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## Tertulliani "Apologeticum"

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## Tertulliani "Apologeticum."<sup>1)</sup>

Tertullian's *Apologeticum* is justly renowned. It is renowned because of its author, Tertullian, who because of the diction, style, extent, and time of his writings is recognized generally as the father of Church Latin.<sup>2)</sup> There is no doubt that later writers, among them men of such importance as St. Augustine, Ambrose, and Cyprian, were influenced by him. Of Cyprian it is said that he called Tertullian simply *the teacher*.<sup>3)</sup> And yet, important as all the writings of Tertullian are, many of them have now lost their claim to the attention of all except the specialist and the historian. But not so his *Apologeticum*; that retains its significance for all, and parts of it are still quoted in sermons and theological literature. Dr. Rauschen, who has edited the *Fasciculus VI* of the *Florilegium Patristicum*, writes of it: "*In 'Apologetico' dictio moderatior et elegantior, oratio concinnior, compositio aptior et plenior est.*" But the content also of this book is very instructive, not only to the historian, but also to the theologian, in fact, to every intelligent Christian. The jurist, the logician, the rhetorician, the writer, the pastor, the preacher, and the teacher may all find material, instruction, and help in these pages. This is not only our personal opinion. The *Apologeticum* of Tertullian has always been highly esteemed in the Christian Church. In his *Prolegomena*, the same Dr. Rauschen whom we quoted above writes of this particular opus: "*Inter omnes, quas veteres Christiani adversus ethnicos scripsere apologias, maxime eminet Tertulliani 'Apologeticum,' quod opus quanti ab aequalibus habitum sit, iam inde patet, quod brevi, postquam in lucem prodiit, teste Eusebio, h. e. II, 24, in Graecum sermonem translatum est; is enim honor, quod sciamus, praeter hunc librum tribus tantum actis Christianis priorum saeculorum contigit: actis s. Appollonii, ss. Scilitanorum, s. Perpetuae et Felicitatis.*"

Even where we should not use the same arguments as Tertullian, his methods are nevertheless highly interesting to us. It has been

1) *Apologeticum* is the usual name, but we do meet with *Apologeticus*; when this latter name is employed, the word *liber* is understood.

2) "*Tertullian ist einer der originellsten und bis Augustin der individuellste aller lateinischen Kirchenschriftsteller. Es paarte sich in ihm punische Glut mit praktischem Roemersinn; religioes entflammt, besass er einen durchdringenden Verstand, hinreissende Beredsamkeit, stets schlagfertigen Witz und hervorragende Kenntnisse auf allen Gebieten. Dabei beherrschte er wie kein anderer die lateinische Sprache und gestaltete sie frei zu ganz neuen Formen; seine Schriften haben nach der Vulgata auf die lateinische Kirchensprache am meisten Einfluss geuebt. Er schreibt einen knappen, markigen, darum aber auch oft dunklen Stil; richtig sagt von ihm Vincenz von Lerin: Quot paene verba, tot sententiae.*" (Rauschen-Altaner, *Patrologie*, 11th ed., p. 89.)

3) Rauschen, p. 90.



said that he is very bitter and sarcastic. Well, in his case it certainly was true: *Difficile est satiram non scribere*. We are far from claiming perfection for Tertullian; but if he had been milder in his expressions, some would have criticized him for his pussy-footing. Luther also was criticized for his harsh language, but he told his critics that the disease of the times required desperate remedies. Did not John the Baptist say to the Pharisees and Sadducees: "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" Did not Jesus call the scribes and the Pharisees hypocrites and blind guides, who strained at a gnat and swallowed a camel? *Matt. 23, 24.*

But why not read and study this important volume of patristic literature and then judge for yourself? I have before me Dr. Rauschen's *Fasciculus VI*, in which he offers the *Apologeticum*. I do not believe that there is a better text than the one which Dr. Rauschen submits. He selected his readings with the aid of the best manuscripts, including the *Codex Fuldensis*.<sup>4)</sup> We remember distinctly that many years ago, when reading Cicero's *De Senectute* and having come to that celebrated passage near its close: "*O praeclarum diem, quum ad illud divinum animorum concilium coetumque proficiscar,*" etc., a certain commentator exclaimed that all the trouble, time, and energy which is required to learn the Latin language would be fully repaid if one could read no more Latin than this writing of Cicero's. That is an extravagant statement. But it is true that the reading of such works as the more important of those of St. Augustine and of the *Apologeticum* of Tertullian repays one in part at least for the pains and trouble one has had in learning the Latin language.

But have these books not been translated, so that we may read them in the vernacular? True; yet we all know that almost all originals suffer very much by translation. And we have never known another work that so stubbornly resists the art of the translator as the *Apologeticum* of Tertullian. Tertullian was a rhetorical master, an *antistes artis dicendi*. And he knew the Latin which was spoken in his day, the literary medium of the educated Roman. Terse, reflexive, insinuating, intriguing, devastating, crushing speech he wielded like a literary Hercules.<sup>5)</sup> Translate Tertullian! Who has

4) We found very few misprints. The following come to mind: *perique* for *plerique*, p. 67; *ne* for *neque*, p. 93; and on another page *visi* instead of *nisi*.

5) The following are the chief data of Tertullian's life: Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus was born about 160 A. D. at Carthage. His father was a heathen and an officer in the Roman army. Tertullian received a careful education and acquired control of the Greek language. Eusebius (*Hist.* 2, 2, 4) claims that he became a lawyer. His writings certainly abound in legal phrases and show him to have been at home in court-room procedure. Not long before 197 A. D. he became a Christian. At this time he was a married man. From that very time dates his



ever enjoyed a translation of Horace? Who could say in English or in German, in any manner nearly as incisive as Horace employs, what he says when he speaks of the *laudator temporis acti*? So it is with Tertullian's Latin. Moreover, just like Horace, Tertullian uses expressions concerning the exact meaning of which there has been endless dispute. A fair Latin scholar might easily write an article of some length on what Horace meant when he said: "*Difficile est proprie communia dicere.*" And just so the commentators have fought about some of the expressions of Tertullian. What does Tertullian mean when he writes in his very first paragraph: "*Quod proxime accidit domesticis iudiciis*"? Some say he means cases that involved husband and wife or other members of the same household, while others say he refers to secret sessions of court conducted in utmost privacy.

In not a few places the Latin is actually easier to understand than the English translations which are suggested. At the close of his fifteenth chapter of the *Apologeticum*, e. g., Tertullian writes: "*Hoc prius capite et omnem hinc sacramenti nostri ordinem haurite, repercussis ante tamen opinionibus falsis.*" For this the Rev. Wm. Reeve, A. M., of Middlesex, England, offers the following translation: "Here, then, I shall present you with the whole series of our religion, having first returned an answer to some groundless objections against it." That is neither a good translation, nor is the English easily understood. Indeed, we must refer to the Latin to help us to understand the English. In order to understand Tertullian's meaning, it is necessary to keep in mind that it is impossible to express in plain English the meaning of his Latin sentence without using more words than Tertullian used. What Tertullian means to tell his readers in that sentence is this: "Having now in what I have written so far thoroughly refuted your false opinions of our religion, I beg you to retain all this in mind and to receive and learn from what I am about to write a general correct view of our holy religion." Tertullian must be read repeatedly and with the best notes and comments to be obtained, for there are not a few references and expressions which require whatever explanation the specialist in Roman and Christian antiquities may be in a position to offer.

But now let us delve into the contents and meet this ardent apologist at his best.

The very first paragraph is a strange combination of a *captatio*

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literary activity as a Christian writer. About the year 205 he joined the sect of the Montanists. He died in Carthage about 220. He is the author of more than thirty pamphlets, essays, and books. Three of these are apologies, quite a number are polemical; then there are some of devotional content, and finally there are a number in which he defends his Montanistic views.



*benevolentiae* and cutting sarcasm. It as well as the rest of the opus reveals Tertullian's ardent, intense, and nervous temperament. The man was sensitive and inclined to extremes.<sup>6)</sup> He addresses his appeal and defense to the *Romani imperii antistites*. By *antistites* he does not mean the Roman senators, as Eusebius surmised, but the governors of the Roman provinces. It behooved these latter to take cognizance of cases against the Christians.

At the very outset our author also mentions his reason for submitting this apology to them. Since the governors, whether from fear or shame, will not permit an oral defense of the accused Christians in open court, Tertullian begs them to permit the truth to find a hearing at least by way of a written appeal.

He adds that, while the Christians are not overmuch surprised at the treatment which they receive, because they are aware that they are pilgrims and strangers in a foreign country whose "conversation is in heaven," yet they do not wish to be condemned by those who do not know what they are condemning. Before persecuting Christians, the governors should study the lives and teachings of the accused.

Thereupon Tertullian declares that senseless hatred of the mere name of Christian inspires the persecutors. The ignorant hatred of that name is so intense that its very mention infuriates the masses. "Why don't you investigate the actual practises of these hated Christians? Why don't you acquaint yourselves with the facts?" He accuses his opponents of hating the very name of Christian with such a blind fury that they refuse even to listen to the truth about the Christian religion. He assures them that those who formerly hated this religion cease hating it as soon as they learn to know it and begin to hate what they were when they hated it. In short, the heathen hate the Christian religion because they do not know it, and they do not wish to know it because they hate it. That is the vicious circle.

After clinching this argument, Tertullian accuses the governors of dealing with those accused of being Christians as no other accused person is dealt with. By torture and threats they attempt to force the Christian to deny that he is a Christian, whereas every other accused person is subjected to measures which are to force him to confess himself guilty. In this connection Tertullian refers to that celebrated correspondence between Emperor Trajan and the younger Pliny, governor of the province of Bithynia. He ridicules the advice of Trajan: "*Tunc Traianus rescripsit hoc genus inquirendos quidem non esse, oblatos vero punire oportere.*" He stigmatizes this sentence as a perfectly self-contradictory judgment: "*O sententiam necessitate confusam! Negat inquirendos ut innocentes et mandat puniendos ut nocentes.*" Returning to his former complaint, he tells these

6) *Le style c'est l'homme.* (Buffon.)



judges that they do not want the accused Christians to tell the truth, but want them to deny and to lie. The name of Christian is so hateful to the heathen that they prefer putting up with the losses incurred through the depravity of a pagan to reaping the profits which accrue to them through the very virtues of a Christian. A heathen husband prefers a heathen wife, whose fidelity is unreliable, to a Christian wife, whose character is above suspicion. A heathen father prefers a disobedient unbelieving son to an obedient Christian son. A heathen master prefers an unreliable pagan slave to one who is loyal, but a Christian. All because of this senseless hatred of the Christian religion.

If it is objected that Roman laws demand acts of worship to be tendered the Roman gods, Tertullian tells the governors that human laws ever needed revision or repeal. He reminds them of the fact that even Lycurgus's laws were changed by the Greeks and that before this the Romans also frequently altered or rescinded the laws of their ancestors. Tertullian is not satisfied to fight on the defensive, but turns to offensive warfare when he tells these men who so readily appealed to the laws of ancestors: "*Laudatis semper antiquos, sed novo de die vivitis.*"<sup>7</sup>) He makes the claim that Emperor Tiberius had wished to have Jesus acclaimed divine by the Roman Senate, but the senators refused to do his bidding. Tertullian insists that it is all in favor of the Christians that such a scoundrel as Nero was the first to persecute them. Tertullian is in error, however, in claiming that Nero was the first persecutor, nor is it true that only the most contemptibly wicked of the Roman emperors hunted down the Christians.

Having pilloried the general method of the persecutors, he turns to examine the specific charges lodged against the Christians. He mentions infanticide and incest. No crime of this nature has ever been proved against Christians. In this malicious accusation the Romans followed idle gossip. "*Natura famae omnibus nota est.*" He quotes the *Aeneid*, IV, 174, and stigmatizes such conduct as unworthy of serious and conscientious men. Tertullian shows that the very stories about the Christians which were current are incredible and asks his readers if they can really believe that men would teach that by such atrocities and infamies heaven and eternal life are to be obtained. Thereupon he turns upon his adversaries and tells them of the shameful and inhuman acts which they themselves attribute to their gods. Here he stirs the cesspools of pagan filth, stories which are too repulsive to be translated into the vernacular. By way of contrast he states that scrupulous chastity is demanded of all Christians. Many Christians even practise celibacy.

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7) Luther employed the same method of turning from defensive to offensive warfare.



Then he takes up the accusation of the heathen that the Christians do not worship the gods nor burn incense to Caesar. In rejoinder he reminds them that they themselves did not always honor these gods, since many of them were introduced later on from captive nations. Moreover, he proves that these gods were mere men, who were apotheocized. Such gods depended upon foolish and lying men for the honor done them, for among Romans no gods were accredited except such as the Roman Senate approved. He discusses the individual spurious merits of some of these gods, saying of the god Liber: "*Ceterum si propterea Liber deus, quod vitem demonstravit, male cum Lucullo actum est, qui primus cerasia ex Ponto Italiae promulgavit, quod non est propterea consecratus ut frugis novae auctor, quia ostensor.*" At some length he enters upon the description of the manufacture, sale, pawning, mutilating, and packing away as rubbish, even burning and melting down, of these idols of wood, lead, and stone. He speaks of the mice, insects, and spiders which gnaw at, and infest, these dumb, helpless statues and images. He tells them that they themselves fear the living Caesar more than any of their gods. Aye, he accuses the heathen of despising their own gods, because they relate all manner of unsavory jests about them and offer defective, old, and diseased animals as sacrifices. He mentions some of these unsavory anecdotes which their poets and philosophers repeat about the gods. In quoting from Tacitus, he calls that Roman historian *ille mendaciorum loquacissimus*. (XVI, 3.) If the Christians do not worship Caesar and refuse to offer him divine honor or to burn incense upon his altar, they nevertheless respect him, obey his civil laws, fight for him, and pray for him.

He now turns to show the truth of the teachings of the Christians in the Scriptures. He calls attention to the undisputed *antiquity* of these writings. Tertullian's chronology, it must be admitted, is not reliable. But for that matter, where are the latest results of the chronological calculations concerning the times of different prophets and kings of the Old Testament which may be considered conclusively settled? Tertullian urges also the fulfilment of the prophecies of the Holy Scriptures as a proof of their trustworthy character. Then he deals with the person of Jesus. His Christology is not complete, but orthodox. He calls Jesus *Filius Dei*. He differentiates between the pure, holy conception and birth of Jesus and the shameful acts from which the pagans claimed that their demigods sprang. He reminds the Romans, however, that their wise men, also those of the Greeks, taught that *λόγος, id est, sermonem atque rationem, constat artificem videri universitatis*. He concludes this subject by telling his readers that the Christians, while bleeding and suffering under torture, are wont to exclaim: *Deum colimus per Christum!* (XXI, 28.)



After discussing demons and devils and their activities, he shows that the gods of the heathen are such demons and that the demons themselves have often confessed that they are not gods, but devils.

He demands that liberty of worship for the Christians which the Romans have conceded to other religions, even to the most superstitious. From their own historical records he proves that the victories and power of the Roman Empire cannot be a gift of their gods in reward for Roman piety, for Roman religion followed Rome's establishment, not *vice versa*. In this connection Tertullian indulges in some banter about their inferior sacrifices and their even more inferior gods: Sterculus, Mutuus, Larentina (*Acca Larentia*). He does not fail to chaff them with the fact that they are more punctilious about showing deference to the living Caesar than to honoring *ipsum de Olympo Iovem*. He reiterates that the Christians are not impious or atheists. They worship the only true God and pray for Caesar and serve the empire. Do not the Romans themselves remind their victorious generals of their frailty by having one stand behind them when their triumphs were celebrated and call to them at intervals: *Respice post te! Hominem te memento!* (XXXIII, 4.) Of Caesar Augustus he relates that the emperor never wished to be called *dominus*. In favor of the Christians he mentions that they do not avenge themselves, but love even their enemies and help them; that they care for their poor by collecting alms at their love-feasts (*agapae*); and that honor and office in the church is not bestowed *pretio, sed testimonio*. "*Neque enim pretio ulla res Dei constat.*" (XXXIX, 4.) Even the heathen testify to the love of the Christians by saying of them: "*Vide ut invicem se diligant et ut pro alterutro mori sint parati,*" whereas of the heathen it must be said, You hate one another. We Christians are willing to share what we have with our brethren: "*Omnia indiscreta sunt apud nos praeter uxores.*" (XXXIX, 11.)

At the beginning of his fortieth chapter the author states that every calamity is charged to the Christians. If the Tiber overflows its banks, if the Nile does not inundate the fields, if there is no rain, if there is an earthquake, if there is a famine, if there is a pestilence, "*statim 'Christianos ad leonem!' adclamatur. 'Tantos ad unum.'*" Notice the sarcastic fling in "*Tantos ad unum.*"

He records the fact that the Christians pray before meat and partake of food and drink with due temperance, speaking only what the Lord may hear. With prayer they also rise from table. After defending the Christians against the senseless accusation of causing every calamity (just as if there had been no calamity before the Christian religion made converts in Roman territory), he shows that Christians are reliable and diligent business men. If any business has fallen off, it is that of the *lenones, aquirioli, sicarii, venenarii,*



*haruspices, harioli, mathematici.* Remember that the *mathematici* of that time were the astrologers. He adds: "*His infructuosos esse magnus est fructus.*" (XLIII.) He calls attention to the fact that there are no Christian assassins, purse-snatchers, robbers, or corrupters of youth. The Christian religion is not a mere human philosophy, such as that of Socrates, that *corruptor adolescentium*. He mentions the shameful sins of other heathen philosophers and their pharisaic pride. He castigates the vices of Democritus, Diogenes, Zeno, Lycurgus, etc.

He closes by telling his opponents that they themselves are convicted by their own conscience, by reason and logic, by all nature and intuition. He defends the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, and he shows that they, the heathen, praise those very things in the writings of their poets and philosophers which they condemn in the teachings of Christians. If their own authors relate the sacrifice of life for the sake of truth and virtue, all this is noble, glorious; but if a Christian dies for his faith, he is called a fool and a coward. Your Cicero, Seneca, etc., speak in high praise of men and women who endured pain and death, but we demonstrate these virtues by deeds. Let the heathen remember: "*Semen est sanguis Christianorum.*" And if you do condemn us, God acquits us. "*Cum damnamur a vobis, a Deo absolvimur*" is the last sentence of Tertullian's apology.

In spite of occasional obscurities and linguistic difficulties, the *Apologeticum* is a gem. It pictures the fearful depth of heathen depravity as Paul portrays it Rom. 1. And it informs us of the godliness, grace, kindness, loyalty, and devotion unto death of the early Christians. All of us, but especially those of the Christians who must meet the arguments of paganism, can learn much from this early defender of our faith. While we do not deny that the apologist is more successful in routing the infidel than in confirming the Christian, we dare not underestimate the value and importance of this work of stopping the mouths of vain talkers and deceivers, Titus 1, 11.

M. S. SOMMER.

### Luthers persönliche Glaubensstellung vor 1520.

Daß Luther durch Gottes Gnade im Frühjahr des Jahres 1518 zur Erkenntnis der seligmachenden Wahrheit kam, besonders durch seine Studien bei seiner Vorbereitung auf seine Pfaltervorlesung, die im August dieses Jahres begann, ist bereits vor zwei Jahren in dieser Zeitschrift (Band II, 747 ff.) dargelegt worden. Auch wurde dort gezeigt, daß die Erkenntnis, die Luther damals gewann, nicht eine bloß momentane oder zeitweilige war, sondern sich als von wirklich anhaltender Kraft bewies. Allerdings drückte sich Luther in den ersten Jahren in der Lehre