tusc. 2.1.4</td>
<td>Div. inst. 3.25.2</td>
<td>Pursuit of Philosophy</td>
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<td>Aen. 1.16</td>
<td>Div. inst. 2.16.18</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Aen. 2.355-7</td>
<td>Div. inst. 5.9.4</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Aen. 4.366 sq.</td>
<td>Div. inst. 5.11.4</td>
<td>Cruelty</td>
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<td>Aen. 6.128 sq.</td>
<td>Div. inst. 6.24.10</td>
<td>Repentance</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Aen. 6.542 sq.</td>
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<td>Temptation</td>
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<td>Aen. 7.133 sq.</td>
<td>Div. inst. 1.15.12</td>
<td>Gods</td>
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There are a few conclusions to be drawn from this small survey. The most notable is that Lactantius uses the citations from classical authors mainly as *congeries* and *comparatio*; thirty of the forty citations are so used with an equal number in each of these categories. This means that he uses citations merely as a kind of overstatement or *repetitio*, and not as an enlargement or development of the idea. It is a mere piling up, an *enumeratio*, a kind of artificial adornment which, while fortifying the idea by its sheer weight, does not form an integral part of its development. Only in three cases, two of which are from Plato, does Lactantius use a citation as *incrementum*, that is, to advance his argument. Notable too, however, is his rather subtle use of *ratiocinatio*. In seven instances he cites an author whose argument enhances that of Lactantius only indirectly by an inference drawn by the reader. In the fifteen cases of contrary *comparatio*, the same number of citations is to be noted from Plato whom Lactantius greatly admires, as from Epicurus whom he intensely dislikes.
Six of the references from his model, Cicero, confirm his position and only three dissent from it. Four of the Virgil citations oppose Lactantius' position. In the dispositio naturalis column the great majority of the citations were used in the centre of the speech, the confirmatio. This goes against the advice of Cicero. Rather surprisingly only four were used in the peroratio, which Cicero suggests as the most apt position in the speech for amplificatio, and three of these are from Plato, perhaps an indication of Lactantius' faith in his great authority.

As a general conclusion it may be said that though Lactantius' selection, i.e., inventio, of classical authors was copious and varied, the application of these texts to his own argument, i.e., amplificatio, was rather formal and stilted. He knows his authors and uses them more lavishly than any other previous Christian apologist, but he applies them rather mechanically, as a kind of enumeratio or repetitio, and rarely as an essential part in the construction of his argument. He seems to have his own fixed position, and then to tack on in a rather stilted fashion numerous references from the pagan authors, not in a series of steps, incrementum, but by means of a piled-up accumulation or congeries, in order to strengthen and confirm his own already determined position.

In the development of the idea, in order to advance and fortify his argument Lactantius also appeals to the emotions by the use of many other rhetorical devices.¹ Though he occasionally uses hyperbole,² he

¹The following techniques mentioned are included under the heading, dispositio, insofar as they are related to the development of the idea; however, they also belong to elocutio insofar as they are concerned with the choice and use of words.

²Div. inst. 5.3.23: "O mentem Cimmeriis, ut aiunt, tenebris atriorem"; Div. inst. 5.11.14: "Quis Caucasus, quae India, quae Hyrcania tam immanes... bestias aluit?"
usually attempts less dramatic but nonetheless effective techniques. Like his mentor in the *De finibus* and *Tusculanae disputationes*, in order to render his argumentation natural, he makes use of the question.\(^1\) Frequently he abruptly interjects an apostrophe\(^2\) or an exclamation.\(^3\) The dialogue is another of his classical techniques, for example, the discussion with the Epicureans on spontaneous generation,\(^4\) or the beautiful conversation between the harassed Christian and the encouraging Christ.\(^5\)

In his effort to evoke the emotions, he deftly varies his techniques. In the first chapters of Book Two, for example, after a calm introduction, the discussion begins with questions, then follow a close argumentation, more questions and finally a moving and varied peroration. Lactantius' emotional appeal which is generally calm, balanced and always sincere, is seen best in the moral exhortations he delivers in his perorations.

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\(^1\) *Div. inst.* 1.9.1 sq. et passim.

\(^2\) *Div. inst.* 1.18.12: "O in quantis tenebris, Africane, versatus es, uel potius o poeta . . . !"; *Div. inst.* 1.20.17: "Quod si recipis, o Marce Tulli, non uides fore . . . ?"

\(^3\) *Div. inst.* 1.21.11: "dementiae insanabilem!" or *Div. inst.* 4.1.10: "Miserum calamitosumque saeculum!"

\(^4\) *Div. inst.* 2.11.2 sq.

\(^5\) *Div. inst.* 4.24.16-17: "Inpossibilia praecipis. 'Ecce ipse facio.' 'At ego carne indutus sum cuius est peccare proprium.' 'Et ego eandem carnem gero et tamen peccatum in me non dominatur.' 'Mihi opes contenmere difficile est, quia uiui aliter non potest in hoc corpore.' 'Ecce et mihi corpus est et tamen pugno contra omnem cupiditatem.' 'Non possum pro iustitia nec dolorem ferre nec mortem, quia fragilis sum.' 'Ecce et in me dolor ac mors habet potestatem et tamen ea ipsa quae times uinco, ut uictorem te faciam doloris ac mortis. Prior uado per ea quae sustineri non posse praetendis: si praecipientem sequi non potes, sequere antecedentem.'"
for example, on the confidence and belief in God: "Non sub pedibus Deum quaerat..., sed quaerat in sublimi, quaerat in summo";¹ his distrust of the world: "Purgemus igitur conscientiam";² or in his moving exhortation to the Christian life:

Superest ut exhortemur omnes.... Proinde si sapientes, si beati esse uolumus, cogitanda et proponenda sunt nobis.... Hunc sequamur omnes, hunc audiamus, huic deuotissime pareamus.... Deseratur, si fieri potest, via perditionis.... Veniant qui esuriunt..., ueniunt qui sitiunt.... Intendamus ergo iustitiae..., militemus..., congrediamur.³

Lactantius' invective, which is in the tradition of the classical rhetoricians, is often sharp.⁴ He calls his opponents sots, fools, beasts, etc. "Uos, o philosophi, non solum indoctos et impios, uerum etiam caecos, ineptos deliros probamus."⁵ At times, however, his invective becomes rather exaggerated when, for example, he shows the Epicurean gods suspended in midair before the meeting of the atoms: "Nisi atomi coissent..., adhuc d'ii per medium inane penderent";⁶ or when he pictures the honour of a Vestal Virgin preserved by a donkey: "Vesta beneficio asini virgo;"⁷ or when he describes Cicero speaking of the gods as if he

¹Div. inst. 2.18.1.  
²Div. inst. 4.24.20; 3.30.3.  
³Div. inst. 7.27.1 ff.  
⁴In the De oratore 2.54, Cicero distinguishes between dicacitas and cavillatio, respectively mordant and gentle invective.  
⁵Div. inst. 2.5.10; Div. inst. 6.10.21: "Otiosi et inepti senes"; Epit. 34.10: "Diogenes, cum choro canum suorum."  
⁶De ira Dei 10.30.  
⁷Div. inst. 1.21.27.
were the gatekeeper of Mount Olympus: "tamquam ipse plane . . . ianitor fuerit in caelo." Lactantius' use of cavillatio, however, is more common. He gently mocks the hypocrisy of the pagans for concealing their craven beliefs in beautiful words: "Honeste quidem ista dicuntur, sed inhoneste turpiterque creduntur." He smiles at the inconsistency of Cicero who chastises the Greeks and then obediently follows them: "Graecos . . ., quorum leuitatem semper accusat et tamen sequitur"; and he scoffs at the utopian aspect of the Platonic community: "Adhuc in orbe terrae neque tam stulta neque tam sapiens ulla gens extitit quae hoc modo uiiueret." He often satirizes a situation or person in a pithy turn of phrase. The conquests of Rome are legal injustices; Stoic perfection is inhuman virtue; Epicurean pessimism is impious wisdom; and the peoples' games are public homicides.

In his use of dispositio, then, Lactantius displays a variety of rhetorical techniques that are admirably suited to persuade his educated

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1 Div. inst. 1.18.3.
2 Div. inst. 1.20.9.
3 Div. inst. 3.14.7.
4 Div. inst. 3.22.11.
5 Div. inst. 6.9.4.
6 Div. inst. 6.10.12.
7 De i ra Dei 12.1.
8 Div. inst. 6.20.15.
readers. He achieves orderliness by the careful arrangement of his ideas. He develops those ideas by the use of logic, and by moving the feelings through question, dialogue, peroration, gentle invective and, to some extent, through amplificatio. By so arranging and developing his thought, that is, by his disposito, Lactantius places himself firmly, except in his rather formal use of amplificatio, in the tradition not of his fellow Christian apologists but of the ancient classical rhetoricians.

ELOCUTIO

One of the problems faced by early Christians was the articulation of Christian devotion and theology in languages that were so closely bound up with classical culture in its varied forms. While the Greek Christians found their way prepared by the translation of the Septuagint and the language of Judaic Hellenism, the educated Christians in the West were required to construct a vocabulary of their own. Early Christian writers rejected the restrictions of classical Latin; consequently, purity of language that to them was merely convention often gave way to a certain pragmatism in expressing the ideas of salvation. While Greek

1Cicero defines elocutio: "Idoneorum verborum ad inventionem accommodatio." Inv. rhet. 1.7. This includes, of course, not only words as such, but also their use in phrases, clauses, etc. Thus it is not intended that elocutio means only diction, but also figures of speech, syntax, prose rhythms, etc., as will be shown in the following pages. In this section, an exhaustive study of Lactantius' elocutio is not intended, but only a short critique of some of the principal techniques which he uses to persuade his readers to accept his Christian magisterium.

2Even Augustine states that correct language is only a matter of convention: "Utrum enim ignoscere producta an correpta tertia syllaba dicitur, non multa curat qui peccatis suis Deum ut ignoscat petit, quolibet modo illud verbum sonare potuerit. Quid est ergo integritas locutionis, nisi alienae consuetudinis conservatio loquentium veterum auctoritate firmatae?" Aug. De doctr. Christ. 2.13.19.
was first the language of Christian writers in the West, for example Justin, Hippolytus and Irenaeus, Latin gradually gained precedence so that although the liturgy in Rome was practised in Greek until the fourth century, the complete Latinization of the Western Church was achieved within three centuries.¹

The first Latin translation of Sacred Scripture was made in the middle of the second century, and the first Acts of the Martyrs and the Passiones in North Africa were written down in Latin later in the same century. The difficulty of translating into a highly developed language new ideas not connected with this culture was soon manifest. Both in Greek and in Latin the Christians rejected many words with a fixed religious meaning, and either chose a new word, i.e., a neologism, or attributed to a neutral word a new Christian meaning, i.e., a semasiology.² The Latin Christians also employed many loan words, e.g., ecclesia and baptismus, unlike the Greeks who typically resisted the use of foreign words, and thus although the association of Christian with pagan words was avoided, contact with the pagan culture of Rome was thereby


²Earlier, the Jewish translators of the Septuagint, for example, did not use θεοφανεία for the manifestation of God's majesty, but the more neutral δόξα because this meaning lay outside the meaning of pagan theophanies. Also the more general εὐχαριστία was preferred to the cultic εὐδοκία.
at first impeded. However, through the works of Lactantius and, later, Ambrose and Augustine, the encounter between Christian thought and pagan culture developed and matured. Other factors that hindered this contact were the general low estate of education among the Christians and especially their conservatism in translation. In the early Latin translations of Scripture, for example, the Latin Christians followed a method of very literal translation. Probably influenced by the Jewish tradition, they considered every word precious. The North African Codex Palatinus(e) translates St. Luke 1. 28: χαίρε καὶ ευχαριστήσῃ... as Ave gratificata, a transliteration, yet vivid and very meaningful. However, the very use of these vulgarisms by the Christians revealed at the same time the creative fertility of the Latin language, and once words were adopted by the cultivated language of educated writers like Lactantius they could no longer be considered as vulgarisms, but as creative and constituent parts of the Latin language.

Although Lactantius used mainly the classical rhetorical elocutio and so differed in his literary presentation considerably from that of other early Christian Latin writers, he could not help but be greatly influenced by the current language of Christianity. Eloquentia tulliana was his ideal, but the literary form of Lactantius reveals the considerable debt he owed to the developing Christian idiom. He is often com-

1. Compare the Vulgate's, Ave gratia plena.


pelled to use the philosophical and theological vocabulary of contemporary literature. To express his philosophical ideas he uses technical terms like substantia, patibilis, ineloquibilis, inlaesibilis etc., and to translate Christian ideas, he employs church terms like sacramentum, confessio, devotio, resurrectio, etc. From Scripture he also takes over non-classical expressions like terram promissionis, principes huius saeculi and opera misericordiae. ¹ For Baptism, he uses the Greek loan word, baptismus, ² but he prefers the use of the current Christian word, lauacrum, e.g., "Homo caelesti lauacro purificatus."³ He also uses the early Christian word haereticus in the sense used by the Christians for those separated from the church.⁴ His use of the name for devil reflects current Christian usage. He uses not only the loan word diabolus and its popular form, zabulus, ⁵ but also the current word, a"uersarius. ⁶ He often substitutes the Latin uates for the loan word, propheta, and distinguishes according to current Christian usage between the pagan seers, uates, and the Judaic-Christian prophets, prophetae.⁷ Salutaris, used both as an adjective and

¹Div. inst. 4.17.12; 5.1.15; 5.14.18.
²Div. inst. 4.15.2.
⁴Div. inst. 4.30.13. He distinguishes between coetus for a band of heretics, and ecclesia for orthodox believers.
⁵Epit. 22. 6; De mort. pers. 16.5.
⁶De mort. pers. 16.5. etc. He is familiar too with the Latin equivalent, criminator. Div. inst. 2.8.6. etc.
⁷Div. inst. 7.23.5.
a noun, and salvator are two more Christian words found in old versions of the Scripture that are adopted by Lactantius.¹ The Christian semasiologism, confessio, is used not only as a profession of faith, gloriosa confessio,² which was the traditional usage of honour accorded by the Church to a Christian martyr, but also as a confession of sin, "in qua est confessio et paenitentia."³ The common Christian verb formation -ficare is also frequently used by Lactantius,⁴ and he employs in a passage on the expulsion of evil spirits from the minds of the followers of Christianity, the distinctly Christian signum passionis, the sign of the cross. He is not above the use of pleonasms, e.g., docet dicens, ostenderat dicens etc.⁵ which reflect the usage not only of current literature but also of Sacred Scripture. Most of the apologists, of course, also used Christian terminology, but Lactantius used it sparingly, to a considerably less degree, for example, than Tertullian. Characteristic of him is the natural, almost inconspicuous manner with which he assimilates these technical terms into his own style.⁶

For all this, however, Lactantius' vocabulary is mainly classical even in the expression of specifically Christian notions. This is seen

¹Div. inst. 4.12.6 and 9.
²De mort. pers. 1.1; 16.5.
³Div. inst. 4.30.13.
⁴Div. inst. 2.5.3; 4.16.17; 7.14.14 etc.
⁵Div. inst. 4.4.4; 4.21.4.
⁶His use of specifically Christian words might be used as internal proof that he was also writing for Christians who alone would have understood their full meaning.
in the exposition of Christian dogma in Book Four of the Institutes, for example, in his description of Christ's mission: "Statuerat Deus...
ducem magnum caelitus mittere, qui eam (religionem), perfido ingratoque populo ablatam, exteris nationibus reuelaret";\(^1\) of Christ's miracles:

Aegros ac debiles et omni morborum genere laborantes uno uerbo unoque momento reddebat incolumes, adeo ut membris omnibus capti receptis repente uiribus roborati ipsi lectulos suos reportarent, in quibus fuerant paulo ante delati...

Multorum quoque linguas in eloquium sermonemque soluebat.

Item surdorum patefactis auribus insinuabat auditum, pollutos et aspersos maculis repurgabat.\(^2\)

Furthermore, Christ is called a classical *legatus ac nuntius Dei*,\(^3\) the Antichrist, *tyrannus ille abominabilis*,\(^4\) and the devil, *ille diuini nominis semper inimicus*.\(^5\)

Though the syntax of Lactantius is usually Ciceronian it often reflects the many changes that Latin syntax underwent since the time of Augustus. He will use a single verb or verbal with a plural subject, sui in place of suus,\(^7\) or the possessive adjective instead of

\(^1\) *Div. inst.* 4.2.5; *Div. inst.* 4.10.1: "Ut esset necesse ... Dei filium descendere in terram, ut constitueret Deo templum doceretque iustitiam ... et, cum magisterio functus fuisset, traderetur in manus inpiorum mortemque susciperet."

\(^2\) *Div. inst.* 4.15.6.

\(^3\) *Div. inst.* 4.25.1.

\(^4\) *Div. inst.* 7.25.8.

\(^5\) *Div. inst.* 6.6.3.


\(^7\) *Div. inst.* 5.5.5: "de tutela sui"; *De ira Dei* 23.7: "sui emendatione."
Occasionally he uses loosely adjectival pronouns, adverbs, prepositions and conjunctions. Rather frequent is the non-classical use of mood. Declarative verbs, for example, are followed by quod and even rarely by quia, while the infinitive is found with verbs requiring quod or ut, and even with habere. On occasion he uses the comparative with ab: "Orpheus qui a temporibus eius fuit recentior," and the instrumental ablative with in: "facientes et ipsi in nomine magistri dei magna miracula." Lactantius, then, adopted like the other apologists, though not to the same degree, many contemporary stylistic forms. What is notable is that he was so little affected by them. Tertullian, writing a hundred years earlier, is filled with vulgarisms. In his time Lactantius

1 Div. inst. 4.26.14: "Sed haec inenarrabilis potestas imago uirtutis maioris fuit, quae demonstrabat tantam uim habituram esse doctrinam suam"; Div. inst. 7.4.1: "Sed de prouidentia satis in primo libro diximus: quae si est, ut apparet ex mirabilitate operum suorum."

2 Div. inst. 6.15.5: quisque for quisquis; Div. inst. 5.15.7: alteris for aliis; De ira Dei 13.14: alterutra for utraque; Div. inst. 4.14.12: rursus is used in the sense of iterum, and in Div. inst. 4.12.14: semel for primum; Div. inst. 2.12.14: tenetur ad uitam; Div. inst. 4.26.37: notare de; signum de sanguine imponere; Div. inst. 4.12.14: credere in + accus.; Div. inst. 4.11.11: in potestate; Div. inst. 7.11.4: nec aliter for non aliter; De ira Dei 17.3: nec for ne quidem.

3 Div. inst. 4.12.6: declarauit quod; Div. inst. 6.22.3: scit enim quia.

4 Div. inst. 1.22.14: illos aetas facit putare; Div. inst. 5.1.12: gaudebit se uersari.

5 Div. inst. 4.12.15: indui habent; Div. inst. 7.6.6: habent dicere.

6 Div. inst. 1.13.11; Div. inst. 1.21.16.

7 Div. inst. 4.21.2; Div. inst. 4.14.18.
is preeminent among the Christians of the West as the transmitter of the classical style. Peculiar to him is the ability to weave the late Latin vulgarisms easily into his predominantly classical style, thereby transforming the current idiom in the West into a respectable means of expressing at least his own version of Christian morality and doctrine.

In his use of abstraction and metaphor Lactantius is guided by his equable temperament as well as by his classical heritage. More intellectual than imaginative, he often chooses abstractions like, \textit{unitatem diuinae potestatis} or \textit{substantiae caelestis dignitatem}.\textsuperscript{1} He prefers the use of conventional and studied metaphors of rhetoric like those borrowed from the language of war and law, which reveals his Roman spirit.\textsuperscript{2} Others are borrowed from the pagan and Christian moralists: life is a journey or sea voyage;\textsuperscript{3} truth is a light;\textsuperscript{4} religion is a food or cure.\textsuperscript{5}

In Cicero's definition of metaphor,\textsuperscript{6} he lists six categories:


\textsuperscript{1}\textit{Div. inst.} 1.3.24; \textit{Div. inst.} 2.14.1.

\textsuperscript{2}\textit{Div. inst.} 3.17.1: "Decertemus ... stare ... fugientes atque deiectos nostro campo insequamur"; \textit{Div. inst.} 4.3.4: a long comparison between God and the pater familias.

\textsuperscript{3}\textit{De opif. Dei} 20.9; \textit{Div. inst.} 1.1.11.

\textsuperscript{4}\textit{Div. inst.} 2.1.13; \textit{Div. inst.} 7.25.8.

\textsuperscript{5}\textit{Div. inst.} 1.1.22; \textit{Div. inst.} 6.24.23.

\textsuperscript{6}\textit{Cic. Rhet.} 4.24.
### A. War

1. *De opif. Dei* 1.9: In qua ciuitate nomen dederis.  
4. *Div. inst.* 3.4.9: Gladium, ... scutum.  
5. *Div. inst.* 3.5.8: Eodem mucrone transfixit.  
10. *Div. inst.* 7.10.4: Depellere et fugare, ... munierit.  

### B. Law

1. *Div. inst.* 4.3-4: Comparison between Christ and the pater familias.  
5. *Div. inst.* 6.22.5: Sub dicionem ... manciparimus.  
7. *De ira Dei* 10.42 sq: Mundi republica, ... regi et imperatori.  
9. *Epit.* 43.3: Exheredatos, ... adoptatos.  
As a conclusion it may be said that in his use of metaphor Lactantius is quite restrained. He appears content to present an image that is simple and subdued, and though clear, rather formalized and uninspiring. His metaphors lack the sparkle evident in many classical authors. It may also be said that in preferring almost exclusively Cicero's first category of metaphor, rei ante oculos ponendae causa, Lactantius, at least in this small sampling, did not attain the wide and easy mastery of metaphor recommended by his classical model.

One of Lactantius' great achievements in style is his technique of combining and arranging words. With the purpose of pleasing the ear of his pagan readers the rhetorician applies the full force of his power by the skillful and varied use of three methods, the copious, the symmetrical and the periodic. The effect of copiousness he obtains by anaphora, pleonasm and synonym, while the effect of symmetry he obtains usually by balance, and at times by chiasmus. On a grander scale is his

1 De opif. Dei 19.9 sq.: "Magna est enimuis hominis, magna ratio, magnum sacramentum ... , hic beatus est, hic denique ... ; si delicatus ... , si uirtute ... ; si terrae ... "; Div. inst. 4.23.4: "Vetas me irasci, uetas cupere, uetas libido commoueri, uetas dolorem, uetas mortem timere "; Div. inst. 6.18.12: "Hunc homini praeferat, hunc malit."

2 Div. inst. 2.9.11: "Alternaper uices successione"; Div. inst. 3.2.1: "Ut omni errore sublato ueritas patefacta clarescat"; Div. inst. 5.10.10: "Tranquilla moderatione lenire."

3 Div. inst. 1.1.10: "Copiaet facultate dicendi, claritate ac nitore, inlustranda et quodammodo adserenda"; Div. inst. 4.1.6: "Caligo et tenebrae"; Div. inst. 7.4.12: "Diuersis ac repugnantibus, uit et caueat."

4 Div. inst. 4.4.1: "Sapientia spectat ad filios, quae exigit amorem, religio ad seruos, quae exigit timorem"; Div. inst. 4.24.7: "Docere praeceptiendo, confirmare faciendo"; Epit. 26.4: "Neque in philosophia sacra celebratur neque in sacris philosophia tractatur."

5 Div. inst. 2.8.62: "Fabricaretur desuper caelum, terra subter fundaretur"; Div. inst. 2.9.18: "Uterque uidit, sed errauit uterque"; Epit. 38.2: "De Deo in spiritu, in carne ex homine."
adroit use of the periodic sentence. Found generally in the exordiums and perorations of his chapters, they combine elegance with length, clarity with complexity, subordination with movement, all in one harmonious whole. Take, for example, his treatment of the providence of God:

Nam si peritus architectus, cum magnum aliquod aedificium facere constituit, primo omnium cogitat quae summa perfecti aedificii futura sit, et ante emetitur quem locum leue pondus expectet, ubi magni oneris statura sit moles, quae columnarum interualla, qui aut ubi aquarum cadentium decursus et exitus et receptacula, haec, inquam, prius prouidet, ut, quaecumque sunt perfecto iam operi necessaria, cum ipsis fundamentis pariter ordiatur, cur Deum quisquam putet in machinandis animalibus non ante prouidisse quae ad uiuendum necessaria essent quam uitam ipsam daret? 1

At times the operative word appears at the beginning of the sentence, 2 but usually it is reserved for the end, "uitam merebitur sempiternam." 3 One of the chief merits of Lactantius' periodic sentence, however, lies in his use of the classical prose rhythm endings, the clausulae. He has a particular liking for the syllabic combination, (.-.--), and he likes the ring of the similar combination (.-.-.--) as well as the famous Ciceronian esse videatur, (.-. ...). 4 Lactantius uses these endings not only at the end of sentences but he may also use them at the end

1De opif. Dei 6.5-6; Div. inst. 2.8.3; Div. inst. 3.12.7; Div. inst. 4.16.5 et passim.
2De opif. Dei 2.6.
3De opif. Dei 19.10.
4Lactantius also frequently uses the endings (.-.-.--), the (.-. .--), the (.-. --.) and many others. Though these prose rhythms are little known or used today, a knowledge of them helps greatly in the understanding of the modern vers libre.
of every clause of the same sentence.\textsuperscript{1}

With the decline of classical Latin in later imperial times, a gradually increasing emphasis on accentual stress took place in the spoken language of the people. This occurred from the third to the sixth centuries when the uneducated and the people from the provinces began to fail to distinguish between the long and short duration of the spoken syllable.\textsuperscript{2} This general tendency spread to literature, and the question arises as to whether Lactantius was affected by it or did he remain completely and firmly fixed in the tradition of his classical models. The studies made on the prose rhythm of Latin and Greek writers\textsuperscript{3} have shown that by comparing the incidence in percent both of metrical and accentual stress of one author with those of earlier and later writers,

\textsuperscript{1}Div. inst. 1.1.11: "Nam si quidam maximi oratores professionis suae quasi ueterani decursis operibus actionum suarum postremo se philosophiae tradiderunt (\ldots\ldots), eamque sibi requiem laborum iustissimam putauerunt (\ldots\ldots), si animos suis in earum rerum quae inueniri non poterant inquisitione torquerent (\ldots\ldots), ut non tam otium sibi quam negotium quaesisse uideantur (\ldots\ldots), et quidem multo molestius quam in quo fuerant ante uersati (\ldots\ldots) quanto iustius ego me ad illam piam, ueram diuiriam sapientiam quasi ad portum tutissimum conferam (\ldots\ldots), in quo omnia dictu pronasunt, auditu suauia, facilia intellectu, honesta susceptu (\ldots\ldots).

\textsuperscript{2}cf. F. di Capua, Il cursus e le clausole nei prosatori latini e in Lattanzio, (Bari, 1949), pp. 21-2.

it is possible to determine the character of that author's style in relation to classical and non-classical prose, and further with sufficient statistics to generalize on the state of the language of the times. The two extreme norms in studies of this kind are the metrical prose of Cicero on the one hand, and on the other the accentual but rhythmical prose of the Middle Ages. That part of the sentence which best illustrates the gradual shift from metrical to accentual stress is the last part or final cadenza of the phrase, what is known as the clausula.

In the classical authors the metrical clausulae predominate by a considerable margin over the accentual. For example, in a study made by Knook,\(^1\) of the speeches of Cicero, the survey shows that 70% of the clausulae end in six of the common classical prose metres, while only 50% have accentual stress. However, in the samplings of Cyprian who wrote three hundred years later, approximately the same percentage, 73%, shows metrical endings, but no less than 71% displays the accentual stress or what is commonly called cursus.

While the word cursus was, in classical literature, a generic term meaning the rhythmical flow of the discourse, cursus orationis,\(^2\) it came to be applied to the various dispositions of the accented and non-accented syllables of the final phrase of the sentence.\(^3\) In late Latin and medieval

\(^1\)Knook, *Overgang*, p. 84 sq.

\(^2\)Cic. *De or.* 2.16.39; *Orat.* 58.198; Quint. *Inst.* 9.4.70.

\(^3\)"Dans son acception la plus stricte, le cursus est le rythme dû à une succession déterminée de syllables accentuées et de syllables inaccentuées, affectant les fins de phrase ou de membres de phrase," Nicolau, "L'origine du cursus," 1.
prose, there were four types of cursus: planus containing five syllables, ^--^~, with the accent on syllable two and five, e.g., régna caelórum; tardus containing six syllables, ^--^~, with the accent on three and six, e.g., èsse cognóvimus; velox containing seven syllables, ^----^~, with the accent on two and seven, e.g., dómínnum confitêmur; and trispondaicus containing six syllables, ^---^~, with the accent on two and six, e.g., têrra venerâtur. All these four accentual cursus are derived from the quantitative clausulae of classical literature, and the Christian and pagan prose writers of this interim period between metre and accent strove to select the clausulae in which the metrical ictus and accentual stress coincided. They were, in a sense, torn between the old and the new, and they tried to satisfy both. They attempted to combine the metrical prose of the literature of the Golden Age with the accentual prose of the spoken language of their contemporaries.

In this period, before the accentual cursus won out, stands the figure of Lactantius. A sampling both of the classical clausulae and the medieval cursus found in his writing will be compared with surveys done on classical, contemporary and later Latin prose authors. This will reveal the position that Lactantius assumed with respect both to the past and to the present. Was he in fact the Christian Cicero, as he is commonly called, scrupulously preserving and perpetuating the metrical cadences

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1di Capua, II cursus, pp. 22-3.

2For the statistics used in this survey I am indebted especially to the studies of H. Hagendahl, "La prose métrique d'Arnobe," and M.B. Carroll, The Clausulae in the Confessions.
of classical literature,\(^1\) or was he simply a gifted prose stylist terminating his phrases in the manner of metrical and contemporary prose?

From a sampling of 639 clausulae taken from Book One of the *Divine Institutes*, Hagendahl and Carroll have shown\(^2\) that 73.1% terminate in six common classical prose metres.\(^3\) This compares favorably with the percentage taken from the Ciceronian speeches sampling, and with those of the Christian Cyprian (73.1), who wrote somewhat earlier, and Jerome (72.2), who wrote about a century later. The contemporary Christian, Arnobius, has a higher incidence (86.8), as has the later secular writer, Ammianus (86.2). What are considered ametrical prose, of course, show a lower incidence (58.6 for the Latin translation of St. Athanasius and 63.6 for *Vita aliquot excellentium Batauorum*). What can be concluded from this is that, unlike many of the writers of the period, Lactantius by the use and incidence of these metrical clausulae stands firmly in the classical tradition of Cicero.

A study of the percentage of Lactantius' accentual cursus, however, reveals a different conclusion. While the incidence of the three regular accentual forms, viz., *planus*, *tardus* and *velox* in the speeches of Cicero is 49.8%, Lactantius' figure indicates a considerably higher 64.5%. This is also much higher than the average frequency found in five classical


\(^2\)Hagendahl, "La prose métrique d'Arnobe," 257-60; Carroll, *Clausulae in the Confessions*, p. 3.

\(^3\)Spondee Cretic 5.3; Double Spondee 2.9; Dichoree 24.4; Cretic Spondee 24.7; Double Cretic 10.8; Trochee Cretic 5.0.
authors, viz., Caesar, Nepos, Livy, Tacitus and Cicero (34.8). However, Lactantius' percentage is lower than that of any other late Latin and early medieval writer investigated. It is lower, for example, than Cyprian (71.3) and Jerome (78.7), and much lower than Arnobius (88.5) and Symmachus (82.5). Yet it is considerably higher than that of ametrical prose (45.9 and 49.8). The significance of Lactantius' 64.5% is that he stands midway between the classical and late Latin authors, even his contemporaries. By using the accentual cursus to a considerably less degree than his contemporaries, he definitely identifies himself with the classical tradition. At the same time, however, in showing a much higher incidence of cursus than the classical authors, he reflects the general tendency of contemporary Christian and secular writers to use the accentual endings that were common in current speaking and writing. Thus while it is true that Lactantius looks to the past and has, as it were, one foot in the classical tradition, he has, like the other authors of the period but not to the same extent, the other foot planted firmly in the soil of the living and changing language of his time.

Lactantius, then, uses a variety of rhetorical techniques in order to persuade his educated readers to accept his Christian magisterium. These rhetorical techniques are, in general, in the tradition of the classical writers.¹ Lactantius' citation of classical and religious authors

¹ Though the last work of Lactantius, De mortibus persecutorum, because of its different literary genre and often vehement style, was long considered to have been written by another author, its authenticity, which was discussed in Chapter I, has since the early part of this century been firmly established. It displays the same taste for order and logic, the same rhetorical figures and even the same use of the
is an important element of *inventio*, the discovery of material, which is the first division of classical rhetoric. No other Christian apologist has assembled such a vast armory of citations to illustrate his argument in the rejection of polytheism and defence of Christianity. However, Lactantius relies too strongly on Cicero, and although the orientation of his *magisterium* is Christian, its content and style are influenced substantially by Cicero. In his citing of authors, he is clearly sensitive to the classical poets, particularly Virgil, while in the selection of prose, he appears, except in the case of Cicero, more formal and almost mechanical. In the second division of rhetoric, *dispositio*, he displays the traditional order and clarity in the arrangement of chapters and in the development of ideas. He moves the feelings calmly and gently by the time-honored classical techniques, and although the application in Lactantius' argument of the classical authors, that is, the *amplificatio*, is principally *enumeratio*, or according to Quintilian *congeries*, the *dispositio* of Lactantius stands mainly in the classical tradition. His *elocutio*, which is the third division of rhetoric, though it reveals a word choice and syntax influenced by both

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periodic sentence that are to be found in his other works. e.g., De *mort.* pers. 16.7; 47.4; 2.6; 3.4-5. However, Lactantius' invective in the *De mortibus* is more often *didacitas* than *cavillatio*—Daia, for example, is described in his rapid promotion as "iam non pecorum, sed militum pastor," De mort. pers. 19.5—and his style is more colorful than in his other works. The *De mortibus* sometimes reflects current Christian usage, but usually it remains faithful to the classical tradition. His use of the legal phrase in *De mortibus* 40.5: "Innocentes duci iubentur," for example, although it is seen in Christian literature, e.g., in the Acta martyrum around 180 and later in Tertullian's *Ad scapulam* 5.1: "Tum paucis duci iussi," can also be found earlier in the pagan classical literature, for instance, in Pliny, Ep. 10.96.3: "Perseverantes duci iussi."
classical and contemporary usage, also remains in the classical tradition in its arrangement of words. This Lactantius achieves through an appeal to the ear of his cultivated readers, mainly by his elegant use of the prose rhythms of the periodic sentence. Nevertheless his clausulae display not only the classical flow of the metrical ictus but also the contemporary ring of the accentual cursus. His metaphors too, which are simple and generally uninspired, do not possess the variety and sparkle suggested by the classical critics. Thus Lactantius is not, as some modern commentators, e.g., Pichon and Wojtczak, suggest, simply the barren transmitter of the frozen style of Cicero, but he is also the living embodiment of the changing tradition of contemporary speech and literature.

Consequently the rhetoric of Lactantius shows the influence mainly of classical but also of contemporary literature which he assimilates and moulds into a dignified literary form of his own. He makes use of this rhetoric as a pedagogical instrument to win to Christianity his educated pagan readers, "ad rectiorem uiam reuocandi,"1 but in so doing he also helps to make rhetoric acceptable in the eyes of his Christian readers, so that henceforth the study of pagan literature, "nihil noceat religioni atque iustitiae, sed etiam prosit quam plurimum."2 Rhetoric, then, is now to be a common bond between the Christian religion and pagan culture in that both are now to be clothed in an elegant rhetorical form. Henceforth rhetoric is to have a dual role, that is, for educated Christians as well as for educated pagans: if the Christian religion is presented in

1 Div. inst. 1.1.21.
2 Div. inst. 5.1.11.
rhetorical form it should attract educated pagans to Christianity, and conversely the pagan literature should appeal to Christians if they are educated to appreciate the classical form. Therefore, for Lactantius, rhetoric becomes a medium and catalyst, helping to bridge the gap between religion and wisdom, and so it is to be not only an effective instrument of pedagogy, but also it now assumes a much larger function than merely a *ratio bene dicendi* and becomes an integral part of Lactantius' Christian *magisterium*. By fashioning a graceful literary form from elements of both classical and contemporary Christian literature, Lactantius helps to shape a new Christian culture in which he has succeeded to some degree in joining wisdom with religion: "Volui sapientiam cum religione coniungere."1 With some justification, then, Lactantius can apply these words to his own rhetoric: "Oratio cum suavitate decurrens capitis mentes et quo voluerit inpellit."2

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1 *Div. inst.* 5.1.11. Cicero also attributed to rhetoric a much more important role than the art of speaking well. cf. *Cic. Inv. rhet.* 1.4.5, 7. Rhetoric, the culture of the word of human communication, is the secret of man's conquest of civilization; *Brut.* 7.26-29. Eloquentia is the fully educated condition or state that gives civic leadership and the happy life; *Orat.* 1.6.20-23. The orator must have universal knowledge and education; 1.8.34; 1.13.59. The orator is defined by his ability *de omnibus rebus copiose dicere*; 1.16.72: *peropolitus omnibus artibus*; 2.1.5. The fully-educated orator possesses all wisdom as well as the techniques of eloquence; 2.10.40. The orator cannot be a mere specialist; 2.36.153. Rhetorical education promises *et bene vivendi et copiose dicendi rationem*; 3.14.54-55. Education without virtue is the arming of madmen; 3.16.60-61; 3.32.126-131, the ideal of universal learning; 3.35.142-143, the vision of a complete education, both philosophical and rhetorical.

2 *Div. inst.* 6.21.4
CHAPTER III

LACTANTIUS' REACTION TO POLYTHEISM AND PHILOSOPHY

POLEMIC AGAINST POLYTHEISM

In Lactantius' attempt to prove the superiority of Christianity and present his Christian magisterium, the first adversary he considered was Graeco-Roman polytheism. Officially and formally polytheism held first place, and in name at least educated pagans considered themselves adherents of the ancient religion. For many an important force in Roman religion still 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. These sentiments were shared by many conservative senators and later by several emperors, e.g., Marcus Aurelius and Julian. 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. This sentiment reappears in the dying days of paganism when Symmachus in his Relatio expresses an appeal on behalf of the Victory Altar.


2In the form of a prosopopoeia, 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?" Symmachus, Relatio 9.
However, although this formal argument undoubtedly entered into Lactantius' considerations, it is most probably not the most compelling and substantial reason why he undertook the rejection of polytheism. While it is true that at the time of the writing of the *Divine Institutes* mythology still formed part of the official religion, nevertheless for the majority of pagans the practice of their religion assumed other forms. It would seem that just as in the case of philosophy, a more stringent reason in Lactantius' mind for the rejection of polytheism was its use as a rhetorical technique. Lactantius considered it important rhetorically, before he could expect acceptance of his own doctrine, to begin the apology to his learned readers by attacking polytheism. For him the refutation of the errors of polytheism constituted an important element in the rhetoric of his Christian magisterium.¹

There is little originality in Lactantius' treating the subject of pagan mythology itself. Other Christian apologists had attacked polytheism frequently in the past,² but, as has been pointed out, disapproving of the method and style of his African apologists, Lactantius resolved to try a new approach. He wished to appeal not only to logic but, unlike Tertullian and Cyprian, to appeal especially to literature,³ to what his educated readers

¹ The refutation of paganism occupies Book One, chapters 1-7 of Book Two, and chapters 1 and 2 of Book Six of the *Divine Institutes*. The remainder of Book Two in considering the origin of paganism is also a strong but indirect attack against polytheism.

² The refutation of polytheism always held a very important position in all the apologies. cf. Just. I *Apol.* 21.5; 25.1-3; Athenag. *Apol.* 17-21; Thphl. *Aulol.* 1.9; Tat. *Orat.* 8-10; Clem. Alex. *Protrep.* 2.

³ cf. preceding chapter for Lactantius' technique in the use of literature, especially pp. 62-64 for his treatment of the classical poets.
held in high esteem, namely the books of their own philosophers, historians and poets, and using them as his main weapon of refutation, Lactantius the teacher hoped to refute the basic errors of pagan religion: polytheism, anthropomorphism, and immorality.

Like the other apologists Lactantius makes considerable use of arguments from reason as a pedagogical instrument in refuting pagan religion. ¹ Regarding the first error, polytheism, he presents a dilemma by showing that a plurality of gods contradicts the notion of divinity. Either the gods have a power that is limited, and then they are not gods;² or they have a power that is infinite, and then there will result endless conflicts.³ The first hypothesis is refuted by the notion of perfection, that is, polytheism by the very word implies imperfection, or limited power, because there can be only one perfection, or one unlimited power; the second hypothesis is refuted by the concept of order and unity, that is, order and unity are impossible if there exists a multiplicity of gods. To reinforce the appeal of this argument to a people who greatly admired order and unity, Lactantius employs 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 one commander are impera-

¹ e.g., Just. I. Apol. 2.1; 14.4; 68.1. Of its great importance to the Christian apologists, Daniélou says: "Leur but est surtout de montrer l'accord du message chrétien et de la raison humaine. C'est là ce qui constitue leur ressort principal et qui établit en même temps le contact entre le message chrétien et l'hellénisme." Daniélou, Message évangelique, p. 34.

² Div. inst. 1.3.7.

³ Div. inst. 1.3.16.
The first argument based on perfection might not have moved all his pagan readers, but the second from order would have appealed to pagans and Christians alike. Discussing further the oneness of God in Book Four of the Institutes, Lactantius also tries to refute polytheism with the logical argument from paternity, saying that it is impossible to attribute paternity to more than one god: "Quodsi natura non patitur ut sint unius hominis multi patres ex uno enim procreatur—, ergo etiam deos multos colere contra naturam est contraque pietatem."\(^2\)

Then Lactantius employs logic against the anthropomorphic nature of the gods. He first attacks two gods, Saturn and Jupiter, and the hero, Hercules.\(^3\) He condemns Hercules and belittles his feats of strength. As for Jupiter, he scorns his double title of Optimum Maximus with the charge of parricide and impurity on the one hand, and timidity and impotency on the other.\(^5\) Saturn is neither the most ancient god since creation existed before him, nor the most just since he murdered his

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\(^1\)Div. inst. 1.3.19.

\(^2\)Div. inst. 4.3.13.

\(^3\)Though these were important gods or heroes of classical antiquity, Lactantius may also have had other reasons in mind: the attacks on Saturn may well have been prompted by the popularity of the Saturnalia and the worship of Saturn among the pagans in Lactantius' native Africa. cf. J. Stevenson, "Aspects of The Relations Between Lactantius and The Classics," Studia Patristica, IV (1959), 50. Furthermore, the first two enjoyed considerable popularity at the time inasmuch as Diocletian, in adding the title Iovius to his name, and Maximian, Herculius, had in a sense consecrated to them the destiny of the Empire. cf. Pichon, Lactance, p. 76.

\(^4\)Div. inst. 1.9.

\(^5\)Div. inst. 1.10.10-14.
own children.\textsuperscript{1} The other gods Lactantius treats briefly, pointing out their vices and misfortunes, which reveal the humanity of their condition. However, he singles out for further treatment the special goddesses of Rome and their immodest legends, for example, Lupa, Flora and Venus Calva.\textsuperscript{2} Finally, Rome's belief in abstract gods like Pavor, Honor, Virtus, though it suggests a certain degree of mental reflection, is not worthy of the majesty of God.\textsuperscript{3} Although there is nothing novel in Lactantius' exposition of Roman mythology, he does present a clear and balanced resumé of classical polytheism in a manner that is quite different from the tediousness of Arnobius and the impetuosity of Tertullian.

In his treatment of the immorality of the gods, Lactantius blends his logic with emotion. It really is foolish of Cicero, he says, to charge Verres with adultery, for Jupiter, whom Verres worshipped, committed the same crime; or to charge Clodius with incest with his sister, for the goddess, Juno whom they worshipped, is both wife and sister to Jupiter \textit{Optimus} and \textit{Maximus}.\textsuperscript{4} Insinuations are made even about the purity of the virgin goddesses, Minerva and Diana, whose images adorn the gymnasia.\textsuperscript{5} The exploits of Hercules are trivial in comparison with the true strength of self-restraint required in the control of anger and

\textsuperscript{1}Div. inst. 1.11.50-65.
\textsuperscript{2}Div. inst. 1.20.1-5 (Lupa); 1.20.6-11 (Flora); 1.20-27-32 (Venus Calva).
\textsuperscript{3}Div. inst. 1.20.11-26.
\textsuperscript{4}Div. inst. 1.10.14.
\textsuperscript{5}Div. inst. 1.20.11-17.
passion,\(^1\) and trivial also are the honourable titles of Ceres, Bacchus and Vulcan, attributed to them because of their supposed invention of agriculture, etc., in comparison with the great benefits of God the Creator.\(^2\) Lactantius also scorns the brutality of the pagan ideal of conquering heroes,\(^3\) but it is against pagan worship that he argues most vehemently.\(^4\) Their cult, he says, is at best foolish because it expects that by the offering of incense, the sacrifice of animals and the recitation of mechanical formulas, the gods will be appeased and the devotee blessed, even though he is an adulterer or a parricide.\(^5\) It is brutish too in that it often demands human sacrifice and mutilation.\(^6\) Because of the sensitivity of his readers, Lactantius spares them the lurid details found in Arnobius, but what he does continually insist on is the impotency of pagan religion to furnish a code of practical conduct. In his eyes the greatest blight of paganism is not polytheism nor anthropomorphism but the divorce between mechanical worship and moral conduct.\(^7\)

\(^1\)Div. inst. 1.9.2.


\(^3\)Div. inst. 1.18.8.

\(^4\)Most of the apologists strongly attacked pagan cults not only because they were influential in family, professional and civic life, but also because the refusal of Christians to practise them was the main reason why the pagans accused them of impiety. Just. I Apol. 9.1-3; Athenagoras 13; Theophilus 2.2. cf. Daniélou, Message évangélique, p. 21.

\(^5\)Div. inst. 6.2.10.


\(^7\)Div. inst. 4.3.1: "Nihil ibi desseritur quod proficiat ad mores excolendas uitamque formandam." "No one before Lactantius had better 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; the other resting well-nigh solely on
Use of Pagan Authors

To these proofs of reason Lactantius adds the testimony of pagan literature. He does not appeal to the testimony of the Jewish prophets 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 uideatur esse de his quibus omnino non creditur."¹ In the systematic ordering of pagan testimony in order to refute his pagan adversaries, Lactantius stands alone among the Christian apologists of the Latin West.² At the beginning of the first book of the Divine Institutes he dwells 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.³ Then coming to the question of polytheism and monotheism, he first cites as strong proof for the unity of God the poets, Orpheus, Ovid and Virgil.⁴ Then he calls upon the rites in which the 'fingers' alone had a part, and which exacted neither purity of heart, assent of the intelligence, nor a right intention." De Labriolle, History and Literature of Christianity, p. 208.

¹Div. inst. 1.5.1.
²Pichon, Lactance, p. 79.
³Div. inst. 1.2.2-6.
⁴Div. inst. 1.5.1-14. He cites 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."

Verg. Aen. 6.724-727. In this argument, however, he specifically omits Homer. "Homerus nihil nobis dare potuit quod pertineat ad ueritatem: qui humana potius quam diuina conscripsit."
philosophers, those dedicated to truth, Thales, Pythagoras, Zeno, Plato, Cicero, Seneca, etc. Their authority has greater weight, he feels, because they have been concerned not with matters of fiction but with the investigation of the truth.¹ He has no difficulty, for example, discerning in what he calls the mens of Thales and Anaxagoras or in the ratio diuina of Chrysippus and Zeno, the equivalent of the God of the Christians.²

Then in the sixth and seventh chapters of Book One, he sets forth what he considers the sacred and weighty testimony of the Oracle of Apollo, Hermes Trismegistus and especially the ten Sibyls.

After the refutation of polytheism through the testimony of pagan literature, Lactantius attempts to confound pagan anthropomorphism and worship by the same method. He cites Cicero on the humanity of Aesculapius, son of Apollo,³ and Homer on the death of the twins, Castor and Pollux.⁴ Still relying on the authority of pagan literature, he quotes 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,⁵ he quotes the well-known lines of Lucretius:

¹Div. inst. 1.5.15.
²Div. inst. 1.5.16 sq.
³Div. inst. 1.10.1 and 2; cf. Cic. Nat. d. 3.22.57.
⁴Div. inst. 1.10.6; cf. Hom. Il. 3.243.
⁵Div. inst. 1.21.48.
"o stultas hominum mentes, o pectora caeca!
qualibis in tenebris vitae quantisque periclis
degitur hoc aevi quocumque est!" 1

He also appeals to the testimonies of Ovid on the rites of human sacrifice to be observed in the worship of Rome and Carthage. 2 The copiousness of his citations is what especially distinguishes him from most other apologists. In the citing of pagan authors, moreover, Lactantius is generally accurate and balanced, and it is with this kind of restrained and careful presentation that he attempts to reveal to his cultivated readers the errors of pagan religion.

**Lactantius' Explanation of the Origin of Paganism**

Lactantius was not content merely to offer a refutation of paganism through human reason and testimony; he also wanted to reveal its very basis and genesis: "ne qua dubitatio relinquatur, hic secundus liber fontem ipsum patetaciet errorum." 3 Wishing to confound paganism completely and definitely, he devoted his second book, entitled *De origine erroris*, to ascertain the origin and basis of ancient polytheism.

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 especially proposed by many Stoics. 4 The second explained paganism through a study of history, main-

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1 Lucr. 2.14-16.

2 Div. inst. 1.21; cf. Ov. Fast. 5.629 sq.

3 Div. inst. 2.1.1. Lactantius also treats this topic in Book One, especially in Chapters 12, 15, 17-23.

4 E.g. Chrysippus, Cornutus, Strabo. Cf. Quaestiones Homericae; Plut. Vit. Hom.; Cic. Nat d. 1.15.40 and 2.62.24 sq.; Hor. Epist. 1.2 and Ars P. 391 sq.; Sen. Ben. 1.3.9. There is, however, apart from the Stoics, a long history of the allegory of myth with philosophers like Parmenides, Empedocles, Anaximander and especially Metrodorus of Lampascus of the late fifth century. Cf. J. Tate, "The Beginnings of
taining that the gods were heroes, kings, conquerors and rulers who were apotheosized after their death in recognition of their great deeds. 1 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 many historians more or less consciously followed it when they looked for historical truth beneath the poetical myths of literature. 2

The allegorical explanation of the Stoics is more reasonable, Lactantius thinks, because to them it offers an intelligent interpretation. 3 However, he rejects it with the same argument of reason, fearing that it might become an intellectual refuge for obstinate pagans; 4 with Cicero 5 he feels that the allegories cannot be reconciled with the truth which the human and precise details of the lives of the gods convey. 6

On the other hand, Lactantius accepts Euhemerism because in humanising polytheism, it tends to render it prosaic and reduce it to the commonplace of sinful, human existence. 7 The shower of gold in Danaë’s lap was, he feels, merely Jupiter’s payment for his immodest outrage. 8


1Diod. Sic. 6.1 sq.; 5.41 sq.
2Pichon, Lactance, p. 83. cf. H. Franke, Euhemerus van Messene (Amsterdam, 1940); G. Vallauri, Euemero di Messene (Turin, 1956).
3Div. inst. 1.17.1.
4Div. inst. 1.12.3-12.
5Cic. Nat. d. 2.28.70.
6Div. inst. 1.17.2.
7Lactantius probably took this argument from Cicero, Nat. d. 1.42.119.
8Div. inst. 1.11.18.
The eagle of Ganymede was only the carved symbol of the ship on which Jupiter sinfully bore him off.\(^1\) Again, Prometheus was but a vulgar craftsman who happened to be the first to mould the figures of humans.\(^2\)

To confirm the Euhemerist position, Lactantius characteristically fortifies his own arguments with the testimony of the pagan writers, especially Cicero and the Sibyls.\(^3\) He even refers to Nepos, Cassius and Varro,\(^4\) and especially the *Sacred History* of Ennius, from which he transcribes entire pages, for example, the life, death and burial of Jupiter, and the infanticides of Saturn.\(^5\) He displays a certain subtlety in divining the motives that originally inspired this doctrine: occasionally he attributes the apotheosis to fear and flattery, "in adulationem praesentis potentiae,"\(^6\) but generally to sincere motives of admiration, respect and devotion.\(^7\) He considers their origin to be from the family or local tribe before their worship spread abroad.\(^8\) In the hands of Lactantius Euhemerism becomes a clever device to persuade his readers, for his main purpose in presenting it is to show that gods who are human, especially if they are immoral,

\(^{1}\) *Div. inst.* 1.11.19.
\(^{2}\) *Div. inst.* 2.10.12.
\(^{4}\) *Div. inst.* 1.13.8.
\(^{5}\) *Div. inst.* 1.11.34-5 and 45-6; 1.14.2-4. cf. Ennius *Sacra historia*, frg. 1, 8, 9, 12.
\(^{6}\) *Div. inst.* 1.15.2.
\(^{7}\) *Div. inst.* 1.15.2 sq. This is a rhetorical device.
\(^{8}\) *Div. inst.* 1.15.8.
are not gods at all and do not merit the respect, much less the worship of educated Romans, and therefore polytheism for still another reason is to be totally rejected by any sensible man.

In his analysis of paganism Lactantius encounters the difficulty of what explanation to assign to the miracles and prodigies in which paganism abounds. If paganism is utterly false, then the gods possess no power to perform the miraculous events that fill the pages of Roman history. Lactantius carefully catalogues them in the seventh chapter of Book Two: the miracle of the augur, Attus Naevius, and King Tarquin the Proud; the 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. He offers the simple solution that these miracles were performed through the power, not of the gods, but of the daemones or what he considers evil spirits. Although Plato considered the daemones as beneficent spirits,¹ the early Christian apologists, including Lactantius, confined them to the single role of purveyors of evil.² Lactantius' method of treating the matter, however, is new: in support of his own position he again enlists the pagan auctores by appealing to Hesiod, Socrates and Plato on the existence of the daemones,³ and Hermes and

²e.g., Min. Fel. Oct. 26 and 27; Just. I Apol. 5.2-4; 14.1; 23.3.

"τοὶ μὲν δαίμονες ἐίσι Δίῳ μεγάλου διὰ βουλὴς ἐσθελοῖ, ἔπιχθόνιοι, φύλακες θυτῶν ἄνθρωπων."

Pl. Symp. 202e sq.
Asclepius on their power, and hatred for man. 1 From chapters eight to sixteen of Book Two he traces in broad outline the great events of creation, the fall of Adam and the corruption of man, the passage from monotheism to polytheism, and then the evil daemones and their prodigies as revealed through the deeds of pagan gods. Here Lactantius ingeniously links the Euhemerist doctrine with the theory of the daemones: the daemones cause the dead kings to be worshipped as gods, or rather cause themselves to be worshipped under the names of the gods. 2 Thus paganism is rendered not only ridiculous by his Euhemerist explanation but also odious, inasmuch as the pagan gods are in reality only convenient pseudonyms for the daemones themselves.

With this, the teacher Lactantius completes his refutation of polytheism. Through the Euhemerist doctrine, namely, that the classical gods are merely glorified kings and heroes, he exposes the falsity of the genesis of polytheism, but anxious to deal a final and crippling blow, he adds the theory of the daemones, 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 because it is engendered by evil demons is despicable as well. In the hands of Lactantius, this

1 Div. inst. 2.15.6-8; Ps. Apulei. Asclep. 25. Charging them as the inventors of astrology, soothsaying and divination, he also invokes the Sibyls. Div. inst. 2.16.1; Orac. Sib. 3.228-9:

"έπει πλάνα πάντα τάδ' ἐστίν
δεσποτήρ ἄφρονες ἄνδρες ἐρευνῶσιν κατὰ ἱμαρ.",


2 Div. inst. 2.16.3: "Et illorum sibi nomina quasi personas aligas induerunt." For demons worshipped as gods, cf. Just. I Apol. 5.2.
combination is a clever rhetorical technique to assure the collapse of paganism and prepare for the acceptance of his Christian magisterium. It is with a certain relief and satisfaction that Lactantius feels in the last chapter of Book Two that he has once and for all refuted polytheism: "Peracta est nisi fallor magna et difficilis suscepti operis portio . . . depulimus errores." ¹

REACTION TO PAGAN PHILOSOPHY

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. He knew that his treatment of polytheism was generally no more than an expansion of the traditional criticism of the Christian apologists. In the encounter with his new adversaries, the pagan philosophers, Lactantius realizes that his task will be considerably more demanding.² Apart from the sporadic and generally unsuccessful attacks of the apologists, no Latin Christian before him ever embarked on such an undertaking. Besides, the knowledge and eloquence of his opponents are more formidable.³ Even if his cultivated readers reasonably reject polytheism, they may rest content, Lactantius fears, in the rational explanations of Zeno and Plato, systems that provide satisfaction to the mind and solace for the heart. His duty, then, as a Christian teacher, is to demonstrate the absolute

¹Div. inst. 2.19.1.
²Div. inst. 2.19.2: "Nunc uero maior nobis ac difficilior cum philosophis proposita luctatio est."
³Div. inst. 2.19.2.
superiority of Christianity over philosophy, as he demonstrated earlier its superiority over polytheism, and he hopes that if the philosophers honestly desire the truth, he will truly bring it about "ut quaesitam ueritatem diu et aliquando inuentam esse credant et humanis ingeniis inueniri non potuisse fateantur."¹

Lactantius, however, is not irreconcilable in his opposition to the philosophers. Although he does not hesitate to point out their faults and question their virtues, he pities their ignorance more than he blames their pride, and he criticises more the system that produced the error than the individual who submits to it. In fact, seeing truth scattered throughout the pages of the various systems, he feels that it is his task to collect these grains of truth and he hopes to work them into the leaven of the full truth of Christianity.²

In his criticism of philosophy, Lactantius generally attacks the classical position of the various schools. In this he is 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 traces the formal and original exposition of a particular doctrine and then proceeds logically to reveal its error.³ Lactantius, then, is only in the stream of this tradition, and

¹ Div. inst. 2.19.6.

² Div. inst. 3 passim. Most apologists saw in pagan philosophy a partial truth which belonged to them as Christians. e.g., Just. II Apol. 13.2-4; 8.1; Clem. Alex. Strom. 1.13.57.1; 2.7.55.1; 6.10.82.2.

consequently since he has in mind mainly the classical doctrines of the ancient philosophers, it is difficult to judge from his writings about the current state of the four great schools of philosophy. In his refutation of a particular position, he employs not only his own reasoning but also the reasoning of the various philosophical schools. As it suits him, he uses one in refutation of the other: Plato and Epicurus, for example, are invoked to prove against Aristotle that the world had a beginning, and Epicurus again, to demonstrate against Aristotle and Plato that the world has an end.¹ On the subject of creation he enlists Plato against the Epicureans, the Stoics against Democritus, Aristotle against Aristippus, and so forth. No preference is given to any one system; no school is entirely right; none entirely wrong. Truth is 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 is, that while half the truth lies scattered through the different systems of the philosophers, the whole truth resides in the true philosophy, Christianity.

In Lactantius' criticism of pagan philosophy the question arises as to the relevance, validity and significance of his attack on the classic positions of the great philosophical schools, especially those of the Epicureans. This question may be partly answered by examining the state of the various schools at the time of Lactantius to determine whether in fact Lactantius was attacking the classic positions of strong and popular

¹References will be given later in the chapter, though much of this material seems to be taken directly from Cicero.
contemporary schools. If not, the answer must be looked for elsewhere. First with respect to the school that Lactantius attacks most vigorously, Epicureanism, the Emperor Julian, who reigned shortly after the death of Lactantius, declared: "Indeed the gods have already in their wisdom destroyed [Epicurus'] works, so that most of his books have ceased to be."¹ Not long after Augustine spoke of the demise of Epicureanism: "Their contentions have been rooted out and reduced to silence."² Many modern authors also speak of the impotency of Epicureanism in late Imperial times. Panichas³ claims that by the fourth century Epicureanism had all but disappeared as an organized movement; it had failed because its principles were inimical to those of the Roman Emperor and State. Kelly⁴ states simply that in the Christian era Epicureanism had lost all effective force. Even DeWitt, who points out that Epicureanism still commanded attention in the fourth and fifth centuries,⁵ admits that it was on the wane in the fourth century and by the fifth it had been absorbed, according to him, into the Christian community.⁶ Thus if Epicureanism in Lactantius' time was apparently not a vigorous and popular force, why did Lactantius direct his criticism principally against it? Although it is

¹ Julian. Ep. No. 301 C-D (Wright).
⁴ Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines, p. 10.
⁵ N.W. DeWitt, St. Paul and Epicurus (Minneapolis, 1954), pp. 42; 156-57.
true that Epicureanism epitomized for Christians the spirit of paganism and Epicurus was held by them as the great heretic and voluptuary, it would seem that for Lactantius the refutation of Epicureanism served principally as a technique or device of rhetoric to prepare the way for the presentation of his Christian magisterium. Just as Cicero, the model of Lactantius and of all Latin rhetoricians of the time, attacked Epicureanism in the first book of De natura deorum, so too would Lactantius. For Lactantius and all educated men in the West even in the fourth and fifth centuries, Cicero commanded extraordinary authority and respect. However, the difference between Cicero and Lactantius is that Cicero was attacking a very real and popular Epicureanism. One of the chief aims in writing his philosophical works was to stem the tide of popularity that Epicureanism enjoyed in Italy. Was there, then, any immediate relevance to Lactantius' attack of the classical positions of Epicureanism? In the schools of the time Christian students would be exposed at least to the poetry of Lucretius. Lactantius might well have had this potential danger in mind as a teacher concerned for the spiritual well-being of his pupils. However, in the absence of any proven contemporary strength in Epicureanism, the main reason for Lactantius' rejection of its doctrine appears to be rhetorical. This method would be expected of a


rhetorician, particularly a Christian rhetorician, who deliberately modeled himself on Cicero, and as such it would appeal to his educated readers, both pagan and Christian. In fact, most of Lactantius' arguments against Epicureanism are to be found in Book One of the *De natura deorum.*

Although Lactantius attacks the classical positions of Platonism and Stoicism only in a cursory way and on a few specific points, it seems that he uses them also as part of his rhetorical method. He surely was not attacking the Platonism of his time which had evolved into a greatly changed Neo-Platonism. As for Stoicism, after undergoing a sharp decline about the middle of the third century, it did not constitute an important intellectual force at this period. There apparently existed, then, no practical threat to Christianity from the positions of either of these schools as presented by Lactantius in his works. However, just as Cicero attacked Stoicism in the second book of the *De natura deorum,* so too does his spiritual pupil, Lactantius. It is a perfectly valid and effective device of rhetoric which all his educated readers would understand and accept. Thus, it would appear that for Lactantius the formal criticism of the classical positions of the philosophical schools, especially Epicureanism, was little more than a rhetorical device preparing the way for the presentation of his own Christian magisterium.

1e.g., anthropomorphism and implied atheism, Nat. d. 1.15.71 sq.; atomism, Nat. d. 1.23.65 sq.; providence, Nat. d. 1.43.121 sq.

Pressing to the attack, Lactantius displays an uncharacteristic spirit of ridicule. Citing the inadequacy of the philosophers by their own admission, he mocks them with epithets of caeci, inepti, deliri, and then narrating anecdotes from Cicero and Seneca, he recounts the philosophers' vices: "Si quis mores eorum diligenter inquirat, inueniet iracundos, cupidos, libidinosos, adrogantes, proteruos, et sub obtentu sapientiae sua uitia celantes." Even their virtues he calls into question, for he condemns the vanity of Cato's suicide, and even passes judgment on the eloquence of Cicero. Occasionally he erroneously attributes a doctrine to a philosopher, as when he alludes to the implied atheism of Plato. The most grievous fault of the philosophers, however, is their pride; the pagan worshippers really are wiser in their ignorance because, realizing their condition, they do not seek what is beyond them.

1 Div. inst. 3.28.11.
2 Div. inst. 2.5.10.
3 Div. inst. 3.15.8 sq. The criticism of the morality of the pagan philosophers was common among the apologists. Just. I. Apol. 9.4-5; Athenag. Apol. 35.
4 "Cato qui fuit in omni sua uita stoicae uanitatis imitator." Div. inst. 3.18.5.
5 Div. inst. 3.14.12.
6 Div. inst. 2.4.26. Lactantius probably took this from the De natura deorum 1.12.30.
7 Div. inst. 3.5.4.
The severity of Lactantius' polemic against the philosophers, however, often gives way to sincere praise. He renders homage to their lofty geniuses, "tot ac tanta ingenia,"¹ and he calls Socrates and Plato the kings of the philosophers.² Cicero, however, is accorded the highest praise. He was not only the most distinguished of the orators, but also the most princely of the Roman philosophers.³ How nobly he treated the sublime themes of God and conscience,⁴ and if he erred, the fault ought not to be assigned to him, but to his sect.⁵ Frequently his doctrine parallels that enunciated by Sacred Scripture itself,⁶ and he spoke of the law of God with such unction as to excel even the inspired utterances of pious Christians.⁷ Seneca, too, is highly praised as the most astute of the Stoics⁸ and the most Christian of the philosophers.⁹ Though Lactantius generally rejects Epicurean doctrines, he often enlists Lucretius in the refutation of paganism.¹⁰ The philosophers, then, are frequently treated with benevolence. Lactantius realizes that though the

¹Div. inst. 3.30.2. Lactantius' theme of praise and blame is principally a rhetorical device.
²Div. inst. 3.17.29.
³Div. inst. 1.17.3.
⁴Div. inst. 6.24.18.
⁵Div. inst. 2.8.53: "Haec non Ciceronis est culpa, sed sectae."
⁶Div. inst. 2.11.15.
⁷Div. inst. 6.8.6.
⁸Div. inst. 1.5.26.
¹⁰Div. inst. 2.3.12.
truth lies scattered particulatim\textsuperscript{1} through their works, they were unable to attain the full truth simply because, unaware of the necessity of God's revelation,\textsuperscript{2} they relied solely on reason, and yet he feels that they deserved to attain it because they yearned so persistently and passionately to know it above all else.\textsuperscript{3} Consequently, Lactantius does not reject philosophy but the error in philosophy, and respecting the sincerity of their motivation and the truth of their doctrine he tries to integrate both into what he feels is the full truth of Christianity.\textsuperscript{4}

In the first six chapters of his polemic against the philosophers Lactantius takes up the old philosophical problem of knowledge. First of all, he claims, in philosophy there are only two subjects: knowledge and conjecture and no other,\textsuperscript{5} and if both are impossible, then philosophy is destroyed. The Academics, he says, maintained that because nothing certain can be known about anything, knowledge is impossible through reason and therefore should be confined to 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.\textsuperscript{6} Thus, concludes Lactantius, the whole of philosophy is destroyed.

\textsuperscript{1}Div. inst. 7.7.7.
\textsuperscript{2}Div. inst. 2.3.13.
\textsuperscript{3}Div. inst. 1.1.3. "Erant illi quidem ueritatis cognitione dignissimi, quoniam scire tanto opere cupiuerunt atque ita, ut eam rebus omnibus anteponerent."
\textsuperscript{4}Div. inst. 6.2.17.
\textsuperscript{5}Div. inst. 3.3.1. cf. Clem. Alex. Strom. 1.20.98.4.
\textsuperscript{6}Div. inst. 3.3; 3.4; 3.6. The sources for these arguments probably were the Academica and De natura deorum.
"Ergo si neque sciri quidquam potest, ut Socrates docuit, neque opinari oportet, ut Zenon, tota philosophia sublata est."¹

Lactantius’ second criticism of the philosophers, which is also dialectic rather than persuasion, is directed against the numerous contradictions and discords he discovers in their works.² He often refrains from expressing any opinion of his own but merely manipulates the texts of his adversaries so that they often contradict and destroy each other. Plato and Epicurus are used, as has been pointed out above, to prove against Aristotle that the world has a beginning; and Epicurus to prove against Aristotle and Plato that it has an end.³ At times their fight is so bitter that in destroying their opponents, as though they carried a sword but no shield, they destroy themselves.⁴

Lactantius then investigates the formal cause of morality, and in so doing, he gradually unfolds, in the very rejection of the pagan philosophical schools, the outline of his own Christian morality.⁵ He holds that the pursuit of morality far outweighs in importance the study of physics and logic. The latter are indeed rather useless because they

¹Div. inst. 3.4.2; cf. Epit. 26.5 sq.
²This was also common among the apologists, e.g., Thphl. Autol. 2.4; 3.3; Tat. Orat. 25.
³Div. inst. 2.10.25. cf. Pl. Ti. 28c; Epicurus ad frg. 304.
⁴Div. inst. 3.4.9. "Pereunt igitur universi hoc modo et tanquam Sparti illi poetarum sic inuisem iugulant, ut nemo ex omnibus restat."
⁵Though the orientation of Lactantius’ morality was specifically Christian, most of its content was, in fact, distinctly pagan and, more specifically, Ciceronian.
have not furnished happiness. True value lies in morality, whereas "in illa physica sola oblectatio est." Rejecting the philosophical schools as erroneous or inadequate, he offers the solution for the moral problem of happiness and virtue, which he feels lies in religion.

Lactantius generally restricts himself to dealing with three great classical schools of philosophy, Platonism, Stoicism and Epicureanism. The following passage, which is Lactantius' summary of Epicurean doctrine, explains his strong antipathy towards Epicureanism:

Deos nihil curare; non ira, non gratia tangi; inferorum poenas non esse metuendas, quod animae post mortem occidunt nec ullo omnino sint inferi; uoluptatem esse maximum bonum; nullam esse humanam societatem; sibi quemque consulere; neminem esse qui alterum diligat nisi sua causa; mortem non esse metuendam forti uiro nec ullum dolorem, qui etiamsi torqueatur, si uratur, nihil curare se dicat.

Although a positive influence of Epicurus can be seen, for example, in Lactantius' view of primitive man in Book Six of the Institutes and in his acceptance of Epicurus as an ally in the refutation of pagan worship, 5

1 Div. inst. 3.13.6, an old theme in Hellinistic philosophy, Cicero, Seneca, etc.

2 Div. inst. 3.7.1.

3 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: Socrates, Plato and the Stoics.

4 Div. inst. 3.17.42. The source for most of Lactantius' arguments against Epicureanism seems to be the first book of the De natura deorum. In general, Lactantius sides with Cotta, Cicero's spokesman for the Academicians, although his treatment of Epicureanism is somewhat cursory and superficial. This superficiality leads to inaccuracy. It is unfair, for example, to state without a distinction that in Epicureanism there is no human society and that everyone is interested only in himself with no regard for others.

5 Div. inst. 2.3.10. The Epicureans are wiser than the pagan worshippers, Lactantius says, because they see through the folly of polytheism. cf. Lucr. 6.52 sq.; 5.1198 sq. However, Lactantius soon begins to chastise them for their atheism. Div. inst. 3.
Lactantius cannot tolerate Epicurean atheism and hedonism, and in fact it is the philosophy of Epicureanism, he feels, which epitomizes the pagan spirit to which he is so violently opposed. He attacks it throughout his first philosophic work, De opificio Dei, which deals chiefly with the providence that Epicureanism denies, and in his later work, De ira Dei, citing the Epicurean concept of god, he argues that since the Epicurean god dwells in idle immobility he can enjoy neither beatitude nor, consequently, possess divinity.

It is, however, in the Divine Institutes that, because of its implied atheism, atomism and materialism, Epicureanism undergoes its most vigorous and extensive condemnation. By purportedly flattering the base instincts of man and by attempting to remove fear from the hearts of men, it destroyed, Lactantius believes, religion itself and thus it deprived man of the singular good that is proper to him alone. Epicurus was not a philosopher, but an upstart, a fool, a mad man. Although he demolished polytheism through ridicule, he did not conclude from this that one god exists, but in refuting polytheism, he also destroyed monotheism and the true God of Christianity. The occasional austerity of Epicurean

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1 De ira Dei 4.2: "Ex hoc, inquit Epicurus, beatus est et incorruptus deus, quia nihil curat, neque ipse habet negotium neque atteri exhibet."

2 Div. inst. 3.17.2.

3 Div. inst. 3.10.9.

4 Div. inst. 2.8.49; 2.17.18.

5 Div. inst. 7.3.26.
morality\textsuperscript{1} is really hypocrisy; indeed it opens the door to a tacit permission for all sins.\textsuperscript{2}

The Epicurean atomic theory, Lactantius continues, is not only contradictory but also illogical.

\textit{Cum tam minuta esse dicantur . . . quomodo hamos aut angulos habent? quos, quia extant, necesse posse diuelli. . . . Si sensu carent, nec coire tam disposite possunt quia non potest quidquam ratione efficere nisi ratio.}\textsuperscript{3}

Furthermore, the Epicurean view of death, \textit{mors nihil ad nos}, is completely false. It is not the state of death that men fear but the act of dying; besides the Epicureans assume quite gratuitously that souls also perish with the death of the body.\textsuperscript{4} The denial of providence and the afterlife gives \textit{carte blanche} to make merry, to rob, to kill.\textsuperscript{5} No more effective stimulus can be granted to a band of robbers than to read them a resumé of Epicurean philosophy.\textsuperscript{6} Lactantius is somewhat severe here, but he makes his judgment only after assessing not only the metaphysical first principles of its founder but also the practical consequences of the system, and consequently he does not hesitate to condemn the irreligion and materialism of a philosophy which he feels stands as an antithesis to all he holds as a Christian.

\textsuperscript{1}Div. inst. 3.27.5; cf. Epic. ad frg. 601.
\textsuperscript{2}Div. inst. 3.17.3.
\textsuperscript{3}Div. inst. 3.17.26-27; cf. Lucr. 2.333 sq.
\textsuperscript{4}Div. inst. 3.17.33; cf. D. L. 10.125.
\textsuperscript{5}Div. inst. 3.17.36.
\textsuperscript{6}Div. inst. 3.17.41.
After concentrating his attack mainly on the Epicureans, Lactantius briefly turns his attention to the other schools. He praises the Pythagoreans along with the Stoics for their belief in the immortality of the soul, but chides them for the false conclusion they draw, namely the doctrine of metempsychosis. Socrates is praised for his scorn of the ambitious speculations of the metaphysicians, but criticized for his implied carrying this to the point of despising all earthly happenings, and for failing repeatedly to break completely with atheistic superstitions. Plato’s errors are more serious because, Lactantius feels, they tend to destroy the whole fabric of society. In his most original criticism of classical thought, Lactantius severely condemns the communism outlined in the Republic. Though a collectivity of property is not impossible, it would demand an extraordinary indifference to money. Collectivity of wives, however, would deteriorate into pure bestiality and the absolute neglect of conjugal love, while the communal living of children would result in the complete abandonment of filial and paternal love. Lactantius claims that this attempt of Plato at equality stemmed from

1 Div. inst. 3.19.19.
2 Div. inst. 3.20.12.
3 Div. inst. 3.20.16; cf. Tert. Apol. 46; Pl. Apol.
4 "Concedamus ut possit fieri: omnes enim sapientes erunt et pecuniam contemnent." Div. inst. 3.21.3. Lactantius fails to explain that the community of goods in the Republic applies only to the philosopher rulers and their military auxiliaries, and the community of wives to the former alone.
5 Div. inst. 2.21.4.
6 Div. inst. 3.21.8 sq.
an erroneous notion of justice and he feels that justice cannot be effected by law and external decree but should, on the contrary, emanate from the interior, from the heart of man. ¹ If man is to be equal to 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. ² Besides Plato's collectivism, Lactantius also condemns his position on the eternity of the world, ³ as well as his proof for the immortality of the soul from the pre-existent forms that the soul supposedly grasps as though it recalls and remembers them. ⁴

Turning to the Stoics, ⁵ Lactantius strongly reprimands them for their approval of suicide. Drawing the parallel with homicide, he cries: "Si homicida nefarius est, quia hominis extinxtor est, eidem scelere obstrictus est qui se necat, quia hominem necat." ⁶ The Stoics were erroneously persuaded that death was always and essentially a blessing, ⁷ while in fact it could be either a blessing, that is, if it followed a

¹ Div. inst. 3.22.2: "Sed tota in hominis mente uersatur." The justice of the Republic is interior, although not from the heart but from the reason. cf. Resp. 3.

² Div. inst. 3.22.3 sq.

³ Div. inst. 7.1.6; cf. Cic. Acad. pr. 2.37.118.

⁴ Div. inst. 7.22.19; cf. Pl. Phd. 72e; Cic. Tusc. 1.24.57 sq.

⁵ Since Lactantius' own doctrine is so greatly influenced by Stoicism as well as by Platonism, he criticizes them only briefly.

⁶ Div. inst. 3.18.6. This condemnation of suicide Lactantius may have taken from Seneca, Ep. 24.25; 30.15.

⁷ This is a distortion of the Stoic position of reasonable departure, rationalis e vita excessus, which was permitted only under certain definite circumstances. cf. D. L. 7.130.
virtuous life and consequently led to an eternal reward, or it could be a curse, if it followed a sinful life and thus led to eternal damnation.\(^1\) He goes on to condemn their considering all faults, trivial or grave, of the same serious nature, but he chides them especially for their placing among the vices the beautiful and distinctively human virtue of pity, "qui plane vocatur humanitas qua nosmet inuicem tueremur."\(^2\)

In most of the preceding arguments drawn from reason which he uses to refute pagan religion and philosophy, Lactantius employs Stoic logic. It is not known from what immediate source he learned it, but what is quite evident from his reasoning is that he knew and used the five propositions of Stoic logic as enunciated by Chrysippus and reported by Diogenes Laertius.\(^3\) His subtle use of several propositions in the same argument is nowhere seen more clearly than in his first argument against polytheism which was described earlier in the chapter. He employs no less than three of the Stoic propositions in this argument.

\(^1\)Div. inst. 3.19.9; cf. Cic. Leg. frg. 3.
\(^2\)Div. inst. 3.23.8 and 9.
\(^3\)D. L. 7.80-1.

(i) If A, then B; but A, therefore B.
(ii) If A, then B; but not B, therefore not A.
(iii) Not A and B together; but A, therefore not B.
(iv) Either A or B; but A, therefore not B.
(v) Either A or B; but not A, therefore B.

In the following analysis of Lactantius' Stoic logic, this enumeration will be used. cf. Arnold, Roman Stoicism, p. 146 sq.; B. Mates, Stoic Logic (Berkeley, 1961); J.M. Bochenski, Ancient Formal Logic (Amsterdam, 1963). Because of his wide knowledge of Cicero, Lactantius probably knew Cicero's treatment of conditional propositions in the Topica 14.
(v) Either A (The gods have a limited power) or B (The gods have unlimited power); but not A, therefore B.

(i) If A (The gods have limited power), then C (They are not gods); but A, therefore C.

(ii) If B (The Gods have unlimited power), then D (There will be disorder); but not D, therefore not B.

In a further argument against polytheism from the notion of paternity, Lactantius uses the first proposition:

(i) If A (There is one paternity), then B (There is one God); but A, therefore B.

In the arguments against the individual gods and heroes, e.g., Jupiter and Hercules, he argues from the absence of a virtue which the true God should possess:

(ii) If A (The true God exists), then B (He is virtuous); but not B, therefore not A.

In his rejection of various positions of the philosophers, Lactantius also uses the logic of the Stoics. Against philosophy in general he reasons:

(v) Either A (Knowledge is possible) or B (Conjecture is possible); but not A, therefore B.

(i) If C (Nothing is certain), then D (Knowledge is not possible); but C, therefore D.

(i) If E (Not all is known with certainty), then F (No conjecture is possible), but E, therefore F.

Against Plato's eternity of the world, he argues:
nor the training to approach the sophisticated schools, but they too should be called to wisdom for they are men, capable of reason and the pursuit of truth.\textsuperscript{1} Another weakness of philosophy lies in its lack of certitude. Being merely of human origin, it displays no unity, no authority, and consequently the noble precepts expressed by the various schools are often contradictory, and so ineffective.\textsuperscript{2} Cicero himself admitted that philosophy's main purpose was not to teach but to divert.\textsuperscript{3} Since philosophers disagree as to the basis of human beatitude, supernatural religion must show that it resides not in pleasure, nor in virtue alone, but in the immortality of the virtuous soul which only faith can promise.\textsuperscript{4}

Moreover, philosophy is inept, Lactantius feels, because it is incomplete. Its notion of God, for example, is inadequate because it attempts to explain occurrences in the world, not by the power of God, but by Nature or by Fortune, which "per se nihil est; ... est accidentium rerum subitus atque inopinatus euentus."\textsuperscript{5} Confusing God and Nature, philosophers conceive Nature as a creative power, as an abstract law, or as the Universe, but surely God, and not Nature, is responsible for the functions which these notions imply.\textsuperscript{6}

\textsuperscript{1} Div. inst. 3.25.5.
\textsuperscript{2} Div. inst. 3.15.5.
\textsuperscript{3} Div. inst. 3.16.5; cf. Cic. Off. frg. 5.
\textsuperscript{4} Div. inst. 3.27.13.
\textsuperscript{5} Div. inst. 3.29.1.
\textsuperscript{6} Div. inst. 3.28.5.
The philosophy of these distinguished pagans, though sincere and partially true, is, in Lactantius' mind, if not irreligious, at least basically naturalistic. Furthermore, to achieve an appeal as universal as possible, philosophy should be less a meditation and a preparation for action, and more a precise and practical code of conduct for action itself. Although much truth lies throughout its works, Lactantius feels that philosophy has not furnished complete wisdom because only God through religion can fulfill that function. The philosophers' ignorance of God also has led to an ignorance of the nature of man and his soul. ¹

Philosophy sought through its Roman moral philosophers like Cicero, Seneca and Epictetus to achieve a religious and moral ideal that would appeal to the educated Roman, but to Lactantius it is the Christian religion that alone can satisfy and complete that ideal. In his desire to appeal to these same Roman readers, Lactantius as an apologist and a teacher exposes, by means of logic fortified by a judicious use of the classical pagan authors themselves, the fallacy and absurdity of pagan religion, and the error but also the truth of philosophy. As a Christian magister anxious to announce his message Lactantius has first to disprove paganism before establishing and expecting acceptance of his own position.

Though in general Lactantius uses the standard methods of Christian apology in his attack on paganism, no other Christian Latin writer has assembled with such care and diligence so vast an array of classical and religious authors to illustrate his argument. In this important tech-
nique of his magisterium, which seems to be mainly rhetorical, he is far more methodical and thorough than his Christian counterparts. What is also notable is that Lactantius was thoroughly acquainted with Stoic logic which he applied with considerable skill. The cogency of his argument, in fact, often depends not on the accumulated illustration of classical authors but on the force of the propositional logic of the Stoics. Thus Lactantius often seems to be more concerned with demonstration than with persuasion. Furthermore he is often rather superficial in his summary and appraisal of pagan philosophical doctrines. This is particularly true of his treatment of the Platonists and Stoics, but less so of the Epicureans. He seems to foreshadow, if only in an incipient way, the method perfected and used so commonly by philosophers and theologians throughout the Middle Ages, the accessus ad auctores. While most of his references can be traced, he does not always represent substantially, and occasionally not fairly, the original and classical position of the various schools. He is more often the doctus orator than the sapiens philosophus. In fact, the motivation for his rejection of polytheism and criticism of philosophy, in view either of the changed or impotent state of current polytheism and pagan philosophy, would seem to be not one of a religious philosopher anxious to attack the evils and dangers of his day but of a classical rhetorician eager to score a point with his educated readers and so prepare them to accept his own Christian magisterium. His material especially on the Epicureans and Stoics appears to be borrowed mainly

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from Cicero. However, as will be seen particularly in Chapter Five, he often disagrees with his classical models and takes up a strong and independent position of his own. This applies above all to Epicureanism and in fact to any view that is clearly at variance with the Christian position. Nevertheless, he is far more lenient with pagan philosophy than most other Christian writers. Though rejecting the error of the pagans, the educator Lactantius accepts the truth of their philosophy, and employing a formal classical style, he incorporates that truth into his own teaching. By so doing he hopes to show that the religious aspirations of the pagan worshippers and the sincere inquiries of the pagan philosophers are to be realized only in the religion and wisdom of Christianity.
CHAPTER IV

THE METAPHYSICS OF LACTANTIUS' MAGISTERIUM

In his final theological work, *De ira Dei*, Lactantius states that there are three steps of knowledge in the ascent to truth, the denial of polytheism, the acceptance of monotheism and the profession of Christianity.¹ The final two chapters of this paper will be concerned with the second and third steps in Lactantius' ladder to the abode of truth, and will outline very briefly the principal points of his positive Christian teaching.² Chapter IV will be concerned with the speculative aspect of Lactantius' magisterium, that is, his first principles, while chapter V will treat the ethical aspect, that is, the practice of that doctrine.

¹ *De ira Dei* 2.1-2: "Nam cum sint gradus multi per quos ad domicilium ueritatis ascenditur, non est facile cullibet euehi ad summum. Caligantibus enim ueritatis fulgore luminibus qui stabilem gressum tenere non possunt, revoluuntur in planum. Primus autem gradus est intelligere falsas religiones et abicere inpios cultus humana manu fabricatorum, secundus uero, perspicere animo quod unus sit deus summus, cuius potestas ac prouidentia effecerit a principio mundum et gubernet in posterum. Tertius, cognoscere ministrum eius ac nuntium quem legauit in terram, quo docente liberati ab errore quo inplicati tenebamur formatique ad ueri dei cultum iustitiam disceremus."

² It was common practice among the apologists after their rejection of pagan doctrines to present their version of Christian truth in which they invoked, unlike Lactantius, the authority of Scripture, but, like him, the authority also of the pagan philosophers. e.g. Athenag. *Suppl.* 7; Just. *I Apol.* 8.4; Thphl. *Autol.* 2.38.
GOD

Monotheism

For his concept of God, Lactantius borrowed the basic notions from the various schools of pagan philosophy, corrected them and then wove them into the context of his own Christian theology. Dealing with monotheism, for example, he admires the order of the world and the regularity of the stars proposed by the Stoics, but he does not conclude from this, as they did, that the stars are divine. On the contrary, since stars do not possess freedom of the will, they cannot be divine.¹ In fact, he ridicules Stoic pantheism, saying that if the world were divine, then all creatures of the world would also have to be divine, even frogs, gnats and ants.² He insists on the distinction between creature and creator, on the existence, not of an immanent, but of a transcendent God.³ God, indeed, is sovereign, one and incomprehensible, as Plato states in the Timaeus,⁴ and in his proof of monotheism Lactantius employs the enumeration of Greek philosophical doctrines on the divine which Cicero uses in the De natura deorum.⁵

The most fundamental notion of God in Lactantius' theology is that of the divinity conceived as pater et dominus. This forms the meta-

¹Div. inst. 2.5.14. Lactantius quotes the Stoic, Balbus, from the De natura deorum 2.21.54.
²Div. inst. 2.5.36.
³Div. inst. 2.5.37.
⁴Div. inst. 1.8.1; 4.4.6; cf. Pl. Ti. 28 c.
physical basis of all his speculative and ethical teaching. Taken from one of the keystones of Roman law, patria potestas et disciplina, it is used first of all to prove the oneness of God. Having refuted polytheism with the argument that it is impossible to attribute paternity to more than one god, Lactantius states that the two divine attributes which best reveal the oneness of God are pater and dominus. "Unus igitur colendus est, qui uere pater nominari; idem etiam dominus sit necesse est, quia sicut potest indulgere, ita etiam cohercere." He then discusses the nature of these attributes:

Pater ideo appendatur est, quia nobis multa et magna largitum, dominus ideo, quia castigandi ac puniendi habet maximam potestatem. . . . Quis enim poterit filios educare, nisi habeat in eos domini potestatem? Nec immerito pater familias dicitur, licet tantum filios habeat: uidelicet nomen patris conplectitur etiam seruos, quia familias sequitur, et nomen familiae conplectitur etiam filios, quia pater antecedit.

Lactantius explains that this notion of God as pater-dominus means for man that he is bound to God by a double relationship as son to father, and as servant to master. The consequence of this dual relationship, he continues, which is really one because it includes the same subjects, man and God, is that wisdom, which springs from


2 Div. inst. 4.3.11-13.

3 Div. inst. 4.3.14.

4 Div. inst. 4.3.15-16.

5 Div. inst. 4.3.17.
the father-son relationship, is joined to religion, which, in turn, springs from the master-servant relationship.¹ The one God conceived as pater-dominus, then, is not only the source of wisdom and religion but also the bridge between them. Consequently, this notion includes not only wisdom² but also religion or justice.³ Since wisdom is the main doctrine of Lactantius' metaphysics, and justice the main doctrine of his ethics,⁴ the notion of God as pater-dominus becomes the theological foundation of the entire doctrine of Lactantius.

**Providence**

Like many other pagan and early Christian philosophers before him, Lactantius was very concerned to establish the notion of divine providence. This forms an important element of his magisterium. According to him, providence can be proved from the order, greatness

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¹ Div. inst. 4.4.1-2: "Quibus rebus apparat quam inter se conjuncta sint sapientia et religio. Sapientia spectat ad filios, quae exigit amorem; religio ad seruos, quae exigit timorem. Nam sicut illi patrem diligere debent et honorare, sic hi dominum colere ac uereri. Deus autem, qui unus est, quoniam utramque personam sustinet et patris et domini, et amare eum debemus, quia filii sumus, et timere, quia serui. Non potest igitur nec religio a sapientia separari nec sapientia a religione secerni, quia idem deus est qui et intellegi debet, quod est sapientiae, et honorare, quod est religionis."

² Cf. also Div. inst. 6.9.24.

³ Epit. 54.4: "Primum autem iustitiae officium est deum agnos cere eumque metuere ut dominum, diligere ut patrem. Idem enim qui nos genuit, qui uitali spiritu animavit, qui alit, qui salvos facit, habet in nos non modo ut pater, uerum etiam ut dominus licentiam uerberandi, et uitae ac necis potestatem, unde illi ab homine duplex honos, id est amor cum timore debetur."

⁴ This will be shown later in the present chapter and in chapter V.
and splendour that can be perceived both in the universe and in man, and blind and stupid are they who deny it. Just as man is made for God, so too, claims Lactantius, is the entire world made for man.

In the first pages of the Divine Institutes, Lactantius acknowledges the influence of the Stoics and Cicero on his concept of providence. Referring to them, he states that there is little reason for him to refute those who reject providence because, "Prouidentiam tollentibus satis responsum uidetur ab hominibus argutis et eloquentibus."

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1 Div. inst. 7.3.25-4.1: "Cum uero mundum omnesque partes eius ut uidemus mirabilis ratio gubernet, cum caeli temperatio et aequalis in ipsa uarietate cursus astrorum luminumque caelestium, temporum constans ac mira descriptio, terrarum uaria fecunditas, plana camporum, munimenta et aggeres montium, viriditas uerbaque siluarum, fontium saluberrima eruptrio, fluminum opportuna inundatio, maris opulenta et copiosa interfusio, uentorum diuersa et utilis aspiratio ceteraque omnia ratione summa constent, quis tam caecus est ut existimet sine causa esse facta in quibus dispositio prouidentissimae rationis elucet? Si ergo sine causa nec est nec fit omnino quicquam, si et prouidentia summi dei ex dispositione rerum et uirtus ex magnitudine et potestas ex gubernatione manifesta est, hebetes ergo et insani qui prouidentiam non esse dixerunt. Non inprobarem, si deos idcirco non esse dicerent ut unum dicerent, cum autem ideo ut nullum, qui eos delirasse non putat, ipse delirat. . . Quae si est, ut apparet ex mirabilitate operum suorum, necesse est etiam hominum ceterasque animantes eadem prouidentia creauerit."

2 De ira Dei 14.1.

3 De ira Dei 13.8: "Sed intelligimus et ipsa eodem modo in usum hominis a deo facta partim ad cibos partim ad uestitum partim ad operis auxilia, ut clarum sit diuinam prouidentiam rerum et copiarum abundantia hominum uitam instruere atque ornare uoluisse, ob earum causam et aerem uolucribus et mare piscibus et terram quadrupedibus inpleuit." This doctrine was also affirmed by many other Christian writers, e.g., Just. L.Apol. 10. Pastor Hermas, 2.4, however, maintained that the world was made for the sake, not of man, but of the church.

4 Div. inst. 1.2.6.
The influence of the Stoic Seneca, for example, can be seen when he quotes Seneca’s declaration of confidence in a providence which permits innocent men to suffer. He recalls this theory of manly endurance in order to absolve God of the charge of severity and to rationalize the sufferings of Christians.\(^1\) Greatly influenced by the classical authors, he writes his first work, *De opificio Dei*, to illustrate that the provident hand of God operates in man down to the minutest detail; with its emphasis on physiology, this little work has one definite aim, to teach what was to its author part of the very substance of Christianity, the existence and wisdom of divine providence.\(^2\)

In the first chapter Lactantius expresses the hope that he will improve on the classical notion of providence outlined in Cicero’s *De republica* and *De natura deorum*,\(^3\) and he declares that he will begin by contemplating the providence revealed in the human body. However, he first marvels at the providence of God shown in man’s reason;\(^4\) unlike the beasts God did not arm man from without but only from within by assuring his protection not through the body but through the soul.\(^5\)

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\(^1\) *Div. inst.* 3.29.16; cf. *Sen. Prov.* 2.4; 2.7; 4.16.

\(^2\) "La description du corps humain n'est que le cadre; le fond c'est une démonstration de dogme de la providence." Pichon, *Lactance*, p. 64.

\(^3\) *Rep.* 4.1.1; *Nat. d.* 2.47 sq. Cicero’s influence on Lactantius in the *De opificio Dei* has been shown on p. 57. For the influence of Posidonius independently of Cicero, cf. E. von Ivanka, "Die stoische Anthropologie in der lateinischen Literatur," *Anzeiger der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien*, LXXXVII (1950), 178-92.

\(^4\) *De opif. Dei.* 2.6-7: "Statuit enim [scil. deus] nudum et inermem, quia et ingenio poterat armari et ratione vestiri. Ea uero ipsa quae mutis data et homini denegata sunt, quam mirabiliter in homine ad pulchritudinem faciant, exprimi non potest."

\(^5\) *De opif. Dei.* 2.9: "Hominem uero quoniam alterum animal atque inmortalis fingebat, non forinsecus ut cetera, sed interius armavit nec munimentum eius in corpore, sed in animo posuit."
Although man's body is weak, a marvellous providence is shown in the structure of all his organs. In chapter five Lactantius admires the shape of body and limbs, with the head, "in quo esset regimen totius animantis," on top, and in chapter seven he expresses wonder at the arrangement and appearance of the body which extends even to side-burns and to beards. There is a special providence too in the head of man, which unlike an animal's, drawn out and extended, is like an orb and globe, the perfect figure. Providence is also manifest in the beauty and grace of the limbs as well as in the mystery of the inner organs. While the use of many inner organs like the liver remains unknowable, speaking of the sexual organs, Lactantius offers a very strange biology. The left side of the womb produces girls, he says, and the right boys. Feminine qualities in boys and masculine in girls are explained by the seed being deposited in the wrong side of the womb. After admitting the difficulty of explaining the nature of the voice in chapter fifteen, he returns to the providence revealed in the mind and soul, and in the remaining chapters he discusses their origin, constitu-

1 De opif. Dei 3 and 4.
2 De opif. Dei 5.6.
3 De opif. Dei 7.11: "et a temporibus effusi ante aures capilli. . . . Iam ratio barbae incredibile est quantum conferat uel ad dino-scendam corporum maturitatem uel ad differentiam sexus uel ad decorem uirilitatis ac roboris."
4 De opif. Dei 8.4.
5 De opif. Dei 10-14.
tion and destiny. He concludes the *De opificio Dei* with a firm rejection of fate and a declaration of man's freedom in order that he may practise virtue and so gain eternal life.

In the *Divine Institutes* Lactantius deepens his notion of providence. In a moving passage in chapter two of the first book, he wonders whether there could possibly be anyone so uncouth as to deny the existence of providence when he raises his eyes to heaven.

Nemo est enim tam rudis, tam feris moribus quin oculos suos in caelum tollens, tametsi nesciat cuius dei prouidentia regatur hoc omne quod cernit, 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.

In the fourth book he takes a step further, maintaining that if man should prove ungrateful for the *incredibilis beneficentia* of providence, he would be in danger of losing his sense of piety and even his very belief in God. He goes 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

1This will be treated later in the chapter under the nature of man.

2*De opif. Dei* 19.7: "Etiamsi astra efficientiam rerum continent, nihilominus a deo fieri omnia, qui astra ipsa et fecit et ordinavit."

3*De opif. Dei* 19.8: "Hoc igitur dei munere caelesti atque praeclaro an utamur in nostra esse uoluit potestate: hoc enim concesso ipsum hominem uirtutis sacramento religuit, quo uitam posset adipisci."

4Div. inst. 1.2.5.

5Div. inst. 4.3.3 ff.
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 implies necessarily that of a punishment for the wicked, Lactantius devotes his next work, *De ira Dei*, entirely to the theme of divine retribution, and to complete the notion of providence, he views God in his last work, *De mortibus persecutorum*, as protecting the just and punishing the wicked, not in the abstract but in the very real context of an historical account which graphically depicts the hideous deaths of the great persecutors of Christianity.

**Logos**

Another aspect of Lactantius' idea of God deals with his notion of the *logos*, which because of its christological application and consequent importance in the Christian *magisterium* was treated not only by Lactantius but also 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 was to try to explain to the pagans—and to themselves—how Christ was God, and at the same time to avoid the pagan charge of Christian belief in the divinity of more than one God.

For Lactantius, when God decided to create the world, He produced a Son like Himself, to be the instrument of creation with the same

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1. Lactantius' notion of divine retribution will be treated at length in chapter V under the heading, Anger and punishment of God.

2. Neither Lactantius' notion of the *logos* nor that of any of the apologists was Subordinationist. For them the *logos* was always one in essence with the Father. cf. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, pp. 100-1.
power as His own. 1 Thus the Son, the logos, or spiritus similis patri, as Lactantius calls Him, was not eternal but was created in the interval between eternity and the creation of the world. In order to express this spiritual birth of the Son, Lactantius uses terms like produxit and creatus est. 2 Was this the generation not of a God but of a creature? To express clearly the idea that the Son derived His essence from the Father and consequently that He was divine and not a creature, he discreetly uses words like genuit and progenuit: "Antequam praeclarum hoc opus mundi adoriretur, sanctum et incorruptibilem spiritum genuit, quem filium nuncuparet." 3

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 calls, in a quotation from Hermes Trismegistus, διότερος θεός, 4 a kind of second-place God. Having spent two books in refuting polytheism, however, Lactantius has no intention of conveying the impression that he has altered his stand and subscribes to a Christian ditheism. He shows in rather a sophisticated way that the Father cannot exist without the Son nor be separated from Him, and that both are joined in an indivisible unity of mind, spirit and substance.

1 Div. inst. 2.8.3.
2 Epit. 38.9.
3 Div. inst. 4.6.1; Epit. 37.1.
4 Div. inst. 4.6.4; cf. Herm. Trism. Serm. 8.
Cum dicimus deum patrem et deum filium, non diuersum 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. 1

Thus there is only one God not two, and he who acknowledges the Son as God also acknowledges the Father. 2 To acknowledge as God both Father and Son is the wisdom and mystery of God: "Haec est sapientia et hoc mysterium summi Dei." 3 In this way, Lactantius preserves both the monotheism of Christianity and the divinity of Christ.

There was, of course, a two-fold birth of the Son, one pre-temporal in the spirit, and the other temporal in the flesh, "in spiritu ante ortum mundi, postmodum in carne ex homine Augusto imperante." 4 Christ was born of a virgin with no earthly father, and by becoming holy flesh, He freed man's sinful flesh from destruction. 5 He is the speech or reason of God, or as the Greeks say more fittingly, the logos, since He is to be the teacher of the knowledge of God and of the heavenly mystery that God wishes to reveal to man. 6 He is the wisdom which

1Div. inst. 4.29.3-4.
2cf. 1 Io. 4.15.
3Epit. 44.2.
4Epit. 38.2.
5Epit. 38.9.
6Div. inst. 4.8.8-9; 4.9.1: "Ille uero cum sit et ipse spiritus, tamen, cum uoce ac sono ex dei ore processit sicut uerbum, ea scilicet ratione, quia uoce eius ad populum fuerat usurus, id est quod ille magister futurus esset doctrinae dei et caelestis arcani ad homines perferendi. Ipsum primo locutus est, ut per eum ad nos loqueretur et ille uocem dei ac voluntatem nobis reuelaret. Merito igitur sermo ac uerbum dei dicitur, quia Deus procedentem de ore suo uocalem spiritum, quem non utero, sed mente conceperat, inexcogitabili quadem maiestatis suae uirtute ac potentia in effigiem, quae proprio sensu et sapientia uigeat, comprehendit. ... Sed melius Graeci λόγον dicunt quam nos uerbum siue sermonem: λόγος enim et sermonem significat et rationem, quia ille est et uox et sapientia dei." Thus Lactantius acknowledges the influence of Greek philosophy on his notion of the logos.
the philosophers sought and failed to find, the wisdom without which there is no hope for man unless he strive to attain it.¹ Thus for Lactantius, Christ, the logos, is of extreme importance in his Christian magisterium, and though the concept of the logos is classical in origin, its orientation is distinctly Christian.

THE UNIVERSE

Creation

Of less importance is Lactantius' concept of the universe which is also greatly influenced by the ideas of the classical philosophers. Lactantius seems anxious to illustrate this aspect of his Christian message by appealing not to Scripture but to the authors whom his educated readers knew and understood. He maintains with the Platonists and the Stoics that God was responsible for creation; with the Stoics that there exists a divine finality in all created things of the universe; and with the Epicureans that the world has a temporal existence.² He holds with Plato against the Stoics that the creator and the creature are separate and that God is not immanent in the universe but transcendent.³ How-

¹ Epit. 44.1. Lactantius makes no mention of a third person of the Trinity. There is really no place for the Paraclete in his system because the Spirit he often mentions is always that of the Son, working not only in creation, but forever locked in mortal struggle with his counterpart, the Spirit of Evil. In general, the apologists are vague and confused about the precise status and role both of the Holy Spirit and Trinity. e.g., Just. I Apol. 33.4 sq.; Dial. 100.5 sq.; Thphl. Autol. 2.10.

² Div. inst. 2.8-10; 7.1 and 3; cf. Cic. Leg. 1.9; Nat. d. 2.21.54 sq.; Epicurus frg. 304.

³ Div. inst. 2.5.37; cf. Cic. Nat. d. 2.21.54 for Stoic position.
ever, he disagrees with Cicero who believes, in his opinion, that matter was uncreated and only organized 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.¹ Matter then would 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.² Furthermore, not only did matter have a beginning, it also had an end. Plato was wrong, as was Aristotle, in claiming the eternity of the universe; they were both deceived in thinking that material things could endure forever.³

It was common for Christian writers to attribute the argument on the eternity of the world to Aristotle and other pagan philosophers.⁴ They were probably referring to Aristotle's argument in Book VIII of the Physics. In Lactantius' answer he uses the Stoic argument, namely that anything the parts of which are all perishable necessarily perishes itself.⁵

¹ Div. inst. 2.8.16; cf. Cic. Nat. d. frg. 2.
² Div. inst. 2.8.38 sq.
³ Div. inst. 7.1.8; cf. Cic. Acad. pr. 2.37.118; 38.119.
⁴ Just. Dial. 5; Thphl. Autol. 2.4 and 8; Arn. Adv. Nat. 2.56.
The second of Lactantius' arguments against the eternity of the world goes as follows: if the world always existed it can have no ratio; but it does have a ratio; ergo. Lactantius probably formulated this argument himself but the notion that there is a ratio in the universe he certainly saw in Cicero.¹

Though the Epicureans correctly considered the universe temporal, Lactantius feels that their system effectually denied both the existence of God and His providence. The former they implicitly denied by explaining the universe through a chance combination of atoms, the latter by expressing an essential pessimism in the world. Atoms of themselves, explains Lactantius, have no power to create or organize, nor can man be spontaneously generated.² As to the pessimistic view of the world, Lactantius can not understand their dissatisfaction with creation. With Stoic optimism he conceives the universe as a city efficiently and hierarchically run in which both animals and the world exist for the sake of man, just as man exists for God.³ Showing the influence of Cicero,⁴ he claims that the animals are created to feed, clothe and serve man and that his own body is an extraordinary mechanism designed with beauty and for utility, to enjoy, under God, all the marvels of the universe.⁵

¹Cic. Nat. d. 1.2.4; 2.30.75 etc. Augustine later used the same argument as Lactantius. De civ. D. 11.4.2.
²Div. inst. 2.11.5.
³Div. inst. 7.6.1.
⁴cf. Cic. Leg. 1.8.25.
⁵Div. inst. 2.10.1 and 14; 7.3.25.
Principally, then, Lactantius draws his concept of the creation of the universe from the pagan philosophers. He believes in creation, as did the Platonists and Stoics, without the Platonic dogma of the eternity of matter; in the divine finality of the world like the Stoics without their pantheism; and in the temporality of the world like the Epicureans without their atomism and pessimism. The pedagogical principle governing this choice of pagan doctrine always remains constant, the notion of God creating, providing, ruling, so that Lactantius' pagan readers would be won over to monotheism and so to Christianity.

**Eschatology**

The seventh book of the *Divine Institutes* contains a strange account of the last days of the world that distinguishes it radically from the other books of Lactantius' work. He speaks of the fall of Rome, strange phenomena in the heavens and on earth, wars and plagues, the reign 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 millennium 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 that Lactantius gives of these catastrophes in the seventh book hardly suggests

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1 The immediate source of most of his material appears to be the *De natura deorum*. The creation story of Genesis, however, forms a background for the account of the formation of man in the *De opificio Dei*.

2 "Il n'y a qu'une partie de son oeuvre où il soit fort difficile de retrouver son esprit habituel, c'est celle où il expose les prédictions relatives aux derniers temps du monde." Pichon, *Lactance*, p. 127.
the disciple of Cicero. He is, however, only expressing ideas that existed in Jewish, Christian and pagan literature. He thought that this kind of writing would also appeal to educated Romans, as at this time similar works, for example, the Sibylline Books, engaged the interest of the pagan world. ¹

The main immediate source for this eschatological material appears to be the Sibylline literature which Lactantius liberally cites. Avoiding for the most part the more balanced account of the last days given in Scripture, Lactantius is convinced that pagan literature carried more weight with his cultivated readers and thus would be more effective in the presentation of his teaching. He occasionally invokes the classical authors when, for example, he cites the authority of Chrysippus on the resurrection,² and when he quotes the beautiful lines of the Eclogues on the coming golden age,³ but the Sibylline Books are his


²Chrysip. De div. 1, frg. 14: "τοῦτον δὲ οὖτως ἔχοντος δῆλον, ὡς οὖν ἄδοξαν καὶ ἤμας μετὰ τελευτήσαι πάλιν περιδόῳ τινὶ χρόνου εἰς τοῦτο ἐν ὧν ἔσμεν ἄποκαταστῆσαι σχήμα." cf. Div. inst. 7.23.3.

³Verg. Ecl. 4.38-41; cf. Div. inst. 7.24.11.
most common source. 1

Ages of the world

It was a common literary practice in classical and early Christian times to divide the history of the world and of man into ages or periods. Hesiod, for example, divided history into five periods: golden, silver, bronze, heroic and iron. 2 Tertullian compared the four stages of divine justice with the four ages of man and also with the four stages of the growth of plants. 3 Lactantius refers to his own age as old and decadent: "quasi fatigati et delabentis mundi ultimam senectutem." 4 Then, relying on Seneca, he compares the ages of Rome with the ages of man: "Non inscite Seneca Romanae urbis tempora distribuit in

1 Besides the Sibyllines, Lactantius quotes on several occasions Hystaspes, a Hellenized oriental and magus, or perhaps an oriental Greek of the first or second century A.D. Div. inst. 7.15.19; Epit. 68.1. Cumont maintains that Lactantius had a Latin translation of the Oracles of Hystaspes before him when he wrote. F. Cumont, "La fin du monde selon des mages occidentaux," Revue de l'histoire des religions, CIII (1931), 77 sq. He attempts to show the relation not only between Hystaspes and many details of Lactantius' chiliasm but also between Hystaspes and the Sibylline Books, pp. 68-93. The source, in turn, for these authors from whom Christian writers borrowed directly was not only Jewish, as will be pointed out later in the chapter, but also more remotely, Cumont claims, Persian and Hellenic. "Ce système est né de la combinaison de vieilles traditions mazdéennes avec l'astrologie babyloniennne, et quand l'hellénisme eut conquis l'orient, la doctrine chaldé-persique s'adapta à la cosmologie stoicienne." 93.


3 Tert. De virg.

4 Div. inst. 7.14.16.
The first age, the infancy of Rome, corresponds to the period under King Romulus, the second to its boyhood under the other kings. Its youth he associates with the age of the early Republic when having thrown off the yoke of tyranny it preferred to obey laws rather than kings: "Reiecto superbae dominationis iugo maluisse legibus ob-temperare quam regibus." The manhood of Rome he places from the end of the Punic War to the time of the Civil Wars: "Cumque esset adolescencia eius fine Punici belli terminata, tum denique conformatis iuribus coepisse iuuenescere." The present age, the imperial rule of one man, because it has lost the liberty it once possessed and defended under Brutus, is the final age of Rome, the period of senescence, second—infancy and inevitable and justifiable death:

Haec fuit prima eius senectus, cum bellis lacerata ciuilibus atque intestino malo pressa rursus ad regimen singularis imperii recidit quasi ad alteram infantiam revoluta. Amissa enim libertate, quam Bruto duce et auctore defenderat, ita consensuit, tamquam sustentare se ipsa non ualeret, nisi adminiculó regentium niteretur. Quodsi haec ita sunt, quid restat nisi ut sequatur interitus senectutem?

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2 Div. inst. 7.15.14.

3 Div. inst. 7.15.14.

4 Div. inst. 7.15.16-17. Rome was Roma aeterna for the pagans until the sack of Alaric in 410. Even Christians grieved at Rome's destruction. Lamented Jerome: "My voice sticks in my throat; and, as I dictate, sobs choke my utterance. The city which had taken the whole world was itself taken." Ieron. Ep. 127.12. Though Rome was often looked on still as caput mundi and Roma aurea, Constantinople, built by Constantine in 330, became the real seat of government for the Christian Roman Empire.
In Lactantius' mind this image of decadent Rome becomes an apologetic weapon to illustrate the mutability of an empire that has lost its freedom and persecuted truth, but it also shows for him the transience of all empires that do not possess the spiritual orientation and destiny of the Christian faith.

**Chiliasm**

Another, more religious example of the ages of the world that was used by late Jewish and early Christian writers was the conception of the entire history of the world as composed of seven millennia. The last millennium was thought to correspond to the reign of Christ or the Messiah on earth just before the end of the world, and the beginning of the new kingdom to come. This was a combination of two specifically Jewish eschatological elements. In the first, the Messiah will rule in a renewed Jerusalem, as is found later in the New Testament; in the second, a cosmic catastrophe will take place in this world and will then inaugurate a new universe, as is found in the last part of the Book of Enoch. These were combined with pagan, that is oriental and Hellenic, elements to form the late Jewish and early Christian millenarianism which is found, for example, in the Revelation of St. John, 19-22, where the terrestrial reign of Christ was conceived as lasting a thousand years.

This thousand years was the period that was thought to correspond to the seventh millennium. From the seventh millennium it was

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1 J. Daniélon, "La typologie millénariste de la semaine dans le christianisme primitif," *Vigiliae Christianae*, II (1948), 1-16.
a simple step to associate it with the seventh day of Genesis because in the Jewish creation story the seventh day not only symbolized happiness at the end of time, but it was also considered to last a thousand years. It was then logical to consider the time of the world as anterior to this seventh millennium, and consequently comprising 6000 years or six days.¹ This cosmic week totalling in all 7000 years is what is found in many early Christian writers, including Lactantius.² "Therefore," says Lactantius, "the world must continue in its present state through six ages, that is, six thousand years ... and at the end of the sixth thousandth year all wickedness must be abolished from the earth and righteousness reign for a thousand years."³ Lactantius attaches great importance to the sixth day which according to his reckoning is almost completed. From the time of creation to Christ's birth 5500 years have elapsed, he says, and then another 300 years to his own time. Consequently the seventh millennium or the year 6000 is only 200 years away.⁴ As it was on the sixth day that God made man, so now, he maintains, on the sixth great day of the earthly age the true and perfect man is being formed and quickened by the doctrine and precepts of God.⁵

¹cf. Didache 15.
²Hippol. Dan. 3; Tert. De anim. 37.
³Div. inst. 7.14.9-11.
⁴Div. inst. 7.23.3-5.
This will usher in, continues Lactantius, the golden millennium of the reign of Christ. After the Resurrection the Son of God will reign with great justice among men for a 1000 years. The devil will be chained, and man and earth, he concludes in a fine, lyrical passage, will enjoy a period of unprecedented prosperity and peace:

Tunc auferentur a mundo tenebrae illae quibus obfundetur atque occaecabitur caelum, et luna claritudinem solis accipiet nec minuetur ulterius, sol autem septies tanto quam nunc est clarior fiet. Terra uero aperiet fecunditatem suam et uberrimas fruges sua sponte generabit, rupes montium melle sudabunt, per riuos uina decurrent et flumina lacte inundabunt: mundus denique ipse gaudebit et omnis rerum natura laetabitur erepta et liberata dominio mali et impietatis et sceleris et erroris. Non bestiae per hoc tempus sanguine alentur, non aues praeda, sed quieta et placida erunt omnia. Leones et vituli ad praesepe simul stabunt, lupus ouem non rapiet, canis non uenabitur, accipitres et aquilae non nocebunt, infans cum serpentibus ludent.¹

In forming his picture of millenarianism Lactantius not only combines the Scriptural text and the Sibylline prophecies, but he also includes appropriate passages from the fourth Eclogue of Virgil,² who, unlike other pagan poets, looks forward rather than backward to a golden age. Many other Christian writers before and after Lactantius also interpreted Virgil in a Christian sense,³ but unlike some of them Lactantius sees no coincidence between the child of the Bucolics and the Infant Christ.

¹Div. inst. 7.24.7-8.  
²Div. inst. 7.24.11; cf. Verg. Ecl. 4.21-45.  
³Cyprian, De habitu virginum 14, appears to be the first. cf. P. Courcelle, "Les exégèses chrétiennes de la quatrième églogue," Revue des études anciennes, LIX (1957), 294. cf. also Augustine, De civ. D.10.27.
Lactantius regards the poetic conception of the seven millennia of the world as real; for him and, he feels, for his pagan readers, the chiliastic view of history constitutes a reality whose truth is guaranteed by the authority of the sacred writings.\(^1\) Time is running out, the last days are near. It is imperative for all to repent, to believe and so be saved. The urgency with which Lactantius summons his readers to rigorous repentance not only dramatizes his eschatological vision of human history but also underscores its purpose as an integral and important part of his Christian magisterium.

**MAN**

**Nature of Man**

Another important, and at times gloomy, aspect of Lactantius' magisterium is his dualistic concept of the nature of man. In man Lactantius sees a reflection of the eternal struggle between good and evil, between God and the devil, that takes place in the universe.\(^2\) Man is united to God and to heaven by means of his soul, but to the devil and to the earth by his body. He is indeed a combination of light and darkness, life and death.\(^3\) He stands midway between God and the beast,

\(^1\) *Div. inst.* 7.14.5: "Nos autem, quos divinae litterae ad scientiam veritatis erudiant principium mundi finemque cognouimus."

\(^2\) Lactantius' dualism, which underlies his entire ethical teaching, will be treated in detail in chapter V.

\(^3\) *Div. inst.* 2.12.3 and 7. Apologists generally view the nature of man as dichotomist, but all hold firmly to the freedom of the will. Just. I *Apol.* 10.4; Athenag. *Suppl.* 24.4; Thphl. *Autow.* 2.27. Although like Lactantius they believe in dualism, they also like him subscribe to man's progress and ultimate destiny in heaven. cf. Thphl. *Autow.* 2.24.
between complete knowledge and absolute ignorance.\(^1\) Through his soul he tends to goodness, through his body to sin, and all the while he is constantly harassed by the attacks of Satan.\(^2\) In part, he is a divine being \(^3\) because his soul is composed of the fire which emanates from heaven,\(^4\) a doctrine very clearly obtained from the Stoics;\(^5\) but also in part, he is an evil being because he is composed of the earth which is associated with the devil. In this union of heaven and earth, Lactantius says, the image of which is expressed in man, those things which belong to God occupy the higher part, namely, the soul which has dominion over the body, but those things which belong to the devil occupy the lower part, that is, the body which being earthly ought to be subject to the soul, as the earth is to heaven.\(^6\) Man, consequently, should learn about himself\(^7\) but above all he should learn about God and worship Him. Because God created the world for man and man lives for God, it is the worship of God or religion that is the unifying and basic reason

\(^1\)Div. inst. 3.6.2-4.

\(^2\)Div. inst. 3.29.13-17.

\(^3\)Div. inst. 4.3.1.

\(^4\)Div. inst. 2.9.25-26.


\(^6\)Div. inst. 2.12.10.

\(^7\)Div. inst. 3.9.5.
for the existence both of the world and of man. 1

As to the origin of the human soul Lactantius insists on its immediate creation by God alone. Resisting the influence of Tertullian who held a materialistic theory on the origin of the soul, 2 he maintains that the human soul can 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 from God alone: "Ab uno eodemque omnium deo patre qui legem rationemque nascendi tenet solus, siquidem solus efficit." 3 He does not specify at what precise moment God created the soul but it must be early because he severely condemns the sin of abortion: "Ad uitam enim deus inspirat animas, non ad mortem." 4

On the immortality of the soul Lactantius carefully outlines the arguments of Plato but he judges them insufficient. 5 The argument based on the nature of motion he rejects on the grounds that it grants

1 Div. inst. 7.5.3-5: "Sicut ergo mundum propter se deus fecit, quia commodis eius non indiget, sed propter hominem, qui eo utitur, ita ipsum hominem propter se. Quae utilitas deo in homine, inquit Epicurus, ut eum propter se faceret? Scilicet ut esset qui opera eius intellegereat, qui prudentiam disponendi, rationem faciendi, virtutem consummandi et sensu admirari et uoce proloqui posset: quorum omnium summa haec est, ut deum colat. Is enim colit qui haec intellegit, is artificem rerum omnium, is uerum patrem suum debita ueneratione prosequitur qui uirtutem maiestatis eius de suorum operum inuentione inceptione perfectione metitur."

2 Tert. De an. 9.

3 De opif. Dei 19.1 and 3. As typical confirmation he invokes Lucretius 2.991-2:

"Denique caelesti sumus omnes semine oriundi,
Omnibus ille idem pater est."

4 Div. inst. 6.20.18.

5 Div. inst. 7.8.2; Pl. Phdr. 245 c sq.; cf. Cic. Tusc. 1.23.53; Rep. 6.25.27.
immortality to animals as well as to man; another, drawn from the great faculties of the mind, he transcribes without comment.¹ There are, he feels, more cogent proofs to be drawn, for instance, from the existence of God. Just as the invisible God exists eternally, so too must the invisible soul after the body's death.² With Cicero³ he argues that the soul must be immortal since man alone of all the creatures of the universe has a knowledge of God. Furthermore, a life of virtue is foolish unless the soul receives an immortal reward. The temporality of vice as well as the permanency of virtue also proves the soul's immortality.⁴ Just as the fruit of vice is immediate and passing, so the reward of virtue is lasting and eternal. Cicero agrees with this position, though with hesitation, that the chief good does not come to man except after death.⁵ There are, in reality, two deaths, of the body at the termination of life, and of the soul, in the punishment of hell. So too there are two lives, of the body on earth, and of the soul in heaven.

Since the body is solid and formed from the earth, and the soul light and free of material, as Plato holds,⁶ after death the body

¹Lactantius, however, uses the argument from motion in his earlier De opificio Dei 17.
²Div. inst. 7.9.
³Cic. Leg. 1.8.
⁴Div. inst. 7.10.
⁵Div. inst. 7.10.9; cf. Cic. Tusc. 1.46.
⁶Pl. Phd. 80d.
will return to earth, and the soul to heaven. Even Lucretius, *oblitis quid adseret*, admits this in an unguarded moment.\(^1\) In heaven, the just soul will enjoy the immortal rewards of his virtue and noble deeds, and the wicked suffer the eternal recompense of his wickedness and impiety.\(^2\) On the question, therefore, of the origin and nature of the human soul, Lactantius has insisted, with clear influence from the classical authors, on both the divine origin and the spiritual and immortal nature of the soul. In view of Lactantius' missionary purpose, this doctrine constitutes an important part of his Christian teaching.

**Knowledge**

In early Christian literature, \(\gamma\nu\omicron\omicron\sigmai\zeta\), *scientia*, knowledge, had two distinct meanings, a scientific understanding of the dogmas of the Christian faith that was obtained mainly through the study of Sacred Scripture, and secondly, a higher, religious knowledge of a mystical nature that was inspired by Christ and the Holy Spirit. The first was the Christian body of doctrine or creed which not only by its intellectual and spiritual appeal was supposed to overcome the false \(\gamma\nu\omicron\omicron\sigmai\zeta\) of rival systems, but also supplied the catechesis for both the catechumens and the faithful. It was basically the revelation contained in the Bible or as Cyril of Jerusalem called it, the stones of *gnosis*.\(^3\) It was all

\(^1\) Lucr. Rer. nat. 2.999-1001:  
"Cedit item retro, de terra quod fuit ante,  
in terras, et quod missumst ex aethereis oris,  
id rursum caeli rellatum tempia reuptant."

\(^2\) Div. inst. 4.11.

\(^3\) Cyril. Ierus. Procat.
to be found in the Old and New Testaments, and it formed a strong bulwark against the false knowledge of the pagans, heretics and Gnostics. Orthodoxy meant true knowledge and all else was heresy, spurious and false knowledge or opinion, γνώμη.  

The second type of γνώσις in Christian literature was the almost mystical knowledge of God and divine things which also depended on revelation but was obtained by asceticism and prayerful study of the Scriptures. Christ was looked upon as the pedagogue who schooled the soul, first by discipline, then by instruction, to the knowledge of Himself as the eternal word. He was also the physician who cured the sick soul of its passions and led it to a saving knowledge, γνώσις, of His divinity. In Origen, while simple faith regards the humanity of the Saviour, γνώσις, or enlightened faith, rises to His divinity. It is a supernatural wisdom, σοφία, which can be taught neither by man nor angel but only by the one teacher, the Son who is wisdom itself, or by the Holy Spirit. It drives out passions, πάθη, and produces ἀπάθεια. Although the ascent to understanding is gradual, γνώσις ought to be sought assiduously until at last it becomes θεωφία.

1Clem. Alex. Strom. 7.16.


3Clem. Alex. Paed. 1.1-2.

4Cyril. Alex. Serm. 6.

5Origen De princ. 3.
its final consummation.¹

Lactantius can also be placed in the same tradition of knowledge as the Christian East. Although he does not always distinguish between the two types of knowledge, both are present in his works. With Lactantius as with the eastern Christians, Christ is the teacher of both dogmatic and mystical knowledge, but unlike them the main orientation of that knowledge is practical and ethical rather than speculative and mystical.

To begin with, knowledge for Lactantius is strictly speaking a peculiar property not of man but of God. Unlike God, man of himself can only conjecture and is not capable of arriving at knowledge, which comes to him only from without, that is, from God.² The investigation of natural causes, because it stems from man's ignorance, brings not knowledge but only uncertainty and conjecture.³ The causes and systems of heavenly things cannot be known through man because, being hidden, there is no man to teach them, and so they ought not to be investigated because they exceed the limit of human reflection.⁴ Socrates

¹Clem. Alex. Strom. 6.7.61.

²Div. inst. 3.3.1-3: "Duabus rebus uidetur philosophia constare, scientia et opinatione, nec uilla re alia. Scientia uenire ab ingenio non potest nec cogitatione comprehendi, quia in se ipso habere propriam scientiam non hominis, sed dei est. Mortalis autem natura non capit scientiam nisi quae ueniat extrinsecus. Idcirco enim oculos et aures et ceteros sensus patefecit in corpore diuina sollertia, ut per eos aditus scientia permanet ad mentem."

³Div. inst. 3.3.8-9.

⁴Div. inst. 3.6.
was wise in not wishing to pry into the forbidden things of the universe.\footnote{Div. inst. 3.20.9. cf. Min. Fel. Oct. 13.1.}

However, Lactantius concedes that a knowledge of some earthly things is not only useful but also necessary.\footnote{Div. inst. 3.5.5: "Ignoratio enim rerum omnium non potest esse sapientia, cuius est scire proprium."} Yet knowledge of itself, even though of divine origin, is not wisdom nor the highest good. Even knowledge of good and evil, by itself, is insufficient towards undertaking good and avoiding evil, but it is only when it is combined with virtue that it becomes wisdom: "Uirtus autem cum scientia coniuncta sapientia est."\footnote{Div. inst. 3.8.31.} Nevertheless, Lactantius insists, virtue requires knowledge; otherwise it is like a body without a head. Cimon of Athens, for example, was virtuous because he gave alms to the needy and clothing to the naked, but all these good deeds were superfluous and empty because he did not possess the knowledge of God.\footnote{Div. inst. 6.9.8-10.}

The source of truth is not the philosophers, nor one’s own intellect but divine revelation.\footnote{De ira Dei 1.3.} It is God alone who illuminates our mind: "Lumen autem mentis humanae deus est,"\footnote{De ira Dei 1.6; cf. other early Christian writers for their doctrine of illumination: Just. Dial. 18.3; I Apol. 12-19; Clem. Alex. Strom. I.20.98.4; I.7.38.4. Other illumination texts from Lactantius: Div. inst. 2.3.25; 2.19.1; 3.1.4; 5.4.1; 5.4.7; 6.1.1; 6.2.16; 6.4.24; 6.18.2.} for the knowledge of truth is divine and belongs only to God.\footnote{De ira Dei 1.9.} And He illuminates not only our
mind but also our heart. In a rare and almost mystical sentence Lactantius speaks of God as sending the warming rays of His light and grace to the very heart of man: "Hoc templum dei ... claritate ac luce sapientiae illuminatur."¹ This knowledge which comes only from God is concerned primarily with the practice of virtue: it leads to virtue but more basically it is perceived only by those already possessing virtue, the just and wise: "Quae sit uera uirtus scire non potest nisi iustus ac sapient."²

Early in the Divine Institutes God is presented as the teacher of the knowledge of truth, that most pleasant food for the soul,³ but it is not until the fourth book that Lactantius specifies the divine teacher as Christ: "Ille magister ... doctrinae dei et caelestis arcani ad homines perferendi."⁴ He is to be the teacher of righteousness sent by the Father to give the new law to new worshippers.⁵ According to Lactantius, Christ is the perfect teacher because He combines the wisdom of His doctrine and the virtue of His life. Man finds it difficult to follow precepts unless the instructor practises them himself. Christ had to become man to accomplish this because otherwise man would

²Div. inst. 6.6.28.
³Div. inst. 1.1.19-20, etc.
⁴Div. inst. 4.8.8.
⁵Div. inst. 4.13.1. The figure of Christ was always looked upon by Christians from the earliest times as the supreme pedagogue both in doctrine and example. cf. B. Gerhardsson, Tradition and Transmission, trans. by E.J. Sharpe (Lund, 1964).
offer as an excuse the weakness of human nature, and yet since Christ is also God, the authority of His teaching is greater. Thus Christ is the most perfect teacher since creation because He not only imparts heavenly knowledge by His doctrine, but He also confirms it by the eminent virtue of His life: "Nemo enim post mundum conditum talis extitit nisi Christus, qui et uerbo sapientiam tradidit et doctrinam praesenti uirtute firmavit."  

If the gift of this heavenly knowledge confirmed by example can be granted to man only by the perfect teacher, Christ, what is to be the role of Lactantius himself? In an important statement in the preface of the *Divine Institutes* he clearly sets out his own pedagogical role. He declares that since few possess this gift of knowledge inasmuch as its truth is either hidden or contemned, it will be his mission to remove some of the external obstacles to that knowledge by helping to dispel in some small way this ignorance and contempt, so that the learned may be directed to true wisdom and the unlearned to the true religion:

> Uerum quoniam pauci utuntur hoc caelesti beneficio ac munere, quod obuoluta in obscuro ueritas latet eaque uel contemptui doctis est, quia idoneis adsertoribus eget, uel odio indoctis ob insitam sibi austeritatem, quam natura hominum procliuis in uitia pati non potest—nam quia uirtutibus amaritudo permixta est, uitia uero uoluptate condita sunt, illa offensi, hac deleniti feruntur in praeceps et bonorum specie falsi mala pro bonis ampectuntur—, succurrendum esse his erroribus credidi, ut et docti ad ueram sapientiam dirigantur et indocti ad ueram religionem.  

For Lactantius this is the sum of knowledge: "Cuius scientiae summam breuiter circumscribo, ut neque religio ulla sine sapientia suscipienda

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1 *Div. inst.* 4.23.10.  
2 *Div. inst.* 1.1.7.
sit nec utta sine religione probanda sapientia."¹ If man should gain this knowledge, which is ultimately and basically imparted only by Christ, the great pedagogue, Lactantius' own teaching and missionary efforts would be amply rewarded because man would then know the role and direction of his life: "Si quis cognita ueritate discusserint, sciet quo referenda et quemadmodum sibi uita degenda sit."²

**Wisdom**

The notion of wisdom in Lactantius is the most central and spiritual theme in his entire Christian magisterium. Like many other early Christian writers Lactantius shaped this concept from Christian tradition, which in turn, depended on two sources, Biblical and classical.³ In the Old Testament, wisdom, הָוָּקְמַה, was looked upon in many ways, first as a manifestation in the work of creation of the personal presence of God,⁴ and secondly as his continuing and saving action in history,⁵ and then especially as a religious and ethical experience of this continuing divine action in the hearts of men.⁶ Jewish wisdom was con-

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¹ Div. inst. 1.1.25.
² Div. inst. 1.1.25.
⁴ Prov. 8.30-31: "Then I was at his side each day, his darling and delight, playing in his presence continually, playing on the earth, when he had finished it, while my delight was in mankind."
⁵ Is. 28.29; 46.10 etc.
⁶ Moses who received the revelation of God on Mount Sinai became the father of wisdom. cf. Exodus; Prov. 1.7: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."
sidered not primarily intellectual but religious because it belonged to
God and it came from God; but it was also looked upon as very practical
because it meant the faculty of distinguishing between what was good and
what was evil, and it enabled man, inspired by this religious experience,
to practise virtue with joy and perseverance. Thus Jewish wisdom
generally implied the concept of the wise and salvific action of God in
creation and in man.

The second Christian source of the concept of wisdom, the clas-
sical _sophia_, also had an ethical orientation. In the _Theaetetus_, for
example, Plato says that wisdom consists in being virtuous like God. 1
The Stoic definition of wisdom ascribed to Chrysippus includes the
notion of right conduct. 2 For Sophocles and Euripides, wisdom beatifies. 3
In the same way, the Latin _sapientia_ bears witness to the beatifying
force of wisdom. Virgil writes: "Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere

1 Pl., Thet. 176 c: "θεος ούδεμιν ούδαμως άδικος, ἀλλ’ ὠς οἶν
τε δικαίωτατος καὶ σὺν ἑστιν αὐτῷ ἀμιστερον οὕδεν ἡ ὅς ἀν
ἡμῶν αἱ γεννησαί στὶ δικαίωτατος. περὶ τοῦτο καὶ ἡ ὡς ἀληθινὸς
dεινότης ἀγάρως καὶ οὐδεμία τε καὶ ἀνανερία, ἡ μὲν γὰρ τοῦτον
γνώσις σοφία καὶ ἀρετή ἀληθινή, ἡ δὲ άγνοια ἀμαθία καὶ κακία
ἐναργής."

2 Chrys. frg. 35.

3 Soph. Ant. 1348-1349:

"πολλῷ τὸ φρονεῖν εὔδαιμονίας
πρῶτον ὑπάρχει."

Eur. Bacch. 72-3:

"μάχαρ δοτις εὔδαιμων
τελετάς θεόν εἰδός
βιοτάν ἄγιστεθείς."
causas."¹ And Cicero asks: "Num humilitas sapientem beatum esse prohibebit?''² The classical notion of σοφία or sapientia, therefore, reveals the close relationship between knowledge and virtue, wisdom and happiness.

For the early Christians, the figure of Christ is conceived both as the person who grants wisdom and the one who personifies it.³ This conception, then, appears in two currents, the notion of wisdom as saving knowledge given by Christ through the Christian revelation and leading to beatification, and secondly, the tendency to consider wisdom as personified in and identified with Christ. The early Christians considered their knowledge of Christ to be a beatifying knowledge, filled with light, understanding and relish. St. Peter alludes to the words of the Psalmist: "Taste and see that the Lord is good,"⁴ and the Epistle to the Hebrews says: "those who have tasted the good word of God."⁵ Clement of Rome also teaches that the Lord wishes to make us taste the knowledge which is immortal.⁶ The second current is seen from the second century when the apologists begin in a more systematic way to identify wisdom with the person of Christ in order to prove his eternity and divinity.⁷ Both currents are seen in Origen.⁸ Among the Latins the

¹Verg. G. 2.490.
²Cic. Tusc. 5.2.
³1 Cor. 1.24; 2.6-10.
⁴1 Petr. 2.3; cf. Ps. 34.8.
⁵Heb. 6.4.
⁶1 Clem. 36.2.
⁷Just. Dial. 61.1; 62.4 etc.
⁸Origen. In Is. hom. 2: In lib. Iesu nave hom. 7.7.
same two currents are evident. St. Hilary, for example, gives a striking example: "Sapientiam quae Christus est, lignum uitae cognominari," and he continues, "in quo comparative beatudinis profectus ostenditur."\(^1\) St. Augustine defines wisdom as: "Sapientia, id est contemplatio veritatis, pacificans totum hominem, susciptiens similitudinem Dei quae ita concluditur,"\(^2\) and he describes the beatifying effect of wisdom: "Beate uiuere ... nihil aliud habere quam nosse."\(^3\)

Lactantius stands at the beginning of this Latin Christian tradition. For him, Christ not only personifies wisdom, "quia ille est et uox et sapientia dei,"\(^4\) but he also breathes wisdom into the soul of man, "Deus ... inspirauit ei sapientiam soli."\(^5\) The theology of Christ conceived as the logos and the personification of divine wisdom has already been treated earlier in this chapter, but it is the second aspect of wisdom, that is, the wisdom of Christ as granted to man that is far more important and central to the teaching of Lactantius.

In the first place, divine wisdom was given as a special gift to man at his generation when God formed him into His own image: "Deus cum formaret hominem ueluti simulacrum suum, quod erat diuini opificii summum, inspirauit ei sapientiam soli."\(^6\) As with knowledge

\(^1\)Hil. Tract. in Psalmos 1.2-3.
\(^2\)Aug. De serm. Domini in monte 1.3.
\(^3\)Aug. De 83 quaest. 35.1-2.
\(^4\)Div. inst. 4.9.1.
\(^5\)De ira Dei 13.13.
\(^6\)De ira Dei 13.13.
this wisdom can be derived not from man who is clothed in a mortal body, but only from God who is incorruptible and immortal: "Non potest autem facere quae deus, quia mortali corpore indutus est, ergo ne intellegere quidem potest quae facit deus."\(^1\) Man can understand not by his own reflection or debate but only by learning and hearing from God: "Homo autem non cogitando aut disputando adsequi eam potest, sed discendo et audiendo ab eo qui scire solus potest et docere."\(^2\) Lactantius calls on his readers to rejoice in this gratuitous divine gift which the philosophers sought for so long and failed to find: "Nobis gratulemur quod veritatem ac sapientiam caelesti beneficio tenemus, quam tot ingeniis, tot aetatibus requisitam philosophiam numquam potuit inuenire."\(^3\)

Wisdom has many qualities: it is reserved to man, it dwells in the soul and it joins knowledge and virtue.\(^4\) Furthermore it consists, "non in sermonis ornatu, sed in corde atque sensu," that is, it is practical and salvific unlike philosophy, "quae ad beatam vitam nihil refert."\(^5\) It is conducive to action, as Cicero says: "Sapientia enim nisi in aliquo actu fuerit quo uim suam exerceat, inanis et falsa est."\(^6\) It must also

\(^1\)Div. inst. 7.2.4.
\(^2\)Div. inst. 7.2.9.
\(^3\)Epit. 35.5.
\(^4\)Div. inst. 3.9.1: "Uenio nunc ad uerae sapientiae summum bonum. Cuius natura hoc modo determinada est, primum ut solius hominis sit nec cadat in ullum aliut animal, deinde ut solius animi nec communicari possit cum corpore, postremo ut non possit cuiquam sine scientia et uirtute contingere."
\(^5\)Epit. 30.5.
\(^6\)Div. inst. 3.16.2; cf. Cic. De or. 1.8.33 sq.; 1.43.44.
be gained quickly because life is short: "Sed sapiendum est et quidem
mature, non enim nobis altera uita conceditur."\(^1\)

Lucretius erred in placing the origin of wisdom in a man, the
first philosopher whom he called a god;\(^2\) Cicero also erred in being a
sceptic and in placing wisdom in a philosophy that did not lead to virtue.\(^3\) Although Seneca saw wisdom in the philosophy of moral living, he erred
too.\(^4\) The great diversity of moral precepts among philosophers causes
confusion and uncertainty.\(^5\) Furthermore, philosophy cannot be wisdom
because confined as it is to a few, it excludes the mass of humanity,
women, slaves and rustics.\(^6\) No, since wisdom must be one in order
to be true, it must reside only in God who is one and true.\(^7\) Wisdom,
then, comes not from philosophy but only from God whose powerful
action cleanses and sanctifies the soul that is open to what, in Lactan-

\(^{1}\text{Div. inst. 3.16.7-8.}\)

\(^{2}\text{Div. inst. 3.14.2; cf. Lucr. 5.6 sq.}\)

\(^{3}\text{Div. inst. 3.14.15: "Tui ergo te libri arguunt, quam nihil a}
philosophia disci possit ad uitam."}\)

\(^{4}\text{Div. inst. 3.15.1; cf. Sen. Exhort. frg. 17.}\)

\(^{5}\text{Div. inst. 3.15.2: "Quid potest esse tam falsum quam regulam}
uitae philosophiam nominari, in qua diuersitas praeceptorum rectum
iter impediat et turbet?"}\)

\(^{6}\text{Div. inst. 3.25.}\)

\(^{7}\text{Div. inst. 3.15.5: "Nam illa terrena quoniam falsa est, uaria}
et multiplex sibique tota contraria est. Et sicut unus est huius mundi
constitutor et rector deus, una ueritas, ita unam esse ac simplicem
sapientiam necesse est, quia quidquid est uerum ac bonum, id
perfectum esse non potest, nisi fuerit singulare."}
tius' theology, is surely divine grace. 1

If, then, wisdom emanates not from man but only from God, what precisely is its nature? It is, according to Lactantius, first the knowledge of God and secondly His worship: "Omnis sapientia hominis in hoc uno est, ut deum cognoscat et colat." 2 The philosophers strove all their lives but failed to attain this wisdom which includes the whole rationale of man's existence:

1 In an eloquent passage Lactantius contrasts the sterility of human philosophy and the efficacy of divine wisdom. *Div. inst.* 3.26: "Quod ergo illi poscente natura faciendum esse senserunt, sed tamen neque ipsi facere potuerunt neque a philosophis fieri posse uiderunt, sola haec efficit doctrina caelestis, quia sola sapientia est. Illi scilicet persuadere cuiquum potuerunt, qui nihil persuadent etiam sibi, aut cuiusquam cupiditates oppriment, iram temperabunt, libidinem cohercebunt, cum ipsi et cedant uitiis et fateantur plus ualere naturam? Dei autem praecepta quia et simplicia et uera sunt, quantum ualeant in animis hominum, cottiudiana experimenta demonstrant. Da mihi uirum qui sit iracundus maledicus effrenatus, paucissimis dei uerbis tam placidum quam ouem reddam. Da cupidum auarum tenacem, iam tibi eum liberalem dabo et pecuniam suam plenis manibus largientem. Da timidum doloris ac mortis, iam cruces et ignes et Perilltaurum contemnet. Da libidinosum adulterum ganeonem, iam sobrium castum continentem uidebis. Da crudelem et sanguinis adpetentem, iam in meram clementiam furor ille mutabitur. Da iniustum insipientem peccatorem, continuo et aequus et prudens et innocens erit: uno enim lauacro malitia omnis abolebitur. Tanta diuinae sapientiae uis est, ut in hominis pectus infusa matrem delictorum stultitiam unD semel inpetu expellat: ad quod efficiendum non mercede, non libris, non lucubrationibus opus est. Gratis ista fiunt, facile, cito, pateant modo aures et pectus sapientiam sittiat. Nemo uereatur: nos aquam non uendimus nec solem mercede praestamus. Dei fons uberrimus atque plenissimus patet cunctis et hoc caeleste lumen uniuersis oritur quicumque oculos habent. Num quis haec philosophorum aut umquam praestitit aut praestare si uelit potest? Qui cum aetates suas in studio philosophiae conterant, neque alium quemquam neque se ipsos, si natura paululum obstitit, possunt facere meliores. Itaque sapientia illorum ut plurimum efficiat, non excindit uitia, sed abscondit. Pauca uero dei praecepta sic totum hominem inmutant et exposito utere nouum reddunt, ut non cognoscas eundem esse."

2 *Div. inst.* 3.30.3.
Quapropter nihil est aliud in uita quo ratio, quo condicio nostra nitatur, nisi dei qui nos genuit agnitione et religiosus ac pius cultus: unde quoniam philosophi aberrauerunt, sapientes utique non fuerunt.  

After stating what is the sum of wisdom, God's knowledge and worship, Lactantius then explains what he means by the first step of wisdom, divine knowledge: "Ergo in dei agnitione et cultu summa uersatur: in hoc est spes omnis ac salus hominis, hic est sapientiae gradus primus, ut sciamus qui sit nobis uerus pater." But besides a knowledge of God himself, divine wisdom, according to Lactantius, also grants a certain earthly knowledge, first of terrestrial activities but secondly and more importantly of good and evil. It is the office of wisdom to discern and distinguish between the good and the evil which is set before every man, and it has discharged its office when the good is chosen and the evil rejected.

The second part of Lactantius' wisdom, as will be explained at length in the next chapter, is the worship of God, cultus dei or religio. It consists of two spiritual activities, first and primarily of donum,

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1 Div. inst. 3.28.1.

2 Div. inst. 6.9.24. The remainder of verse 24 applies to the second part of wisdom, as will be shown shortly.

3 De ira Dei 13.13-15: "Deus cum formaret hominem ueluti simulacrum suum, quod erat divini opificii summum, inspiravit ei sapientiam soli, ut omnia imperio ac dicioni suae subiugaret omnibus-que mundi commodis uteretur. Proposuit tamen ei et bona et mala, quia sapientiam dedit, cuius omnis ratio in discernendis bonis ac malis sita est. Non potest enim quisquam eligere meliora et scire quod bonum sit, nisi sciat simul reicere ac uitate quae mala sunt. Inuicem sibi alterutra conexa sunt, ut sublato alterutro utrumque sit tolli necesse. Propositis igitur bonis malisque tum demum suum peragit sapientia et quidem bonum adpetit ad utilitatem, malum reicit ad salutem."
that is, a virtuous life, integritas uitae, and secondly of sacrificium, that is, laus et hymnus.¹ This worship of God, "deum uere colere,"² is owed to God because He has bestowed reason on man. Consequently, man's every action, every concern should be directed to God in order to serve and please Him with obedience and loyalty.³

There is, indeed, only one hope in life for man,⁴ and that is the rejection of false religion and false philosophy and the following of true wisdom, the knowledge and worship of God. By accepting and following this true wisdom, that is, Christianity, man will merit eternal life.⁵

According to Lactantius, when man accepts the wisdom of Christianity, he unites philosophy and religion. While philosophy is false because it has no religion, and religion because it has no philosophy, Christianity is true because it succeeds in combining the two and in producing a wise religion and a religious wisdom:

Illis autem, quia uera non sunt, nulla concordia: neque in philosophia sacra celebrantur neque in sacris philosophia tractatur, et ideo falsa religio est, quia non habet sapientiam, ideo falsa sapientia, quia non habet religionem. Ubi autem utraque conjuncta sunt,

¹Div. inst. 6.25.7.
²Epit. 36.2.
³Div. inst. 6.9.24: "Eumque solum pietate debita prosequamur, huic pareamus, huic deuotissime seruiamus, in eo promerendo actus omnis et cura et opera collocetur."
⁴Epit. 47.1: "Una spes hominibus uitae est, unus portus salutis, unum refugium libertatis."
⁵Epit. 47.2: "Uera sapientia id est religione suscepta fiant immortalitatis heredes."
ibi esse ueritatem necesse est, ut si quaeratur ipsa ueritas quid sit, recte dici possit aut sapiens religio aut religiosa sapientia. 1

This is the very heart of Lactantius' doctrine. The failure of philosophy because it has no religion and of religion because it has no philosophy is swallowed up in Christianity, the religious philosophy and the wise religion. Christianity is a religion that is wise, he says, because it knows the proper object of its worship; it is a wisdom that is religious because its knowledge is completed by deed and action:

Ubi autem sapientia cum religione inseparabili nexu cohaeret, utrumque esse uerum necesse est, quia et in colendo sapere debemus, id est scire quid nobis et quomodo sit colendum, et in sapiendo colere id est re et actu quod scierimus implere. 2

It effects this union between philosophy and religion by worshipping the one God and by referring all life and action to him, the one supreme authority: "Ubi ergo sapientia cum religione coniungitur? Ibi scilicet ubi deus colitur unus, ubi uita et actus omnis ad unum caput et ad unam summam refertur." 3

Lactantius explains the nature of this inseparable relation of wisdom and religion in Christianity even more basically by associating both with his most fundamental theological tenet, the notion of God as pater et dominus. We worship God as Father, he says, through wisdom

1Epit. 36.4-5.
2Div. inst. 4.3.6.
3Div. inst. 4.3.7. As a corollary, Lactantius identifies in Christianity philosophers and priests, a common medieval conception: "Denique idem sunt doctores sapientiae qui et dei sacerdotes."
because we are sons; as Lord through religion because we are servants. Wisdom or divine knowledge comes first; religion or virtuous action follows. They are one because both knowledge and action refer to the same God, the first to the understanding of Him, the second to His worship. Those who do not accept this can be neither wise nor religious. Philosophy is like a disinherited son, polytheism like a runaway slave. One rejects his father, the other his master. Philosophers and polytheists will be punished because the former did not accept God as father and the latter did not accept God as master, whereas the Christians who are both wise and religious will attain the reward of the heavenly kingdom.  

The way of wisdom may have the appearance of folly, but the wise man is happy to suffer in order to obtain virtue and ultimately the reward of virtue, immortality in heaven.  

The wisdom of Lactantius, then, like the wisdom of other early Christian writers, includes the theology both of the logos and, more importantly, of the saving divine presence in the minds, hearts and actions of men. Not only does Christ personify the wisdom of God: "Ille est sapientia dei," but He also breathes heavenly wisdom into 

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1 Div. inst. 4.4.1-6.
2 Div. inst. 6.7.
3 Div. inst. 3.27.12-13: "Beatus est igitur sapiens in tormentis: sed cum torquetur pro fide, pro iustitia, pro deo, illa patientia doloris beatissimum faciet. Est enim deus qui solus potest honorare uirtutem, cuius merces inmortalitas sola est."
4 Div. inst. 4.9.1.
the soul of man: "Inspirauit ei sapientiam." ¹ In Lactantius' view, this wisdom is two-fold, the knowledge of God and the worship of God. For him, knowledge means the acceptance of God as father, and worship means the service of Him as master. Thus the speculative aspect of wisdom is joined to the ethical through the acknowledgment and service of God, the same father and lord, pater et dominus. Wisdom and religion are now inseparably joined, not in philosophy, not in polytheism, but in Christianity, the wise religion and religious wisdom, religiosa sapientia and sapiens religio. ² This is Lactantius' apostolic message, his Christian magisterium. Paganism tried to gain wisdom through mythology or through philosophy, but it failed, says Lactantius, because its religion lacked an intellectual value and its philosophy a moral consistency. It was a religion, that is, a mythology, without wisdom, and a philosophy without religion, that is, morality. ³ For Lactantius Christianity alone enjoys the union of philosophy and religion.

This is the main thesis of Lactantius. It is, of course, too simple, and it is also ultimately unfair both to paganism and to Christianity. It highlights rather superficially what Lactantius considered the errors of paganism, while at the same time, by calling Christianity a religious philosophy, it neglects its supernatural character. However, it epitomizes the belief of Lactantius, namely, that Christianity through this union becomes the real wisdom, the true magisterium.

¹De ira Dei 13.13.
²Epit. 36.5.
³Div. inst. 4.3.1-5.
CHAPTER V

THE ETHICS OF LACTANTIUS' MAGISTERIUM

THEOLOGICAL BASIS OF LACTANTIUS' ETHICS

Existence of God

To Lactantius Christian morality does not oppose that of the pagan moral philosophers: it harmonizes with and completes it.\(^1\) Christianity, however, first establishes as morality's solid base the existence of God, and as its sovereign good, religion, without which morality is like a body without a head,\(^2\) but once so fortified, morality has nothing to fear; it can then borrow freely any truth the philosophers may offer.\(^3\) Sensible, Lactantius thinks, are the words of Cicero who says that the man who follows nature cannot harm his fellow man;\(^4\) so are the reflections of Seneca on the omniscience of God,\(^5\) and the words of Plato on true worship which is both interior and moral.\(^6\) Acceptable too is a verse

\(^{1}\) Lactantius differs from the other apologists in that he is less severe in his judgment of pagan morality. However, even they are generally not violent in their criticism, but simply point to the decalogue or to Christ as the true morality. Thphl. Autol. 3.9; Just. I Apol. 14.1-4.

\(^{2}\) Div. inst. 6.9.9.

\(^{3}\) Div. inst. 6.2.16-17.

\(^{4}\) Div. inst. 6.11.2; cf. Cic. Off. 3.5.25.


\(^{6}\) Div. inst. 6.25.1 sq.; cf. Pl. Leg. 956 a.
from the generally impious Lucretius on the fraternity of man.¹

Yet for all its virtues Lactantius considers the morality of the philosophers too naturalistic. He feels that it tends to neglect God and therefore to pervert the notion of virtue.² In fact, he criticizes not only the Epicureans who, he feels, render the life of man superuacua because of their atheism, but he even blames Cicero for his errors and contradictions.³ Maintaining that Cicero obtained the matter for his De officiis from Lucilius,⁴ he attacks the latter's verse definition of morality on three grounds: that it neglects the faculty of the will by claiming that virtue resides only in knowledge; that it is too idealistic by advising complete restraint in the pursuit of worldly goods; and lastly that it is incomplete by advocating patriotism—which presupposes discord among nations—as the pre-eminent virtue.⁵

Lactantius also criticizes 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

¹Div. inst. 6.10.7; Lucr. 2.991: "Denique caelesti sumus omnes semine oriundi." Consequently, says Pichon, Lactance, p. 132: "Il (Lactance) est souvent plus près du De officiis ou du De beneficiis, que des petits traités de Tertullien et de saint Cyprien."

²Div. inst. 6.5.1. Lactantius' criticism of pagan morality is always conditioned by his concept of God, which, though classical in origin, has a distinctively Christian meaning and importance.

³Div. inst. 6.5.4: "Haec quam falsa sint mox uidebimus."

⁴Div. inst. 6.5.3-4; cf. Lucil. frg. 1.

⁵"Commoda praeterea patriai prima putare." Div. inst. 6.5 and 6.
through sin, the other, to happiness through virtue. Lactantius admits that the pagan interpretation is ingenious, but he feels also that it is erroneous since it represents both roads as terrestrial. The Two Ways begin, indeed, in this life, but they do not end with death but continue eternally in the next. The way of virtue is presided over by Christ, dux immortalis, the way of wickedness, by Satan, adversarius Dei. He then submits his own illustration of the Two Ways with the analogy of the rising of the sun, that is, virtue, and its setting, that is, sin: "Quid enim opus est Y littera in rebus contrariis atque diversis? Sed altera illa melior conversa est ad solis ortum, altera illa deterior ad occasum." In the next chapter he presents another striking analogy, a long comparison between Christian and military life.

1 Div. inst. 6.3.9.

2 In classical literature 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 arising from this allegory had been 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 1.5, which holds that the Two Ways are the essence of Christian doctrine. For apologetic use, cf. Just. I Apol. 49.5; II Apol. 7.5-6.

3 Div. inst. 6.3.17.

4 Div. inst. 6.4.14-17: "Itaque cum simul proposita sunt homini bona et mala, considerare unum quemque secum decet quantum satius sit perpetuis bonis mala breuia pensare quam pro breuius et caducis bonis mala perpetua sustinere. Nam sicut in hoc saeculo cum est propositum cum hoste certamen, prius laborandum est, ut sis postmodum in otio, esuriendum sitiendum, aestus frigora perferenda, humi quiescendum uigilandum periclitandum est.... Sin autem praesens otium malueris quam laborem, malum tibi maximum facias necesse est.... Sic in omni hac uita, quia nobis adversarium deus reservauit, ut possemus capere uirtutem, omittenda est praesens uoluptas, ne hostis opprimat, uigilandum, stationes agendae, militares expeditiones obendae, fundendus ad ultimum cruar, omnia denique amara et grauia patienter ferenda, eo quidem promptius, quod nobis imperator noster deus praemia pro laboribus aeterna constituit."
It is true, he says, that the doctrine of the Two Ways and similar notions influenced the pagan man of good will, but Christian morality undertakes to set man on the road to perfection by introducing him to a higher and purer wisdom.\(^1\) This the pagans did not understand, but spelled out it means that God dominates all things. He is the source of all goodness and truth, and His supreme law defines all other law and gives meaning to all virtue.\(^2\) Virtue without piety has no meaning, nor has its converse, piety or religion without morality.\(^3\) Consequently, for Lactantius morality and religion are as indissolubly linked as the head and body of the human organism.\(^4\)

**Dualism**

The second theological basis for the ethics of Lactantius lies in the doctrine of dualism which permeates all his writings.

After God had begotten His Son, Lactantius contends that He then created another Spirit endowed with virtues and powers like the Son, but who, unlike the Son, did not persevere in the innocent state in which he had been created.\(^5\) This Spirit, which he calls \(\text{oiv}\) \(\text{b}\) o\(\text{l}\)o\(\text{c}\)

\(^1\)Div. inst. 6.2.16.

\(^2\)Div. inst. 6.17.29: "Qui autem deum colit, haec patitur nec timet: ergo iustus est. His rebus efficitur ut neque uirtutes neque uirtutum exactissimos limites nosse aut tenere possit omnino quisquis est a religione dei singularis alienus."

\(^3\)Div. inst. 5.9.21: "Omni populo... cuius omnis religio est sine scelere ac sine macula uiuere."

\(^4\)Div. inst. 6.9.9-10.

\(^5\)Div. inst. 2.8.4: "Deinde fecit alterum, in quo indoles diuinae stirpis non permansit. Itaque suapte inuidia tamquam ueneno infectus est et ex bono ad malum transcendit suoque arbitrio, quod illi a deo liberum fuerat datum, contrarium sibi nomen adscivit."
or criminator, sinned through envy of the Son, his antecessor, and henceforth became the source of evil in the world: "Unde apparat cunctorum malorum fontem esse liuorem." However, just as the contrary 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, concludes Lactantius, was necessary for the existence of good, "ut posset esse uirtus." 

Is God, then, the ultimate author of evil? As this is impossible, Lactantius tries to explain the existence of evil, not as many later Christian theologians did through the consequent and permissive will of God, but through his antecedent and absolute will:

Illum constituit malorum inuentorem, quem cum faceret dedit illi ad mala excogitanda ingenium et astutiam, ut in eo esset et uoluntas praua et perfecta nequitia.

Thus, according to Lactantius, God does not commit sin but He seems to will it in order to effect virtue. 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

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1Div. inst. 2.8.5.
2Div. inst. 2.8.6; 5.7; 6.15 etc.
3Div. inst. 2.8.7: "Fas non erat ut a deo proficisceretur malum."
4Div. inst. 2.8.7.
5This explanation has the merit, if not of satisfying the intellect of his pagan and Christian readers, perhaps of dramatizing the power of evil in its role as the brachium sinistrum of God.
polytheism. Lactantius also associates these fallen angels, whom he calls daemones, with what the Greeks call guardian spirits, δαίμονες.

He recalls both Hesiod and Socrates:

Hi sunt daemones, de quibus poetae saepe in carminibus suis locuntur, quos custodes hominum appellat Hesiodus. Ita enim persuaserunt hominibus inlecebris atque fallaciis suis, ut eosdem deos esse crederent. Denique Socrates habere se a prima pueritia custodem rectoremque uitae suae daemonem praedicabat, sine cuius nutu et imperio nihil agere posset. 2

They are also the spirits who frequent houses and temples, that is, the Penates and Lares, the spirits who initiated astrology, augury and divination in order to deceive and injure men. 3 Because they possess some knowledge of future events, they mix truth with falsehood, 4 but they exert no power over men of faith whose protection is piety and the cross of Christ. 6 God's purpose in providing men with an adversary is that he may practise virtue in this life and so ultimately gain an eternal reward in heaven. 7 Lactantius' theory that evil exists to exercise and perfect virtue is distinctly Stoic, and the influence of

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1 Div. inst. 2.17; Epit. 22. Lactantius is not original in this. Most apologists held that man's evil was caused by the wicked daemones. e.g., Just. I Apol. 5.2; II Apol. 5.3 sq., 7.2 sq.

2 Epit. 23.1 and 2; cf. p. 116, ftnt. 3.

3 Epit. 23.3 sq.

4 Div. inst. 2.16.

5 Div. inst. 2.15.

6 Div. inst. 4.27.

7 Div. inst. 2.17; 6.4.
Seneca on this point has already been mentioned in chapter II. This theory explains not only why the good suffer evil and the wicked enjoy benefits,¹ but why the presence of evil is a very necessity for the exercise of virtue.²

The fundamental concept underlying Lactantius' theory of evil, however, is what is known as dualism, that is, there exists a basic opposition between sense and spirit.³ Lactantius' dualism has immense significance in his Christian magisterium for, as will be shown shortly, it shapes not only his concept of man but also his entire theory of the practice of virtue, and for Lactantius virtuous living is the main constituent of Christian wisdom. In the Christian era dualism was often expressed in an exaggerated form in Manicheanism, which consisted in two omnipotent and independent principles, good and evil. Lactantius veered towards Manicheanism but was saved from it by placing the creation of evil in the hands of God. According to the dualism of Lactantius, as was shown in the previous chapter, man is composed of two substances equally opposed to each other, soul and body. For him the soul is immortal and good, the body temporal and evil.⁴ The soul is light and life, the body, darkness and death. Goodness springs from the soul, evil and sin from the body.⁵ As knowledge comes from the soul and ignorance

¹ Div. inst. 5.22. and 23.
² Div. inst. 6.15.
³ Most apologists also held dualism. cf. chapter IV, p. 161, ftnt. 3.
⁴ Div. inst. 7.11.
⁵ De ira Dei 15.3.
from the body, it is man's body which prevents the mind from grasping the truth: "Mens hominis, tenebroso corporis domicilio circumsaepta a veri perceptione submota est." ¹ Thus since the body of man is worthless it must be trampled upon—calcare—in order to see the truth and gain eternal life. ² Christ, however, intervenes and saves sinful flesh from destruction by Himself becoming holy flesh: "caro sancta, ut per eum caro, quae subiecta peccato fuerit, ab interitu liberaretur." ³

**Evil and virtue**

As a result of this sinfulness of man's body and the attacks of the evil spirits, evil, both physical and moral, is visited upon mankind. Evil is necessary, however, contends Lactantius, for the very existence and exercise of virtue: "Uirtus enim per mala et probatur et constat." ⁴ It is necessary for the exercise not only of virtue but also of the wisdom and rationality of man. No one can choose what is better and know what is good unless beforehand he knows what is evil: "Itaque nisi prius malum agnouerimus, nec bonum poterimus agnoscere." ⁵ Wisdom performs its duty if it chooses the good and rejects the evil, but if evil is removed, wisdom and virtue also disappear. Evil also exists to

¹ *De ira Dei* 1.4.
² *De opif. Dei* 19.9 and 10.
³ *Epit.* 38.9.
⁴ *De ira Dei* 20.2.
⁵ *De ira Dei* 3.23.
balance good, that is, so that virtue may be opposed by vice and that God may punish some and honour others. ¹ The Christian persecutions, which Lactantius describes in the fifth book of the Divine Institutes as well as the entire De mortibus, ² are caused by the hatred of the devils who take over and pervert the minds of the persecutors. Their purpose, however, is to exercise virtue, that is, to make man patient, keep him innocent and chastise him for his faults.³ Suffering reveals the true disciple, the soldier of Christ: "Hoc est esse discipulum dei, hoc est militem Christi." ⁴

Virtue, then, consists in bearing with evil: "Cuius ratio in sustinenda et superanda malorum acerbitate consistit." ⁵ There can be no virtue without the trial of evil. Paraphrasing the Stoic Chrysippus, Lactantius argues that since good and evil are contraries, if vice is removed, the merits of virtue will also be taken away. How can there be any perception of justice unless there first be injustice? What else is justice but the removal of injustice? ⁶ Virtue cannot be gained without the greatest labor and suffering.⁷ And by means of this asceticism and

¹Div. inst. 2.17.
²Div. inst. 5.9; 11-14; 20; 22-24.
³Div. inst. 5.23.
⁴De mort. pers. 16.9.
⁵De ira Dei 13.24.
⁷Div. inst. 3.8. cf. also Cyprian Demetr. 26.
suffering the practice of further virtue is rendered easier.  

There are three steps in the ladder to virtue, Lactantius says, abstaining first from evil works, then from evil words and finally from evil thoughts. Lactantius elaborates this profound aspect of his magisterium, saying that the difficult ascent to virtue is achieved primarily by the practice of piety which renders a man completely just, indeed almost enables him to attain the likeness of God. But there is danger that virtue carried to excess will deteriorate into vice. Referring explicitly to the Stoics, he says: "Quod haec quae sunt bona fines suos habent. Quos si exesserint, in uitia labuntur, ita ut constantia nisi pro ueritate suscepta sit, fit inpudentia." Virtue alone, then, is not sufficient. Wisdom, the highest good, requires both virtue and the knowledge of God: "Uirtus autem cum scientia coniuncta sapientia est." As was noted earlier, Cimon of Athens who had virtue, but no knowledge of God, was like a body without a head. Virtue should be practised to please not men but only God, for it is only in God that virtue takes its source and validity. Furthermore, true religion or worship consists mainly, according to Lactantius, in the virtuous life: "Haec est religio caelestis, non

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1 Epit. 59.1: "Superatis autem affectibus et perdomitis voluptatibus facilis in conprimendis ceteris labor est ei qui sit dei ueritatisque sectator."

2 Div. inst. 6.13.

3 Div. inst. 6.14.3; cf. Cic. Tusc. 4.6.11.

4 Div. inst. 3.8.31.

5 Div. inst. 6.9.

6 Div. inst. 6.18.
Thus for Lactantius virtue and religion are synonymous. The reward for the faithful practice of this difficult virtue is eternal life. Quoting Terence, Lactantius states that all sufferings must be manfully endured for the sake of the divine reward:

"Molendum esse usque in pistrino, uapulandum, habendae compedes." Sed his multo atrociors, carcer catenae tormenta patienda, sustinendi dolores, mors denique ipsa et suscipienda est et ferenda, cum liqueat conscientiae nostrae nec fragilem istam voluptatem sine poena nec uirtutem sine diuino praemio fore. 2

Anger and punishment of God

It has been shown that in Lactantius' theology evil is necessary for the practice of virtue. What heightens even more strongly the importance of dualism in Lactantius' magisterium is a corollary to this notion, namely, that God who rewards the good must also punish the evil. To establish this, Lactantius composed two books, De ira Dei and De mortibus persecutorum. The first outlines the theory of divine anger, the second records its execution on the persecutors of Christianity. The notion of God's anger, which is treated in these two books in a manner that is distinctive to Lactantius, is a counterpart to the concept of providence of God discussed in the De opificio Dei and Divine Institutes. It is fundamental to Lactantius' theology: if God is pleased

1 Div. inst. 6.2.13. This notion will be treated at greater length later in the chapter in the section on the worship of God.

2 Div. inst. 7.27.3; cf. Ter. Phorm. 2.1.19.
with goodness, then He must be displeased with wickedness. Lactantius considers it essential to religion, for without it there exists no punishment for evil, no reward for good, indeed, no God: "Sine ira deum credentes dissolunt omnem religionem."¹

With the title taken from the De ira of Seneca, Lactantius’ De ira Dei begins by placing the notion of God’s anger in the author’s scheme of knowledge. The book is to be concerned, he says, with the second step, that is, man’s knowledge of the one God since the anger of God is a divine attribute flowing from that knowledge.² No philosopher, Lactantius continues, ever claimed that God possesses only the attribute of anger and not of kindness. His book is directed against the Epicureans who denied both anger and kindness in the gods, and, in fact, all other divine attributes including providence,³ and also against the Stoics who accepted the divine goodness but denied God’s anger because anger is unbecoming both to God and to man.⁴ Lactantius vigorously rejects both positions. If you love, you hate, he says, and if you do not hate, you do not love. The source is the same for both: love of the good necessarily includes the hatred of evil, and so anger results.⁵ Since God is moved by kindness, He must also be moved by

¹ De ira Dei 22.2.
² De ira Dei 2.
³ De ira Dei 4; cf. Epic. frg. 243; Cic. Nat. d. 1.17.45.
⁴ De ira Dei 5; cf. Sen. De ira 1.1.4; 1.2.1 sq.
⁵ De ira Dei 4 and 5.
anger. If there is no divine anger, as the Epicureans and Stoics say, then there is no religion because the absence of the fear of God in man leads to immorality and the rejection of religion. Without God's anger and the consequent absence of fear in man, there can be no religion because His anger is the "summa et cardo omnis religionis et pietatis,"¹ and if there is no religion, then wisdom and justice will also disappear because conjecture would replace wisdom, and immorality the fear of God and justice.²

Although evil has a necessary purpose, to prove virtue, and indeed good cannot exist without it, God, because of His goodness, also prohibits and hates evil. Just as kindness befits God in order to reward goodness, Lactantius continues, so does anger befit Him in order to punish crime. If God has omnipotent power and consequently a care and concern for the world, is it not reasonable for Him to be angry if the divine laws are broken? Like the anger of the head of a household God's anger is reasonable and just, for by His punishment discipline is preserved, morals corrected and licentiousness suppressed. The commission of crime must arouse anger. Otherwise tacit approval or indifference is revealed. However, he cautions, since many indulge in unjust anger, the delay of punishment is often desirable.³ Anger in man is natural but ought to be short-lived. The anger of God is natural

¹De ira Dei 6.2.
²De ira Dei 8 and 12.
³De ira Dei 15-18.
too but is persistent only against him who perseveres in sin. Though
sinners may prosper for a time, no one ultimately escapes God's judg-
ment: "Nec tamen ille qui peccat sperare debet perpetuam inpunitatem,
quia nulla est perpetua felicitas."1 God, however, is indulgent and is
appeased by the repentant sinner: "Et qui peccare desinit, iram dei
mortalem facit."2 Keeping in mind that the reward for goodness is
eternal life and for evil eternal death, man, Lactantius concludes,
should live to win God's friendship and so never fear his anger: "ut
et propitium semper habeamus et numquam uereamur ratum."3

The De mortibus persecutorum describes the horrors of the
divine anger visited upon the emperors who persecuted Christianity.
Though God may delay punishment, when it comes it serves only to
reinforce the rigour of His justice and anger.4 In the course of its
brief fifty-two chapters in which he describes the execution even in
this life of this avenging justice on the long line of emperors who
persecuted Christianity, Lactantius completes in a concrete way the

1De ira Dei 20.1-2.
2De ira Dei 21.10.
3De ira Dei 24.15.
4De mort. pers. 1.6: "Distulerat enim poenas eorum deus, ut
ederet in eos magna et mirabilia exempla, quibus posteri discerent et
deum esse unum et eundem iudicem digna uidelicet supplicia impiis ac
persecutoribus inrogare." The notion of divine retribution in this life
is common both in classical and Christian literature. By defying
heaven and opposing its will, the θεομαχος brought terrible punish-
ment both on himself and his goods. cf. the alleged suicide of Pontius
Pilate in Eusebius H.E. 2.7; or the ignominious deaths of the persecut-
ing emperors in Jerome: "quod contabuerint carnes eorum et oculi
comptruerint." Ieron. Comm. in Zach. 49.5.
theoretical notion of divine anger outlined in the De ira Dei. The anger of God, then, is essential to Lactantius' theology of virtue: if God is pleased with and rewards the actions of the just, it follows that He must be angry with and punish the actions of the wicked.

**Example of Christ**

The third notion that serves as the theological basis for the ethics of Lactantius is the example of man's supreme guide and pedagogue, Christ. In Book Four of the *Divine Institutes* Lactantius attempts to show that the miracles of Christ not only prove that He is divine but they also serve a further function, to express a meaning that is both symbolic and practical. Jesus gave sight to the blind, but this also means that all nations are now to see the light; He restored hearing to the deaf, but this means that all will hear the truth; He caused the mute to speak: this means too that all men will speak His truth; He cured the lepers: this means that sinners are to be cleansed of their crimes; He raised the dead: this foretells the awakening of the infidels to the religion of Christ.¹ Christ, then, is the perfect teacher who has a lesson for man by all His actions. However, He is not only the great teacher of wisdom, but also the model of virtue who alone can raise man to God because He unites both God and man in Himself.² Although man has still to suffer in this life, he always has the example of Christ before him. In his weakness man needs an example; no sys-

¹ *Div. inst.* 4.26.4 sq.

² *Div. inst.* 4.25.5.
tem of teaching is perfect unless it is completed by deeds. Since Christ is the perfect teacher, it is appropriate that He should act as well as teach. Thus it was that to provide an example and inspiration for men Christ assumed flesh and spent His life in the practice of virtue. \(^1\) To practise virtue and so offer man a perfect example, Christ had to become man, and yet being God as well, the authority of His teaching is stronger. \(^2\) Thus being both God and man, Christ is the perfect mediator between man and God. As a result, by the example of His virtue which He practises through His humanity, and by the authority of His teaching which He exercises through His divinity, Christ will help man overcome his flesh and so draw his spirit to immortality. \(^3\)

Indeed there is no hope for man unless he follows this incarnate wisdom, "nisi ueram religionem ueramque sapientiam, quae in Christo est, fuerit secutus."\(^4\)

Revealing a predilection for the classical writers even to the final chapter of the **Divine Institutes**, in a last tribute to Christ, his model and guide, Lactantius applies 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:

\[
\text{Ueridicis hominum purgauit pectora dictis}
\text{et finem statuit cuppedinis atque timoris}
\text{exposuit bonum summum, quo tendimus omnes,}
\]

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\(^1\) Epit. 45.

\(^2\) Div. inst. 4.24.

\(^3\) Div. inst. 4.25.

\(^4\) Epit. 44.1.
Lactantius presents the highest Christian ideal, the following of Christ, teacher and guide, and then, more pointedly and more successfully than any other Christian apologist, he immediately confirms this ideal with a citation from the pagan Lucretius. Thus Lactantius offers still another aspect of his Christian magisterium, the imitation of Christ, by combining once again Christian and pagan elements.

JUSTICE IN LACTANTIUS

Both classical and early Christian philosophers gave to justice a pre-eminence over all other virtues. Cicero, for example, called justice the mistress and queen of the virtues, "domina et regina virtutum," and the highest ideal of the moral life: "Omnium quae in doctorum hominum disputatione versantur, nihil est profecto praestabilius quam plane intellegi nos ad iustitiam natos." In his magisterium Lactantius also considers justice the highest virtue: "Summa uirtus aut fons est ipsa uirtutis", "uirtutum omnium mater." For him it embraces

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1 Div. inst. 7.27.6; cf. Lucr. 6.24-28.
2 Cic. Off. 3.28.
3 Cic. Leg. 1.28; cf. also Pl. Resp. 4.443 c-e; Arist. Eth. Nic. 5.3 and 5.
4 Div. inst. 5.5.1. For a discussion of the romanitas of justice in Lactantius, cf. p. 218 sq.
5 Div. inst. 3.22.5.
all other virtues: "Iustitia ... omnes simul uirtutes amplectatur,"¹ and it feeds and sustains the soul: "Animae materia et cibus est sola iustitia."² It incorporates the ideal for which men were born, "hominem autem non nisi ad iustitiam nasci,"³ and establishes the royal road by which men gain eternal life, "iustitiae uiam, qua gradiens homo ... ad uitam aeternam perueniret."⁴

More specifically, the notion of justice in Lactantius consists of two virtues, the worship of God and the love of one's fellow man: "Deum scilicet honorare tamquam patrem, hominem diligere uelut fratrem: in his enim duobus tota iustitia consistit."⁵ These two virtues, piety and equity, pietas et aequitas, or religion and righteousness, religio et humanitas, are the inseparable veins or fountains of justice. Piety, the worship of God, is the source and origin, caput eius et origo, and equity, se cum ceteris coaequandi, its force and method, uis et ratio.⁶

¹ Div. inst. 5.14.9.
³ Div. inst. 6.25.9.
⁴ Div. inst. 4.26.25.
⁵ De ira Dei 14.5.
⁶ Div. inst. 5.14.9-12; 15-16: "Iustitia quamuis omnes simul uirtutes amplectatur, tamen duae sunt omnium principales quae ab ea diuellir separarique non possunt, pietas et aequitas. Nam fides temperantia probitas innocentia integritas et cetera eiusmodi uel natura uel institutis parentum possunt esse in iis hominibus qui iustitiam nesciunt, sicuti semper fuerunt: nam Romani ueteres, qui iustitia gloriari solebant, iis utique uirtutibus gloriantur quae, ut dixi, proficisci a iustitia possunt et ab ipso fonte secerni. Pietas uero et aequitas quasi uenae sunt eius, his enim duobus fontibus constat tota iustitia: sed caput eius et origo in illo primo est, in secundo uis omnis ac ratio. Pietas autem nihil aliut est quam dei notio, sicut Trismegistus uerissime definiuit, ut alio loco diximus. Si ergo pietas est cognoscere deum cuius cognitionis haec summa est ut colas, ignorant utique iustitiam qui religionem dei non tenet. ... Altera est iustitiae.
The first duty of justice is to be united with God, the second with man. The first, justice to God, is called religion, religio, the second, justice to man, is called righteousness or kindness, humanitas uel misericordia. The latter stems from the former and consists in doing good to our fellow man, assisting him in his need and affliction.\(^1\)

In order to help form his own Christian concept of justice, Lactantius uses the famous dilemma of Carneades concerning justice and wisdom. Carneades argues that justice interferes not only with the interests but even with the safety of man. He presents two contradictions: in the selling of a wicked slave or an unhealthy house, the wise man will conceal the faults, while the just man will reveal them and thus suffer a loss; more seriously, if in a storm there is a plank that can carry the weight of only one man, the wise man will save himself at the expense of the other, while the just man will prefer to die.\(^2\)

\(\text{pars aequitas: aequitatem dico non utique bene iudicandi, quod et ipsum laudabile est in homine justo, sed se cum ceteris coaequandi, quam Cicero aequabilitatem uocat. Deus enim, qui homines et generat et inspirat, omnes aequos id est pares esse uluit, eandem condicionem uiuendi omnibus posuit, omnes ad sapientiam genuit, omnibus immortalitatem spopondit: nemo a beneficiis eius caelestibus segregatur.}^{\text{cf. Off. 1.25.88; De or. 1.42.188; 2.52.209. The association of justice with piety, pietas-justitia, εὐδαιμονία-δικαιοσύνη, was common in classical literature. cf. Pl. Euthphr. 12 c-e; Xenoph. Mem. 4.8.11; Cic. Nat. d. 2.153; Sen. Ep. 90.3.}}\)

\(\text{1Div. inst. 6.10.2; 8-9: "Sed tamen primum iustitiae officium est coniungi cum deo, secundum cum homine. Set illut primum religio dicitur, hoc secundum misericordia uel humanitas nominatur.\ldots\ Ob hanc necessitudinem germanitas docet nos deus malum numquam facere, semper bonum. Id autem ipsum bene facere quid sit, idem ipse prae-scribit: praestare auxilium depressis et laborantibus, inpertiri uictum non habentibus."}\)

\(\text{2Div. inst. 5.14 and 16. This passage probably comes from the lost pages of Philus' report of the defence of injustice made by Carneades in Cicero's De republica 3.19.29 sq. cf. C.W. Keyes (Loeb), p. 209.}\)
Lactantius is shocked at Carneades' immorality, but he suggests that perhaps the case was a typical trick of the Sceptics to point out the uncertainty that exists in all intellectual questions.\(^1\) Even the solution of Cicero is unsatisfactory.\(^2\) He really misses the point, claims Lactantius; besides, he frequently contradicts himself. From the human point of view, Lactantius admits, Carneades was right in judging the honest man foolish.\(^3\) However, the practical judgment of the philosopher is not wisdom but astuteness since wisdom does 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. Being outside a religious context, the pagan philosophers were incapable of formulating a true and complete concept of justice.\(^4\)

Justice, then, has no human origin. It cannot emanate basically from human laws because they rest on self-interest,\(^5\) and are to be obeyed not through a sense of duty but of fear. Human laws, Lactantius continues, possess only a relative and changing authority,\(^6\) and, indeed, give authorization to much injustice and crime. In fact, all the injustice in the world's history stems from this concept of justice which lacks a religious orientation.

\(^1\) Div. inst. 5.17.9.

\(^2\) Div. inst. 5.18; cf. Cic. Rep. 3.28.40.

\(^3\) Div. inst. 5.14.2.

\(^4\) Div. inst. 5.18.1.

\(^5\) Div. inst. 5.9.2 sq.

\(^6\) Div. inst. 6.9.6 sq.
In this context of religion, Lactantius outlines the history of the justice of mankind. First there was the era of the reign of Saturn, the Golden Age, the age of innocence and monotheism.\footnote{Div. inst. 5.5.} 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.\footnote{Though Lactantius obtained this description from the classical authors, e.g., Cicero, Virgil and Ovid, his explanation that the world's evil and injustice began with the loss of monotheism was a novelty which had escaped earlier Christian writers.}

The remedy for this reign of injustice is simple, a return both to the worship of the one God, common Father of humanity, and to the simple life of purity and frugality.\footnote{Div. inst. 5.5.5.} If all men are sons of the same Father and all are called to an eternal life with Him, then all are equal in this life, all are brothers in His sight.\footnote{Div. inst. 5.14.16.} Slave and master, rich and poor no longer exist. This external equality, however, has to be accompanied by the internal virtue of humility, that is, the interior recognition of the equality of one's fellow man. 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 will disappear.\footnote{Div. inst. 5.8.6 sq.}

Then man will recover his state of pristine innocence and live out his days in a new Golden Age. Thus the cycle of human justice is complete.
The primeval age of monotheism, innocence and justice will be again recaptured with the advent of Christ and complete Christianity.\(^1\) Christian justice, however, stands as a reproach to the pagans and what often results is a persecution of the Christians.\(^2\) During persecution it must appear foolish to pagans when Christians prefer death to the worship of idols. Christian justice is indeed folly unless those who have refused neither torture nor death for the sake of the worship and honour of the true God, finally obtain the reward of eternal life.\(^3\)

**Worship of God**

Justice in Lactantius, as has been said,\(^4\) consists of two parts, the worship of God and the love of man. Man's first duty is to acknowledge God as a parent, to fear Him as a master and to love Him as a father; his second duty, which follows from the first, is to acknowledge man as a brother since God made all men equal.\(^5\) The first and inalterable law of man is the worship of God.\(^6\) This consists in the offering to

\(^1\)In this broad and optimistic view of human history Lactantius was concerned with the practical rather than with the metaphysical order, and his merit lay in formulating a precise though demanding concept of justice that would affect the day-to-day relations of his fellow Christians, and only ultimately the relations among nations at large. cf. Pichon, *Lactance*, p. 139.

\(^2\)Div. inst. 5.9.

\(^3\)Div. inst. 5.19; Epit. 52.

\(^4\)cf. p. 200 sq.

\(^5\)Epit. 54.

\(^6\)Div. inst. 6.8 and 9.
God not of a material sacrifice but principally of an innocent soul:

"Haec est religio caelestis, non quae constat ex rebus corruptis, sed quae uirtutibus animi qui oritur e caelo, hic est uerus cultus, in quo mens colentis se ipsam deo immaculatam uictimam sistit."¹ This worship or immaterial offering, in turn, is divided into two actions: first and chiefly, a gift, which is permanent, that is, innocence of soul; and secondly a sacrifice, which is temporal, that is, praise and hymns.

According to Lactantius, the latter is the sole exterior ceremonial in the worship of God, and although this is one of the few references to any form of external worship and Lactantius does not say so explicitly, the phrase, "sacrificium laus et hymnus," might well refer to the Eucharistic service of the Christian community.² If man fulfills these obligations continually and faithfully both in church and at home, his justice will then be perfect and complete.³ The worship of God, which is the divine aspect of justice, then, must be largely interior

¹Div. inst. 6.2.13.
³Div. inst. 6.25.5, 7, 12, 14-16: "Duo sunt quae offeri debeant, donum et sacrificium, donum in perpetuum, sacrificium ad tempus. . . . Sed utroque non utitur deus, quia et ipse incorruptus est et illud totum corruptibile. Itaque deo utrumque incorporale offerendum est, quo utitur. Donum est integritas animi, sacrificium laus et hymnus; si enim deus non uidetur, ergo his rebus coli debet quae non uidentur. Nulla igitur alia religio uera est nisi quae uirtute et iustitia constat. Uerbo enim sacrificari oportet deo, siquidem deus uerbum est, ut ipse confessus est. Summus igitur colendi dei ritus est ex ore iusti hominis ad deum directa laudatio . . . nec tantum hoc in templo putet sibi esse faciendum, sed et domi et in ipso etiam cubili suo. Secum denique habeat deum semper in corde suo consecratum quoniam ipse est dei templum. Quodsi deo, patri ac domino, hac adsiduitate, hoc obsequio, hac deuotione seruierit, consummata et perfecta iustitia est: quam qui tenuerit, hic, ut ante testati sumus, deo paruit, hic religioni atque officio suo satisfecit."
and spiritual, and it must also be pure and holy, not proceeding from the hand but from the heart. Its effect is to immortalize man and gain for him the reward of heaven. Thus, the worship of God, cultus dei, pietas, religio, which belongs to the first and essential aspect of justice, "Iustitia est ueri dei cultus," consists mainly in the interior living of a virtuous life and only secondarily in the external giving of divine praise.

**Humanitas**

While man's first duty is the worship of God, his second, Lactantius says, is the love of his fellow man, that is, humanitas. Man must acknowledge his fellow man as a brother since God made all men equal. It is the disregard of the first duty that led to the neglect of the second in the course of human history, and it is the same divine law that commands the love of God and of our neighbour. One criterion for love of neighbour is to do as you would like done to yourself: "Radix iustitiae et omne fundamentum aequitatis est illut, ut non facias quod pati nolis, sed alterius animum de tuo metiaris." However, Lactantius advances

1 Epit. 53.3: "Quid igitur ab homine desiderat deus nisi cultum mentis, qui est purus et sanctus? Nam illa quae aut digitis fiunt aut extra hominem sunt, inepta fragilia ingrata sunt. Hoc est sacrificium uerum, non quod ex arca, sed quod ex corde profertur, non quod manu, sed quod mente libatur, haec acceptabilis uictima est quam de se ipso animus immolauerit."

2 Div. inst. 7.5.22.

3 Epit. 51.1.

4 Epit. 54.

5 Epit. 55.2.
from this rather negative non nocere to a higher, more positive norm, to be of service to one's fellow man, proximum prodesse. Therefore human justice, he continues, is two-fold, not only malum non facere or innocentia, but also bonum operari or misericordia. "Illa incohat iustitiam, haec conplet." If all men, he says in a moving passage, are created by the one God and descend from the one human father, then we must love through the deeds of charity all men, even our enemies. Our justice to man, humanitas, then, must be universal, not, like Cicero's, to be directed only to suitable persons. If man's justice is universal, generous and disinterested, it can also serve as an expiation for sin.

1 Epit. 55.4.
2 Epit. 60.1.
3 Epit. 60.3-4; 6-7: "Si enim ficti ab uno deo et orti ab uno homine consanguinitatis iure sociamur, omnem igitur hominem diligere debemus. Itaque non tantum inferre iniuriam non oportet, sed ne inlatam quidem uindicare, ut sit in nobis perfecta innocentia, et ideo iubet nos deus etiam pro inimicis precem facere semper. Ergo animal commune atque con-sors esse debemus, ut nos inuicem praestandis et accipiendis auxiliis muniamus.... Si quis uictu indiget, inpertiamus, si quia nudus occur-rerit, uestiamus, si quis a potentiore iniuriam sustinet, eruamus. Pateat domicilium nostrum vel peregrinis uel indigentibus tecto. Pupillis defensio, uiduis tutela nostra non desit. Redimere ab hoste captius magnum misericordiae opus est, aegros item et pauperes usiere atque refouere. Inopes aut aduenae si obierint, non patiamur insepultos iacere. Haec sunt opera, haec officia misericordiae, quae si quis obierit, uerum et acceptum sacrificium deo immolabit."

4 Div. inst. 6.11.9 and 11: "Marcus Tullius in suis officialibus libris nonne hoc idem suadet, non esse omnino largiendum? Sic enim dixit: largitioque quae fit ex re familiaris, fontem ipsum benignitatis exaurit. Ita benignitate benignitatis tollitur: qua quo in plures usus sis, eo minus in multos uti possis.... Quod cum intellegeret infhumanum esse ac nefarium, mox allo capite quasi actus paenitentia sic ait: nonnumquam tamen est largiendum nec hoc benignitatis genus omnino repudiandum et saepe idoneis hominibus egentibus de re familiari inpertendum." cf. Cic. Off. 2.15.52 and 54.

5 Div. inst. 6.11-13.
Therefore, because it is expressed mainly by the corporal works of mercy, the humanitas of Lactantius becomes ultimately misericordia, mercy, love of neighbour or Christian charity, "Hoc secundum officium iustitiae misericordia uel humanitas nominatur." And because humanitas has its source in God, it is also to be identified with the first and divine aspect of justice, religio or pietas: "Sed ipsa humanitas quid est nisi iustitia? Quid iustitia nisi pietas?"

The pagan philosophers, however, not understanding it, considered misericordia a weakness, if not a vice. Though they did admit that they should help a neighbour in danger of death, they refused to help one in want. Though they recommended caring for the sick, they disdained burying the dead. They stopped half-way, Lactantius explains, because they were uncertain of their principles; they did not see that charity or the brotherhood of man and, in fact, all virtues have their

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1 Div. inst. 6.10.2.
2 Div. inst. 3.9.19.
3 Div. inst. 6.10.11 sq.; cf. previous page, ftnt. 4; cf. also Div. inst. 6.11.8: "Hinc est illa Plauti detestenda sententia:

Male meretur qui mendico dat quod edat:
Nam et illud quod dat perit et illi producit uitam ad miseriam."

Trin. 2.2.58-59. The Oxford text reads:

"De mendico male meretur qui ei dat quod edit aut bibat;
Nam et illud quod dat perdit et illi prodit uitam ad miseriam."

The Stoics in fact might have considered charity as a virtue. cf. L. Edelstein, The Meaning of Stoicism (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), pp. 90-91. However, Lactantius' source for the Stoic view is Cicero.

4 Div. inst. 6.11.6.
basis in religion. All men come from God, as they will eventually return to Him, and thus linked by the common bonds of origin and humanity, they owe one another help in all needs and sufferings.  

An important moral application of the justice of Lactantius lies in his consideration of the human emotions, affectus. First, he finds the Stoic position untenable. He agrees with Cicero that the suppression of human emotions is contrary to nature. If the emotions are connected in some way with the organs of the human body, as physiologists maintain, they cannot be destroyed except at the expense of those organs. Furthermore, the affections are an essential condition for the exercise of virtue in the struggle against sin. Desire, pleasure and fear are not evil, but in moderation can be virtuous. This the Peripatetics held, but, Lactantius maintains, even they were in error because there can be no question of moderation in vice: "Carendum est uitiis etiam mediocribus." The proper use of the affections, he says, does not spring from moderation but from a knowledge of their true cause. Desire can be wrong even in moderation if directed to a forbidden object, e.g., another man's wife. Since it is impossible and unnatural to suppress the emotions and insufficient to moderate them, the solution, in Lactantius' mind,

1 Div. inst. 6.10.3-4.
2 Div. inst. 6.15.2: "Peripatetici ergo rectius qui haec omnia detrahi negant posse." cf. Cic. Tusc. 4.19 sq.
3 Div. inst. 6.15.4.
4 Div. inst. 6.16.1.
5 Div. inst. 6.16.
lies in directing them to the goal determined by God.\textsuperscript{1} As they are created by God, the human emotions in themselves are good, whether they are anger, desire or love. It is man's task to direct them in view of the end intended by their creator. Lactantius, then, feels that the proper use of the emotions can be ascertained only after determining the reason for their existence, and then using them moderately in the light of their eternal end.\textsuperscript{2}

While he considers the affections natural and necessary, Lactantius regards the senses, sensus, and their pleasures, voluptates, with suspicion. In keeping with his dualism he states, like the other apologists, that the senses must be rigidly controlled.\textsuperscript{3} The eyes, for example, are made for the contemplation of the stars and the heavens, and are not to be polluted by the viewing of contests in the forum and immodesty on the stage. These unnatural sights not only disturb the serenity of our souls but they also avert us from our duties to God and man.\textsuperscript{4} Furthermore, the pleasures of the ear are to be reserved only for spiritual songs and readings.\textsuperscript{5} Taste and smell too, because they belong to the earthly body, are dangerous.\textsuperscript{6} Sex is permissible only in monoga-

\textsuperscript{1}Div. inst. 6.17.9.
\textsuperscript{2}Div. inst. 6.17.
\textsuperscript{3}cf. other African apologists who probably influenced Lactantius here, Minucius Felix Oct. 37.11 sq.; Cyprian Don. 8.
\textsuperscript{4}Div. inst. 6.20.33: "Uitanda ergo spectacula omnia, non solum ne quid uitiorum pectoribus insidat, quae sedata et pacifica esse debent, sed ne cuius nos voluptatis consuetudo deleniat et a deo atque a bonis operibus auertat."
\textsuperscript{5}Div. inst. 6.21.
\textsuperscript{6}Div. inst. 6.22.
mous marriage, and intense mutual love helps avoid adultery. Chastity
cannot be impossible as God himself advocated it, and in fact many
practise this crown of virtue, this virtue of God, "omniaque con-
summatio uirtutum ... uirtutem dei."¹

Man, however, is free to practise a virtuous life. God has
given to man's soul, which Lactantius calls a heavenly gift, the faculty
of freedom: "Hoc igitur munere (anima) caelesti atque praeclaro an
utamur in nostra esse uoluit potestate."² Granted this freedom, how-
ever, man is bound to practise virtue in order to gain eternal life:
"Hoc enim concessu ipsum hominem uirtutis sacramento religuit, quo
uitam posset adipsici."³ If man falls, as he will,⁴ God, our Lord
and indulgent parent, will grant complete pardon to the penitent sinner:
"Ergo idem dominus ac parens indulgentissimus remissurum se
paenitentibus peccata promittit et obliteraturum omnes iniquitates eius
qui iustitiam denuo coeperit operari."⁵

In general Lactantius achieves a balance in the presentation
of his moral doctrine. He admits degrees in virtue: for example,
justice is adequate if it refrains from evil actions, it is perfect if it

¹Div. inst. 6.23.39. cf. Galen's striking eulogy of Christians
who "preserved unbroken chastity throughout their entire lives." Galen,

²De opif. Dei 19.8. The apologists in general believed in freedom
of the will. cf. Just. I Apol. 43.8; II Apol. 7.5-6.

³De opif. Dei 19.8.

⁴Div. inst. 6.24.9: "Nemo enim potest esse tam prudens, tam
circumspectus, ut non aliquando labatur."

⁵Div. inst. 6.24.4.
abstains from evil words, and divine, if it avoids evil thoughts.\(^1\) He distinguishes between precept and counsel: celibacy is not an obligation but it is the crown of virtues.\(^2\) He tries to temper the exaggerations of the Stoics and Christians like Tertullian by presenting a practical morality realizable by all and so standing midway between the real and the ideal. He is not fair to pagan morality when he judges it in the light of the God of the Christians. Nevertheless, the content of his own morality is principally pagan even though its orientation is Christian. In the presentation of his practical morality, the first synthesis of Christian times, Lactantius' intention always remains to reconcile the morality of the philosophers with that of Christianity in order to win over to Christianity his educated readers. By rejecting the error and incorporating the truth of pagan morality, he effects a synthesis that opens the way for the great moral systems of Ambrose and Augustine.\(^3\)

**Excursus: Romanitas of Lactantius**

An important aspect characteristic especially of the ethical writings of Lactantius that helps to place him in an historical context is his romanitas.\(^4\) Whereas the earlier works, especially the *Divine Institutes*, often display a strongly anti-Roman bias, Lactantius reverses this trend

\(^1\)Div. inst. 6.13.6 sq.

\(^2\)Div. inst. 6.23.39.


\(^4\)For romanitas as the cultural qualities and ethical ideals that were peculiar to classical Rome, cf. H. Bardon, *Il genio latino* (Roma, 1961); also Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, Ch. 2: "Romanitas: Empire and Commonwealth."
and reveals a distinctly pro-Roman sentiment in the later works which were written in the Constantinian period.

Anti-Roman feeling is apparent in many early Christian writings, even from New Testament times. Despite the general loyalty to Rome seen in the Scriptures, ¹ in the Book of Revelation Rome is pictured as the beast with ten horns and seven heads. ² In the second century, Christians are being called a tertium genus, to distinguish them from pagans and Jews, ³ and at the end of the second century and in the third, Christians are refusing to serve in the Roman armies. ⁴ Tertullian becomes increasingly critical of Roman imperialism in his works. "Quaesissetis quibus imperaretis," he says in the Apologia, "plures hostes quam cives vobis remansissent." ⁵ In the later Idolatria, he denies that a Christian can serve under two standards, Christian and Roman, because the former is from God, the latter from Satan. ⁶ Another African, Minucius Felix, also presents Christians as being opposed to the ideals of Rome, and he contrasts the heroism of Christian confessors with that of the pagans. ⁷ With Lactantius in the Divine Institutes,

¹e.g., Matt. 22.21: "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God, the things that are God's."

²Apoc. 13.1 sq.

³Clem. Alex. Strom. 6.5.41; Arist. Apol. 2.

⁴Passio Scilitanorum, Maximiliani etc.

⁵Tert. Apol. 37.4; cf. also Ress. 24.18; Apol. 32.1.

⁶Tert. Idol. 19.2: "Non convenit sacramento divino et humano, signo Christi et signo diaboli, castris lucis et castris tenebrarum; non potest una anima duobus deberi deo et Caesari."

⁷Minuc. Fel. Oct. 37.3.5.
this prejudice becomes even more pronounced. ¹

First of all, of course, as has been pointed out in chapter III, ²
Lactantius chastises the Romans, especially in Book One of the Institutes, for their clinging to the old pagan religious traditions, the religiones ineptae. ³ He calls the Capitol an empty monument, inane monumentum, ⁴ and he lashes out at the past glories of Rome, maintaining that the Senate

¹V. Loi, "I valori etici e politici della romanità negli scritti di Lattanzio apposti atteggiamenti di polemici e di adesione," Salesianum, XXVII (1965), 84: "Nessun altro apologeta anteriore a Lattanzio offre tanti e così gravi spunti polemici contra la Romanità; dopo di lui soltanto la polemica agostiniana del De civitate Dei raggiungerà toni così aspri et taglienti." Lactantius' early anti-Roman bias is probably attributable in part to his African birth and background. In general, opposition to Rome on the part of African Christians can be explained on historical, ethnic, religious and economic grounds. In the first place, the native Punic and Berber population had been conquered by Rome in the Punic Wars. They were, however, a proud and independent people who always resented Roman domination. After becoming Christians they suffered greatly in the persecutions, but with the accession of Constantine and state Christianity, they began to associate and distrust both imperial and ecclesiastical Rome. This opposition to the Roman Church was strongest among the inland Numidians—Lactantius was born in Numidia—and it later found its strongest expression in the growth of a peculiarly African phenomenon, the rigorist Donatist Church. The strength of the Donatists lay in their appeal to native African sentiment. While membership in the Catholic Church was concentrated in the Romanized Latin-speaking areas of Roman Africa, Donatism drew its members from inland Numidia and from Mauretania where the impact of Roman culture was weakest. It spoke the language of the common people of the villages and countryside, not Latin, but Punic or Libyan. It gave expression to a sense of rigorism which was rooted in the African character; it voiced their sense of social injustice and their resentment at the oppression and exploitation to which they were subjected by the taxgatherer and the landowner; in brief, while taking the form of a strong dislike for Rome, Donatism epitomized the hopes and aspirations of a conquered but proud people. cf. J. Brisson, Autonomisme et christianisme dans l'Afrique romaine (Paris, 1958).

²See p. 107 sq.

³Div. inst. 1.22.9 etc.

⁴Div. inst. 1.11.49.
was a band of adventurers and rascals, and that Rome prospered by injustice and rapine. He likes to recall that Carthage was the rival of Rome and that Hannibal put Roman power to a severe test. Furthermore, rejecting patriotism for religion and brotherly love, like Tertullian, he clearly forbids Christians to engage in military service: "Ita neque militare iusto licebit." He is not surprised at Roman belligerence. How could it be otherwise if Romans cultivated the worship of Mars and Bellona: "Quomodo sanguine abstinebunt qui colunt cruentos deos Martem atque Bellonam?" He sighs for a return to the good days of the Republic, but with the Empire and a consequent loss of individual freedom, he foretells the death of Rome. He attacks the inordinate ambition of Roman imperialism: "Quorundam cupiditas tendit altius, non ut provincias temporali gladio regant, sed ut infinita et perpetua potestate dominos se dici uelint uniuersi generis humani," and he mocks the eternity of Rome whose destruction by divine will the Sibyls prophesy:

1 Div. inst. 2.6.13-16.
2 Div. inst. 6.9.4; Epit. 51.3.
3 Div. inst. 2.16.17-18; 7.15.15.
4 Div. inst. 6.9.10-20.
5 Div. inst. 6.20.16.
6 Div. inst. 5.10.15.
7 Div. inst. 7.15.16-17: "Amissa enim libertate, quam Bruto duce et auctore defenderat, ita consenuit, tamquam sustentare se ipsa non ualeret, nisi adminiculo regentium niteretur. Quod si haec ita sunt quid restat nisi ut sequatur interitus senectutem?"
8 Div. inst. 6.4.22.
"Sibyllae tamen aperte interituram esse Romam locuntur et quidem iudicio dei."¹ While Rome is merely *ciuitas terrena*, Christianity is, for him, *ciuitas aeterna et divina*: "Memento et ueri parentis tui et in qua ciuitate nomen dederis et cuius ordinis fueris."² Christians are now *populus dei* and *populus noster*.³ God alone is now *imperator* and *legislator*: "Nobis ... quibus ipsa lex tradita est ab illo uno magistro et imperatore omnium deo,"⁴ and Christ, His son, also has the right to the same imperial titles, "filium dei ducem et imperatorem omnium."⁵

Lactantius condemns many of Rome's traditional ethical values. Its justice in which it takes great pride is inadequate because Roman piety, which flows from justice, does not acknowledge or worship the one God: "Si ergo pietas est cognoscere deum, cuius cognitionis haec summa est ut colas, ignorat utique iustitiam qui religionem dei non tenet."⁶ Furthermore, the barbarity of human sacrifice in Roman reli-

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¹ *Div. inst.* 7.15.18.
² *De opif. Dei* 1.9.
³ *Div. inst.* 4.30.1; 5.8.8 etc.
⁴ *Div. inst.* 6.8.12; 5.19.25 etc.
⁵ *Div. inst.* 4.6.5; 4.12.17 etc.
region makes a mockery of elegant Roman humanitas.\(^1\) Lactantius also chides Cicero for what he considers a utilitarian concept of humanitas: "Si nunc Cicero uiueret, exclamarem profecto: hic, hic, Marce Tulli, aberrasti a uera iustitia eamque uno uerbo sustulisti, cum pietatis et humanitatis officia utilitate metitus es."\(^2\) In fact, only the Christians have a substantial motive for the exercise of their humanitas which is assisting the unfortunate, the widows, the orphans, etc: "Uerum haec opera proprie nostra sunt, qui legem, qui uerba ipsius dei praecipientis accepimus."\(^3\)

Although Lactantius does sharply criticize several points of Roman ethics, generally speaking, however, his ethics, even while transcending the morality of Rome, reflects it. The two meanings of virtus used by Cicero in the Tusculans, the general recta animi affectio and the specific fortitudo\(^4\) are also commonly used by Lactantius: "Virtus tota

\(^1\)Div. inst. 1.21.3-6: "Galli Esum atque Teutaten humano cruore placabant. Ne Latini quidem huius immanitatis expertes fuerunt, siquidem Latiaris Iuppiter etiamnunc sanguine colitur humano. Quid ab his boni precantur qui sic sacrificant? Aut quid tales dii praestare hominibus possunt, quorum poenis propitiantur? Sed de barbaris non est adeo mirandum, quorum religio cum moribus congruit: nostri uero qui semper mansuetudinis et humanitatis sibi gloriam uindicauerunt, nonne sacrilegis his sacris immaniores reperiuntur? Il enim potius scelerati sunt habendi, qui cum sint liberalium disciplinarum studiis expoliti, ab humanitate desciscunt, quam qui rudes et inperiti ad mala facinora bonorum ignoracione labuntur. Apparet tamen anticum esse hunc immolandorum hominum ritum, siquidem Saturnus in Latio eodem genere sacrificii cultus est, non quidem ut homo ad aram immolaretur, sed in Tiberim de ponte Muluio mitteretur."

\(^2\)Div. inst. 6.11.12; cf. Cic. Off. 2.15.54; also p. 208.

\(^3\)Div. inst. 6.12.22.

\(^4\)Cic. Tusc. 2.43: "Atquin vide ne, cum omnes rectae animi affectiones virtutes appellentur, non sit hoc proprium nomen omnium, sed ab ea quae una ceteris excellebat, omnes nominatae sint. Appellata est enim ex viro virtus; viri autem propria maxime est fortitudo, cuius munera duo sunt maxima, mortis dolorisque contemptio."
nostra est quia posita est in voluntate faciendi boni," and later, "Ita
uirtus est bonum facere, malum non facere," and the military fortitudo
used not only by Cicero but also by many other classical writers:

Multa sunt propria animi, multa propria corporis, multa
utrique communia, sicut est ipsa uirtus: quae quotiens ad
corpus refertur discernendi gratia fortitudo nominatur.
Quoniam igitur utrique subiacet fortitudo, utrique proposita
dimicatio est et utrique ex dimicatione uictoria."3

From this military notion of uirtus is derived the relation of God to
man that is expressed as commander-soldier, imperator-miles. Even
in the final peroration of the Institutes, man, the soldier, is waging
war against the enemy on behalf of his Lord, "infatigabilem militiam
deo militemus."4 Furthermore, the uirtus of Lactantius conceived as
endurance of pain, evil and hardship5 is also very common in Roman
classical literature.6

Lactantius' notion of justice also reveals the romanitas of his
source material. Just as Cicero hails justice as domina et regina
virtutum,7 so too for Lactantius justice is summa uirtus8 and uirtutum

1 Div. inst. 6.5.6 and 11.
2 e.g., Hor. Carm. 3.2.13; 17-20.
3 Div. inst. 3.12.1. A direct comparison of Lactantius' texts
with Cicero's on the subject is noteworthy. Div. inst. 3.8.36: "In
suscipiendis perferendisque laboribus uis officiumque uirtutis est."
Cic. Inv. 2.163: "Fortitudo est considerata periculorum susceptio et
laborum perpessio." cp. also Div. inst. 4.24.7 and Cic. Tusc. 4.53.
4 Div. inst. 7.26.16. This is another way of expressing the
dominus-seruus concept which is so basic to Lactantius' teaching. cf.
p. 141 sq.
5 Div. inst. 3.27.12; 3.29.16; 6.4.11.
6 Cic. Tusc. 2.33; Sen. Prov. 4.13; Sall. Cat. 7.5. etc.
7 Cic. Off. 3.28.
8 Div. inst. 5.5.1; 5.14.7 etc.
omnium mater. 1 As there were for Cicero two divisions of justice, divine and human, religio and aequitas, so too with Lactantius. 2 Lactantius' notion of justice, however, is different from Cicero's for it includes all the following implications: it is perfectio moralis or sanctitas, which reflects Scripture; 3 it is religio dei, which is probably Gnostic; 4 it is also tribuere cuique suum, which is classical; 5 it is misericordia, which reflects Christianity; 6 and finally it is humanitas, which Lactantius interprets as Christian charity. 7

The second part of Lactantius' justice, humanitas, which he links with the first and divine part, pietas or religio, 8 he defines as the greatest bond that exists among men: "Summum igitus inter se hominum unicum est humanitas." 9 This natural feeling whereby man seeks companionship, "animi affectio qua homo societatem apdpetit," springs

1 Div. inst. 3.22.5.
2 Cic. Orat. part. 129; Div. inst. 6.10.2.
3 Div. inst. 4.17.20-21; 6.13.5 etc.
4 Div. inst. 7.5.22; Epit. 51.1; cf. A. Wlosok, Laktanz und die philosophische Gnosis (Heidelberg, 1960), pp. 211-12.
5 Div. inst. 5.14-16 etc.
6 Div. inst. 6.10.2 etc.
7 Div. inst. 6.10.2 etc.
8 Div. inst. 3.9.19: "Ipsa humanitas quid est, nisi iustitia? quid iustitia, nisi pietas?"
9 Div. inst. 6.10.4.
10 Div. inst. 6.10.18.
from the realization of his own weakness.¹ This is a Roman concept but it is criticized by Lactantius himself in a later work.² Pagan humanitas was expressed by a variety of virtues, among which were innocentia, liberalitas, comitas, etc. Cicero defined innocentia as: "Est affectio talis animi quae noceat nemini."³ Lactantius also defines innocentia in the same way: "Illa enim malum non facit,"⁴ but his notion goes much further to include the works of charity, officia misericordiae.⁵ In fact, he identifies the two.⁶ Though he uses caritas in the Christian sense only twice,⁷ Lactantius' addition of misericordia to his notion of humanitas, therefore, goes beyond the pagan Roman concept of humanitas to include the needy and the suffering, and to take on the meaning of Christian charity.⁸ Thus, while the pagan Roman concept of humanitas was expressed in virtues like innocentia, liberalitas, benignitas, etc.⁹ Lactantius' notion, while including some of these, transcends the pagan

¹De opif. Dei 4.18-21.
²Div. inst. 6.10.13-17.
³Cic. Tusc. 3.16.
⁴Epit. 60.1.
⁵Epit. 60.1: "Innocentiae proxima est misericordia. Illa enim malum non facit, haec bonum operatur, illa incohat iustitiam, haec conplet."
⁶Div. inst. 3.23.9: "miserationis affectum qui plane uocatur humanitas."
⁷Div. inst. 7.27.11 and Epit. 29.6.
⁸Div. inst. 6.10.9: "praestare auxilium depressis et laborantibus, inpertiri uictum non habentibus."
⁹cf. Cic. Fin. 5.23.65.
concept and focuses on the Christian corporal works of mercy, "egentes atque inutiles alere."\(^1\)

There is, however, a pronounced shift in Lactantius' attitude toward Rome in his later works, the De ira Dei, the Epitome and the De mortibus persecutorum. The opposition to military service seen in the Divine Institutes,\(^2\) for example, changes to approval in the later works written when Lactantius was in the court of Constantine: "Et sicut fortitudo, si pro patria dimices, bonum est, si contra patriam malum, sic et affectus, si ad usus bonos habeas, virtutes erunt, si ad malos, uitia dicentur."\(^3\) His adherence to romanitas is seen most clearly in the De mortibus persecutorum, which is a political pamphlet written in defence of Constantine's policy, that is, the freedom and the prosperity of the Christian Church coincides with that of the Empire.\(^4\) The persecutors of Christianity were also enemies of romanitas because they did not possess the traditional virtues of the Republic nor did they respect the liberty of the Roman people. The first persecutor, Nero,

\(^1\) Div. inst. 6.11.28.

\(^2\) Div. inst. 6.20.15-16.

\(^3\) Epit. 56.4; cf. De ira Dei 17.6-7; also the reference to the imminent fall of Rome in two hundred years time narrated in the seventh book of the Institutes 7.25.1-5 is tactfully omitted in the Epitome.

\(^4\) De mort. pers. 3.4: "Rescissis igitur actis tyranni non modo in statum pristinum ecclesia restituta est, sed etiam multo clarius ac floridius enuit, secutisque temporibus, quibus multi ac boni principes Romani imperii clauum regimenque tenerunt, nullos inimicorum impetus passa manus suas in orientem occidentemque porrexit."
is called tyrannus impotens;\(^1\) another, Domitian, had his memory condemned—damnatio memoriae—to perpetual infamy: "Senatus ita nomen eius persecutus est, ut neque imaginum neque titulorum eius relinqueret ulla uestigia, grauiisse decretis etiam mortuo notam inureret ad ignominiam sempiternam."\(^2\) The last and most assiduous persecutor, Diocletian, bankrupted the Empire through his greed and indecision: "Hic orbem terrae simul et avaritia et timiditate subuertit."\(^3\)

There are, furthermore, many texts, some even in the Institutes, which while revealing Lactantius as an opponent of the Empire also show him as a defender of the Republic. Julius Caesar is depicted as destroying republican liberty,\(^4\) and Pompey as defending it: "Gnaeus Pompeius bonorum uoluit esse defensor, siquidem pro republica, pro senatu, pro libertate arma suscepit."\(^5\) Lactantius can also show a high regard for the authority and dignity of the Senate,\(^6\) and an aristocratic disdain for homines noui, which extends even to the Emperors Galerius,\(^7\) Severus\(^8\) and especially Daia.\(^9\) He also displays a typical Roman

\(^1\)De mort. pers. 2.7.
\(^2\)De mort. pers. 3.3.
\(^3\)De mort. pers. 7.1.
\(^4\)Div. inst. 1.15.29-30; 6.18.35.
\(^5\)Div. inst. 6.6.17.
\(^6\)De mort. pers. 3.3; 8.4.
\(^7\)De mort. pers. 9.2.
\(^8\)De mort. pers. 18.12.
\(^9\)De mort. pers. 19.6: "Daia uero sublatus nuper a pecoribus et siluis, statim scutarius, continuo protector, mox tribunus, postridie Caesar, accepit Orientem calcandum et conterendum, quippe qui neque militiam neque rem publicam sciret, iam non pecorum, sed militum pastor."
arrogance towards the uulgus, 1 towards the Greeks, 2 and, in fact, towards the East in general. 3

The preceding examples provide some indication of Lactantius' ambivalent attitude towards Rome. His dislike of Rome finds a partial answer in his African birth and background, but probably more compelling reasons for this dislike were his opposition to the paganism of Roman religion and morality, and also his dismay and anger at the persecutions of his fellow Christians by the Roman Emperors. With the accession of Constantine and the acceptance of Lactantius into his court, Lactantius' hostile attitude understandably changed. The motives for this change, however, were not merely political. It is clear that Lactantius preferred the virtues of the Republic to those of the Empire. His patron the Emperor was now in a position to restore these old Roman virtues. On a much wider scale, the new social order of wisdom and justice envisaged by Lactantius in his Christian magisterium was now made possible.

1 Div. inst. 6.11.22-23.
2 Div. inst. 1.15.14: "Quod malum a Graecis ortum est, quorum leuitas instructa dicendi facultate et copia incredibile est quantas mendaciorum nebulas excitauerit."
3 Div. inst. 7.5.11: "Cuius uastitatis et confusionis (i.e., mundi) haec erit causa, quod Romanum nomen tolletur de terra et imperium in Asiam reuertetur ac rursus Oriens dominabitur atque Occidens seruiet." cf. Juvenal Sat. 3.60-65:

"... non possum ferre, Quirites, Graecam urbem; quamvis quota portio faecis Achaei? iam pridem Syrus in Tiberim defluxit Orontes et linguam et mores et cum tibicine chordas obliquas nec non gentilia tympana secum vexit et ad circum iussas prostare puellas."
Summum Bonum: Justice

What is sought by man as his highest good, summum bonum, Lactantius states, must possess three characteristics: it must be peculiar to man alone; it must belong to his soul; and thirdly, it must be sought by virtue and not be virtue itself, as the Stoics say.\(^1\) To the wise man, whether pagan or Christian, this is justice, both divine and human.\(^2\)

If justice is proposed to the man of wisdom as the highest good, what, then, is the distinction between justice and wisdom, which Lactantius also calls the highest good? In a sense they are the same in that each has as its proper object the worship of God, which is conceived by Lactantius mainly as the virtuous life, integritas vitae. Thus, while in other passages\(^3\) Lactantius considers wisdom as the highest good and, in the passage just quoted, justice, it is only because both encompass what is specifically for him the summum bonum, namely the worship of God, cultus dei.\(^4\) Granted this identity, however, there is a clear distinction in Lactantius' thought between wisdom and justice. First, justice

\(^1\)Epit. 28.1 and 9; cf. Cic. Acad. 2.42. 129-131.


\(^3\) e.g.; Div. inst. 3.8-9.

\(^4\) Another possible explanation of this identity is that Lactantius was writing loosely for rhetorical effect.
comprises both divine and human activities, that is, it deals with our duties to God as our Father, religio, and to man as our brother, humanitas. Wisdom, however, deals not with the activities themselves but with the knowledge of divine and human activities. Wisdom, then, is more speculative and deals with knowledge, while justice is ethical and deals with the execution of divine and human duties.¹ Lactantius clarifies the speculative aspect of wisdom and the ethical aspect of justice in the following sentence. Speaking specifically of knowledge and virtue, he says: "Itaque ut breuius et significatius utriusque rei summa officia determinem, scientia est deum nosse, uirtus colere: in illo sapientia, in hoc iustitia, continetur."² Therefore, wisdom and justice are distinct, wisdom being here specified as knowledge and justice as ethics. However, since wisdom and justice both include the worship of God, the complete concept of wisdom is the knowledge of God and his worship, agnitio dei et cultus, and that of justice is the

¹ Epit. 29.5-6: "Sed quoniam soli homini sapientia data est, ut deum intellegat, et haec sola hominis mutorumque distantia est, duo-bus officiis obstricta est ipsa iustitia: unum deo debet ut patri, alterum homini uelut fratri; ab eodem enim deo geniti sumus. Merito ergo ac recte dictum est sapientiam esse divinarum et humanarum rerum scientiam. Oportet enim scire nos quid deo, quid homini debeamus, deo scilicet religionem, homini caritatem. Sed illut superius sapientiae, hoc posterius uirtutis est et utrumque iustitia comprehendit." Occasionally as here and in a few other passages, e.g., Div. inst. 3.9.10, Lactantius seems to conceive justice as a wider concept including the notion of wisdom. This is explained because of the ethical orientation of wisdom, that is, wisdom is not only agnitio dei but also cultus dei, which consists, as has been pointed out, mainly in a virtuous life.

² Div. inst. 6.5.19.
worship of God and the love of fellow man, cultus dei et affectio hominis.

The *summum bonum*, Lactantius states in the third book of the *Institutes*, ¹ cannot be pleasure as the Epicureans say, nor can it be virtue itself as the Stoics say, nor can it be even the knowledge of God alone as the Platonists say, but, says the Wise Man, it must be the worship of God and that worship consists in a virtuous or just life:

> Quare si quis hominem qui uere sapiat interroget, cuius rei causa natus sit, respondebit intrepidus ac paratus colendi se dei gratia natum, quo nos ideo generauit, ut ei seruiamus. Seruire autem deo nihil aliut est quam bonis operibus tueri et conservare iustitiam.²

However, Lactantius does admit the value of knowledge. It shows man the way to the *summum bonum*, while virtue enables him to attain it. The one without the other, he says, is of no avail; from knowledge arises virtue, and from virtue the highest good.³ Thus, the *summum bonum* includes both virtue and to some degree, by extension, knowledge. However, by adding the notion, *cultus dei*, the worship of God, which is common to both, knowledge becomes, in Lactantius' doctrine, wisdom, and virtue becomes justice. Thus, with the worship of God acting as a kind of common denominator, the *summum bonum* is both wisdom and justice. In this way, wisdom is linked to justice which Lactantius identifies with religion, and thus, as was said in the conclusion of the previous chapter, Christianity becomes for Lactantius the wise religion and the religious wisdom, *sapiens religio et religiosa sapientia*.

¹ Div. inst. 3.8-9.
² Div. inst. 3.9.14-15.
³ Div. inst. 3.12.
Reward of Justice: Vita Beata

Of even greater importance than justice in Lactantius' Christian magisterium is the reward of justice, eternal life. While justice is his summum bonum on earth, as a Christian he places even higher the summum bonum of heaven: "Summun bonum immortalitas, ad quam capiendum et formati a principio et nati sumus." However, it is the deeds of justice on earth which bring about this immortal reward. All men seek happiness but they cannot find nor attain it here in this life. Immortality alone brings happiness because it can neither be corrupted nor destroyed. Immortality lies in man's power and is, in fact, owed to man if during his life he perseveres in virtue. The purpose of suffering and evil in this life is to exercise and strengthen his virtue so that he may ultimately gain immortality and an eternal reward. Man will always have before him his guide and commander, Christ, urging him to keep to his post and boldly to engage the enemy in order to obtain the reward of valour which He has promised. But first, before

1 Div. inst. 7.8.1; cf. Just. Dial. 81.4; cf. Rooijen, De Vita Beata.

2 De ira Dei 24.13: "Iustitia uero et beneficentia tam immortales quam mens et anima, quae bonis operibus similitudinem dei adsequitur."

3 Epit. 30.1: "Quis, igitur, erit fructus iustitiae atque uirtutis si nihil habebit in uita nisi malum?"


5 Div. inst. 7.5.

6 Div. inst. 7.27.16: "Intendamus ergo iustitiae, quae nos inseparabilis comes ad deum sola perducet, et dum spiritus hos regit artus—cf. Verg. Aen. 4.336—infatigabilem militiam deo militemus, stationes uigiliasque celebremus, congrediamur cum hoste quem nouimus fortiter, ut uictores ac deuicto adversario triumphantes praemium uirtutis quod ipse promisit a domino consequamur."
the end of the world at the close of the millennium, the devil who has been chained will be released. He and the wicked nations will besiege the holy city, but they will be utterly destroyed. The just will emerge from their hiding places, and then will take place the second and great judgment. ¹ In this final judgment, the good will be welcomed to a life of blessedness, the evil condemned to eternal punishment. How, Lactantius wonders, can souls which are spiritual suffer? They are to be directed, he says, to a state midway between immortal and mortal where they will suffer through the taint of their mortal body. ² The just man, however, will appear before God with abundant resources, rich in purity, mercy, patience, love and faith. ³ The heavenly reward for his life of virtue, Lactantius states in one of his highest theological speculations, will consist not only in his attaining a likeness of God, "iustitia uero ... quae similitudinem dei adsequitur," ⁴ but even in his enjoying a kind of mystical union between God and himself, the just soul, "ut possint cum deo beatissima necessitudine copulari." ⁵

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¹ Div. inst. 7.26.


³ Div. inst. 7.27.11: "Ille ad deum copiosus, ille opulentus adueniet, cui adstabant continentia misericordia patientia caritas fides."

⁴ De ira Dei 24.13.

⁵ De ira Dei 24.11. These views were common among the apologists. cf. Just. I Apol. 10 and 52; Tat. Orat. 13 sq.; Iren. Adv. haer. 5.8.1.
In summary, Lactantius defines wisdom as the worship of God, and only secondarily as the knowledge of God: "Nam deum uere colere, id est nec aliut quidquam quam sapientiam,"\(^1\) and justice as the worship of God, and only secondarily as human justice: "Iustitia est ueri dei cultus."\(^2\) But the worship of God consists in virtue: "Seruire autem deo nihil aliut est quam bonis operibus tueri."\(^3\) Therefore, the two most central notions of Lactantius' thought, wisdom and justice, both point to the virtuous life, integritas uitae, as the summum bonum of man's earthly existence. The **summum bonum** of Lactantius' **magisterium**, then, is primarily ethical. For Lactantius Christianity, the religious philosophy and the philosophical religion, is not a body of doctrine, but in the sense of the pagan schools, a philosophy, a way of life, an **\(\text{\γ\ω\γ\υ\η} \)**.\(^4\) Just as the teaching of the pagan schools of philosophy called for a turning away from the former life, accepting the new way of life and following the master pedagogue, so too the Christian **magisterium** of Lactantius calls for a turning away from paganism, accepting Christianity and following the pedagogue, Christ. Just as the teaching of the philosophical schools was mainly ethical, so too is the **magisterium** of Lactantius. Therefore the **magisterium** of Lactantius is the new way of life, the new philosophy, the new justice, the new religiosa sapientia et sapiens religio, Christianity.

\(^1\) Epit. 36.2.

\(^2\) Epit. 51.1.

\(^3\) Div. inst. 3.9.15.

\(^4\) One of the terms used to signify a pagan school of philosophy was **\(\text{\γ\ω\γ\υ\η} \)**, which means not only a way of teaching but also a way of life. cf. Pl. Leg. 659d; Arist. Eth. Nic. 1179 b 31; Chrysipp. Stoic. 3.173. For Christian use, cf. I Clem. 47.6; Iren. Adv. haer. 4.38.1; Or. Cels. 3.5 1. Lactantius uses the word **magisterium**, cf. pp. 38-39.
CONCLUSION

When Lactantius began to compose his Christian works in 303 after his conversion to the new religion, he determined to avoid the mistakes which he had detected in the writings of his fellow North African Christians. Unlike them he planned not merely to refute the errors of polytheism and pagan philosophy but also to present in a systematic way the doctrine of what he considered the true religion and philosophy, Christianity. Hoping to appeal to educated Latin-speaking pagans and Christians alike, he decided to use what they knew and respected, namely the testimony of the pagan authors and the style of classical rhetoric, not only in the rejection of polytheism but also in the presentation of his own teaching. Thus the role of Lactantius became that of a Christian teacher and rhetorician: to instruct and to persuade his readers that Christianity, not polytheism nor philosophy, was the real wisdom, the religious philosophy and philosophical religion. The magisterium of Lactantius is his understanding of the Christian message and the unique method he employed in urgently transmitting it. This study has been concerned with the pedagogy of these spiritual, rhetorical and doctrinal ideals.

What was the original achievement of Lactantius in the transmission of his Christian magisterium? First and foremost it was his particular genius to have assembled the vast armory of classical rhetoricians, philosophers and poets and applied them both to the rejection of paganism and in the presentation of his own doctrine in a
far more inclusive manner than any other Christian apologist before his time. Although he was influenced by them both in the material he treated and the method he employed, the approach of Lactantius was not only more comprehensive in scope but also more positive in its attitude towards pagan culture. He opened the door to the liberalizing influence of classical culture to an extent unknown to any other Christian writer in the West before Augustine. In his use of classical authors, however, Lactantius relies too heavily on Cicero. Moreover, he usually applies his citations in a formal, almost mechanical way merely for the sake of adornment rather than the cogency or advancement of the argument. In general, the rhetoric of Lactantius is classical, though not to the same degree as Pichon thinks. It also displays, more clearly than is admitted by some authors, e.g., Wojtczak, the influence of contemporary and Christian literature and speech which Lactantius assimilates and moulds into a dignified literary form of his own.

Lactantius' criticism of pagan religion and philosophy seems to be principally a device of rhetoric that is aimed not against the threat of current dangers but rather at the literary acceptance by his educated readers. Lactantius incorporates more from pagan philosophy into his own teaching than did his fellow North Africans. In fact, the content of his doctrine, both metaphysical and moral, is drawn mainly from

1 Lactance, Pars 2, Chaps. 4-7.
2 De Lactantio Ciceronis aemulo et sectatore.
classical sources. This dependence on pagan philosophy is reflected not only in most of his doctrines, but also in his method, e.g., his use of Stoic logic. The force of his arguments depends more on the versatile use of propositional logic than it does on the rhetorical citation of classical authors. Nevertheless, while the content of his *magisterium* is classical in origin to a greater degree than that of the other apologists, its synthesis and direction are definitely Christian. Lactantius uses but transcends paganism. Ultimately the basic notions of his *magisterium*, namely God, His anger and worship, the *logos*, eschatology, knowledge, wisdom and justice are not classical but Christian. Thus the *magisterium* of Lactantius is truly and distinctively Christian.

The originality of Lactantius' *magisterium* is also seen in his treatment of divine anger. Based on an important doctrine of his teaching, dualism, it is absolute and uncompromising: if God loves good, He also must hate and punish evil; otherwise there can be no reward for good, indeed no God. Original with Lactantius also is his choice of the *pater-dominus* concept of God as the basis of his theology. This is important in Lactantius' thinking because the identity of these two concepts enables him to argue towards the further identity of what flows from these concepts, namely wisdom and religion. Lactantius is original too in his concise formulation of wisdom as knowledge and worship, and Christianity as *sapiens religio et religiosa sapientia*. Significant is his emphasis on worship or justice, not knowledge, as the main element of Christian wisdom. For Lactantius as a Roman
and Christian, of far greater importance than scientia is integritas uitae.

The teaching of Lactantius, however, is deficient and at times confused. His treatises on Christology and Salvation are inadequate. There is little on the Christian Sacraments, less on prayer and the Liturgy, and nothing on the Trinity. His concept of wisdom as comprising knowledge and worship is overly simple. So too is his identification of worship with the virtuous life. There is confusion in his notion of the sumnum bonum. Is it wisdom, justice or heaven? The notion is intelligible only by introducing the common denominator of wisdom and justice, namely the worship of God, or by distinguishing between justice on earth and its reward, justice in heaven. Lactantius' judgment of pagan morality is often unreasonable since it is made with reference to the worship of the God of the Christians. In general, Lactantius' understanding of pagan philosophy is superficial, and it is even on occasion erroneous. His interest is mainly that of a rhetorician, doctus orator, anxious to discover a citation suitable for the adornment of his text. Furthermore, by calling Christianity a religious philosophy he seriously neglects its supernatural character. This neglect is somewhat relieved by his treatment of the knowledge of man which he believes is obtained by an almost mystical divine illumination.

Another notable characteristic of Lactantius' magisterium is the strain of rigorism, reminiscent of his African background, that is found throughout his works. His dualistic concept of man, for example, is gloomy and absolute. His chiliasm is frightening, his doctrine of the Two Ways uncompromising. In general, his moral doctrine is demanding,
his divine anger severe. Yet there is another and brighter side of Lactantius' teaching. He makes ample provision for God's forgiveness. Moreover, despite the grim burden of virtue, man is comforted by the warm rays of God's knowledge. Lactantius also urgently reminds his readers that man has a better world in store. He is progressing rapidly towards the Golden Age of wisdom and justice, and eventually towards the final reward of eternal happiness. Consequently, Lactantius' world-view is ultimately optimistic. This optimism is reinforced by the omission of the reference to the imminency of the last days and also by the noticeable shift in attitude towards Rome in Lactantius' later works. With Constantine as Emperor the Christian social order of baptized Republican virtues envisaged in Lactantius' magisterium is, even before the advent of the postponed Millennium, now made possible.

In the last chapter of the De opificio Dei Lactantius speaks of the difficulty he expects to encounter in his dispute with the philosophers. He calls on God to grant him the ability and the time, facultas et tempus, to achieve his purpose of persuading his educated readers. "And when I have accomplished this," he concludes, "I shall think that I have lived long enough, and that I have discharged the duty of a man, if my labour shall have freed some men from error, and directed them to the path which leads to heaven." Although it is impossible to determine how successful Lactantius was in realizing this ambition, it is to be expected that his Christian magisterium moved the minds and hearts of many of his readers. Contrary to the opinion of Monceaux,¹ his magnificent

¹H.L.A.C., pp. 358-59.
command of rhetoric, displaying so many of the ingenious techniques of the classical authors, would certainly have impressed learned pagans and Christians alike. His doctrine, a Christianized wisdom and justice, largely classical in origin and inlaid with countless references to the ancient writers, would surely have moved pagans at least to ponder his message, and although the theology of his message was deficient and often severe, the distinctly Christian tenor of his doctrine could not have failed to impress his fellow Christians. Compelling for both, surely, would have been the intensity, urgency and obvious sincerity with which Lactantius attempted to transmit his distinctive Christian magisterium, the religious philosophy and philosophical religion.
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