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Second-Century Greek Christian Apologies
Addressed to Emperors: Their Form and Function

by

© P. Lorraine Buck

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the form and function of four second-century Christian defences: the Apology of Aristides, the two Apologies of Justin Martyr, and the Legatio of Athenagoras. These four works all belong to the same literary genre, i.e., they all contain addresses to Roman Emperors and they all imitate imperial petitions or speeches. They are also the only such works that survive in their entirety.

This thesis has three objectives. The first is to discover the predecessors, if any, of this particular literary genre. While scholars have traditionally posited Aristotle's Protrepticus, Luke/Acts in the New Testament, and Hellenistic-Jewish apology as possible antecedents, it is much more likely that Plato's Apology was the inspiration for these works. Indeed, all three apologists were philosophers prior to their conversion and the only adaptation which they make to this literary form is that necessitated by changes in the political and judicial systems between fifth-century B.C.E. Athens and second-century C.E. Rome.

The second objective is to demonstrate, by a literary/historical approach, that the literary form of the apologies is fictitious. Although scholars have traditionally maintained that the apologists at least intended that their works be read and approved by their

imperial addressees, both contemporary and modern works which consider the form and content of official petitions to the Emperor as well as the particular circumstances in which they were delivered, demonstrate the speciousness of this position.

The third objective is to determine, by a socio/historical approach, the literary and social function of these apologies in the second-century Empire. Two questions are thus posed: what was the intended audience of these apologies and what purpose were they meant to serve? After examining possible scholarly suggestions, in particular, that they were intended for the pagan public as a means of conversion, it is demonstrated that these defences were written primarily for a Christian audience for purposes of exhortation, confirmation, and/or instruction.

INTRODUCTION

No description of the second century C.E. can be more entrancing than that of Edward Gibbon:

In the second century of the Christian era, the Empire of Rome comprehended the fairest part of the earth, and the most civilised portion of mankind. The frontiers of that extensive monarchy were guarded by ancient renown and disciplined valour. The gentle but powerful influence of laws and manners had gradually cemented the union of the provinces. Their peaceful inhabitants enjoyed and abused the advantages of wealth and luxury. The image of a free constitution was preserved with decent reverence: the Roman state appeared to possess the sovereign authority, and devolved on the emperors all the executive powers of government. During a happy period (A.D. 98-180) of more than fourscore years, the public administration was conducted by the virtue and abilities of Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, and the two Antonines.¹

Yet while the second-century Empire might well have afforded long-awaited peace, prosperity, and public well-being to pagan inhabitants, it could hardly have ranked as a particularly "happy period" to the ever-increasing number of Christians. While this century witnessed no general or widespread persecution of Christianity, such as occurred sporadically after the year 250, there were outbreaks of oppression by local authorities, which resulted in the martyrdoms of such prominent Christians as Ignatius, bishop of Antioch (c. 107);² Telesphorus, bishop of Rome (c. 137);³

¹ Edward Gibbon, Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, Everyman's Library, Vol. 1 (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1956), p. 1.

² F. Gerald Downing, however, in his recent article entitled "Pliny's Prosecutions of Christians: Revelation and 1 Peter" (Journal for the Study of the New Testament, 34, 1988, pp. 105-123), questions the view, most recently

and Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna (155).⁴ In the year 177, moreover, in the cities of Lyons and Vienne in Gaul, a particularly vicious incident of mob violence culminated in the execution of all Christians who refused to disavow their faith. Eusebius, in his Ecclesiastical History (V.1.3-63), vividly recounts the atrocities perpetrated against and the bravery demonstrated by, among others, the aged Pothinus, bishop of Lyons, and the slave-girl Blandina. Yet what was even more to be feared by Christians than the occasional outbreak of savagery in their cities was the ever-present threat of private denunciations by pagan and Jewish delators. Justin Martyr, in his Second Apology, relates how a man in Rome, after his wife made countless attempts to convert him to the new faith, denounced her as a Christian when she sent him a repudium or bill of divorce.⁵ In fact, Justin Martyr himself was delated at Rome, probably by the Cynic Crescens, brought before the urban prefect, Q. Iunius

put forward by William R. Schoedel (Ignatius, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985, p. 11), that this bishop was arrested at the instigation of the authorities rather than as a result of a private denunciation.

³ Henry Chadwick, The Early Church (New York: Penguin Books, 1967), pp. 28-9.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ 2 Apol. 2.1-20. Unless otherwise noted, the translation of Justin's apologies which will be used throughout this thesis is by Thomas B. Falls, Saint Justin Martyr (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1965).

Rusticus, and executed between 162 and 168.⁶

Since apostasy, therefore, was the only sure defence which Christians had against persecution, the written apology became the most effective means at their disposal to vindicate both their religion and themselves against unjust charges. Traditionally, the second-century Greek Christians who undertook to compose such defences of the faith have been labelled by scholars "the Apologists", and have generally been understood to include Aristides, Justin Martyr, Tatian, Athenagoras, and Theophilus of Antioch. In addition, at least five other Greek Christians wrote defences of Christianity at this time, but unfortunately their works are either lost, such as that by Miltiades, or survive only in fragments, such as those by Apollinaris, Aristo of Pella, Quadratus, and Melito of Sardis. The Letter to Diognetus, which was composed by an anonymous Greek author, and the Satire on the Profane Philosophers, penned by a certain Hermias, both of which works could possibly date to the end of the second century, have also been labelled apologies by some scholars.⁷

Not all these apologists, however, adopted the same literary form. Aristo of Pella, Justin Martyr, and

⁶ "The Martyrdom of Saints Justin, Chariton, Charito, Evelpistus, Hierax, Paeon, Liberian, and their Community", The Acts of the Christian Martyrs, trans. Herbert Musurillo (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), pp. 43-61.

⁷ Johannes Quasten, Patrology, Vol. 1 (Utrecht-Antwerp: Spectrum Publishers, 1966), pp. 248 and 253.

Theophilus of Antioch each wrote a defence of Christianity in the form of a dialogue, in the first two instances between a Christian and a Jew, and in the last between a Christian and a pagan. The unknown author of the Letter to Diognetus composed his work in the form of an open letter to an equally unknown pagan acquaintance, while Hermias wrote an extremely sarcastic treatise and Tatian a vituperative discourse, both directed to the Greeks. Most of the second-century defences, however, were written in the form of supplications to the Roman Emperor. Aristides' Apology, in other words, was composed in the form of an imperial oration to the Emperor Hadrian; Justin Martyr's two Apologies imitate the form of written petitions to Hadrian's successor, Antoninus Pius; and Athenagoras' Legatio was composed in the form of an ambassadorial speech addressed to the Emperor Marcus Aurelius and his son Commodus.

This thesis will examine the form and function of the four Apologies by Aristides, Justin Martyr, and Athenagoras. These particular defences have been selected for two reasons. First, they all belong to the same literary genre; that is, they all contain addresses to second-century Roman Emperors and they all imitate the form of an imperial speech or petition. Second, they are the only Greek Christian second-century apologies addressed to Emperors which survive in their entirety. Quadratus, a disciple of the apostles, wrote an apology addressed to the Emperor Hadrian, but only

a single fragment survives in Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History (4.3.2). Apollinaris and Melito of Sardis both wrote apologies late in 175 addressed to the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, but the fragments which have been preserved, again by Eusebius (5.5.4 and 4.26.7), are insufficient for satisfactory analysis and discussion.

After examining the political and religious aspects of the Roman Empire with which Christianity was confronted in the second century (Ch. 1) and the three manifestations of pagan opposition to this new faith (Ch. 2), I shall consider the various ways in which the term "apology" has recently been used in scholarly works (Ch. 3). Indeed in the last several decades, scholars such as Avery Dulles (1971), Tessa Rajak (1983), and Robert M. Grant (1988) have been applying to these and other apologetic works definitions of "apology" which are so broad as to be unworkable. They have framed their definitions around ideas such as presentation, confirmation, and persuasion, notions which are undoubtedly found in varying degrees in any apologetic work, but they have often done so to the exclusion of the two basic and essential elements of apology, viz. attack, or the idea that a verbal assault has been made; and defence, or the idea that the work in hand represents a response to that attack. I shall employ in this thesis, therefore, the more restrictive and accurate definition of "apology" as "a defence of one's beliefs in response to accusation or

attack", and I shall use it to accomplish the first of my objectives, i.e., to discover the predecessors, if any, of this literary genre. I shall begin by examining the three antecedents which have traditionally been posited by scholars, viz. Aristotle's Protrepticus; Luke's two-part narrative in the New Testament, i.e., the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles; and the Hellenistic-Jewish apologetic writings, in particular Philo's Hypothetica and Josephus' Contra Apionem. A fourth--and more likely--origin of this genre, however, is the Apology of Plato. Indeed I shall note the similarities between this philosophical work and the second-century Christian defences addressed to an Emperor, demonstrating that the only real adaptation which the apologists make to this literary genre was that necessitated by changes to the political and judicial systems between the fifth century B.C.E and the second century C.E.

My second objective is to demonstrate that the literary form of each of these four Christian defences is fictitious (Chs. 4-6), a view which clearly contravenes the general scholarly opinion that all three apologists presented--or at least intended to present--their defences to the Emperor. In fact, T.D. Barnes has suggested that Athenagoras delivered his Legatio before Marcus Aurelius in September

176 in Athens.⁸ Such an approach to these works, however, is not entirely satisfactory, since it does not take into account the research currently being done by classicists on the concepts of truth and fiction in classical literature, that is, on the degree to which ancient authors revised, or even manipulated and embellished, their historical and biographical sources. A.J. Woodman's Rhetoric in Classical Antiquity,⁹ for example, as well as C.B.R. Pelling's "Truth and Fiction in Plutarch's Lives",¹⁰ examine the meaning of truth and fiction in classical authors and have made it necessary to consider the Christian defences as part of a much larger context. In fact, they have made it imperative to question the traditional interpretation of these apologies as official imperial petitions and have opened up entirely new ways of looking at their form and function.

My third objective is to determine the literary and social function of these Apologies in the second-century Empire (Ch. 7). In particular, I shall pose two questions: what was the intended audience of these works, and what were the intended aims of their authors? With respect to the former, I shall demonstrate, contrary to general scholarly

⁸ T.D. Barnes, "The Embassy of Athenagoras", Journal of Theological Studies, 26, 1975, p. 114.

⁹ A.J. Woodman, Rhetoric in Classical Historiography (London: Croom Helm, 1988).

¹⁰ C.B.R. Pelling, "Truth and Fiction in Plutarch's Lives", in Antonine Literature, ed. D.A. Russell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 19-52.

opinion, that these works could only have circulated, in significant numbers, among Christian communities. With respect to the latter, I shall argue that they were written for at least three purposes: 1) to admonish converts against the evils of polytheism; 2) to confirm the truth and superiority of Christianity for the benefit of those who were wavering in the faith or facing possible denunciation; and 3) to provide assistance to clergy and other educated Christians who were charged with the instruction and/or guidance of Christians within the Church. My examination of the form, audience, and possible functions of these works, moreover, will be based on my previous discussions of the political, religious, and social situation in the second-century Graeco-Roman world (Chs. 1 and 2).

This research will require two methodological approaches. The first is a literary-historical approach, for I shall be studying apologies written according to a specific literary genre and attempting to determine their rhetorical nature, *i.e.*, whether their setting is real or imaginary. I shall examine, for example, the addresses of these four works to determine if they conform to accepted practice and were thus suitable for presentation at the imperial court. In fact, in the case of Aristides' Apology, I shall compare the address found in the Armenian version and the two found in the Syriac version with the addresses of official second-century imperial petitions or libelli

found in such collections of Greek inscriptions as the Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum. I shall also consider the tone and clarity of these defences to ascertain their appropriateness--or not--for official written petitions to the Emperor. Indeed the unfocussed and offensive nature of Justin's Apologies in particular would have precluded the possibility that they were written for the eyes or ears of the imperial court. I shall be aided in this task by the monumental work of Fergus Millar, entitled The Emperor in the Roman World, in which he discusses the relationship between the Roman Emperor and his subjects and provides numerous examples of imperial petitions, letters, and speeches written in the first five centuries of the Christian era. I shall also be considering the monograph of the third-century rhetorician Menander which provides a wide variety of prescriptions for writing imperial speeches in the early Empire. This work will be particularly useful when examining Athenagoras' Legatio. Since this defence was written in the form of an ambassadorial speech to the Emperor, I shall be able, by determining how closely Athenagoras followed Menander's prescriptions, to judge the probability that his defence was actually intended to be read at the imperial court.

The second methodological approach is socio-historical. Based on my conclusion that these Apologies were not intended for the Emperor, I shall be attempting to uncover

both the intended audience and the social function of these four defences. With respect to the former, I shall rely to a large extent on the very helpful book by Harry Y. Gamble, entitled Books and Readers in Early Christianity, which provides many insights into the publication and distribution of literature in the second century. With respect to the latter, I shall draw upon the research by Victor Tcherikover and Martin Goodman on the function of Hellenistic-Jewish apologies. In addition, I shall consult the works of notable social historians of the second century, such as Ramsay MacMullen, who discusses the presentation of Christianity to the pagan world in the early Empire, and Rodney Stark, whose new book examines, from a sociological perspective, the likely methods by which early Christians won converts to the faith.

This thesis is thus a study of a literary genre as actualized in four second-century Greek Christian apologies. Since a paucity of research on their literary form and function has seriously impaired our understanding of these works, I trust that this investigation will fill a very real scholarly gap.

CHAPTER 1

The Second-Century Roman Empire: Its Political and Religious Aspects

The political and religious systems of the second-century Roman Empire had one common goal: the peace and security of the State. For this reason, both systems played an integral part in the lives of all Roman citizens, for good or ill, and the Christians were no exception. Indeed the apologists adapted their supplications for relief and toleration to the common and current practice of petitioning the Emperor, and all second-century Christians were judged according to their willingness or not to participate in the religious rites and ceremonies of the traditional Roman cult. An examination of the political and religious life of the early Empire, therefore, can aid our understanding both of the plight of the Christians and of the apologists' response to it.

Political

Although in theory the Senate was the ultimate source of power in the state,¹ in reality the authority of the Senate rested solely on the Emperor's will, while that of the Emperor rested on something much more real: the support

¹ Frank Frost Abbott, A History and Description of Roman Political Institutions (New York: Biblo and Tannet, 1963), p. 341.

of the army and its commanders.² The powers of the Emperor, to the extent that they had a purely legal foundation, were based on the imperium and the tribunicia potestas,³ and these, as described by Cornelius Fronto, conferred upon him the right "to urge necessary steps in the senate; to address the people on very many matters in public meetings; to correct the injustices of the law; to send letters to all parts of the globe; to bring compulsion to bear on kings of foreign nations; to repress by their edicts the faults of the provincials, give praise to good actions, quell the seditious and terrify the fierce ones".⁴ The Emperor's authority, in other words, was virtually absolute, and it was through his extensive personal contacts with provincial governors, municipal magistrates, and individual subjects that this authority was most fully manifested and actualized.

Since it was not in the Emperor's interest to tolerate

² William T. Arnold, The Roman System of Provincial Administration to the Accession of Constantine the Great (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), p. 110.

³ Abbott, op. cit., p. 344.

⁴ As quoted by Fergus Millar, The Emperor in the Roman World (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1977), p. 203. Much of the following discussion on the relationship between the Emperor and his subjects is taken from this work, since it was, in 1977, and still is, the definitive writing on the subject. Articles such as Wynne Williams' "The Libellus Procedure and the Severan Papyri", Journal of Roman Studies 64, 1974, pp. 86-103; and William Turpin's "Imperial Subscriptions and the Administration of Justice", Journal of Roman Studies 81, 1991, pp. 101-118, while helpful, deal primarily with issues not directly related to this thesis.

administrative mismanagement or unjust oppression, particularly at the provincial level, it was essential that he be well acquainted with his Empire and hold his governors in strict control. It was his prerogative, therefore, to override any provincial edicts and, when important administrative matters arose, to lay down an imperial "constitution", which was incorporated into the lex provinciae. More importantly, however, since such measures could only be effective if he were made aware of potentially volatile matters, the Emperor expected that his governors regularly inform him, via the elaborate postal system established under Augustus, of any pressing concerns which arose in their territories.⁵

One need look no further than Pliny for an example of a provincial governor who kept in close communication with the Emperor. As Millar has pointed out, Pliny not only sought advice on questions arising from legal cases, such as that involving the Christians in his province, he also asked for direction regarding the recruitment and disposition of troops, queried matters regarding kings beyond the Empire, sought imperial approval of building projects which almost invariably involved requests for the despatch of experts, transmitted requests for communal or individual beneficia, made enquiries about rights and privileges and requested

⁵ Arnold, op. cit., pp. 132-3.

rulings on them,⁶ -and he even sought permission to establish a city fire brigade.⁷ While scholars in the past have often interpreted this massive correspondence as evidence that the governor was simply "averse to taking decisions on his own",⁸ Millar has suggested that Pliny, in his continual submissions to Trajan, was simply acting as "a normal imperial governor".⁹ In fact, Millar points out, Pliny's correspondence is significant, not because it was incessant and frequently unnecessary, but because it seems to mark the beginning of the process of continuing consultation as a means of administering the Empire. Since Trajan issued considerably more rescripts than previous Emperors, and since many of these were in reply to queries from the provinces, it could very well be that Pliny was simply paving the way for successive governors to take counsel with the Emperor, not simply on political or military matters, but also on their routine jurisdiction and the problems and demands arising from their subjects.¹⁰

That such "ad hoc consultations"¹¹ between Emperor and

⁶ Millar, op. cit., pp. 325-6.

⁷ Pliny, Ep. X.33 and Trajan's reply Ep. X.34.

⁸ Frend, Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), p. 218.

⁹ Millar, op. cit., p. 325.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 326.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 329.

governor were not simply an anomaly of Trajan's reign is demonstrated by the large number of imperial rescripts which we possess in response to questions and requests from provincial governors from the reign of Hadrian to that of Severus Alexander. The following examples, two of which involve Christians, are sufficient to demonstrate the variety of issues on which these emperors were approached.

A rescript addressed by Hadrian to Egnatius Taurinus, proconsul of Baetica, concerns a minor local incident--the death of a young man due to the carelessness of his friend--and records Hadrian's concurrence with the punishment fixed by Taurinus, viz. banishment for five years and financial compensation to the victim's father. Hadrian also issued a rescript pertaining to a more serious issue of long-term importance, viz. how to deal with accusations against Christians, in which he instructs the current proconsul of Asia, Minucius Fundanus, not to accept delations of Christians without proper and convincing proof of crimes. Antoninus Pius, in response to a query by the proconsul of Baetica, instructs the latter to investigate the accusations of harsh treatment made by a group of slaves who had sought refuge at an imperial statue and, if their complaints were legitimate, to order them to be sold. At the time of the Christian martyrdoms in 177, Marcus Aurelius, having received a request for direction from the legatus of Lugdunum, instructs him to execute all Christians, even

those who are Roman citizens, and to release those who deny the faith. Finally, Severus Alexander wrote a most eloquent reply to a proconsul seeking advice on the subject of gifts from the inhabitants of the province: "As regards xenia, hear what our view is: there is an old proverb, 'Neither all, nor on every occasion, nor from all'. For it is most uncivilized to accept gifts from no one, but to take them generally is degrading and to accept all of them a sign of excessive avarice".¹²

Provincial governors thus had no independent power base and no independent executive or administrative authority; they governed at the pleasure of the Emperor. To enable the Emperor to remain in touch with provincial concerns, therefore, Trajan introduced an informal system of continual --and sometimes obligatory--consultation with his governors, a policy which became a fundamental feature of the imperial government under the Antonines and continued until at least the reign of Severus Alexander.

Yet it was also expedient for the Emperor to be in direct communication with organizations within the provinces, and in particular with individual cities. Once a district had achieved the status of a city, therefore, usually after appealing to the Emperor and demonstrating a sufficient potential for self-government, it was almost invariably granted the right to approach the Emperor on

¹² Ibid., pp. 329-333.

matters of legal, administrative, or social concern. Since municipal magistrates were rarely of sufficient rank or personal prominence to correspond directly with the Emperor, however, their letters were either forwarded by the respective provincial governor or presented formally and publicly to the imperial court by embassies.¹³ They were then considered and handled by the Emperor personally.¹⁴

Imperial embassies were despatched by a city for two main purposes. The first was to make a formal demonstration of loyalty to the Emperor, perhaps at the time of a victory or of a specific formal event such as when Gaius assumed the toga virilis, or, more commonly, on the accession of a new Emperor. An inscription from approximately the year 37 records the despatch of an embassy by the city of Assos in the Troad on the accession of Gaius:

Since the rule of Gaius Caesar Germanicus Augustus, the hope of the prayers of all mankind, has been proclaimed, and the joy of the world knows no bounds, and every city and every province has hastened to set eyes on the god, as the happiest of ages in[sic] now dawning for men: it was voted by the council and the Romans in business among us and the people of Assos to appoint an embassy of the foremost and best Romans and Greeks to address and congratulate him....¹⁵

Yet embassies were also sent by cities specifically to petition the Emperor, be it for financial help after a

¹³ Ibid., pp. 217-219.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 219.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 412.

natural disaster, for a judgement on a divisive municipal dispute, or even for new rights or privileges. The city of Chersonesus in the Crimea, for instance, sought from the Emperor, presumably Commodus, an extension of their exemption from the tax on prostitutes,¹⁶ while a letter from Antoninus Pius reveals that he had been approached by the cities of Coronea and Thisbe over a land dispute and had decided firmly in favour of the Coroneans.¹⁷ Yet although such supplicatory embassies were clearly distinguished from those of a diplomatic nature, it was not unknown for a delegation bringing congratulations to the Emperor to seize the opportunity either to request new rights or to ask for a settlement of some local dispute. When Claudius, for example, was proclaimed Emperor on 24 January 41, at least two of the embassies which arrived not only honoured his accession but also presented him with urgent demands.¹⁸

Yet whatever the purpose of the delegation, the procedure was almost always the same. Once the assembly of a city made a decision to send an imperial embassy,¹⁹ it first had to establish the current location of the Emperor. Given, for instance, that Hadrian made extensive tours of the Empire and that Marcus Aurelius was frequently away on

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 429.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 436.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 412.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 384.

military campaigns, this undertaking could be a serious challenge. Indeed it was often the case that ambassadors were confronted with arduous journeys, sometimes of thousands of miles; in fact, legal sources frequently refer to the consequences of an individual's absence from his city while on such a mission.²⁰ Yet even when an embassy reached the Emperor, further ordeals were usually in store. The first task was to obtain an imperial hearing, which often involved innumerable frustrations and delays; the second was to make a suitable and convincing oration or legatio in the Emperor's presence, again a daunting undertaking for an ambassador. When the oration had been delivered, the delegation presented the Emperor with a decree signed by the municipal magistrates, and then had only to await his reply. This usually took the form of an official imperial letter, addressed to the city, which the envoy would then carry back with him. If the reply were favourable, the letter was usually inscribed on tablets and placed in the local marketplace for the information of the citizens.²¹

Commissioned ambassadors, moreover, were not alone in seeking hearings with the Emperor. Individual subjects also had the right to make appeals and they, too, sought the

²⁰ Ibid., p. 382.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 217-18.

Emperor wherever they could find him.²² Plutarch, in fact, tells how Julius Caesar, just moments before his assassination, was handed a petition by the philosopher Artemidorus of Cnidus regarding the conspiracy against him; he was prevented from reading it, however, by the crowd of suppliants closing in upon him.²³ While some petitioners, such as Herodes Atticus, Virgil, and the grammarian Velius Celer, were of sufficient status to communicate with the Emperor by letter,²⁴ the normal procedure by which private persons received an imperial pronouncement was to appear before the Emperor in person and to present a libellus or written request.²⁵ While on occasion a request was given an immediate, verbal response,²⁶ the libellus, being a written document addressed to the Emperor, generally received a subscriptio or written reply.²⁷ This was usually inscribed on the petition itself,²⁸ which was then, at least from the

²² William Turpin, "Imperial Subscriptions and the Administration of Justin", Journal of Roman Studies, 81, 1991, p. 101.

²³ Millar, op. cit., p. 240.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 470.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 538.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 424.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 243-4.

²⁸ The question of whether it was the Emperor himself or one of his subordinates who actually subscribed the petitions is still being debated. Vid. Tony Honoré, Emperors and Lawyers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), passim; and Turpin, op. cit., p. 101 and n. 4.

mid-second century onward, posted up at the current imperial residence for the instruction of both the petitioner and the public.²⁹ It was the responsibility of the particular petitioner to make a copy for himself and to have it witnessed.³⁰

Individual subjects, like provincial and municipal officials, appealed to the Emperor for a wide variety of reasons, both major and minor.³¹ A libellus, for example, could contain information demanding immediate attention, such as that submitted to Julius Caesar regarding his imminent demise. Suetonius, moreover, recounts how Gaius once refused to accept a libellus containing information about his safety because he believed he had done nothing to provoke anyone's hatred.³² A petitioner could also appeal for benefits or favours, just as Atticus approached Caesar regarding protection for his property at Buthrotum.³³ Sometimes a request was made for an indulgence on behalf of an accused or condemned individual; the Christian hermit, Eutygianus, for example, petitioned for an indulgence to be granted to an accused officer in Constantine's escort.³⁴

²⁹ Millar, op. cit., p. 538.

³⁰ Williams, op. cit., pp. 100-101.

³¹ Millar, op. cit., p. 252.

³² Ibid., p. 240.

³³ Ibid., p. 241.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 541.

Groups of peasants, moreover, from communities not of recognized city status, petitioned the Emperor for relief from oppression by local or imperial authorities; one group from near Vaga in Africa complained to Commodus of the excessive demands made upon them for labour in the fields and for payments in kind to an inn used by official travellers.³⁵ Yet by far the majority of libelli were simply requests from individual citizens on legal matters pertaining to family or property. In some instances, these petitions were presented by women; Flavia Tertulla, for example, sought advice from the Emperor when she discovered that she was married to her uncle,³⁶ while a woman in Rome, discussed by Justin Martyr in his Second Apology, petitioned the Emperor for time to put her affairs in order after having been denounced by her husband as a Christian.³⁷

It was one of the foremost duties of the Emperor, therefore, to hear requests, accusations, and complaints from all corners of his Empire,³⁸ an expectation which is vividly reflected in Hadrian's alleged encounter with a woman desiring his attention; after having been told that he had no time to deal with her concerns, she replied: "Then

³⁵ Ibid., p. 542.

³⁶ Ibid., p 548.

³⁷ 2 Apol. 2.

³⁸ Williams, op. cit., p. 86.

do not be a king!".³⁹

Yet since all things depended solely on the Emperor's will, this open-door policy was subject to at least two qualifications. The first is that the senatorial elite in Rome, as well as the educated bourgeoisie from the major cities in the provinces, had far easier and faster access to the Emperor than those individuals who, for example, had to progress through the equestrian ranks or, even more particularly, were relegated to the humbler classes and confined to the far reaches of the Empire. While the evidence clearly indicates that the Emperor received petitions from common soldiers, freedmen, slaves, and even peasants in remote communities in Thrace and Asia, it was usually only at mass gatherings, such as at the games and shows at Rome or sometimes at events in provincial cities, that he found himself confronted with the demands and requests of the lower segments of society.⁴⁰

The second qualification is that, "however consistent and comprehensible were the attitudes and priorities which informed the system", it resulted nonetheless in apprehensiveness and uncertainty on the part of the petitioner and in arbitrariness on the part of the Emperor.⁴¹ It was not unknown, for instance, for private

³⁹ Ibid., p. 3.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 36-7.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 9.

petitioners and even ambassadors to be overcome with fear and trembling in the imperial presence. According to Quintilian, Augustus, sensing the nervousness of a soldier about to present his libellus, quipped that he was as uncertain as a man giving a present to an elephant.⁴² In fact, the experience of meeting the Emperor was such as to prompt an orator to write:

Nor is it any small matter to make a request on one's own behalf to the emperor of the whole world, to put on a brave face before the eyes of such majesty, to compose one's expression, to summon up one's courage, to choose the right words, to speak without fear, to stop at the right moment, and to await the reply.⁴³

Yet sometimes a petitioner's fear was more than justified, for the Emperor's pronouncement on any request, be it from a governor, a city magistrate, or a private subject, could be unpredictable and inexplicable, depending on nothing more than his mood at the time. Ambassadors from Gadara, for example, were well aware of the risk they were taking when they recited before Augustus vicious accusations of oppression against Herod. They carefully studied the Emperor's reaction throughout the ambassadorial oration, and when they realized that, despite their legitimate grievances, he remained well disposed towards Herod, each member of the delegation committed suicide on the spot.⁴⁴

⁴² Ibid., p. 242.

⁴³ As quoted by Millar, ibid., p. 385.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 9.

The Emperor thus made it his business to keep well acquainted with his Empire, and his Empire, i.e., his administrators and subjects, took advantage of his openness and responsiveness to bring before him innumerable queries, requests and complaints. Yet notwithstanding the evident simplicity and even appeal of this system, it must never be forgotten that the Empire was at the mercy of two overriding factors: first, that the power of the Emperor was absolute; and second, that the exercise of that power was a function of his goodwill and favour.

Religious

From the late republic through the early Empire, the national cult, viz. the worship of the traditional gods with Jupiter as the supreme patron of the Roman state, formed the basis of Roman public religion.⁴⁵ In the eyes of the governing classes at least, Rome's long-standing and unwavering devotion to the ancestral religion was her most salient and important feature. As the Stoic Balbus asserts in Cicero's de Natura Deorum, "[I]f we care to compare our national characteristics with those of foreign peoples, we shall find that, while in all other respects we are only the equal or inferiors of others, yet in the sense of religion,

⁴⁵ J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, Continuity and Change in Roman Religion (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 198.

that is, reverence for the gods we are far superior".⁴⁶ Indeed it was both natural and acceptable to be skeptical about particular rites and gods, but about the religio itself, i.e., the truths which it embodied, there could be no doubt.

The main reason for the continuity of the national religion was its close interconnection with the well-being of the State. By virtue of the pax deorum, the ancestral gods in their totality were the guardians of Rome, and failure to appease them by traditional ceremonies and practices could expose her to misfortune. Indeed the gods had an enormous potential for both helping and harming mortals, and it was thus important to minimize their unpredictable anger.⁴⁷ The historian Livy, for instance, recounts how Camillus, in the war against Veii in 397 B.C.E., allegedly admonished the Romans "that all went well so long as we obeyed the gods, and ill when we spurned them", while earlier in 463, the remedy for pestilence was a general sacrifice to the Roman gods by the entire population.⁴⁸ It is thus not surprising that Decius, in the mid-third century C.E., found the Christians' refusal to participate in the traditional Roman religion to be both

⁴⁶ As cited by W.H.C. Frend, op. cit., p. 105.

⁴⁷ Lane Fox, Pagans and Christians (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1987), p. 38.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

unpatriotic and a threat to the unity and safety of the Empire.⁴⁹

Yet Roman religion underwent considerable change in the first century C.E., due principally to the establishment of a monarchical form of government. Since public well-being had now become largely dependent on the well-being of the ruler, rather than on decisions reached by the Senate, the primary objective of the national religion was to offer divine support to both reigning and dead Emperors. Early in the first century, therefore, new rites and ceremonies which expressed and encouraged loyalty to the Emperor sprang up across the Empire, usually at the instigation of the people.⁵⁰ During the reign of Augustus, for instance, the worship of Roma et Augustus grew up spontaneously in the provincial capitals and other large cities; after his death the cult of Divus Augustus was officially established in Rome and other major centres, while people in the towns of Italy and the provinces set up numerous temples in his honour.⁵¹ Under Tiberius and Claudius, moreover, altars to the Emperor or to popular members of the imperial family were set up in various locations.⁵²

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Liebeschuetz, op. cit., p. 198.

⁵¹ M. Cary and H.H. Scullard, A History of Rome Down to the Reign of Constantine (London: The MacMillan Press Ltd., 1975), p. 399.

⁵² Ibid.

That subject communities should wish to pay due honour and respect to the Emperor was not surprising, given that the Greeks had been offering worship to living rulers since the time of Alexander the Great.⁵³ Yet while the Greeks believed that their rulers had supernatural powers, the Romans for the most part did not, insisting that devotion to the ruler should take second place to devotion to the gods on the ruler's behalf.⁵⁴ This was a point with which the majority of the first-century Emperors agreed--the obvious exceptions being Nero and Caligula--and many strove to keep the worship of the monarch to a respectable minimum. Augustus, for instance, permitted no public devotion towards himself at Rome except among the poorer people who were permitted "to sacrifice in small chapels at street corners to the Lares Augusti".⁵⁵ Tiberius refused to accept the voting of a temple to himself from Spain because he "was satisfied to be human, to perform human duties, and to occupy the first place among men",⁵⁶ while Claudius similarly asserted to the Alexandrines that he did not want a high priest or temples, since he did "not wish to be offensive to [his] contemporaries".⁵⁷ That such restraining

⁵³ Robin Lane Fox, op. cit., p. 40.

⁵⁴ Liebeschuetz, op. cit., p. 198.

⁵⁵ Cary and Scullard, op. cit., p. 350.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 638, n. 42.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 357.

measures were necessary is illustrated by an incident in Ephesus during the reign of Claudius in which the provincial governor was compelled to put an end to what were deemed misplaced imperial rites by his subjects.⁵⁸

By the second century, however, and even in the last decades of the first, the cult of the deified Emperor, although well entrenched in Roman public religion, had become like any cult of the older state gods--a mere formality.⁵⁹ With the exception of Domitian who encouraged the use of the title dominus et deus,⁶⁰ and Commodus who rewarded himself with divine honours for his achievements at the public venationes,⁶¹ Emperors of this period showed little inclination to encourage worship of themselves. Vespasian, for example, was able to joke about his impending deification by stating on his deathbed, "Alas, I think that I am becoming a god".⁶² In Pliny's letter to Trajan regarding the Christians, he told the Emperor that he had compelled those who denied the faith to offer incense and

⁵⁸ Lane Fox, op. cit., p. 40.

⁵⁹ Ibid. For a contrary view with respect to the cult in Ephesus, see Philip A. Harland, "Honours and worship: Emperors, imperial cults and associations at Ephesus (first to third centuries C.E.)", Studies in Religion, vol. 25, no. 3, 1996, pp. 319-334.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 412.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 490.

⁶² Ibid., p. 411.

wine to his statue as proof of their sincerity.⁶³ In his reply, Trajan agreed totally with Pliny's insistence that the accused prove their loyalty to the State by their actions. He made no reference, however, to Pliny's ruling that the Christians make supplication to his statue; he simply suggested that they should be required to worship the Roman gods.⁶⁴ Marcus Aurelius also demonstrated disinterest in the imperial cult by actually disavowing his personal immortality,⁶⁵ thereby setting the stage for an even further decline of the cult in the third century at the hands of a long succession of ephemeral rulers.

That is not to say, however, that Christians were not compelled in some instances to pay homage to the Emperor as proof of loyalty. While Emperors like Trajan discouraged their own worship,⁶⁶ provincial governors like Pliny found this practice to be both convenient and acceptable when dealing with the Christians.⁶⁷ Indeed at Justin Martyr's trial the prefect Rusticus passed judgement as follows: "Those who have refused to sacrifice to the gods are to be scourged and executed in accordance with the laws", the Emperor no doubt being included in the generic term

⁶³ Pliny, Ep. X.96.

⁶⁴ Pliny, Ep. X.97.

⁶⁵ Cary and Scullard, op. cit., p. 483.

⁶⁶ Pliny, Ep. X.97.

⁶⁷ Pliny, Ep., X.96.

"gods".⁶⁸ Antoninus Pius was definitely in the mind of the irenarch Herod when he beseeched Polycarp, on his way to martyrdom, to say "'Caesar is Lord' and [to] offer...the incense, and so forth".⁶⁹ Perpetua, too, was entreated by the procurator Hilarian to participate in the cult of the Emperor: "Spare your father's white hairs; spare the tender years of your child. Offer a sacrifice for the safety of the Emperors."⁷⁰ Indeed for provincial governors who were faced with numerous trials of Christians, a demonstration of loyalty to the State was a useful--and probably not uncommon--means of distinguishing the true from the false charges of Christianity.

In addition to Emperor-worship, the early Empire also witnessed the introduction of foreign cults or religiones externae. Isis-worship and Mithraism, two Eastern mystery religions, held the greatest appeal to the Romans, largely because of their "personal" element.⁷¹ Isis was an ancient Egyptian nature-deity who was metamorphosed during the Hellenistic period into a universal goddess and mother, a

⁶⁸ Herbert Musurillo, trans., The Acts of the Christian Martyrs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 47.

⁶⁹ Maxwell Staniforth, trans., "The Martyrdom of Polycarp", Early Christian Writings (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), p. 158.

⁷⁰ Willis Barnstone, ed., "The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity", The Other Bible (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1984), p. 176.

⁷¹ Liebeschuetz, op. cit., p. 199.

Saviour figure, and perhaps the "foremost representative of divine femininity in the ancient world".⁷² In return for sincere devotion and compliance with some fundamental rules, such as the occasional fast, she was believed to supply happiness both in this world and in the world to come. Her carefully-arranged ritual, which was not without its emotional element, was directed by a professional clergy, and her ardent followers, instead of merely watching the ceremonials, were permitted an active part in them.⁷³

The worship of Isis was most popular among merchants and seamen, no doubt to some extent because the rites were tied to no particular location and thus could be conducted in almost any centre in the Mediterranean world. Thus from its beginnings in Philae in the south of Egypt, this cult soon spread to the cosmopolitan city of Alexandria, whence it was disseminated to Athens and many other Greek cities, Asia Minor, North Africa, Sardinia, Pompeii, Rome, Spain, Switzerland, Germany, and even Britain.⁷⁴ Although when it first reached the capital it was beset with scandal and political opposition, it nevertheless remained popular; in fact, when Aemilius Paulus ordered the demolition of the temple of Isis in Rome in 50 B.C.E., he could find no

⁷² John Ferguson, The Religions of the Roman Empire (London: Thames & Hudson, 1970), p. 24; cf. Cary and Scullard, op. cit., p. 400.

⁷³ Cary and Scullard, op. cit., p. 400.

⁷⁴ Ferguson, op. cit., pp. 24-5.

workmen willing to undertake the task.⁷⁵ Caligula's erection of a temple in the Campus Martius, moreover, met with no popular resistance, and by the time of Caracalla, Isis-worship was freely and even enthusiastically accepted at Rome.⁷⁶ Indeed the story of the cult of Isis, unlike that of Christianity in the second-century, was "the story of the gradual penetration and acceptance of a foreign cult despite opposition and despite periodic repression".⁷⁷

Yet from the reign of Antoninus Pius on, the cult of Isis lost its primary position among pagan mystery religions to the cult of Mithras, the Persian god of light. On the one hand, the worship of Mithras derived partly from Persian Zoroastrianism; Mithras was the agent of Ahura-Mazda, the power of good, in opposition to Ahriman, the power of evil. It also derived partly from the cult of the Phrygian goddess Cybele, from which it borrowed the ritual of initiation by baptism with the blood of a bull. Like the cult of Isis, it boasted elaborate and impressive initiation rituals, promise of immortality, i.e., a way through the seven planetary spirits which prevented the ascent to the Milky Way after death, and a strict ethical code; like Christianity it offered a ritual of sacred meals and placed

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 25.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Frensd, op. cit., p. 112.

an emphasis upon good works.⁷⁸

Mithraism appealed largely to the upper classes, and in particular to army officers and important businessmen. This was due, no doubt, to its militaristic rites, its high moral code, and its exclusivity to men. With the active and extensive support of the second-century Emperors, most notably Commodus who made it an imperial cult, it spread from the East to the Rhineland, Italy, Spain, North Africa, and Britain.⁷⁹ It survived until the fourth century when Christianity, now favoured by the imperial court, completely superseded it.

Since Roman religion was essentially a national or State cult, Rome judged a religio externa from that standpoint, i.e., a cult was lawful for a particular people "on the basis of tribe or nationality and traditional practices, coupled with the proviso that its rites were not offensive to the Roman people or their gods".⁸⁰ Participation in the State religion thus precluded participation in other cults unless these had been officially sanctioned by the Senate, since such practice could be offensive to the gods and thus injurious to Rome and her people. Recognition of a cult, therefore, often took a long time, and until a new religion was recognized, the practice of its rituals and ceremonies

⁷⁸ Cary and Scullard, op. cit., p. 483.

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 483-4.

⁸⁰ Frend, op. cit., p. 106.

by a Roman citizen, especially if this resulted in the abandonment of the State cult, could be punishable.⁸¹ In 186 B.C.E., for instance, participants in the Bacchanalia were imprisoned and executed when Roman Senators learned of this prava et externa religio which reportedly engaged in nocturnal rites, orgies, and secret murder. Nothing was more dangerous to religion, the consul Postumius asserted at the time, than "where sacrifices were performed not by native, but by foreign ritual".⁸² About a century later, Tacitus was to label Christianity a prava religio and to accuse its adherents of criminal offences.⁸³ Unlike Christianity, however, by the second century the Bacchic cult was respectable enough to "provide a popular theme on mosaics of the houses of the wealthy".⁸⁴

The early Empire also witnessed a significant rise in the authority of oracles, a transformation which was, to a large extent, assisted by the benefactions of the Emperors.⁸⁵ While Plutarch, in a dialogue written in the early 80's, laments the serious decline of the oracles, he

⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 106-8.

⁸² As cited by Frend, op. cit., p. 110.

⁸³ Ibid.; cf. Stephen Benko, "Pagan Criticism of Christianity During the First Two Centuries A.D.", Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt 23.2 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), pp. 1065-67.

⁸⁴ Frend, op. cit., p. 111.

⁸⁵ Cary and Scullard, op. cit., p. 483.

is able approximately forty years later to report a recent metamorphosis of the amenities of the Delphic oracle, a transformation with which he credits Apollo, but which can be attributed to the generosity of Hadrian.⁸⁶ Both Trajan and Hadrian, moreover, provided material assistance to the shrine at Didyma, while a dedication of the impressive Doric temple at Claros also bears Hadrian's name.⁸⁷

The consultants of oracles were those who "wished to know and argue, to be reassured or guided through their many choices of thought and action",⁸⁸ and they could consult the gods on almost any personal matter or undertaking.⁸⁹ A certain Poplas, for example, queried whether it was proper to petition the Emperor for monies for a public show".⁹⁰ A little later, when Poplas' health was deteriorating and his finances were depleted, he asked the god who could possibly help him.⁹¹ Yet it was not unknown for oracles to be used as a means of establishing theological truth. A certain client, possibly Polites the Milesian, asked Apollo at Didyma about the fate of the soul after death. He received the following answer: "When the soul is still in the

⁸⁶ Lane Fox, op. cit., pp. 200-1.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 201.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 189.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 227.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 192.

⁹¹ Ibid.

body,...it tolerates the pains which cannot hurt it. When the body fades and dies, the soul ranges free through the air, ageless, forever unwearied.⁹² Some of the gods' responses, moreover, had an anti-Christian focus. Porphyry recounts, for example, how the god was asked by a husband from which god he should seek aid in detaching his wife from Christianity. The reply, in essence, was that the situation was "regrettable but hopeless".⁹³ Moreover, when Hecate was asked whether or not Christ was God, she replied that "his soul survived death but as that of an outstandingly good man, not of a god".⁹⁴

During the late first and the second centuries, a widespread belief in the efficacy of magic also arose.⁹⁵ Although there was an official ban on magical practices, numerous stories of miraculous healings by pagan gods through the mediation of human beings were being circulated and, in many instances, unhesitatingly accepted.⁹⁶ During the reign of Domitian, supernatural powers of this sort were ascribed to a wandering Neopythagorean philosopher named Apollonius of Tyana, while according to Suetonius, Vespasian, on his visit to Egypt, had cured the blind and

⁹² Ibid., p. 193.

⁹³ Liebeschuetz, op. cit., p. 246.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 218.

⁹⁶ Cary and Scullard, op. cit., p. 483.

the lame.⁹⁷ Under Antoninus Pius, moreover, the false prophet Alexander of Abonutichus carried on a notorious but highly successful thaumaturgical practice;⁹⁸ in fact, many prominent Romans, including Marcus Aurelius, were taken in both by his miracles and by his fraudulent oracle presided over by a snake god of his own invention.⁹⁹ Apuleius' Apology, however, gives us the clearest picture of the Roman reaction to magic, viz. fear, not so much of the ambitions of conniving men, but of the chance anger of the gods.¹⁰⁰ Being a student of fish, Apuleius examined and dissected various species and specimens. His enemies, however, saw this practice as dangerous and brought him to trial on the charge of magic; in fact, it was enough for Apuleius to recite the names of well-known writers on magic to create a disturbance in the courtroom.¹⁰¹ It should not be surprising, therefore, that even the Christians were suspected of being practitioners of magic. Glossalalia, which was still practised in Origen's time, was highly suspect to those who witnessed it, for it closely resembled

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ramsay MacMullen, Paganism in the Roman Empire (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 98; vid. also Stephen Benko, Pagan Rome and the Early Christians (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), pp. 110-1.

¹⁰⁰ Lane Fox, op. cit., p. 253.

¹⁰¹ MacMullen, op. cit., p. 218.

the garbled utterances of the magicians.¹⁰² The Christians' nightly gatherings were also closely related to magical practices in the minds of the Greeks and Romans; as Apollonius of Tyana insisted, wizards "cloak their art under the cover of night and of every sort of darkness, so as to preclude their dupes from the use of their eyes and ears".¹⁰³ Even the Christian practice of exorcising demons was associated with some kind of magical art, at least to some extent because magic made use of powerful names and the Christians accomplished their exorcisms by calling on the name of Jesus.¹⁰⁴ Indeed magic was a powerful force in the early Empire, beguiling both the eminent and the humble.

A discussion of major religions in the early Empire would not be complete without a consideration of Judaism, particularly since relations between Palestine and Rome at that time were precarious at best. During the first century, there was, among the Jewish people generally, an antagonism towards Rome and a hope of deliverance by the promised Messiah which both prompted and encouraged local insurrections. This situation was worsened, moreover, when Caligula, in 40 C.E., reversed Augustus' policy of religious toleration and commanded the Jews to erect his statue in the temple at Jerusalem; it was only the Emperor's sudden death

¹⁰² Benko, op. cit., p. 117.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 126.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 118.

which prevented what would likely have been open revolt in Palestine.¹⁰⁵

Under Nero there were also recurrent disorders in Judaea which successive governors were unable to suppress. In 66, a Jewish insurrection in Jerusalem, which began as little more than a mob skirmish, was allowed to develop into a full-scale rebellion and envelop the entire province as well as Galilee and Transjordan. Nero compensated for his previous disinterest in Jewish affairs by sending Vespasian, an officer with a good military record, to head the Roman army of more than 50,000 men. In 67 and 68 respectively, Vespasian reduced Galilee and the lands of Transjordan, but Nero's death forced a cessation of hostilities for two years.¹⁰⁶

Between 70 and 73, however, Titus carried on the war with equal ferocity and brought about the total destruction of both Jerusalem and the Jewish temple. The settlement forced upon Palestine was extremely severe. Most of the surviving population of Jerusalem was reduced to slavery and a Roman legion was stationed permanently in the city. The Sanhedrin was abolished and its criminal jurisdiction taken over by the Roman procurator's court. The Jews were forbidden to rebuild the temple, which had likely been destroyed on Titus' orders, and a ban was imposed on Jewish

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 367-8.

proselytizing, an offence which was systematically punished under Domitian. Yet it was not only Palestinian Jews who were punished for the war, for Jews across the Empire were required to pay a new poll-tax of two drachmae for the service of Jupiter Capitolinus--the two drachmae which they had previously paid to the Temple at Jerusalem--a penalty which Domitian, at least, levied "with inquisitorial rigour".¹⁰⁷ The only beneficence that Rome showed to the Jews was to exempt from Emperor-worship all those in the Empire born into the Jewish faith.¹⁰⁸

Nor were relations between Rome and Palestine any less fragile in the second century. Jewish insurrections were not uncommon in the reign of Trajan, no doubt resulting once again from Messianic hopes, and under Hadrian the Second Jewish War occurred, this time as a consequence of Roman provocation. In his second tour of the eastern provinces, Hadrian attempted to solve the problem of the Jews by forcible assimilation, a policy which the Seleucid king, Antiochus IV, had attempted unsuccessfully three centuries earlier. In 131, therefore, he issued an edict prohibiting circumcision; he also founded 'Aelia Capitolina', a Roman colony at Jerusalem, complete with a shrine of Jupiter Capitolinus on the site of the temple. As a result of these measures, the Jews, led by Bar-Cochbar, engaged in a war of

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 417.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., pp. 415-8.

sieges and small skirmishes which lasted from 131 to 134. The Romans, with numerous reinforcements from other frontiers, eventually won and inflicted serious losses on the other side. Not only did the Romans exterminate a large part of the population of Palestine, which was later replenished by Gentile settlers from neighbouring lands, but they prohibited the surviving Jews from entering Jerusalem, except for once a year, and they changed the name Judaea to Syria Palestina.¹⁰⁹

Under Antoninus Pius, however, the penalties levied against the Jews were relaxed, although the ban upon proselytizing remained. The Jews were no longer prevented from engaging in worship, and Jewish schools and synagogues were once again opened. Indeed an accommodation between Jews and Romans was finally reached, viz. that the Jews, while remaining bereft of a homeland, were allowed to exercise their religion, and indeed it was only by virtue of this concession that the Jewish race was able to continue as a separate nation.¹¹⁰

Conclusion

Such, then, were the political and religious systems within which Christianity was forced to reach an accommodation with Rome. With respect to the political

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 439-41.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 441.

system, Aristides, Justin Martyr, and Athenagoras, as subjects of the Roman Empire, would have been free to petition the Emperor personally, either on their own behalf in a libellus, or as a representative of an accepted body in a legatio or ambassadorial speech. Yet they, too, would have been exposed to the hindrances and hazards of such an undertaking, viz. discovering the Emperor's current residence, perhaps trekking thousands of miles to this location, presenting an acceptable speech in his presence, and, most importantly, finding him receptive to the requests of those who were ostensibly dangerous and expendable adherents of a proscribed religion.

With respect to the religious system, while the Romans were agreeable to incorporating into their traditional religion any legitimate and acceptable cult, they were clearly suspicious and fearful of any sect or practice which might upset the pax deorum. Both the Bacchanalia and the cult of Isis were initially banned for their reprehensible and frightening rituals, and only allowed to take their place in the religious life of Rome when they had undergone the requisite transformations. The Jews and the Romans, moreover, met head to head on several occasions before they reached an agreement which benefitted both sides, i.e. the Jews retained their own ancestral religion and were exempted from Emperor-worship, and the Romans retrieved what they valued the most, peace and stability. Unlike the Jews,

however, the early Christians were unable to reconcile their differences with Rome, and unlike Isis-worship and the Bacchanalia, Christianity continued to be treated as a religio illicita throughout the second century. The next Chapter will examine the three distinct forms in which this Roman opposition to Christianity was manifested in the second century.

CHAPTER 2

Roman Opposition to Christianity: Intellectual, Popular, and Legal

Second-century Christians encountered Roman opposition on at least three fronts: intellectual, popular, and legal. Intellectual hostility took the form of searing critiques by contemporary historians, satirists, and philosophers who depicted them in their writings as atheists, criminals, and even cannibals, primarily on the evidence of hearsay. On a popular level, Christians met with antagonism from relatives, neighbours, and colleagues who were free, regardless of motive, to denounce them to the authorities. Once they reached the lawcourts, moreover, they faced the enmity of provincial governors who tried and convicted them, not for any alleged or real crimes, but simply for being Christians.

Indeed pagan hostility--in all its manifestations--was an integral part of second-century Christian life, and it has important implications for this thesis. First, it was this continual animosity which motivated the Apologists to write their defences, and it was within this context that they did so; second, it was this hostility and abuse which undoubtedly inspired the Apologists to choose the imperial supplication as their literary form; and third, it was the prevalence of pagan hostility in the second century which has misled scholars into supposing, on the one hand, that

the Apologies were intended as imperial petitions for relief from persecution (Chs. 4-6), and on the other, that they were written as proselytizing tools among the pagan masses (Ch. 7).

Intellectual¹

Throughout the second century, various members of the Roman and Greek intelligentsia made reference to Christianity in their writings. Five authors in particular,² each representing a different profession-- historian, rhetor, satirist, physician, and philosopher-- well illustrate how Christianity was perceived by the elite at that time and how, even among this privileged class, knowledge of this new and strange cult was generally based, not on a careful study of Christian writings, but on

¹ I am using the term "intellectual" for that form of pagan opposition which was thought out, written down, and published by members of the Roman and Greek intelligentsia, as opposed to popular opposition which was generally an unreflective and spontaneous verbal reproach of Christians by the wider populace.

² The five selected are Tacitus' Annals 15.44, Fronto's speech as cited by Minucius Felix in his Octavius 8 and 9, Lucian's De morte Peregrini 5, Galen's De pulsuum differentiis 2.4, and Celsus' On True Doctrine. These five have been selected, not only because they represent a cross-section of views on Christianity, but also because in all five cases the reference is unmistakably to Christians, as opposed to Jews (Suetonius, Epictetus, Apuleius), or Cynics (Aelius Aristides). It is possible, moreover, that Marcus Aurelius' reference to Christians in his Meditations is a gloss. Pliny's letter to Trajan, since it deals with Christian trials, will be considered in the section on legal opposition to Christianity.

unskilled observation, hasty and unfounded assumptions, and even malicious gossip.

The Roman historian Tacitus (c.55-c.117 A.D.) makes brief reference to Christianity in the Annals (15.44). In this passage, which describes the fire of Rome in 64 A.D., he accuses Nero of switching the blame for the fire from himself to the Christians, and he recounts in vivid detail the excruciating punishment which Nero inflicted upon them. As evidenced by his account of the events, however, Tacitus was no more well disposed toward this new cult than was the Emperor:

"But all the endeavours of men, all the emperor's largesse and the propitiations of the gods, did not suffice to allay the scandal or banish the belief that the fire had been ordered. And so, to get rid of this rumour, Nero set up as the culprits and punished with the utmost refinement of cruelty a class hated for their abominations, who are commonly called Christians. Christus, from whom their name is derived, was executed at the hands of the procurator Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius. Checked for the moment, this pernicious superstition again broke out, not only in Judaea, the source of the evil, but even in Rome, that receptacle for everything that is sordid and degrading from every quarter of the globe, which there finds a following. Accordingly, arrest was first made of those who confessed [to being Christians]; then, on their evidence, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much on the charge of arson as because of hatred of the human race."³

Tacitus clearly states, therefore, not only that Christianity was an evil and base superstition, but also that Christians committed blatant criminal acts and

³ As cited and translated by Henry Bettenson, Documents of the Christian Church (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), pp. 1-2.

manifested a hatred toward the rest of humanity. These assumptions, however, were based upon little more than vague gleanings from suspicious sources. Tacitus had obviously heard that Christus, the leader of the cult, had been executed under Tiberius as a common criminal, and had quickly concluded that his followers were also wicked malefactors. Moreover, since Christianity had raised its ugly head in Rome, the home of all pernicious cults, he had assumed that it, too, was a despicable superstition. After all, it was an offshoot of Judaism, a strange religion which manifested a hatred toward the human race, so it no doubt imitated this unfathomable perversion.⁴ Indeed Tacitus derived his knowledge of Christianity from both what he had heard and what he had consequently surmised, and drew a picture of this new cult which was both unjust and untrue.

One particularly gruesome attack on the Christians is found in Minucius Felix' Octavius (8 and 9), a Christian apology from the early third century. In this work, the critique is suspiciously connected with an oration by Fronto in which he allegedly accused the Christians of similar atrocities, viz. the practice of ritual murder and sexual-erotic activity. According to the account in Minucius

⁴ Tacitus uses the expression odium humani generis with respect to the Christians, which is very similar to his description of the Jews in Histories 5.5.1: Apud ipsos, fides obstinata, misericordia in promptu, sed adversus omnes alios, hostile odium, as cited by Stephen Benko, op. cit., 1980, p. 1064.

Felix:

"[a]n infant covered over with meal, that it may deceive the unwary, is placed before him who is to be stained with their rites: this infant is slain by the young pupil, who has been urged on as if to harmless blows on the surface of the meal, with dark and secret wounds. Thirstily--O horror! they lick up its blood; eagerly they divide its limbs. By this victim they are pledged together". After much feasting, "when the ...fervour of incestuous lust has grown hot with drunkenness, a dog that has been tied to the chandelier is provoked, by throwing a small piece of offal beyond the length of a line by which he is bound, to rush and spring; and thus the conscious light being overturned and extinguished in the shameless darkness, the connections of abominable lust involve them in the uncertainty of fate. Although not all in fact, yet in consciousness all are alike incestuous, since by the desire of all of them everything is sought for which can happen in the act of each individual."⁵

Although the origin of this description remains uncertain, it is clear that the author labours under a serious misunderstanding regarding the Christian Eucharistic service.⁶ This could have been derived, on the one hand, from the language of the Eucharist, *viz.* the "eating" of the body and the "drinking" of the blood of Jesus, who was often depicted as the son or child of God, or on the other hand, from stories of the Eucharist as practised by various Gnostic sects.⁷ What is certain, however, is that Fronto had heard the scurrilous rumours of Christian debauchery and

⁵ Stephen Benko, "Pagan Criticism of Christianity During the First Two Centuries A.D.", Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt 23.2 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), pp. 1082-3.

⁶ Ibid., p. 1085.

⁷ Ibid., p. 1083-5.

anthropophagy which were rampant at that time;⁸ indeed Pliny's letter to Trajan makes it clear that he, too, had heard reports to that effect and was relieved to learn, after torturing two deaconesses, that they were unfounded⁹. Unlike Pliny, however, Fronto had not only lent an ear to these sordid stories, but had both accepted them as true and made them the basis for his critique, thus spreading the gossip and scandal even further.

Lucian of Samosata (c.115-c.200) was a well-known Greek humourist who parodied the life of an unusual Christian named Peregrinus Proteus (ca.100-165). Suspected of murdering his father, Peregrinus fled to Palestine where he converted to Christianity, took positions of leadership in the Church, and was eventually denounced and imprisoned for his faith. While in jail, he was visited continually by widows, orphans, old women, and even prominent men who read the Bible to him, brought him food, and generally kept him company. Some Christians sent cash donations, presumably to alleviate the costs of his legal defence. Peregrinus, for whatever reason, was not martyred for his faith, and when he was released from prison, he returned to his native Parium

⁸ References to the two charges of debauchery and anthropophagy among the Christians recur in Justin's First Apology (26), Athenagoras' Legatio (3), Tertullian's Apology (7), Clement of Alexandria's Stromateis (3.2.10), and Epiphanius' Panarion (26.4 and 5).

⁹ Pliny, Ep. X.96, as cited by Benko, op. cit., pp. 1068-9.

where he was excommunicated from the Church, possibly for eating meat sacrificed to idols. He then began to travel and to seek new adventures, one of which was to become a Cynic philosopher. In 165 A.D., he cremated himself at Olympia, an event witnessed by his biographer Lucian.¹⁰

From Lucian's biography, De Morte Peregrini, one can easily discern his disparagement not only of the life of Peregrinus, but also, and more importantly, of the lives of those Christians who associated with him. Indeed he portrays these individuals as:

"poor souls [who] convinced themselves that they will all be immortal and will live forever, on account of which they think lightly of death and most of them give themselves up. Furthermore their first lawgiver convinced them that they are all each others' brothers after they once deny the Greek gods and break the law and worship that crucified sophist and live according to his laws. They despise all things and consider them common property accepting such doctrines by faith alone. So if a cheater who is able to make profit from the situation comes to them, he quickly becomes rich laughing at the simple people".¹¹

Thus Lucian, too, had only a vague and scanty knowledge of this new religion. What little information he had, moreover, was obviously derived from two very suspicious sources: first, from what he had surmised on the basis of Peregrinus' manipulation of well-meaning Christians; and second, from what he had gleaned from personal observation and injudicious local gossip--as Benko has pointed out, the

¹⁰ Benko, ibid., pp. 1093-5.

¹¹ As cited by Benko, ibid., p. 1095.

"information Lucian gives us about Christians in this treatise is not particularly profound and everybody who knew Christians probably knew as much about them as he mentions".¹² Indeed Lucian expended little time or effort on a study of these "simple people"; he simply described, for all those who had not yet discovered the absurdity of this new superstition, what he and others had chosen to accept--on extremely little evidence--as the truth.

Galen of Pergamum (c.129-199), the well-known medical doctor and philosopher, makes three brief references to Christianity in some of his medical writings. In the first, which is preserved in Arabic, Galen praises the Christian way of life and likens it to that of philosophers:

"Most people are unable to follow any demonstrative argument consecutively; hence they need parables, and benefit from them...just as now we see the people called Christians drawing their faith from parable (and miracles), and yet some acting in the same way (as those who philosophize). For their contempt of death...is patent to us every day, and likewise their restraint in cohabitation...and they also number individuals who, in self-discipline and self-control in matters of food and drink, and in their keen pursuit of justice, have attained a pitch not inferior to that of genuine philosophers".¹³

The second quotation, which appears in his work entitled De pulsuum differentiis, criticizes the irrational basis of Christianity: "In order that one should not at the very beginning, as if one had come into the school of Moses and

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

Christ, hear talk of undemonstrated laws, and that where it is least appropriate".¹⁴ A third reference, again preserved in Arabic, confirms this view: "If I had in mind people who taught their pupils in the same way as the followers of Moses and Christ teach theirs--for they order them to accept everything on faith--I should not have given you a definition".¹⁵

As is evident from these texts, therefore, Galen's acquaintance with Christianity was superficial at best. In the first reference, while he clearly takes the unprecedented step of putting Christianity on an equal footing with philosophy, he does so by virtue of its active pursuit of justice, its insistence upon sexual propriety, and its blatant condemnation of death--again, respects in which Christianity was known to any pagan who encountered its adherents in the course of their daily lives or who frequented the Roman amphitheatre. As Wilken affirms, it was "through their way of life, not simply their teachings, that Christians first caught the attention of the larger society"¹⁶, and it is clearly upon this way of life, which was "patent to [him] every day", that Galen bases his conception of this new religion. In the last two

¹⁴ As cited by Benko, op. cit., p. 1099.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Robert L. Wilken, The Christians as the Romans Saw Them (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 82.

references, moreover, Galen fails to make any clear distinction between Christians and Jews. In both cases, he considers them members of the same "school", obviously a philosophical school, and he denounces them both for their reliance upon faith rather than reason.¹⁷ Given that Christianity, as Wilken attests, was well established as a movement independent of Judaism by the mid-second century, and that even those who were only casually acquainted with Christians could differentiate between them, Galen's remarks are clearly not indicative of a keen understanding or an in-depth study of Christian practices and beliefs.¹⁸

Unlike these four pagan authors, however, the Platonic philosopher Celsus (c. 117-c.180) published a critique of Christianity, entitled On the True Doctrine, which was primarily grounded, not in hearsay or casual observation, but in a considered reading of Christian texts.¹⁹ Although only brief fragments of this treatise remain, these suggest that Celsus was familiar with a variety of Christian works

¹⁷ Wilken, *ibid.*, p. 73, suggests that, since Galen was concerned with the same problem in both Christianity and Judaism, *viz.* their absence of reason, and since both religions held the creation account in Genesis, upon which he was basing his criticism, as authoritative, he saw no need to differentiate between them. Such a view, however, requires one to assume that Galen's knowledge of both Judaism and Christianity was far greater than is suggested by these three references.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 72-3.

¹⁹ In fact, he was well acquainted not only with Christian texts, but also with Jewish and even Gnostic writings.

and even with some Christian apologies--particularly those of Justin Martyr whose arguments, in several instances, he seems to reverse.²⁰

In his treatise, Celsus attacks Christianity on many and varied issues, but three receive particular attention. First, like Galen, Celsus criticizes Christianity for its insistence upon faith rather than reason, for this invariably results, he insists, in the gullible and the uneducated being duped by myths and absurdities. Indeed "[o]ne ought first to follow reason as a guide before accepting any belief, since anyone who believes without testing a doctrine is certain to be deceived".²¹

Second, Celsus exposes the unoriginality of Christianity. The stories of Jesus' birth, for example, derive from the myths of Danae and Melanippe, and Jesus is clearly not the only one "who goes about begging and claiming to be the Son of God".²² Even those "tricks" ascribed to Jesus by his disciples are no different from

²⁰ In particular, he answers Justin's charge that Plato borrowed from Moses by insisting that Jesus borrowed from Plato and Paul from Heraclitus, and he replies to Justin's contention that paganism is a corruption of the truths of Christianity by asserting that Christianity has misinterpreted the truths embodied in the works of Plato. Henry Chadwick, Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), pp. 22-23 and note 59.

²¹ R. Joseph Hoffman, trans. and intro., Celsus. On the True Doctrine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 54.

²² Ibid., p. 58.

those of the sorcerers, and these, at least, perform their magic before everyone in the marketplace.²³

Third, Celsus particularly delights in denouncing the absurdities of Christianity, especially the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Resurrection. Since Celsus' God is the God of Plato--transcendent, immutable, and impassive--he flagrantly attacks the Christian God who found it necessary "to descend from the heights" to save humanity.²⁴ Was the purpose of this descent to discover what was going on among his creatures? For if he did not already know, he is not omniscient, and if he did know, his divine power must surely have been sufficient to correct them. "A fine god indeed who must pay a visit to the regions below, over which he is said to have control".²⁵ It is also absurd, he writes, to believe that a body, once it has decayed, can return to its original condition. The soul may be immortal, but Heracleitus was surely correct to state that "corpses should be disposed of like dung, for dung they are".²⁶

Thus Celsus was clearly unique among second-century pagan authors for his acquaintance with contemporary Christian texts. Yet even he was not wholly at ease with this strange, new religion, and even he was willing to heed

²³ Ibid., p. 59.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 39.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 76.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 86.

--and to publish--unsubstantiated rumours. He states, for example, that Christian teachers were afraid of the educated classes and appealed solely to the helpless and hopeless of society. "Let no one educated, no one wise, no one sensible draw near[, he writes]. For these abilities are thought by us to be evils. But as for anyone ignorant, anyone stupid, anyone uneducated, anyone childish, let him come boldly."²⁷ Recent sociological investigations into the class basis of early Christianity, however, reveal that this was clearly not the case. As Rodney Stark points out, since 1931, when scholars first began to question "this proletarian view of the early church, a consensus has developed among New Testament historians that Christianity was based in the middle and upper classes".²⁸ Stark goes a long way to confirming this view, moreover, by considering not only individual case studies,²⁹ but also survey research studies of general populations,³⁰ and he concludes that "people must have a degree of privilege to have the sophistication needed to understand new religions and to recognize a need for

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 72-3.

²⁸ Rodney Stark, The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 31.

²⁹ For example, the Mormons and the Christian Scientists, ibid., pp. 39-40.

³⁰ For example, the 1977 Gallup Poll of the adult U.S. population, and the 1989-90 National Survey of Religious Identification, ibid., pp. 40-44.

them. This is not to say that the most privileged will be most prone to embrace new religious movements, but only that converts will be from the more, rather than the less, privileged classes".³¹ As Stark points out, moreover, Wayne Meeks, too, suggests that relative deprivation accounted for a large proportion of converts to the early church, i.e., that people who were relatively privileged, but who believed that they merited more, were most likely to convert to Christianity.³² Indeed Celsus' criticism of Christian teachers is clearly unfounded; in fact, it is nothing other than hearsay.

Nor is Celsus totally apprised of one of the most fundamental of early Christian doctrines, viz. the disciplina arcana. According to this teaching, the most important of religious truths were withheld from the uninitiated, i.e., from those who were not ready or worthy to receive divine knowledge. Even catechumens were permitted to participate fully in the faith only after a prolonged and strict preparation; in fact, they had to be deemed morally and spiritually fit before they were instructed in the nature of the Sacraments.³³ Celsus,

³¹ Ibid., p. 39.

³² Ibid.

³³ Allusions to this practice are found in Tertullian, Cyprian, and Origen, and more definitely in Christian authors of the fourth and fifth centuries. Numerous examples of early Christian silence regarding their doctrines and practices are found in Isaac Williams, Tracts

however, criticizes the Christian teachers for resolutely refusing to answer questions about their religion--in fact, for discouraging questions of any sort. "If only they would undertake to answer my question", he writes, but their "favorite expressions are: 'Do not ask questions, just believe!' and 'Your faith will save you!'".³⁴ Indeed for all his study of Christian texts and investigation of Christian doctrines, even Celsus was wholly ignorant of one of the basic teachings of the early Church.

Second-century pagan authors, therefore, were more cognizant of the vicious gossip which surrounded this new religion than of the teachings and practices which it expounded; not even Celsus' condemnation of Christianity was based strictly on Christian texts. Nor were they averse to spreading the rumours even further--and thus to exacerbating the uneasy and unenviable situation of the Christians. Indeed, as will be seen in the following section, the pagan masses were already more than willing to inflict hardship on their Christian relatives, neighbours, and colleagues, and needed little incentive or encouragement from the Greek and Roman intelligentsia.

80 and 87, Tracts for the Times (London: Gilbert & Rivington, Printers, 1840-1842).

³⁴ Hoffman, op. cit., p. 54.

Popular

For most second-century Christians, the foremost threat of persecution came from the private denunciations of their fellow citizens. In fact, as Geoffrey de Ste. Croix states, "the standard procedure in punishing Christians was 'accusatory' and not 'inquisitorial': a governor would not normally take action until a formal denunciation...was issued by a delator".³⁵ This form of malevolence was far more worrisome and frightening than the later systematic persecutions, moreover, because it was much more insidious. Indeed, a Christian had to be constantly on his or her guard against possible denunciation by someone who might previously have been considered trustworthy--be it a neighbour, a colleague, or a relative--but who now saw denunciation as a foolproof means of settling a score. That such a threat was very real, however, is clearly borne out by the account of Polycarp's martyrdom, which states that this elderly bishop was hauled before the authorities at the instigation of an angry mob³⁶. Justin Martyr, moreover, relates two incidents of private denunciation in his Second Apology. These two narrations are unique, however, in that they focus attention, not on the respective Christians who were placed on trial, but on their respective

³⁵ G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, "Why were the Early Christians Persecuted?", Past and Present, 26, November 1963, p. 15.

³⁶ The Martyrdom of Polycarp 3.

private delators. The first (Ch. 2) is a vivid account of the denunciations of a Roman woman and her catechist by the former's pagan husband, while the second (Ch. 3) describes the character and activities of the Cynic Crescens, Justin's frequent opponent in public philosophical debate, by whom he expected to be denounced in the near future. In each of these narratives, Justin not only describes an incident of private delation, but he also creates a striking profile of the accuser himself, making it abundantly clear just how insidious and how alarming this form of hostility actually was.

Justin's first story runs as follows: Under Q. Lollius Urbicus, urban prefect from 146 to 160, a certain Roman woman, once she had been taught the doctrines of Christ, refused to persist in the immoral and wicked deeds which she had previously performed with the household servants, and sought to convince her pagan husband likewise to amend his licentious ways and to follow her example of self-control. When her husband refused to alter his behaviour, at the urging of her friends and although desiring a divorce, she forced herself to remain with him in the hope of his eventual transformation. Yet when he journeyed to Alexandria and news reached her of his worsening behaviour, she promptly sent him a bill of divorce and left him, lest she herself be implicated in his impiety. Incensed that she had divorced him against his will, her husband denounced her

to the authorities as a Christian. She thereupon petitioned the Emperor for a delay in her trial to set her affairs in order, and her husband, prevented from pursuing his case against her, directed his attack towards her Christian teacher, Ptolemaeus, whom he contrived to have arrested on the same charge. Ptolemaeus was thus imprisoned, enchained, and severely beaten over a long period of time, and when he was finally brought to trial, he was merely asked one question: "Are you a Christian?". When he readily confessed his devotion to Christ, he was martyred on the spot, along with Lucius and another Christian who boldly challenged Urbicus about the injustice of the trial proceedings.

Scholars have traditionally treated this narrative as yet another example of Christian hagiography.³⁷ Yet as Justin himself states, his primary aim in recounting this story is to expose the disturbing events occurring at Rome³⁸, *viz.* unjust denunciations by malevolent pagans, and this account is well suited to such an undertaking. Indeed it allows Justin to portray the husband from two very different, but equally despicable sides, *i.e.*, from the perspectives of both the woman and her catechist, and thus

³⁷ The most notable example is R.M. Grant, Greek Apologists of the Second Century (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1988), pp. 69-73.

³⁸ Justin Martyr, Second Apology, trans. Thomas B. Falls, Saint Justin Martyr (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1965), p. 119.

to emphasize, doubly effectively, the outrage being perpetrated against innocent Christians.

Justin takes pains, first of all, to expose the sexual degeneracy of the husband, and he does this by contrasting his conduct with that of the wife. Indeed the husband's unbridled lust, his obstinate refusal to change his behaviour, and his desire that his wife continue participating in his debaucheries are well demonstrated in the light of her self-control, her patience with her husband's impiety, and her desire to distance herself from his sinful acts. Justin's reference to her repugnance at sharing her husband's table and bed, moreover, is a further but more subtle condemnation of the latter's immorality. In early Christianity, the two notions of food and sex were strongly linked as communicators of vice.³⁹ This is evidenced, for example, in Revelation 2:20, where the author rebukes the Christians in Thyatira for tolerating the prophetess Jezebel, who beguiles the servants into practising immorality and into eating food sacrificed to idols. What Justin is saying, therefore, is that the husband's actions were so impious that the wife was repelled at the thought of physical intimacy with him, fearing that his evil might somehow enter and contaminate her.⁴⁰

³⁹ Margaret Y. MacDonald, Early Christian Women and Pagan Opinion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 208-210.

⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 209.

Yet Justin reveals not only the husband's immorality, but also his irrational and obsessive brutality. He accomplishes this by contrasting the behaviour of the husband, who bribes a centurion to enquire into Ptolemaeus' beliefs and who has him ruthlessly abused in prison, with that of Ptolemaeus himself, who accepts his unfortunate circumstances with both honour and courage. The ultimate comparison is manifested, however, in the tranquility and resignation with which the catechist faced martyrdom and the rage and arrogance with which the husband faced rejection. Yet not only Ptolemaeus, but also the two onlookers in the story illuminate the disreputable conduct of the husband, for while the latter acts unjustly towards Ptolemaeus and compels him to forfeit his life, his two fellow Christians stand up against injustice and pay with their own lives.

In recounting this story, therefore, Justin has created a profile of the typical pagan delator: an individual whose character was lewd and depraved, whose methods were little less than savage, and whose motives--lust, rage, and revenge--were base and contemptible. Indeed for Justin it was necessary to disclose the cause of the Christians' distress, and one way to accomplish this end was to publicize this painful story of pagan malice and vengeance.

That Justin should wish to promulgate the disturbing events that were occurring around him is clearly not

surprising in that he himself was expecting to be denounced, in the near future, by the Cynic Crescens, "that lover of fanfare and ostentation". Indeed this so-called philosopher, he insists, purposely depicted Christians "as if they were atheists and irreligious, merely for the purpose of captivating and gratifying the deceived mob". When Justin attempted to question him, moreover, and thus to convince him of his errors, he found him to be totally ignorant of Christian doctrines and practices. Indeed if Crescens was attacking Christians without studying their teachings, he "is positively wicked, and far worse than illiterate", and if he has studied them, but chooses, through fear of his audience, to deny that he is a Christian, then "he is much more vile and evil, because he is then inferior even to a slave in popular and unreasonable opinion and fear". In fact, Justin rails, Crescens is so enslaved to popularity and irrationality that even the saying of Socrates--"no one is to be preferred to truth"--is disregarded by him.

Thus once again Justin has created an effective paradigm of an evil pagan delator. Crescens was clearly dishonest, ostentatious, and vile, and his actions were motivated solely by fear and self-gratification. Once again, therefore, Justin felt the need to publicize the gravity of the situation and the potential dangers which confronted Christians in the form of vindictive and angry

pagans.

Nor was Justin over-reacting with respect to these private delations, for their numbers were rapidly increasing. This is evidenced by the governor Pliny in his letter to Trajan: "Before long, as is often the case, the mere fact that the charge [of Christianity] was taken notice of made it commoner, and several distinct cases arose. An unsigned paper was presented, which gave the names of many".⁴¹ That many delators were accusing Christians solely as a means of settling personal vendettas, moreover, as in the two instances recounted by Justin, is demonstrated by Trajan's reply to Pliny that Christians were not to be sought out, and that any unsigned or anonymous papers, such as Pliny had already received, were not to be admitted, since they were "a very bad example and unworthy of our time".⁴²

Hadrian, Trajan's successor, was also concerned about the increase in private prosecutions. This is evidenced by his rescript to the Proconsul of Asia, a copy of which Justin appended to his First Apology, which reveals not only their frequency, but also the confusion and hysteria surrounding them:

"If...the subjects of your province can back up their complaint against the Christians, so as to accuse them in court, I do not object to their

⁴¹ Pliny, Ep. X.96.

⁴² Pliny, Ep. X.97.

doing so, but I cannot allow them to proceed solely by noisy demands and shouts. It is far more appropriate, if anyone wishes to make an accusation, that you decide [the question]."⁴³

Thus the citizens of Asia Minor were clearly accustomed to denouncing Christians, not by submitting signed papers, but by creating such disturbances that the Proconsul was obliged to seek counsel from Rome. Indeed they were obviously aware of the many benefits such delations could afford, and were both well able and well prepared to take advantage of them.

For second-century Christians, therefore, the ever-increasing number of private delations by pagans was serious cause for alarm, and Justin, in particular, took steps to warn Christians of their vulnerability to this injustice. Yet the tribulations of the Christians did not end with denunciation. Their subsequent trials, often conducted by strict and unyielding governors, were no less distressing, since the only charge laid against them was that of being Christian, and the only punishment for such a charge was execution.

Legal

The basis of the legal opposition to Christianity in the second-century has been a question of considerable debate during the past several decades. It is generally agreed by scholars that the normal charge against the

⁴³ As translated by Falls, op. cit., p. 108.

Christians, from at least the year 112 onwards (and perhaps even from 64), was the nomen Christianum, i.e., they were accused simply of being Christians.⁴⁴ This conclusion is based primarily on the second- and early third-century Christian apologists; on several accounts of early martyrdoms; and, most particularly, on the correspondence of 111-12 between Pliny and the Emperor Trajan.⁴⁵ In his letter to the Emperor, Pliny asks for direction regarding those individuals accused before him "as Christians" (qui ad me tamquam Christiani deferebantur),⁴⁶ and he outlines the procedure which he had been following up to that point, viz. he asked the accused three times if they were guilty of the charge. If they denied their faith and willingly offered prayers to the gods, they were allowed to go free; if they confessed, they were executed. Although Trajan is very cautious in his reply to Pliny and refuses to lay down a set form of procedure, he instructs the governor that Christians must not be sought out and that any anonymous accusations must not be considered. He concurs with Pliny's course of

⁴⁴ Vid. A.N. Sherwin-White, "Early Persecutions and Roman Law Again", Journal of Theological Studies, N.S., Vol. III, 1952, pp. 205-7; de Ste. Croix, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?", op.cit., pp. 9ff.; and Frend, op.cit., p. 220.

⁴⁵ De Ste. Croix, op.cit., pp. 9-10. The two letters in question are Pliny, Epp. X.96 and X.97.

⁴⁶ Unless otherwise noted, all references to the correspondence between Pliny and Trajan will be to the edition and translation by J. Stevenson, A New Eusebius (London: SPCK, 1987), pp. 18-21.

action, however, in punishing those brought before him and convicted "as Christians" (qui Christiani ad te delati fuerant) and in releasing those who deny the charge and worship the gods. As G.E.M. de Ste. Croix concludes, "Pliny could justifiably take this to mean that punishment was to be for the Name alone".⁴⁷

Scholars also tend to agree that the judicial process used against the early Christians was invariably that used for most criminal trials, viz. the cognitio extra ordinem.⁴⁸ As A.N. Sherwin-White has pointed out, the characteristics of this procedure were three in number: 1) a charge had to be made in proper form, i.e., not by an index or informer, but by a delator or private prosecutor; 2) a case had to be heard by a holder of imperium--usually the Praefectus Urbi or a Praefectus Praetorio in Rome and the provincial governor in the provinces⁴⁹--with the assistance of his concilium or advisory council of friends and officials; and 3) the magistrate overseeing a case was free, not only to formulate and impose penalties, but also to decide which cases would be recognized as criminal and which would not

⁴⁷ De Ste. Croix, op. cit., p. 10.

⁴⁸ De Ste. Croix, op. cit., pp. 11-13; A.N. Sherwin-White, Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), pp. 13-19; Frend, op. cit., p. 218.

⁴⁹ De Ste. Croix, op. cit., p. 11.

even be considered.⁵⁰ The essence of this procedure, therefore, which has been described as a "legalised absence of settled form",⁵¹ was quite simple: an accuser alleged a crime against an individual and the magistrate hearing the case decided if and how it should be handled.⁵²

With the exception of the concilium, all the elements of the cognitio extra ordinem can be discerned in the correspondence between Pliny and Trajan.⁵³ At first, according to the usual process of delation, individuals were brought before Pliny by private accusers and charged with being Christians. As governor of Bithynia, and therefore the holder of imperium, Pliny was free to deal with these accusations the way he thought fit, and thus he tried and executed all those who obstinately clung to their faith. Before long, however, because of the success of previous delators, the number of cases began to increase and, what was worse, the usual process of denunciation began to be abandoned, i.e., certain individuals were being accused of Christianity, not by a private prosecutor, but by the submission of an unsigned list of names. It was at this point that Pliny thought it necessary to seek instruction

⁵⁰ Sherwin-White, op. cit., 1963, p. 17.1

⁵¹ Theodor Mommsen, Römisches Strafrecht (Berlin, 1899), p. 340.

⁵² Sherwin-White, op. cit., 1952, p. 18.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 17.

from the Emperor, whose response made it very clear that anonymous accusations were not to be heeded.⁵⁴

By the time of Trajan, therefore, Christianity was already a religio illicita, and private citizens were free to denounce to the Roman authorities those suspected of adhering to this new cult. The question which has been exercising scholars for many years, however, and which has yet to be conclusively, or even satisfactorily, answered is: Why was the Name sufficient to condemn the Christians? Throughout this period, according to Sherwin-White, there was considerable change and development in the attitude of the Roman government towards the Christians. In its earliest stage, i.e., from Nero to Hadrian, Christianity was banned because of the alleged flagitia, or crimes, associated with it. There is thus a parallel, in this respect, between Christianity and both the Bacchanalia in 186 B.C. and the Druids under the Julio-Claudians, i.e., that when a cult appears to be inseparably connected with criminal offences, a complete ban, or at the very least strict control, may be placed upon that cult.⁵⁵ Because of the flagitia, the Name constitutes a capital charge and acts as "a pointer to the magistrate, indicating a man whom it is proper for him to coerce as a malefactor if accused".⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Pliny, Ep. X.97.

⁵⁵ Sherwin-White, op. cit., 1952, p. 207.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

That Christianity in this period was closely linked to immoral and criminal activity, moreover, is demonstrated by Tacitus, Suetonius, and Pliny; in all three, "the only ground indicated for the proscription of the cult is its association with crimes and immoralities"⁵⁷--most probably cannibalism, incendiarism, and magic.⁵⁸

Yet even as early as 112, Sherwin-White maintains, the attitude towards the Christians was changing. Pliny was satisfied, subsequent to the torture of Christian deaconesses and apostates, that the flagitia associated with Christianity were a fabrication; yet he nonetheless continued to persecute. In a very clear statement to Trajan, however, he explains that, whatever else their offences might be, the Christians were deserving of punishment due to their contumacia, i.e., their refusal to obey a reasonable order of the magistrate. That the Christians continued to pay for their noncompliance is demonstrated by the words of the proconsul who prosecuted the Scillitan martyrs in 180: "though time was given to them to return to the Roman tradition, yet they remained obstinate in their will. Therefore I condemn them to death by the sword".⁵⁹ Indeed in both instances the attitude of

⁵⁷ A.N. Sherwin-White, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?--An Amendment", Past and Present, Number 27, April 1964, p. 23.

⁵⁸ Sherwin-White, op. cit., 1952, p. 208.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 211.

the Christians seemed seditious--and therefore deserving of capital punishment.

De Ste. Croix contends, however, that the basis for the persecution of the Christians in the second century lies neither in their flagitia nor in their contumacia. There are, he maintains, some minor factors which undoubtedly contributed to the hostility of the authorities: the disturbances between Christians and Jews instigated by Christian preaching, the secrecy and seeming seditiousness of the cult, the need to appease public opinion, as well as the provocative nature of voluntary martyrdoms.⁶⁰ Yet the major ground of the oppression against the Christians can only have been their "total rejection of the whole of Roman 'religio' summed up in the charge of 'atheism'".⁶¹ This "religious" motivation--in the ancient denotation of the word--appeared in two distinct forms: "superstitious" and "political". The first, which inspired the majority of the pagan masses as well as certain members of the governing class, arose from an overwhelming fear of arousing the gods' anger.⁶² Since the Christians were asserting either that the gods did not exist or that they were evil daimones, and were refusing to participate in pagan religious rites, the

⁶⁰ De Ste. Croix, op. cit., p. 27; vid. also G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?--A Rejoinder", Past and Present, Number 27, April 1964, p. 32.

⁶¹ De Ste. Croix, op. cit., 1964, p. 32.

⁶² De Ste. Croix, op. cit., 1963, p. 27.

superstitious began to expect imminent divine retribution. When disaster did strike, therefore, whether in the form of a flood, an earthquake, or a plague, the Christians were immediately saddled with the blame, denounced by the populace, and, in many instances, willingly prosecuted by the authorities.⁶³

Yet the motivation to persecute also appeared in a "political" form and impelled those magistrates and Emperors who were not bound by superstition. Such individuals usually felt very deeply and emotionally about their religion, since it was equated in their minds with the ius divinum, i.e., that corpus of state law which pertained to sacred matters and which guarded the pax deorum by means of particular rites and ceremonies. Their religion, in other words, was an integral and vital part of the Roman way of life--the foundation of the state--and the instrument by which they were able to guard the reins of power.⁶⁴ As de Ste. Croix asks: "Can we imagine that such men, however intellectually emancipated from the superstitions of the vulgar, would have had any compunction about executing the devotees of a new-fangled sect which threatened almost every element of Roman religion...?"⁶⁵ Indeed it was always their intention--and to their benefit--to break down the

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 25-6.

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 29-30.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 30.

Christians' rejection of the pagan gods.⁶⁶

Until very recently, most modern scholars followed de Ste. Croix in insisting that the major offence of the Christians was their godlessness. In fact, as recently as 1987, Robin Lane Fox contended that "martyrs died because they refused to honour the pagan gods",⁶⁷ and that atheism was "the basic cause of [the Christians'] maltreatment".⁶⁸ In 1991, however, in his article entitled "On Christian Atheism", Joseph J. Walsh refers to de Ste. Croix' theory as "a satisfying but oversimplified explanation for pagan hostility towards the new faith".⁶⁹ In an in-depth survey of the evidence of pagan ill-will in the second century, he demonstrates persuasively that, in its earliest stages, other characteristics of Christianity, such as "separateness, aggressive proselytizing and polemic, secrecy, Jewish origins, apocalyptic expectations, [and] disruption of families", played an equally important role in arousing animosity.⁷⁰ Moreover, while he, like Sherwin-White,⁷¹ agrees with de Ste. Croix that atheism gradually

⁶⁶ De Ste. Croix, op. cit., 1963, p. 28.

⁶⁷ Robin Lane Fox, Pagans and Christians (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1987), pp. 437-8.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 425.

⁶⁹ Joseph J. Walsh, "On Christian Atheism", Vigiliae Christianae, 45, 1991, p. 256.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Sherwin-White, op. cit., 1964, p. 25.

became the primary cause of pagan hatred, i.e., in the late second and third centuries, he insists that it cannot account for the earlier manifestations of this hostility. As he points out: "In that our sources suggest other attributes of the Christians offensive to their pagan neighbors, there is no need to project atheism's effects back to a period for which they are virtually unattested".⁷²

The basis of the legal opposition to Christianity in the second century thus remains an open question. What is certain, however, is that Christians who were denounced by their neighbours or relatives could be dragged before the authorities for the Name only, and that those who refused to recant were usually executed. This is well illustrated in the account of the trial of Justin Martyr and his companions. Having asked each of the accused whether or not he admitted to being a Christian, the urban prefect simply announced that those "who have refused to sacrifice to the gods are to be scourged and executed in accordance with the laws".⁷³ The trial of the Scillitan Martyrs was no less straightforward. The proconsul, having offered to each of the martyrs a thirty-day reprieve to consider his or her

⁷² Ibid., p. 268.

⁷³ "The Martyrdom of Saints Justin, Chariton, Charito, Evelpistus, Hierax, Paeon, Liberian, and their Community", in The Acts of the Christian Martyrs, trans. Herbert Musurillo (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 47.

position, finally read his decision to the court: "Whereas Speratus, Nartzalus, Cittinus, Donata, Vestia, Secunda, and the others have confessed that they have been living in accordance with the rites of the Christians, and whereas though given the opportunity to return to the usage of the Romans they have persevered in their obstinacy, they are hereby condemned to be executed by the sword".⁷⁴ Indeed Christianity was a religio illicita in the eyes of Rome, and the punishment imposed upon its adherents was stringent and unambiguous. In fact, it was this unyielding attitude on the part of Rome which was responsible, to a large extent, both for the writing of the Apologies and for the literary form which they took, i.e., official petitions or orations addressed to the Roman Emperor. It is to the origins of this literary form that attention now turns.

⁷⁴ "The Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs", as cited in The Acts of the Christian Martyrs, ibid., p. 89.

CHAPTER 3

The Origins of Second-Century Christian Apologies Addressed to Roman Emperors

The term "apology" is derived from the Greek word apologia or "speech in defence", the noun logos meaning "speech delivered in court or assembly", and the prefix apo indicating "the removal of a charge".¹ Apology was thus originally considered to be a speech in defence of an individual seeking acquittal on a specific charge, and as such it embodies two distinct ideas: that an attack or accusation has been made, and that a defence has been launched.² These ideas are aptly demonstrated in the classic example of such an address, viz. Plato's Apology, which depicts Socrates, upon being accused of atheism, as defending himself before the men of Athens.

In the last several decades, however, the term apology, with respect to both Christian and Hellenistic-Jewish examples, has become blurred. This results, to a large extent, from applying definitions that are so inclusive as to be useless. Avery Dulles, for example, understands this term, with respect to the New Testament, to include the notions both of persuading unbelievers to accept

¹ Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, eds., Greek-English Lexicon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), s.v. apologia.

² For a discussion of apology as defence, see Wolfram Kinzig, "Der 'Sitz im Leben' der Apologie in der Alten Kirche", ZKG, 100, 1990, pp. 298-300.

Christianity and of helping believers to overcome their doubts and hesitations. Indeed in the light of such an all-encompassing description, most of the New Testament, as he himself affirms, can be regarded as apologetic.³ Equally broad and unhelpful is his conception of second-century apology as an attempt "to demonstrate the credibility of the Christian faith".⁴ Again, such a definition can incorporate many works that contain little apologetic material.

The vagueness of this term, moreover, is also due to the tendency of scholars to use definitions which downplay or even omit entirely any notion of attack or defence. R.M. Grant, for instance, considers that an apologetic work "emerges from minority groups that are trying to come to terms with the larger culture within which they live".⁵ Yet it is not unnatural for a minority group to wish to "come to terms with", *i.e.*, to understand its place within, its larger environment, and thus to produce works outlining and interpreting its views or beliefs to a wider audience, without these having been assailed, and without even the pretence of a defence, thus bringing into obvious question the designation of such works as apologetic. Even more all-encompassing are the definitions, for example, of Tessa

³ Avery Dulles, A History of Apologetics (London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd., 1971), p. 13.

⁴ Ibid., p. 22.

⁵ R.M. Grant, Greek Apologists of the Second Century (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1988), p. 9.

Rajak, who characterizes Hellenistic-Jewish apology as "the presentation of Judaism to outsiders",⁶ and of Jean Daniélou, who understands second-century Christian apology as "the presentation of the Gospel to the pagan world".⁷ Clearly each of these definitions fails to recognize that an apologetic work both results from an assault on an individual's beliefs and represents a serious attempt to repel it. While other elements, such as persuasion, confirmation, and presentation, are undoubtedly found in varying degrees in any apologetic enterprise, a definition which omits the two essential components of attack and defence is merely a definition of the less polemical and more general acts of preaching and proselytizing. For the purposes of this thesis, therefore, "apology" will be defined as "a defence of one's beliefs in response to accusation or attack".

An unfortunate result of this confusion over the term apology has been an equal amount of confusion over its origins as a literary genre, and in particular over the origins of those apologies addressed to Emperors. Indeed scholars have suggested at least three precursors of this form of Christian defence--Aristotle's Protrepticus,

⁶ Tessa Rajak, Josephus: The Historian and His Society (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1983), p. 225.

⁷ Jean Daniélou, Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973), p. 9.

Hellenistic-Jewish works, and some writings from the New Testament--yet none of these stands up to careful scrutiny.

A) Aristotle's Protrepticus

In Jean Daniélou's work, Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture, he refers to early Christian apologies addressed to Emperors as "the missionary literature of the second century".⁸ A little further on, he states that traces of Aristotle's Protrepticus, a work which exhorts the reader to abandon worldly pursuits and to convert to a life of philosophy, can be found in the writings of the Apologists.⁹ While its influence has been traced in a number of apologetic works, he writes, it "has been demonstrated very precisely with regard to several themes in Justin".¹⁰ Danielou thus refers the reader to Michele Pellegrino's discussion of Justin's Apologies and Aristotle's

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., p. 11. Anthony Guerra similarly contends that Aristotle's Protrepticus was a primary model for Justin in writing his First Apology ("The Conversion of Marcus Aurelius and Justin Martyr: The Purpose, Genre, and Content of the First Apology", The Second Century, Vol. 9, No. 3, 1992, pp. 171-187). His arguments, however, are based on two extremely dubious premises: 1) that Justin was directing his Apology to Marcus Aurelius primarily and in his capacity, not as future Emperor, but as philosopher; and 2) that Justin's foremost purpose in writing his Apology was to convert Marcus to Christianity.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Protrepticus in his work, Studi su l'antica apologetica.¹¹ Yet Pellegrino's comparison of these two works is based primarily on four motifs which are so common as to be unserviceable in determining literary dependency, viz. that humans are the only animals which stand upright; that Christians, in their disparagement of death, can be compared to athletes; that the pains and persecutions of just Platonists, such as Socrates, can be contrasted with the material pleasures of the Epicureans; and the image from Greek tragedy of the deus ex machina. As Pellegrino himself attests, the second motif is used at least five times by Paul, and the fourth is a common element of both Christian and pagan protreptic traditions.¹² In fact, Pellegrino states, many of the Apologists' ideas could easily have been lifted from the florilegia and doxographic handbooks which abounded in the second century.¹³ Thus it appears that Daniélou's overzealous interpretation of Pellegrino's analysis is based on--and necessary for--his own very loose definition of apology as missionary literature, since protreptic is an indispensable component of proselytization. Clearly the Protrepticus, as Anton-Hermann Chroust attests, is first and foremost a "'hortatory' composition or eulogy

¹¹ Michele Pellegrino, Studi su l'antica apologetica (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letterature, 1947), pp. 22-24.

¹² Ibid., pp. 23-24.

¹³ Ibid., p. viii.

which contains a sustained and apparently systematic argument in favor of a life devoted to philosophy".¹⁴ As the philosophic life was not under any form of attack or persecution at that time, it thus stands to reason that this work was not written as a defence of such a lifestyle, and that any influence which it might have had upon Christian apologies was superficial at best.

B) Hellenistic-Jewish Works

Scholars have pointed to the works of Hellenistic Judaism as precursors both of the content and of the literary form of Christian apologies.¹⁵ Aimé Puech, for instance, has stated that "[l]'apologétique chrétienne a été préparée par une Apologétique juive, qui s'était développée pendant l'époque hellénistique, particulièrement à Alexandrie, quand les Juifs de la Dispersion...s'étaient

¹⁴ Anton-Hermann Chroust, Aristotle: Protrepticus. A Reconstruction (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964), p. ix.

¹⁵ In addition to the scholars discussed below, see Johannes Geffcken, Zwei griechische Apologeten (Leipzig: Teubner, 1907), p. ix, and H. Koester, "Early Christian Literature", Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: Supplementary Volume, 1976, p. 555; although Arthur J. Droge argues in his book Homer or Moses? Early Christian Interpretations of the History of Culture that "the roots of early Christian apologetics are not to be sought exclusively within the domain of Hellenistic Judaism, but in the broader historical and cultural context of the Hellenistic and Roman periods" (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1989), p. 195.

trouvés en contact avec l'hellénisme".¹⁶ A little further on, he adds that the Christians learned from Hellenistic-Judaism "une méthode pour démontrer le monothéisme et commenter la Bible, et aussi des procédés commodes pour exploiter à leur profit la littérature classique elle-même".¹⁷ Other scholars, taking their cue from Puech, have attempted to pinpoint specific Hellenistic-Jewish antecedents of either the content or the form of Christian defences addressed to Emperors. Daniélou, concerned with the content of the apologies, states that Hellenistic Judaism produced many missionary works similar to the Christian apologies, such as "the Jewish Sybilline Oracles, the Letter of Aristeas of the second century B.C., and the Contra Apionem of Josephus from the first century. Above all a large proportion of the work of Philo is the product of this missionary preoccupation, notably the Hypothetica..., the De Vita Mosis, and the De Decalogo and De Specialibus Legibus", since these discuss such themes as "the criticism of idolatry...[and] the assertion of the primitive character of monotheism".¹⁸ W.H.C. Frend, moreover, notes that it was "the Jewish arguments against paganism that [the Christian apologist] adopted in his

¹⁶ Aimé Puech, Les Apologistes Grecs du IIe Siècle de notre Ère (Paris: Librairie Hachette et Cie., 1912), p. 10.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁸ Daniélou, op. cit., p. 10.

defence of his new faith", and that Justin Martyr's First Apology "repeats the arguments of two centuries of Jewish apologetic."¹⁹ With respect to the literary form of these defences, Edwin R. Goodenough follows Paul Heinisch in concluding that "the practice of addressing apologetic epistles to a ruler was taken over from Hellenistic Judaism".²⁰ An investigation, however, into the possible similarities of both content and form between the Hellenistic-Jewish writings and the Christian apologies reveals the speciousness of these suggestions.

1. Content

With respect to the content of the defences addressed to Emperors, Puech, Daniélou, and Frend all agree that the apologists' arguments against paganism and idolatry are borrowed from the writings of Hellenistic Judaism. Since the Christian apologies, however, are replete with arguments against pagan culture, and since Hellenistic-Jewish works are both numerous and varied, it is difficult to examine this proposal constructively without restricting the investigation. It seems feasible, therefore, to examine the similarities of content between the Christian apologies

¹⁹ W.H.C. Frend, "The Old Testament in the Age of the Greek Apologists A.D. 130-180", Religion Popular and Unpopular in the Early Christian Centuries (London; Variorum Reprints, 1976), p. 130.

²⁰ Edwin R. Goodenough, The Theology of Justin Martyr (Jena: Verlag Frommannsche Buchhandlung, 1923), p. 82.

addressed to Emperors and two Hellenistic-Jewish works which are, like the Christian defences, "systematically apologetic"²¹, viz. Philo's Hypothetica and Josephus' Contra Apionem.

Of Philo's Hypothetica, which is fragmentary, we have two extracts. The second, preserved by Eusebius, is essentially a description of the Essenes and is too brief to give any clear idea of the structure or content of the work. The first, however, which is also preserved by Eusebius, opens with the suggestion that the author wishes to defend the Jews against the hostile criticism of the Gentiles by offering a rational and orderly account of their history. Philo thus relates the causes of the Exodus from Egypt, proposes possible reasons for Moses' success in leading the people through the wilderness and in conquering Palestine, and concludes with an attestation of the people's devotion and adherence to the Mosaic Law throughout the centuries. He then gives a brief overview of the Mosaic constitution, comparing its severity favourably with the laxity of Gentile law and practice, and points to the purity and integrity of Jewish life with respect to charitable activities and reverence for the Sabbath.

Josephus' Contra Apionem, the second of a two-volume work dedicated to a certain Epaphroditus, responds to anti-

²¹ Martin Hengel, Judaism and Hellenism (London: SCM Press, 1974), p. 70.

Jewish criticisms which were made between the third century B.C.E. and the first century C.E.²² Josephus begins with the statement that any reader of his earlier work, the Antiquities, will no doubt be apprised of how ancient and of what pure stock the Jews are. But some malicious detractors have caused others to contend that the Jews are a young people, simply because the most prominent Greek historians omit mention of them. Josephus thus challenges the antiquity of the Greeks, explains the silence of Greek historians with respect to Jewish concerns, demonstrates the antiquity of the Jewish nation, successfully refutes anti-Jewish slanders, and defends the Mosaic Law.

Like the Christian apologies, therefore, these two Jewish works have a clear apologetic intent. What is more, they were both, as were the Christian defences, written at a time of Roman persecution. While Philo's Hypothetica cannot be dated precisely, Grant maintains that it likely appeared during the reign of Caligula, "around the time when Philo himself was directly concerned with the persecution of Jews at Alexandria and elsewhere".²³ Josephus' work was also composed during a time of imperial hostility toward the Jews, probably around 95 C.E.²⁴ Throughout the previous thirty years, an obvious deterioration had occurred in the

²² Grant, op. cit., p. 17.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

relations between Jews and Greeks, which was exacerbated by the humiliating defeat of the rebels in Palestine. This served not only to destroy the Jews' confidence, but also to buttress the Greeks' hope that Rome would now rescind her support of Jewish rights in the eastern cities. While this protection did not totally disappear under Vespasian and Titus, "Vespasian's transference of the Temple tax of two drachmas per person to the fiscus Iudaicus--a part of the imperial treasury--and its dedication to Capitoline Zeus effectively altered the status of the Jews from that of a privileged minority to that of one visibly treated with particular severity".²⁵

Yet while there are clear similarities between the Christian apologies and these two Jewish writings, the question is whether or not the Christian apologists borrowed arguments from their Jewish counterparts. As Frensdorff has suggested, the apologies of Justin Martyr contain themes which can also be found, mutatis mutandis, in the Jewish authors, and in particular in Josephus. Three of these are particularly notable.

The first is a tremendous respect for certain elements of Greek civilization, and in particular, for the Greek philosophers.²⁶ Josephus, for example, commends

²⁵ Tessa Rajak, op. cit., p. 226-7.

²⁶ Samuel Sandmel, Judaism and Christian Beginnings (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 267.

"Pythagoras, Anaxagoras, Plato, the Stoics who succeeded him, and indeed nearly all the philosophers", since these seem to have understood that God was "One, uncreated and immutable to all eternity; in beauty surpassing all mortal thought, made known to us by his power" (II.168).²⁷

Similarly Justin, in his Second Apology, comments on the goodness of some of the Greek philosophers, particularly Socrates (II.7)²⁸, and points out that they possessed a share of the divine Logos by which they were enabled to express themselves very well and to approximate the divine nature in their contemplations (II.10;13).

The second theme common to both Justin and Josephus is the idea that "special virtue inhered in antiquity";²⁹ in fact, Josephus stresses this idea in his work and states at the outset that one of the purposes of the Contra Apionem is to "instruct all who desire to know concerning the antiquity of our race".³⁰ He thus points to such authors as Manetho, the eminent Egyptian priest; Berossus, the Babylonian astronomer and priest of Bel; and Menander of Ephesus, all

²⁷ All references to Josephus' Contra Apionem will be to the following translation: H. St. J. Thackeray, trans., The Loeb Classical Library, Vol. 1 (London: W.H. Heinemann Ltd., 1956).

²⁸ All references to Justin's two Apologies will be to the following translation: Thomas B. Falls, trans., Saint Justin Martyr (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1965).

²⁹ Sandmel, op. cit., p. 267.

³⁰ 1.3.

of whom, he states, noted the Jews in their works.³¹ Similarly Justin, in his First Apology, attempts to demonstrate the antiquity of Christianity by pointing to its Jewish roots and reminding his readers that Moses was "the first of the Prophets (I.32) and "more ancient than all the Greek authors" (I.44; cf. I.59). Moreover, Christ's coming was foretold by the Jewish Prophets: "In the books of the Prophets, indeed, we found Jesus our Christ foretold as coming to us born of a virgin, ...being hated, unrecognized, and crucified, dying, rising from the dead, ascending into Heaven, and being called and actually being the Son of God" (XXXI.7).

A third and related theme common to both Josephus and Justin is the idea that the Greek philosophers borrowed their ideas from the Jews. According to Josephus, the wisest of the Greeks, i.e., Pythagoras, Anaxagoras, Plato, and the Stoics, adopted views promulgated by Moses, but whereas the philosophers directed their ideas to only a few elite pagans, Moses directed his to all the Jews.³² Justin, too, states categorically that "Plato borrowed from Moses" (LX.1). This is evident, he maintains, from Plato's statement in the Timaeus that God placed His Son "in the universe in the manner of the letter X" (LX.1), which is clearly a misinterpretation of Moses' claim that he made a

³¹ 1.69ff.

³² As pointed out by Sandmel, op. cit., p. 274.

brazen serpent shaped into the figure of a cross and set it up for a sign. (LX.3).

Arguments Against Literary Dependence

Thus it is clear that Justin introduces into his defences at least three themes which are also found in Josephus' apology; yet there is little evidence to indicate that he appropriated these ideas from Hellenistic Judaism. First, given Justin's previous interest in and knowledge of philosophy, and in particular of Platonic philosophy, it is not extraordinary that he would have had and expressed a great respect for Plato or for any of the Greek philosophers, or that he would have wished to draw parallels, or even to forge links, between Greek philosophy and Christianity.

Second, the fact that Justin attempts to demonstrate the antiquity of Judaism is not surprising, since it was a common accusation against Christianity, as against Judaism, that it was of very recent origin. This is clearly attested by Celsus' statements that "Jesus, the so-called savior, ...not long ago taught new doctrines", and that the Christians were wholly unlike the Jews in that they did not "observe certain rites and practices which, though peculiar, [had] a grounding in ancient tradition".³³ The most direct

³³ R. Joseph Hoffman, Celsus. On the True Doctrine (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 57 and 87.

and convincing way to refute such a charge, therefore, was to establish an affinity between Christianity and Judaism and to demonstrate the antiquity of the latter. Moreover, the two presentations of this motif differ considerably. Whereas Josephus points to the antiquity of Judaism with a view solely to demonstrating its superiority and virtue, Justin follows his statement that the ancient Prophets foretold the coming of Christ with a rebuke to the Jews; indeed the Prophets, he points out, had also predicted that the Gentiles, not the Jews, would believe in Him, although "He was foretold...before He actually appeared, first five thousand years before, then three thousand, then two thousand, then one thousand, and, finally, eight hundred" (XXXI.7-8). Indeed if Justin was following Josephus, or any Hellenistic-Jewish work, when he introduced this motif, he was clearly not averse to biting the literary hand that fed him.

Third, Justin's insistence that Moses was the forerunner of the Greek philosophers does not attest to a literary dependence on Jewish works. While the Jewish philosophers Aristobulus, Artapanus, Eupolemus, and Philo undoubtedly depict Moses as the father of Greek wisdom,³⁴

³⁴ John G. Gager, Moses in Greco-Roman Paganism (New York: Abingdon Press, 1972), p. 77. See also E. Schurer, The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ, Vol. 3/1, rev. and ed. Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, and Martin Goodman (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd., 1987), p. 611.

this motif can also be found in the works of the classical Greek philosophers. The Middle Platonist Numenius of Apamea, for example, asked the poignant question: "What is Plato but a Greek-speaking Moses?";³⁵ the Peripatetic Hermippus of Smyrna (c.200 B.C.E.) emphasizes in his De Pythagora the dependence of Pythagoras on the doctrines of the Jews and the Thracians, a passage which Josephus himself reproduces in his Contra Apionem (I.162-65);³⁶ and Antonius Diogenes (late first century C.E.), the author of an adventurous romance, was quoted in Porphyry's work on the life of Pythagoras as stating that Pythagoras studied Eastern nations, including the Hebrews, from whom he learned the exact knowledge of dreams.³⁷ This motif, therefore, was no doubt a well-known tradition not only in Jewish, but also in Greek philosophical circles. Being a Greek-speaking Middle Platonist, moreover, Justin is much less likely to have derived it from the works of Hellenistic-Judaism than from those of the Greek philosophers.

There is one motif, moreover, which is found not only in Josephus (C. Ap. II.73-6) and Justin (I Apol. IX), but also in the works of many Hellenistic-Jewish authors as well

³⁵ Robert M. Grant, From Augustus to Constantine (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 107.

³⁶ Menahem Stern, ed. trans. comm., Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism, Vol. 1 (Jerusalem: The Israeli Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1974), p. 95.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 537.

as in those of Aristides and Athenagoras, viz. the argument against paganism. Yet despite Frensdorff's assertion, quoted earlier, that it was the Jewish arguments against paganism that the Christian Apologists adopted, there is little evidence to suggest any literary dependence, since the Hellenistic-Jewish and Christian authors each focus their condemnation on a different aspect of paganism. That is, the Jews direct their attack more consistently to the idols themselves, i.e., to the actual statues of silver and gold, and denounce these as at best helpless and foolish, while the Christians focus their assault on the vulgarities and absurdities of the pagan gods.³⁸

In the Letter of Jeremiah, for example, the author mocks the pagan idols: "As for the gold which they wear for beauty--they will not shine unless some one wipes off the rust...Having no feet, they are carried on men's shoulders, revealing to mankind their worthlessness. And those who serve them are ashamed because through them these gods are made to stand, lest they fall to the ground. If any one sets one of them upright, it cannot move of itself...but gifts are placed before them just as before the dead (6:24-28)."³⁹ The author of the Wisdom of Solomon points to the

³⁸ That is not to say, however, that the Jews never repudiate the gods or the Christians idolatry.

³⁹ "The Letter of Jeremiah", The Oxford Annotated Apocrypha, ed. Bruce M. Metzger (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965).

foolishness of the Gentiles who "thought that all their heathen idols were gods, though these have neither the use of their eyes to see with, nor nostrils with which to draw breath, nor ears with which to hear, nor fingers to feel with, and their feet are of no use for walking (15:15). In Joseph and Aseneth, moreover, the Jewish hero refuses to kiss the pagan heroine who plants kisses on "dead and dumb idols" (8.5), while the Sibylline Oracles (IV.1) reject pagan idols as "dumb and helpless". Philo, too, in The Special Laws (I.iv.21-22), makes a point of attacking those "persons who have given gold and silver to sculptors and statuaries, as people able to fashion gods for them. And they, taking the lifeless materials and using a mortal model, have (which is a most extraordinary thing) made gods, as far as appearance went, and have built temples and erected altars, and dedicated them to them...To [the priests and priestesses] the Father of the universe thus speaks, saying..."You shall not make to yourselves any gods whatever of this or of any other material, nor shall you worship anything made with hands".

Yet while the Hellenistic-Jewish authors make little or no reference to the gross immoralities of the pagan deities, it is not, as Josephus points out, because they are undisturbed by these atrocities. Rather, he writes, "it is our traditional custom to observe our own laws and to refrain from criticism of those of aliens. Our legislator

has expressly forbidden us to deride or blaspheme the gods recognized by others, out of respect for the very word 'God'" (C. Ap. II.237). Yet despite this prohibition, Josephus himself cannot refrain from denouncing the pagan deities, "for our accusers[, he states,] expect to confute us by a comparison of the rival religions" and thus "it is impossible to remain silent". He is convinced, however, that what he is about to say is true, for it "has been made by many writers of the highest reputation" (C. Ap. II.238).

The Christians, however, generally focus their attack, not on the tangible images of the gods,⁴⁰ but on the stories of their hideous human attributes and their vile and immoral deeds, and they denounce these fabrications as a positive force of evil.⁴¹ Aristides, for instance, in his attack on the Greeks, describes their many gods "some of them male, some female, practised masters in every passion and every variety of folly. [And the Greeks themselves represented

⁴⁰ While the Letter to Diognetus clearly follows the Jewish pattern of denouncing pagan idols, it must be remembered that the author of this work is purporting to answer the question of his addressee as to why Christians hold the cults of the Greeks and the Jews in equal aversion. In other words, he is comparing the idolatry of the Greeks with the sacrifices and rites of the Jews, and he concludes that "[o]ne party, it seems makes its offerings to creatures which cannot partake of the gifts, and the other to One who needs none of them" (Ep. Diog. 3). This translation is by Maxwell Staniforth, Early Christian Writings (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), p. 175.

⁴¹ This is not to say that the Apologists make no reference at all to pagan idolatry. What is clear, however, is that by far the largest portion of their critiques is directed against the vices and misdeeds of the Greek gods.

them to be adulterers and murderers, wrathful and envious and passionate, slayers of fathers and brothers, thieves and robbers, crippled and limping, workers in magic and victims of frenzy...] (VIII). He then proceeds with a detailed account of individual gods to demonstrate the truth of his words (IX-XII), concluding that mankind, "taking an impulse from their gods, practised all lawlessness and brutality and impiety, polluting both earth and air by their awful deeds" (XI).

Justin Martyr points out how the Christians, prior to their conversion, used to worship "Bacchus, the son of Semele, and Apollo, the son of Latona (who in their lusts for men practiced things too disgraceful even to mention), and Proserpine and Venus (who were thrown into a frenzy for love of Adonis...) and Aesculapius, or any one of the other so-called gods", but how they now hold these in contempt and worship the "unbegotten and impassible God, who, we know, never descended with sexual desire upon Antiope, or other such women, or Ganymede" (I.25). Indeed Christians, he maintains, now feel sorry for those who believe such tales. These gullible individuals have obviously been seduced by evil demons (I.25), which "strive to make [them] their slaves and servants. They ensnare, now by apparitions in dreams, now by tricks of magic, all those who do not labor with all their strength for their salvation--even as we, also, after our conversion by the Word have separated

ourselves from those demons and have attached ourselves to the only unbegotten God" (14).

Athenagoras is the most fulsome in his attack, dedicating 10 of his 37 chapters in the Legatio to a denunciation of the forms and deeds of the gods. While he first attacks "their names, showing that they are very recent, and...their images, showing that they were made, so to speak, only yesterday or the day before" (17.1), he then proceeds to a lengthy and vivid description of their hideous and twisted bodies, e.g., "They say that Heracles is a coiled serpent-god and the others Hundred-handed. They say that the daughter of Zeus...had two eyes in the natural place and two more on her forehead and the face of an animal on the back of her neck and that she had horns" (20.2). He saves his most vicious attack, however, for the supposed deeds of the gods, e.g. "Cronus cut off the genitals of his father and threw him down from his chariot and...he slew his children by devouring his male offspring; ...Zeus bound his father and cast him into Tartarus...and fought with the Titans for sovereignty; and...he pursued his mother Rhea when she resisted marriage with him...when she became a serpent, he likewise turned himself into a serpent, entangled her in the so-called knot of Heracles, and had intercourse with her" (20.3). It is the influence of evil demons, Athenagoras points out, which drive men to these gods and thus to immoral activity: "For some--I mean the

devotees of Rhea--castrate themselves; others--I mean the devotees of Artemis--make incisions and gash their genitals. (And the Artemis among the Taurians slaughters strangers!) I shall not discuss those who mutilate themselves with knives and knuckle-bones and what form of demons they have. For it is not God's doing to incite men to things contrary to nature". (26.2).

It is evident, therefore, that the attack upon pagan religion launched by the Christian Apologists differed considerably from that by the Hellenistic Jews. In fact, if the Christians imitated anyone in their denunciation of paganism, it was much more likely to have been the Greek philosopher, Plato, as evidenced from his philosophical treatise, The Republic. In this work, Plato explains to his interlocutor, Adeimantus, that there is no redeeming feature to the lies which Hesiod repeats, about Uranus' deeds and Cronus' revenge on Uranus, or about Cronus' deeds and what his son did to him. "[E]ven if these things were true, I did not think they ought to be just carelessly told before simple young people; they were best left in silence...a young man should not be allowed to hear that he would be doing nothing surprising if he did the worst of wrongs, even if he chastised an erring father in every possible way, but that he would be doing the same as the first and greatest of the gods...And he must never hear at all that gods war against gods and plot and fight (for that is not true

either)".⁴² Indeed it can only be concluded that if the apologists did borrow arguments against paganism from an outside source, it was from Plato and other Greek philosophers, such as the academic skeptics, who similarly repudiated the vile stories of the gods and warned of the detrimental effect these were having on society.⁴³

It is worth making two further arguments, moreover, which support the opinion that the Hellenistic-Jewish writings were not the forebears of the Christian apologies. First, an examination of the most notable published editions of the four Christian apologies reveals numerous references to the New Testament, the Greek Old Testament, and classical Greek works, but none to the Hellenistic-Jewish writings.⁴⁴ The one exception is Justin's First Apology in which he narrates a story found in the Letter of Aristeas concerning the translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek, *viz.* the Septuagint. That Justin reproduces this story, however, does not indicate that he borrowed it directly from Pseudo-Aristeas, since this author, as George W.E. Nickelsburg

⁴² Plato, The Republic, W.H.D. Rouse, trans. (New York: New American Library, 1956, Book II, 376E f.

⁴³ Emil Schurer, op. cit., p. 612, n. 138.

⁴⁴ Justin Martyr, André Wartelle, trans. (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1987); The Apology of Aristides on Behalf of the Christians, ed. trans. J. Rendel Harris, Texts and Studies, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893); Athenagoras: Legatio and de Resurrectione, William R. Schoedel, ed. and trans. (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1972).

attests, undoubtedly knew a tradition regarding the translation of the Old Testament.⁴⁵ Indeed this story was well known in both Jewish and Christian circles, being recounted by Philo and Josephus⁴⁶ and described by "many of the early church fathers".⁴⁷ Moreover, that the origin of the Greek text was common knowledge among early Christian communities is hardly surprising, given that the Church inherited the Greek version from the Jews; in fact, as Samuel Sandmel states, "the use of the Septuagint among Christians, and their basing their claims and theological doctrines on it, sometimes on passages where the Septuagint is markedly different from the Hebrew, led the Rabbis to a virtual disowning of [it]".⁴⁸ In addition, the New Testament writers commonly quote the Old Testament books from this text (eg., Matt. 1:23), and almost all the church fathers, until at least the fourth century, considered the Septuagint as the standard form of the Old Testament, rarely making reference to the Hebrew.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ George W.E. Nickelsburg, "Stories of Biblical and Early Post-Biblical Times" in Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), p. 79, n. 259.

⁴⁶ As pointed out by Falls, op. cit., p. 67, n. 3.

⁴⁷ Nickelsburg, op. cit., p. 80.

⁴⁸ Sandmel, op. cit., p. 261.

⁴⁹ Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, 2nd ed., F.L. Cross and E.A. Livingstone, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), s.v. Septuagint.

The second argument pertains to the Jewish war in Palestine in 132-5, following which it became very obvious that the Christians wished to separate themselves from any association with Judaism. As Grant attests, "the Jewish revolt under Bar Cochba's leadership was not supported by Christians, who in Palestine were persecuted by the 'messiah'. Christians turned toward Greek culture and rather rapidly abandoned the original Jewish context of their religion".⁵⁰ This abandonment was seen very clearly in the move among Christians from Hellenistic-Jewish to Greek writings. As Martin Goodman writes, "the separation of Judaism and Christianity after the first century rendered Jewish Greek writings irrelevant to Christians, who therefore lacked incentive to copy them".⁵¹ The writings of Justin Martyr clearly attest to this "abandonment", for they warmly embrace the rich storehouse of ideas and concepts offered by Greek philosophy, particularly Plato's notion of a transcendent God, but they make few references to Hellenistic-Jewish writings. The question must be asked, therefore, why the Christian Apologists would deliberately borrow from the works of Hellenistic-Judaism when the general trend in the Christian church was to push them to one side and to draw primarily upon the writings of the

⁵⁰ Grant, Augustus to Constantine, p. 105.

⁵¹ Martin Goodman, Mission and Conversion (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 48.

Greeks. Indeed it seems much more likely, and natural, given the philosophical backgrounds of the Christian apologists, that they would consult the works of the classical Greek authors for the incentive, inspiration, and material which they required, rather than the unpopular writings of the Jews.

2. Form

As already indicated, Heinisch and Goodenough are in agreement that "the practice of addressing apologetic epistles to a ruler was taken over from Hellenistic-Judaism".⁵² Yet an examination of the corpus of Hellenistic-Jewish epistles, which spans the period from 200 B.C.E. to 200 C.E., reveals none, so far as I am aware, which comprises all three characteristics suggested by this proposal, viz. an epistolary form, an apologetic intent, and an address to a ruler.

The corpus of Hellenistic-Jewish epistles comprises approximately 28 manuscript letters, some extremely fragmentary; the 11 missives quoted in I Maccabees; the 7 found in II Maccabees; the 2 cited in III Maccabees; the 37 or so quoted by Josephus in his various writings, 13 of which are duplicates of letters found elsewhere in the corpus; the 4 contained in the surviving fragment of the Jewish historian Eupolemus; the 1 recounted in each of the

⁵² Goodenough, op. cit., p.82.

Epistle of Aristeeas, the Apocalypse of Baruch, and the Greek Paralipomena Ieremiae, and the 8 letters and fragments of letters contained in rabbinic literature.⁵³ Scholars have generally divided this correspondence into two categories labelled non-literary and literary.⁵⁴ The first group contains those letters which were intended for a restricted and precise audience and which generally had very specific objectives, while the second comprises letters directed to a wider audience which aimed at communicating beliefs or ideas.⁵⁵ Both of these categories will be examined with a view to uncovering possible precursors of the Christian apologies.

Non-Literary Letters

Non-literary letters were all written in a standard epistolary form, and most were addressed to kings or other high-ranking individuals, such as high priests and generals. Yet it is unlikely that the apologists looked to this correspondence for either assistance or inspiration, for it is not apologetic in either intent or style.

With respect to intent, these letters served a wide

⁵³ P.S. Alexander, "Epistolary Literature", Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period, Michael E. Stone, ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), pp. 579-582.

⁵⁴ Cf. Adolf Deissmann, Light from the Ancient East, trans. Lionel R.M. Strachan (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1965), pp. 148-9.

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 583-4.

variety of purposes. For instance, an epistle sent by Josephus and reported in his Life expresses joy at the news that Jonathan was well and was coming to Galilee (226-227), while a manuscript letter from a certain Soumaios announces to the addressee, Jonathes, that he has sent a messenger to pick up the shafts and citrons for the Jewish citron celebration.⁵⁶ Yet by far the majority of this correspondence is official, i.e., it was written by one king or other high-ranking individual to another for a very specific military, political, or diplomatic purpose, such as reporting on military progress, requesting aid in battle, issuing warnings regarding an enemy, or establishing or restoring friendly relations between independent nations. 1 Esdras 2:16-24, for example, quotes a letter from the Council and the Judges of Coelesyria and Phoenicia to the Persian king, Artaxerxes, warning him of the imminent arrival of the Jews to restore and fortify Jerusalem and to rebuild the temple; a letter from King Solomon recorded in Josephus' Jewish Antiquities 8:50-52 requests King Hiram of Tyre to send some of his subjects to help cut timber for the new temple; and 1 Maccabees 14:20-22 records a letter from the rulers of the Spartans to Simon, the new high priest, confirming friendship between Sparta and Israel. By contrast, however, the Christian apologies, although

⁵⁶ 5/6 Hev 15 (Aramaic). As translated by P.S. Alexander, "Epistolary Literature", op. cit., p. 589.

addressed to a king, viz. the Emperor, were ostensibly directed to him not in his capacity as military commander or even as political leader, but as judicial administrator, and their apparent purpose was not to seek direction or even to make requests, but to explain and defend the religious beliefs of their authors in the hopes of persuading him to cease the persecution of the Christians.

With respect to the style of these non-literary letters, moreover, since they were written for a very precise and official purpose, they are composed in extremely terse, direct, and authoritative language--indeed many contain only a few lines. The apologies, however, were seemingly intended to persuade the Emperor to alter his policy against the Christians, and are duly protracted and detailed and even bordering, in some instances, on tedious and verbose. It seems evident, therefore, that Hellenistic-Jewish non-literary letters are not obvious precursors of the Christian apologies. Indeed, given the obvious dissimilarities of both intent and style between these two literary forms, it can only be concluded that these Jewish epistles would have proved both an unsuitable and an unhelpful prototype for the Christian defences.

Literary Letters

Literary letters adopted the epistolary form "as a means of communicating moral, philosophical, or religious

ideas",⁵⁷ and thus they tended, on the whole, to be longer and more florid and rhetorical than non-literary letters. The two examples of such epistles which most closely compare to the Christian apologies addressed to Emperors are the Letter of Jeremiah and Baruch's letter in the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch.⁵⁸ Yet even these works, as an examination of each will reveal, cannot be considered antecedents of the Christian apologies.

The Letter of Jeremiah can be discounted as a precursor of the Christian apologies for several reasons. First, the intent of this work is not primarily apologetic. As Bruce M. Metzger points out, the Letter of Jeremiah, which professes to be a copy of an epistle sent by Jeremiah in 597 B.C.E. to Jews who had been captured by the king of the

⁵⁷ Alexander, op. cit., p. 583.

⁵⁸ These two works can best be compared to the apologies because 1) they have, like the apologies, only one primary addressee although they were intended for a wider audience, and 2) they were relatively well-known works, at least among the Jews, and could therefore have been familiar to the apologists. Other non-literary epistles, such as Artaxerxes' two letters in Greek Esther Addition B, as well as the letter of King Ptolemy Philopator in 3 Maccabees 3:11-30, are not even closely parallel to the Christian apologies addressed to Emperors: first, they were intended as encyclicals, i.e., they have multiple addressees; second, they have, despite their rhetorical style, what is essentially an official purpose; and third, they are attempts by Artaxerxes to justify his decision to slaughter the Jews, not a work which a Christian apologist would have been tempted to imitate. The two letters between Baruch and Jeremiah in Paralipomena Ieremiae, moreover, also lack an address to an Emperor and an apologetic intent. Moreover, since this work is much more obscure than either the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch or the Epistle of Jeremiah, it is less likely to have influenced the apologists.

Babylonians, "is an earnest though rambling discourse against the folly of idolatry...[attempting] to prove the utter impotence, whether for good or ill, of gods of wood and silver and gold".⁵⁹ In other words, it is not providing the Jews with a defence of their beliefs or practices against outside aggressors, but rather it is an exhortation to fellow-Jews to remain firm in the faith and to disregard the temptation to "become...like the foreigners or to let fear for [pagan] gods possess [them]".⁶⁰ Second, this work is not addressed to a ruler. On the contrary, Jeremiah is writing this letter to a group of frightened and oppressed captives in Babylon in order "to give them the message which God had commanded him".⁶¹ Third, despite its title, this work bears little resemblance to a letter. As Alexander remarks, the work manifests no obvious epistolary form and it is even tempting to dismiss the superscription, which clearly refers to a letter, as mistaken. He resists this temptation, however, for two reasons: 1) if the superscription is removed, the work has no setting and thus becomes an incomplete fragment; and 2) it is dangerous to be too categorical about what constitutes a standard epistolary

⁵⁹ Bruce M. Metzger, ed., The Oxford Annotated Apocrypha (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 205.

⁶⁰ Letter of Jeremiah 6:5, as translated by Metzger, op. cit.

⁶¹ Letter of Jeremiah 6:1, as translated by Metzger, op. cit.

form in a pseudepigraph.⁶² Yet despite these two considerations, he insists, the work "barely sustains even the second person address to the readers".⁶³ So why, he asks, did the author use the term "letter"? "It is possible that the author referred to his work as a letter not because of its literary form, but as a way of attaching it convincingly to the biblical tradition".⁶⁴ It is likely, therefore, that the Letter of Jeremiah did not play a significant role in the particular literary form chosen by the Christian apologists. Indeed it is not an apology, it is not addressed to a ruler, and it is possible that it was never intended to be--or even to imitate--a letter.

Unlike the Letter of Jeremiah, however, Baruch's epistle in the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch does manifest a recognized epistolary formula--in fact, Baruch lifts the opening of his letter out of Jeremiah 29:4:⁶⁵ "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon".⁶⁶ Yet this is not to say that the literary form of this work is unproblematic, for, despite its superscription, it displays characteristics of a sermon and it represents itself, in at

⁶² Alexander, op. cit., pp. 584-5, n. 26.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Revised Standard Version.

least two passages, as Baruch's last will and testament (78:5: 84:1).⁶⁷ The work, moreover, lacks an address to a ruler. Like the Letter of Jeremiah, it professes to be written by a prophet, i.e., Baruch, the ruling son of Neriah, but it is directed, not to a king, but to a group of captives, viz. to the nine and a half tribes which had been exiled on the other side of the Euphrates River. The primary purpose of this letter, moreover, as of the Letter of Jeremiah, is clearly not apologetic, but rather hortatory and consolatory, i.e., to give encouragement and comfort to the exiles. As Alexander attests, this work "was basically conceived of as a sermon or exhortatory address. Note, among other features, how the author closes it with the injunction that it be read out publicly in the congregations of the exiles".⁶⁸ Baruch himself confirms a hortatory and consolatory function for his letter when he states: "My brothers,...I have written to you that you may find consolation with regard to the multitude of tribulations...[Moreover,] you ought to know that...the end which the Most High prepared is near, and that his grace is coming, and that the fulfillment of his judgment is not far".⁶⁹ Baruch's epistle, therefore, like the Letter of Jeremiah, was not a likely antecedent for the form of the

⁶⁷ Alexander, op. cit., p. 584.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ 2 Baruch 82:1-2.

Christian apologies. Although it manifests a standard epistolary formula, it bears no address to a ruler and its main intent is to offer solace to fellow-Jews in captivity, not verbal ammunition against hostile enemies.

It must be concluded, therefore, notwithstanding the views of such learned scholars as Puech, Daniélou, and Goodenough, that the Hellenistic-Jewish writings were neither suitable nor feasible precursors for the Christian apologies. With respect to the content of the Jewish and Christian works, there is little evidence that the apologists appropriated themes from the Hellenistic-Jewish writings. On the one hand, many of the motifs which appear in both the Jewish writings and the Christian apologies could also have been found either in classical works or in the Septuagint, and on the other hand, the similarities between their respective assaults on pagan practices and beliefs tend to fade upon closer examination. With respect to the form of the Jewish writings and the apologies, a thorough search for extant Hellenistic-Jewish epistles addressed to rulers has proved unfruitful. Moreover, the Hellenistic-Jewish epistles which we do have differ significantly from the apologies in intent, addressee, and/or epistolary form. What remains, therefore, is to look at the New Testament writings as possible precursors of the Christian apologies.

C) New Testament Writings

Scholars such as Avery Dulles, Robert M. Grant, and F.F. Bruce have posited various New Testament writings, as well as portions of these writings, as possible precursors of Christian apology. Among the most popular suggestions are Romans 1:28-32 and 1 Corinthians 15:29-33, i.e., Paul's discussions of the doctrines of creation and the resurrection, respectively; Acts 14:15-18 and 17:22-32, i.e., Paul's speeches at Lystra and Athens; and the entire two-part narrative of Luke, i.e., the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles.⁷⁰ Each of these possibilities will be examined in turn.

Romans and 1 Corinthians

Robert M. Grant has devoted a chapter of his most recent book to a discussion of New Testament writings as an

⁷⁰ In his book Let Wives Be Submissive: The Domestic Code of 1 Peter (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981), David L. Balch suggests that the code of household ethics found in 1 Peter serves an apologetic function. He describes this function, however, not as defence against attack, as it is understood in the Christian apologies, but simply as exhortation. In other words, Peter is exhorting his readers to harmony, to long-suffering, and, more significantly, to a preparedness to defend their faith to unbelievers. Balch is stating, therefore, not that the household code as laid down by Peter is itself a defence of Christianity, but that through this code unbelievers may be made aware of Christian activity and behaviour and "put to silence" (p. 81). Balch makes no suggestion, therefore, that this code in any way served as a model for the later Christian Apologies.

antecedent of second-century apology.⁷¹ In this chapter, he directs considerable attention to the Pauline epistles, contending that the "most important examples of apologetic argument in the letters of Paul are his defenses of the doctrines of creation and resurrection which anticipate the main lines of second-century apologetic".⁷² What he fails to demonstrate, however, is how either of these texts, *viz.* Romans 1:18-32 and 1 Corinthians 15:29-33, are in any sense "apologetic".

Indeed, with respect to the passage in Romans, Paul is clearly addressing a group of converted Christians--in fact, the letter is directed to "all God's beloved in Rome"--and his intention, as Avery Dulles points out, is to "confirm his readers in their worship of the true God and to account for the depravity of their pagan contemporaries".⁷³ Indeed this letter offers no hint that Paul is defending the faith against outside attack; his purpose is unmistakably to preach and to exhort. With respect to the passage in 1 Corinthians, moreover, Grant himself states that Paul "is not trying to 'prove' the actuality of resurrection so much as to explain how it will take place".⁷⁴ In other words,

⁷¹ Grant, Greek Apologists of the Second Century, pp. 9-27.

⁷² Ibid., p. 23.

⁷³ Dulles, op. cit., p. 12.

⁷⁴ Grant, Greek Apologists of the Second Century, p. 23.

Grant is using the term "apology" as a synonym for "explanation", a definition which leads one to ask how apology differs, in Grant's mind, from catechism or tuition. Indeed there is little to suggest, in either of these passages, that Paul is responding to an attack against Christianity by non-believers; he is simply preaching the word of God to two groups of newly-converted Christians who, faced with daily temptations from Graeco-Roman society, require instruction, confirmation, and exhortation--not defence.

Paul's Speeches at Lystra and Athens

Grant also maintains that the speech by Paul at Lystra, in Acts 14:15-18, and that on the Areopagus, in Acts 17:22-32, demonstrate the reaction of the nascent church to early pagan confrontation and thus represent the beginnings of Christian apology.⁷⁵ Yet once again he neglects to explain either how these situations were antagonistic for the apostles or how Paul's speeches constitute an apologetic response.

According to Luke, the people of Lystra were amazed at Paul's healing of a cripple and hailed both him and Barnabas as gods, bringing them oxen and garlands and preparing to offer them sacrifice. The two apostles tore their garments

⁷⁵ So also does F.F. Bruce, The Apostolic Defence of the Gospel. Christian Apologetic in the New Testament (London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1959), pp. 29-41.

in dismay at this turn of events and rushed out among the multitude, urging them to abandon the worship of idols and to turn to the living God who, although previously allowing the nations to follow their own chosen paths, had nonetheless left himself a witness in the form of rains, fruitful seasons, food, and gladness. Yet while Paul and Barnabas were unmistakably upset by the reaction of the Lystraeans, there are in this text at least three indicators that the position in which they found themselves was anything but combative. First, Paul and Barnabas, much to their distress, were the helpless objects of the crowd's misplaced and extravagant flattery, not the targets of attack. Indeed once they realized that they were being mistaken for gods, they "rushed out among the multitude" (14:14), hardly an advisable move if the crowd were irate. Second, the people of Lystra were unlikely to attack Paul's beliefs before they were apprised of them, and prior to his address they were wholly unfamiliar with Christian doctrine --and certainly with the acts of healing performed by the disciples. In fact, given their continued insistence upon worshipping the two apostles, it is clear that they were no better informed immediately following it. Third, Paul's speech, as Dulles points out, is simply an exposition of "a popular type of natural theology",⁷⁶ or, as F.F. Bruce describes it, an appeal "to God's natural revelation as

⁷⁶ Dulles, op. cit., p. 10.

Creator and Sustainer of the universe".⁷⁷ It is, in other words, no more than a desperate attempt on the part of the apostles simply to preach the divine nature and revelation to an impassioned and ignorant crowd of pagans in the hope of extinguishing their zeal for idol worship. It is not, therefore, even an early apologetic effort, for it contains no hint of attack on the part of the pagans or of defence on the part of Paul; in fact, in this narrative any hostility arises not from the people of Lystra, but from Paul, who bluntly and unapologetically refers to pagan practices as "vain things" (Acts 14:15).

A similar situation arose in Athens. According to Luke, Paul was dismayed to find the city filled with idols and he began to discourse every day with the Jews in the synagogues and with the Gentiles in the marketplace about Jesus and the resurrection. Despite his efforts, however, the Athenians failed to comprehend his message. They thus took hold of him and brought him to the Areopagus, a name which is singularly confusing for scholars, since it could refer to either the slopes of a hill or a formal judicial court.⁷⁸ Once on the Areopagus, Luke states, the crowd importuned Paul to explain his teaching, for the ideas that he was expounding were alien to them. Like that at Lystra,

⁷⁷ Bruce, op. cit., p. 31.

⁷⁸ The Interpreter's Bible, Vol. IX (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954), p. 232.

therefore, the situation at Athens was non-combative. Some scholars have maintained that Paul, when he was taken to the Areopagus, was subjected to a "formal trial", and they base this, to some extent, on the phrase "in the middle" (17:22) and on the clause "Paul went out from among them" (17:33), which could refer to a trial situation;⁷⁹ yet there is no clear evidence that a trial took place. In fact, the tone of conciliation with which the people urged Paul to explain his teaching suggests that they were extremely interested in what he had to say and escorted him to the slope of a hill that he might address them more freely and effectively.⁸⁰ As Luke himself explains, exploring new sophistries was an integral part of life for many Athenians (17:21), and it would have been natural for them to press the Apostle further about Jesus and the resurrection.

The content of Paul's speech, moreover, like that at Lystra, is non-confrontational. He speaks to the crowd in very general terms about God's creation and universal providence, and he repeats the argument made at Lystra that God previously overlooked the pagans' idolatry, but now required them to repent, since He would one day judge the world through that man whom He raised from the dead. Paul's reference to the resurrection clearly caused some of his hearers to "mock" (17:32), but this is surely not

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

surprising. Active and often aggressive debates on that subject frequently occurred between Scribes and Pharisees at that time, and both Stoics and Epicureans, who rejected any form of material resurrection, were among his audience. Indeed, as Bruce notes, if Paul had "replaced the doctrine of the resurrection of the body by the Greek doctrine of the immortality of the soul, all but the Epicureans who listened to him would have agreed with him".⁸¹ But Paul, of course, was not there to conciliate the crowd, but to preach the Christian gospel. It is also important to note that, when he had completed his address, Paul simply "departed from among them", as he would naturally have done from a philosophical discussion among a group of sophists. Indeed the Athenians, like the Lycaonians, did not attack Paul, and Paul's speech, like that at Lystra, was not antagonistic and offered no defence of Christianity. In both these instances, Paul was simply expounding the faith to a crowd of pagans unacquainted with Christian doctrine in the hope that he might convert them. He was, in other words, simply preaching and proselytizing, and only if one's definition of apology accentuates these activities and disregards the notions of attack and defence, can these two addresses be considered apologetic.

⁸¹ Bruce, op. cit., p. 41.

Luke's Two-Part Narrative

Yet it is not only certain passages of the New Testament which have been posited as precursors of early Christian apology. Bruce has suggested, in his work The Apostolic Defence of the Gospel, that the whole of the Third Gospel and of the Acts of the Apostles are antecedents of second-century apologies addressed to high-ranking Roman officials.⁸² He bases this theory essentially on two observations. The first is that both these works are addressed to a certain "most excellent" (kratistos) Theophilus, a title which was often used of Romans of the equestrian rank, the second order in the hierarchy of Roman society.⁸³ In fact, Luke himself uses this title at least three other times in Acts to refer to the procurators Felix

⁸² Ibid., pp. 47-50. More recently, Mary Rose D'Angelo has suggested that, although Luke-Acts was intended for believers, its ethic was presented in such a way as to serve an apologetic function, i.e., to demonstrate the "surety of the Christian instruction" ("Women in Luke-Acts: A Redactional View", Journal of Biblical Literature, 109/3, 1990, p. 449). She thus characterizes the work as "a defense of Christians' ability to live with the empire" (Ibid.). From such a description, however, it is evident that D'Angelo sees the apologetic function of Luke-Acts, not so much as a defence against blatant attack, but more as persuasion and/or confirmation, i.e., an effort to convince readers of the safety of the Christian message. In other words, D'Angelo does not suggest, as does Bruce, that Luke-Acts is primarily concerned with responding to or refuting a specific attack against Christianity and thus that it is a possible precursor of Christian apology.

⁸³ Ibid., pp. 50-51.

and Festus (Acts 23:26; 24:2; and 26:25),⁸⁴ and thus Theophilus could have held a position of importance to the hearing of Paul's case by the emperor or his deputy.⁸⁵ Unfortunately, however, Bruce's theory is not without flaws. First of all, there is no conclusive evidence that Theophilus was a real individual; indeed the name Theophilus could easily have been a fiction or even a symbol for every "lover of God".⁸⁶ Moreover, even if it be conceded that he actually existed, since writings were often dedicated to real persons whether or not the works themselves were of direct interest to them,⁸⁷ the name Theophilus was very common among Jews, Gentiles, and even Christians,⁸⁸ and the title "most excellent" was used in other than Roman administrative circles. Indeed, as Gealy points out, the term "is not always used in an official sense; it need not refer to equestrian rank; it occurs in conventionally formal, friendly, or flattering speech".⁸⁹

⁸⁴ F.D. Gealy, The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Vol. 4 (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), s.v. Theophilus.

⁸⁵ Bruce, op. cit., p. 51. He rejects the suggestion, however, that Theophilus was the lawyer engaged to take Paul's case and that Luke wrote his two-part history in order to provide material for his defence.

⁸⁶ Gealy, op. cit., s.v. Theophilus.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Bruce's second argument for considering the Gospel and the Acts as precursors of second-century apologies is that both of these writings have a strong apologetic emphasis. Given the complexity of his arguments, it is necessary to consider each of these texts in turn.

Gospel of Luke

In the Third Gospel, Bruce argues, the author makes a concerted effort to defend Christianity against what would have been the common assumption in the Roman Empire at that time that Jesus was a rebel against Rome by emphasizing that his condemnation was a miscarriage of justice.⁹⁰ Bruce cites the following three examples as evidence: Luke relates 1) that Pontius Pilate was reluctant to condemn Jesus; 2) that one of the centurions in charge of the detachment of Roman soldiers who carried out the crucifixion proclaimed him innocent; and 3) that one of the bandits crucified with him attested that he had done nothing wrong, i.e., that he did not belong to a rebel organization.⁹¹ Yet these examples indicate, not that the author was writing an apology, but that this Gospel provides no more--and in some instances less--so-called apologetic material than do the other three.

With respect to Bruce's first example: Luke portrays

⁹⁰ Bruce, op. cit., pp. 48-9.

⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 47-8.

Pontius Pilate as reluctant to condemn Jesus, but so also do the authors of Matthew (27: 11-25), Mark (15:1-15) and John (18:29-40, 19:12). In fact, the author of Matthew relates how Pilate's wife warned him against condemning "that righteous man", thereby adding to his unwillingness to become involved in the whole affair (27:29). Luke states, moreover, that Pilate asked Jesus only once whether he was the king of the Jews, while the authors of Matthew and John recount that Pilate asked him twice, thus allowing Jesus more opportunity to refute the charge and Pilate to release him and be absolved of responsibility.

Bruce's second example is also unconvincing. While Luke clearly records that the centurion responsible for carrying out the crucifixion attested to Jesus' innocence (23:47), the authors of Matthew (27:54) and of Mark (15:39) also recount the incident, while John speaks about the soldier who pierced Jesus' side and witnessed the outpouring of blood and water (19:33-34). Indeed, if this passage demonstrates an apologetic intent with respect to Luke, it demonstrates the same with respect to Mark, Matthew, and John.

Bruce is also stretching the evidence in his third example. While Luke certainly attributes to one of the men crucified with Jesus the words, "This man has done nothing wrong" (Luke 23:41), there is no indication whatever that this was intended as a vindication of Jesus from the precise

charge of insurgency. First, it was the Jews, not the Romans, who wished to bring charges against Jesus, and they, in and of themselves, could not have arrested him on the charge of insurgency against Rome. Second, given Rome's paranoia with regard to any form of local uprising, both Herod and Pilate would no doubt have welcomed the chance to charge Jesus if there had been the slightest hint that he was encouraging open insurrection; neither one, however, "could find [him] guilty of any of [the] charges against him" (Luke 23:14). Third, there is no suggestion at all that the condemned man had any direct knowledge of Jesus' activities. In fact, Luke refers to this man simply as eis de ton kremasthenton, i.e., "one of those who were hanged" with Jesus, and not even as do Matthew (27:44) and Mark (15:27), as a lestes or robber. Indeed Luke is completely silent about both the status and the crime of this man, and to suggest that he was able to--and actually did--attest to something as specific as Jesus' non-involvement in a revolt against Rome is to read far too much into the text--perhaps even to impute to Luke information provided by the other Evangelists.

Clearly, therefore, none of Bruce's three examples in any way demonstrates that Luke's Gospel manifests a strong apologetic emphasis. Indeed, if one insists on ascribing the label apology to this Gospel, one must be prepared to ascribe it to all four--or perhaps, as Avery Dulles has

done, to the entire New Testament.

Acts of the Apostles

Nor are Bruce's examples of apologetic content in the Acts of the Apostles persuasive. In this work, Bruce maintains, Luke attempts to defend Christianity against the accusation that it incited disorder and riots wherever it went.⁹² This he does by introducing into his narrative a nontrivial group of Roman officials who attested that the charges against the Christians were groundless and who even, in some instances, treated Paul and the other missionaries with integrity and goodwill. Among such officials were the proconsul Sergius Paulus, "a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God" (Acts 13:5ff); the chief magistrates in Philippi who apologized to Paul and his companions for the ill treatment they had received (Acts 16:37ff); Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia, who refused to listen to the Jews' accusations against Paul and drove them from the tribunal (Acts 18:12ff); the Asiarchs in Ephesus who sought to convince Paul to avoid the theatre where a disturbance had broken out (Acts 19:23ff); and the procurator Felix and his successor Festus, who treated Paul decently during his imprisonment in Judaea and repudiated the attempts of the Jews to condemn him unjustly (Acts 24:1-26:32). Indeed all these

⁹² Ibid., pp. 49-50.

observations, Bruce attests, point to the conclusion that "Luke must be recognized as the pioneer in that type of apologetic which is addressed to the secular authorities in order to establish the law-abiding character of Christianity".⁹³

Yet of these five supposed examples of Luke's intention of absolving Christianity from the charge of inciting disorder, only the first one actually fulfils this purpose.⁹⁴ Indeed, in this first instance, relations between the Apostles and the proconsul Sergius Paulus were very friendly, for the latter graciously invited Paul and Barnabas to explain their teaching and, following a miracle performed by Paul, accepted the new religion. The remaining four examples, however, can hardly be deemed amiable encounters for the Apostles, since they demonstrate, not that the authorities were lenient and congenial towards the Christians, but that they refused to prosecute them simply because of their own ulterior motives.

In Philippi, for example, the magistrates tore the garments off Paul and Timothy, gave orders for them to be

⁹³ Ibid., p. 51.

⁹⁴ Bruce actually cites a sixth instance, Acts 28:30-1, in which Luke states: "And he lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered". Since this passage describes no particular encounters between Paul and the Romans, however, but simply a general impression of Paul's two-year stay in Rome, there can be no means of determining how congenial the relationship actually was.

beaten with rods, and threw them into prison (Acts 16:22-3). While Bruce rightly points out that these same magistrates later apologized for their actions and allowed the Apostles to go free, he fails to mention that they did so, not because they were penitent, but because "they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens" (Acts 16:38).

Bruce states, moreover, that Gallio, when he was proconsul of Achaia, refused to attend to the Jews' dispute with Paul. Bruce does not state, however, that Gallio wished to avoid the Jews because their accusations pertained solely to Jewish law--and also, it seems, because this was not the first time that the Jews had brought their internal difficulties before him. Indeed Gallio was so unwilling to deal with the Jews that he paid no attention when the people seized and beat up the ruler of the synagogue in front of the tribunal (Acts 18:12-17).

In Ephesus, furthermore, some of the Asiarchs, who were friends of Paul, pleaded with him not to get involved in a dispute between the Ephesians and some of the Apostles. While Bruce is surely correct to suggest that the Asiarchs were sympathetic to Paul's plight and worried for his safety, he fails to point out that they were also concerned, as was a local official, that the Christians were causing an unlawful disturbance. As the town clerk declared, "we are in danger of being charged with rioting today, there being no cause that we can give to justify this commotion" (Acts

19:40-1).

Finally, when Paul was imprisoned in Jerusalem, the procurator Felix, as Bruce indicates, treated him with integrity and goodwill and conversed with him often. Bruce neglects to add, however, that Felix did so because "he hoped that money would be given him by Paul" (Acts 24:26). No doubt Felix also hoped for money from the Jews two years later when, recalled from his post, he left Paul in prison, "desiring to do the Jews a favour" (Acts 24:27).

In these latter four instances, therefore, the authorities either treat the Christians tolerably or eventually release them, not because they are sympathetic to the Christian cause, but because it best serves their purposes to do so. Indeed Luke clearly includes in his narrative some examples of favourable incidents between Christians and Romans, such as the Apostles' meeting with Sergius Paulus, but it is also apparent that he recounts many unfortunate and unpleasant encounters as well.

On the one hand, therefore, Luke's two-part narrative, like the history of any organization composed by one of its own members, contains partisan material. It would have been absurd for Luke to have written a history of Christianity which did not attempt to emphasize its strengths and to justify its weaknesses--or, more to the point, which did not

attempt to make converts.⁹⁵ On the other hand, while it is clear that any written work betrays the particular biases of its author, that does not make the work an apology, *i.e.*, a defence against known and feared aggressors. Indeed only if one's definition of apology, as applied to Christian writings, centres around the acts of proselytizing and preaching can Luke's two-part narrative be given this label.

D) Conclusion⁹⁶

What, then, can be said about the precursors of the Christian Apologies addressed to Emperors? While it is possible that Aristides, Justin Martyr, and Athenagoras borrowed themes from the Hellenistic-Jewish writings, and even--although less likely--from Aristotle's Protrepticus, the literary form which they adopted follows closely in the tradition of Plato's Apology, the classic example of a defence of one's beliefs.⁹⁷ Clearly Plato's work is similar

⁹⁵ Particularly if he was a missionary, as some argue.

⁹⁶ Portions of this conclusion, as well as of Chapters 6 and 7, are reproduced from my article entitled "Athenagoras' Embassy: A Literary Fiction. This article was published by Harvard Theological Review, 89, 1996, pp. 209-26; Copyright 1996 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College. Reprinted by permission.

⁹⁷ Th. Wehofer also subscribes to this view ("Die Apologie Justins des Philosophen und Märtyrers in literarhistorischer Beziehung zum erstenmal untersucht", Römische Quartalschrift, Suppl. 6, 1897, p. 85, as pointed out by Charles Munier, "La Structure Littéraire de L'Apologie de Justin", Revue des Sciences Religieuses, 60,

to that of the Christian Apologies in at least three respects. First, Plato depicts Socrates, who was unjustly charged with atheism, as defending his teaching before the men of Athens. The Apologies, too, represent attempts to defend the Christian beliefs of their authors against what they perceived to be unfair accusation and attack both by their pagan fellow-citizens and by the Roman authorities. Second, Plato chose for his Apology a literary form with which contemporary Athenians were well acquainted, *viz.* an appeal before the Heliaea or People's Court. Indeed fifth-century Athenians were an extremely litigious people, and a court of law was undoubtedly a setting both common and familiar to them. Similarly, the Christian Apologists composed their defences in the form of imperial petitions or orations, a form to which second-century Roman citizens could easily relate. Indeed making appeals to the Emperor on a wide range of legal, financial, and even personal matters was an integral part of daily life in the Empire. Third, Plato portrays Socrates as appealing to that particular group of men which was charged with deciding his particular case. The Apologies, similarly, are written as though directed to the Emperor, who was charged with responding to the particular grievances of his subjects. In other words, both Plato's Apology and the Christian defences are addressed to influential figures who had the authority

to end the injustices being perpetrated against the aggrieved parties.

In fact, the most obvious adaptation which the Apologists make to the classic form of the apology is that necessitated by changes in the political and judicial systems between fifth-century B.C.E. Athens and second-century C.E. Rome. More specifically, Plato represents Socrates as defending his actions and beliefs by presenting a forensic or legal oration before a court of law, a form which was not only common and accepted in the fifth century, but also perfectly suited to Plato's purpose of defending the memory of Socrates. In the second century C.E., however, Roman citizens brought their legal disputes and grievances, not before a select group of men, but before the Emperor, by presenting before him imperial petitions or orations. The Apologies, therefore, in order to reflect this evident change in legal form and procedure, are directed to the reigning Emperor and his family, a literary form which, like that of Plato, was both accepted at the time and well suited to the Apologists' purpose.

Nor is it remarkable that the Apologists should seek inspiration for their literary form from a work of Plato. Aristides, Justin Martyr, and Athenagoras were all Greek philosophers prior to their conversion to Christianity--and in Justin Martyr's case, a Middle Platonic philosopher--and all three were familiar with and admirers of Plato's

philosophical work. In fact, all three adapted many of his ideas to serve the aims of their own Christian agendas, an obvious example being Plato's denunciation of the pagan gods in The Republic.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Vid. pp. 99-100 of this thesis.

CHAPTER 4

The Apology of Aristides

The Apology of Aristides is most likely the oldest extant defence of Christianity.¹ The earliest Christian author to refer to this work is Eusebius, who writes in his Chronicon:

[Quadratus], a pupil of the Apostles, and Aristides of Athens, a philosopher of our faith, gave to Hadrian apologetic entreaties at his command. He had, however, also received from Serennius, that glorious judge, a writing concerning the Christians, that it was certainly wrong to kill them on the basis of rumor alone without trial or any accusation. He wrote to Armonius Fundanus (?), proconsul of Asia, that he should not condemn them without formal condemnation and trial; and a copy of this edict survives to this day.²

In his Ecclesiastical History, Eusebius adds that he himself possessed a copy of Quadratus' defence, and that Aristides' Apology was preserved by a large number of the brethren, even at that time.³ It is believed by most scholars, due to the brevity and vagueness of Eusebius' comments, that he had not actually read Aristides' Apology.⁴

¹ Johannes Quasten, Patrology, Vol. 1 (Utrecht-Antwerp: Spectrum Publishers, 1966), p. 191; also David T. Runia, Philo in Early Christian Literature. A Survey (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), p. 95.

² As translated by Runia, op. cit., p. 239, from Edgar Hennecke, Die Apologie des Aristides. Recension und Rekonstruktion des Textes (Leipzig, 1893), p. 44.

³ Eccl. Hist. 4.3.1.3. See Runia, op. cit., p. 239.

⁴ Several scholars who hold this view are cited by G.C. O'Ceallaigh, "'Marcianus' Aristides, On the Worship of

About a century later, Jerome (c. 342-420) refers to Aristides in his Chronicon, De Viris Illustribus, and Epistle 70, where he reports that Aristides was an Athenian philosopher, that he retained the philosopher's garb after he converted to Christianity, and that, like Quadratus, he presented a defence of the faith to the Emperor Hadrian. This defence, he maintains, was preserved in Jerome's own day, was composed in large part of the opinions of the philosophers, and was later imitated by Justin Martyr. Most scholars agree, however, given that Jerome adds little to the information provided by Eusebius and that there is "a want of literary faith in statements made by Jerome", that his remarks are most likely "mere editorial expansions and colourings of what he found in the pages of Eusebius".⁵

Such was the information on Aristides until the nineteenth century, other than a letter, dated 1534, from Witzel to Beatus Rhenanus, which suggests that the Apology was in print in Latin at that time.⁶ Whether or not this was the case, it was only in 1878 that this work came to the notice of scholars, when the monks of the Lazarist monastery in Venice--the Mechitarists--published a tenth-century

God", Harvard Theological Review, 51, 1958, p. 228, n. 6.

⁵ J. Rendel Harris, "The Apology of Aristides", Texts and Studies, Vol. 1, ed. J. Armitage Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893), pp. 1-2; cf. Robert Lee Wolff, "The Apology of Aristides--A Re-examination", Harvard Theological Review, 30, 1937, p. 239.

⁶ Wolff, op. cit., p. 240.

manuscript of an Armenian translation of its first two chapters.⁷ Other discoveries quickly followed. J. Rendel Harris, in the spring of 1889, discovered a Syriac manuscript of the whole Apology, probably from the seventh century, in the library of the Convent of St. Catharine on Mount Sinai.⁸ This version is invaluable for a number of reasons. First, it includes the complete text of the Apology; second, it contains two addresses, one of them completely different from the one found in the Armenian fragment; third, it provides a full name for the author; and fourth, it establishes beyond question the genuineness of the Armenian fragment.⁹

It was the discovery of this Syriac version, moreover, which led to the further discovery by J.A. Robinson that Aristides' Apology is incorporated in the early Christian romance entitled The Life of Barlaam and Josaphat. Scholars variously ascribed this Greek work to St. John of Damascus (c. 676-749), to an anonymous author alleged to have flourished at the beginning of the seventh century, and to Euthymius (d. 1028), an Athonite monk of the monastery of

⁷ Rev. D.M. Kay, trans., "Introduction", The Apology of Aristides, Ante-Nicene Christian Library (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1897), Additional Volume, p. 260; see also, Johannes Quasten, Patrology, Vol. 1 (Utrecht-Antwerp: Spectrum Publishers, 1966), 192. When the translation from Greek to Armenian was made has yet to be determined.

⁸ Harris, op. cit., p. 3.

⁹ Kay, "Introduction", Ante-Nicene Christian Library, op. cit., p. 260.

St. Athanasius. They are now in agreement, however, that the author was Euthymius, thanks to an article by Paul Peeters which demonstrates that "Euthymius 'translated' the story from the Georgian".¹⁰ Indeed it was an extremely popular romance and was translated into numerous languages in both the East and the West.¹¹ Aristides' Apology comprises chapters 26 and 27 of this novel, where it is represented as precisely what it is: a defence of Christianity. The story runs thus: Prince Josaphat, the young son of King Abenner, is converted to Christianity by the monk Barlaam. The king, in an effort to lure his son back to heathenism, engages Nachor, one of his sages, to impersonate Barlaam so badly in a public disputation that he is certain to lose the contest. God, however, enters into Nachor, and instead of delivering an unwieldy, tedious oration, he launches into a lively and inspired defence of the Christian faith, viz. the Apology of Aristides.¹²

The Priority of the Greek or Syriac Versions?

There has been considerable debate as to which of the two complete versions of Aristides' Apology more closely approximates the author's actual words. According to R.

¹⁰ Wolff, op. cit., p. 234, n. 2; cf. G.C. O'Ceallaigh, op. cit., p. 227, n. 4.

¹¹ Kay, "Introduction", Ante-Nicene Fathers, op. cit., p. 260.

¹² Wolff, op. cit., p. 237.

Seeberg and E.J. Goodspeed, the Syriac version is more representative of the original--the Greek version, in Seeberg's view, being simply a compression and reworking of the original Apology.¹³ J. Rendel Harris, however, maintains that the Syriac version, where it is possible to compare it with the Greek and Armenian texts, reveals added explanatory clauses and a considerable and unnecessary repetition of pronouns,¹⁴ and Otto has gone so far as to state that "the Syriac translator has so altered and amplified his original as almost to have produced a new work".¹⁵ It was not until the 1930's, however, that an article by Robert Lee Wolff, entitled "The Apology of Aristides--A Re-Examination", tipped the scales in favour of the view that the Greek text, found in The Life of Barlaam and Josaphat, more faithfully represents the actual words of Aristides.¹⁶

In this article, Wolff endeavours to demonstrate that Euthymius made use of the actual Apology of Aristides as opposed to some hagiographical version. He begins by pointing out that such a version is purely "hypothetical",

¹³ As cited by Wolff, op. cit., p. 241.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ As paraphrased by J.A. Robinson, "The Original Greek of the Apology of Aristides", Texts and Studies, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893), p. 73, referring to a passage in Otto, Justini Opera, tom. 2. p. xxix.

¹⁶ Wolff, op. cit., pp. 233-247.

for other than the text in The Life of Barlaam and Josaphat, no document has come down to us which contains even a fragment of the original Apology.¹⁷ What is more, such a version would be "difficult to imagine", since the hagiographical technique which a later writer commonly used when borrowing from the work of an earlier one was at best unsystematic.¹⁸ In fact, Euthymius himself provides two good examples of this rather free and undisciplined technique, for in his Life of Barlaam and Josaphat, he borrows from at least two other earlier works, *viz.* a 'life' of St. Catherine of Alexandria found in a collection of the lives of saints compiled by Simeon Metaphrastes in the tenth century, and the so-called Mirror of the Prince, written in the sixth century by Agapetos for the Emperor Justinian.¹⁹ In both these cases, Wolff states, the hagiographical method which Euthymius employs is the "usual" one, *i.e.* "he uses [the works] freely, scattering bits, long and short, throughout his narrative wherever he feels they add to the effect; he never uses a work entire; he reworks sentences to suit himself, dropping words and phrases, or inserting them with equal freedom. In short he borrows here and there, as he pleases; his use is partial and indirect".²⁰ That this

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 241.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 242.

²⁰ Ibid.

is the most common technique, moreover, is evidenced by the borrowings from John Malalas in the 'life' of St. Catherine of Alexandria, the work from which Euthymius was later to borrow; in the borrowings from Theodoret in the martyrdom of Trophimus; and in the borrowings from Clement of Alexandria by the author of the Passion of St. Philip of Heraclea.²¹

Yet the supposed hagiographical method which Euthymius used when he borrowed from Aristides' Apology is in glaring contrast not only to that usually employed by authors, but to that employed by Euthymius himself in the same work. That is, "he took the whole of it; there is little if any reworking (this we know from the Syriac); his use of it is direct and complete".²² It is thus unlikely, Wolff attests, that Euthymius would have taken his material from a hagiographical source--itself hypothetical--which used the material in this same--unusual--way.²³

What is more, that a manuscript of Aristides' Apology would have been in existence as late as the 10th century and that writers would have made free use of it without acknowledging its existence is not unique. This is evidenced by the Codex Parisinus 451, written in 914, which has been the only source of the texts of nearly all the early Christian Apologists. As Wolff thus asks: "Why

²¹ Ibid., pp. 242-3.

²² Ibid., p. 243.

²³ Ibid.

has been the only source of the texts of nearly all the early Christian Apologists. As Wolff thus asks: "Why should not the story of the hypothetical manuscript which contained Aristides, and which Euthymius presumably used, have been similar?"²⁴ The manuscript history of The Didache is even more to the point. Until the nineteenth century, this work was known only through brief references in Eusebius, Athanasius, and some other early Christian writers. In 1875, however, Bryennios, Archbishop of Leres, discovered it in its entirety in a monastery at Constantinople.²⁵ Indeed this manuscript was clearly in existence in the east long after Euthymius' time, which confirms the possibility that a manuscript of Aristides' Apology was available to Euthymius in the tenth century.

As Wolff concludes, therefore, it is certainly possible, and indeed "not improbable", that Euthymius made use of an actual text of Aristides' Apology.²⁶ In fact, it is not unreasonable to suggest that "about the year 978 St. Euthymius...was engaged in transforming a rather primitively told Georgian tale into one of the richest, most sophisticated, and most dramatic of the medieval Christian romances, and had before him as he worked a copy of the Apology of Aristides...This he inserted bodily into his

²⁴ Ibid., p. 244.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 244-5.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 245.

The Intended Addressee: Hadrian or Antoninus Pius?

The question of the Apology's intended addressee is also interesting. Until Harris' discovery of the Syriac text in 1889, scholars tended to agree that Aristides' Apology was addressed to Hadrian, a belief confirmed by Eusebius and Jerome and attested by the Armenian fragment which bears the following title: "To the Emperor Hadrian Caesar, from Aristides, philosopher of Athens".²⁸ The Syriac version, however, contains the preface: "Again the Apology which Aristides the Philosopher made to Hadrian the King on Behalf of the Worship of God (Almighty)", which is followed by another introduction: "(Almighty) Caesar Titus Hadrian Antoninus, Worshipful, and Merciful, from Marcianus Aristides, philosopher of Athens".²⁹ In other words, according to the second address in the Syriac text, Aristides' Apology was directed, not to Hadrian, but to Antoninus Pius.

Harris, in his introduction to his English translation of the Syriac version, argues that the first address in this text is "a mere literary heading, proper, shall we say, for one out of a collection of apologies", while the second "cannot be anything else than a part of the primitive apology".³⁰ In other words, Aristides' Apology was indeed

²⁸ Harris, op. cit., p. 7.

²⁹ As translated by O'Ceallaigh, op. cit., p. 230.

³⁰ Harris, op. cit., pp. 7-8.

intended for Antoninus Pius, and was probably directed to him soon after his accession in 138. He bases this early date on a variety of arguments. First, the Apology manifests a simplicity of style indicative of early Christian works; in other words, the religious ideas and practices, such as the burial of the dead and the concern for the stranger, "are of an antique cast".³¹ Second, the Apology very obviously lacks the tone of contempt and hostility towards the Jews usually found in Christian works of the middle second century.³² Third, there are traces in this work of a creed similar to the Apostolic Symbol, although containing the inconsistent statement, given Aristides' friendly attitude towards the Jews, that Jesus "was crucified by the Jews". Such a clause, Harris maintains, was not to be found in later creeds, despite the anti-Jewish sentiment which abounded.³³ Finally, the Apology's representation of the custom of fasting points to an early date. According to Aristides, the whole church fasts and the amount saved by thus abstaining from food is contributed to the more destitute among them. Moreover, the church fasts, not simply for one day, but for two or three consecutive days, and not because of any church directive, but out of a genuine Christian concern for the poor. This

³¹ Ibid., p. 13.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., pp. 13-15.

means that Christian fasting, Harris concludes, was "a spontaneous, rather than a commanded charity, dictated at once by love and necessity. Can such a practice in such a form be other than early?".³⁴

Yet whether or not one finds these arguments persuasive, an obvious problem arises, as Harris points out, if one accepts that the Apology was directed to Antoninus Pius in approximately 138, i.e., there is no evidence that the Emperor was ever in Athens after his accession, and certainly not at that early date. Two solutions thus present themselves: either Aristides presented his Apology to the Emperor in Rome rather than in Athens, or Antoninus made a visit to the East which has not been recorded. Harris prefers the second option, and points to a letter of Irenaeus to Florinus in which he states that Florinus was at the royal court in Smyrna. This suggests, Harris maintains, that there was some sort of royal residence in this city, and thus the possibility exists that Aristides' Apology was presented to Antoninus during an unrecorded visit to the imperial seat of government in Smyrna.³⁵

Harris' thesis regarding the intended addressee of Aristides' Apology has met with mixed reviews. R.M. Grant

³⁴ Ibid., p. 16. While earnestness in fasting and concern for the poor could certainly point to an early date for the Apology, it does not preclude the possibility that the work was composed under Hadrian.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 17.

has suggested that, while the Armenian fragment and the shorter Greek version could well be dated under the reign of Hadrian, the Syriac text most likely came from the time of Antoninus Pius. He bases this opinion on the fact that the Syriac version contains a denunciation of homosexuality, and Christian apologists only felt at liberty to criticize the deification of Hadrian's companion Antinous after the Emperor's death.³⁶ On the whole, however, scholars have tended to favour the address to Hadrian attested by Eusebius, since, as D.M. Kay pointed out as early as 1897, the second superscription which implies that Antoninus was the intended recipient is the "only ground for questioning" Eusebius' statement.³⁷ Moreover, if one accepts the second subscription as authentic, Kay argues, it is necessary to suppose not only that Eusebius was wrong, but also that Jerome and the Armenian version followed his error, and that the Syriac translator, despite this earlier tradition, just happened to preserve intact the true address. This is clearly to assume too much, especially when, as in this instance, there is no reasonable ground for supposing that Eusebius was reporting anything but a well-established tradition.³⁸

³⁶ R.M. Grant, Greek Apologists of the Second Century (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1988), pp. 38-39.

³⁷ Kay, "Introduction", Ante-Nicene Christian Library, op. cit., p. 260.

³⁸ Ibid.

The Apology as a Defence of Judaism?

While G.C. O'Ceallaigh clearly agrees that Aristides' Apology was presented to Hadrian--in fact, he estimates that it was delivered as early as 125-126³⁹--he also contends that it was presented to the Emperor as a defence, not of Christianity, but of Judaism. The Apology, O'Ceallaigh argues, was composed by a proselyte of Hellenistic Judaism in the second century, "was interpolated and 'edited' by a Christian writer" probably in the late fourth century, and has passed ever since as an apology for Christianity.⁴⁰ Indeed there are four main arguments, he insists, "for concluding that no second-century Christian could have written the entire work as it stands"⁴¹: 1) that the division of the races of men into Barbarians, Greeks, Jews, and Christians in Chapter 2, as well as the balance of that Chapter, are "wholly unacceptable as a writing of the second century",⁴² i.e., no Emperor or pagan Greek would understand or tolerate such a classification, since no one at that time--Greek or Christian--would separate Jews from Christians in an address to an Emperor;⁴³ 2) that the section devoted to the Jews is: a) "too favorable" towards

³⁹ O'Ceallaigh, op. cit., p. 232.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 227.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 234.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 236.

them, i.e., it was clearly intended to extol the virtues of the Jews; and b) "an outright contradiction of itself",⁴⁴ i.e., it claims, for instance, that the Jews worship one God alone, but that they render service to the angels, not to God;⁴⁵ 3) that the author assigns the same (positive) attributes to the Jews as to the Christians, i.e., that no Christian who was writing a defence of Christianity would "think of placing the Jews on a precise par with those of his own faith in so many particulars"⁴⁶; and 4) that the form of the work as it now stands is "manifestly corrupt", i.e., while chapters 1 and 3-13 inclusive constitute a clear and systematic polemic against the Chaldaeans, the Greeks, and the Egyptians, chapters 2 and 14-17 inclusive, which deal with the Christians, are confused and unstylistic.⁴⁷

Yet O'Ceallaigh's logic is flawed in at least three of his four main points. With respect to his first argument, viz. that no one would separate Jews from Christians in an address to an Emperor, one need look no further than the First Apology of Justin Martyr for an example of a Christian author doing just that. As Justin states in Chapter 63 of this work, the Jews teach that it was God who spoke to Moses in the burning bush, but they do not know the nature of the

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 246-7.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 250.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

Father and the Son. Indeed "Jesus Christ is the Son of God...appearing at one time in the form of fire, at another under the guise of incorporeal beings, but now, at the will of God, after becoming man for mankind, He bore all the torments which the demons prompted the rabid Jews to wreak upon Him. Although it is explicitly stated in the Mosaic writings [that it was Christ who spoke to Moses]..., the Jews assert that it was the Father...who spoke thus". Indeed there is little doubt that Justin is separating Jews from Christians in this passage, whether or not Antoninus Pius, the purported addressee, understood the distinction.

With respect to O'Ceallaigh's second point, viz. that the work is too favourable to Jews, it is clearly stated in the first address in the Syriac version that the Apology is concerned with "the worship of God". It is thus to be expected that the author, as a Christian, would both praise the professed monotheism of the Jews (14) -- particularly if the Jews and Christians were still being linked in Christian works as he suggests, and pour scorn on their preoccupation with sabbaths, new moons, the passover -- and service to angels rather than to God (14).

In his fourth argument, O'Ceallaigh maintains that in those sections of the work dealing with the Chaldaeans, the Greeks, and the Egyptians (chapters 1 and 3 through 13), the author has "carefully divided his polemic into the three compartments, one for each of the three polytheistic

racess".⁴⁸ Yet he fails to reconcile this statement with his earlier assertion that "the Egyptians...are not even named in the division of the races";⁴⁹ in other words, that the discussion of the Egyptians seems to have been little more than an after-thought. Moreover, in the Syriac version, the Egyptians are afforded 4 1/2 columns, the Chaldaeans 8 1/2, and the Greeks 12 1/2; this can hardly constitute, as O'Ceallaigh claims, a "carefully divided" or "very systematic and methodically developed" polemic.⁵⁰

Yet even if O'Ceallaigh's four main points were in any way sound, three external arguments cast considerable doubt on the notion that Aristides' defence was originally a Jewish apology which was edited and interpolated by a Christian writer two centuries later. First, O'Ceallaigh's theory requires that Eusebius was unaware that this work was Jewish--a supposition which is highly improbable for two reasons: 1) as evidenced in his Ecclesiastical History, Eusebius is keen to distinguish for readers those Christian works which are "true, genuine, and well authenticated writings" from those which are "disputed", "spurious", or "absurd and impious" (III.25); and 2) Eusebius makes it very clear in his history that he is unforgiving of the Jews for their attacks on Jesus, stating in the first chapter his

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 233.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 250.

intention "to describe the calamities that swiftly overwhelmed the whole Jewish nation, in consequence of their plots against our Saviour". Indeed it is unlikely that such an author would accept as genuinely Christian a work which was written by a Jew in defence of the Jewish nation. Moreover, if one were to accept O'Ceallaigh's assumption that the work was interpolated in the late fourth century, then the apology to which Eusebius must be referring, given that he died in 340, is the purely Jewish work, a conclusion which can only make his assumption that the Apology was Christian even more implausible.

The second argument centres around O'Ceallaigh's statement that if one removes from the Syriac text⁵¹ all the passages which--at least to his mind--cannot easily be explained, viz., chapter 2 and chapters 14 to 17, then "the balance of the work, at least seven-eighths of it, reveals not one of the earmarks of the Christian writer".⁵² Surely, however, the sections of the Apology dealing with the Chaldaeans, the Greeks, and the Egyptians (Chapters 3 through 13) are very much the work of a Christian rather than a Jewish writer. As discussed in the previous chapter, when Jewish authors assaulted pagan practices, they tended to focus their attack on the hated idols of silver and gold,

⁵¹ O'Ceallaigh dismisses the complete Greek version from Barlaam and Josaphat as an "ancillary" text, being "of much later provenience", ibid., p. 228.

⁵² Ibid., p. 233.

whereas the Christians, while they might briefly denounce pagan statues, preferred to inveigh against the vile and hideous pagan gods, since it was these, they believed, who led the barbarous races into profanity and defilement. Indeed Aristides clearly follows the Christian, rather than the Jewish pattern, for while he refers briefly to idol worship in the first half of Chapter 3, he devotes ten chapters (4-13 incl.) to a vicious assault on pagan deities. Clearly the seven-eighths of the Apology which remain after O'Ceallaigh removes what he considers to be inconsistencies and errors were written by a Christian, rather than a Jewish, author.

The third argument against O'Ceallaigh's theory involves a twofold question. First, why would a proselyte of Hellenistic Judaism have felt the need to address an apology to the Emperor Hadrian in the year 125-126? As Michael Grant points out, upon Hadrian's accession in 117, the Jews, probably encouraged by the latter's execution of the Jewish oppressor Lusius Quietus,

"entertained rather high hopes of Hadrian. He was praised by an Alexandrian Jew in extravagant terms and hailed as a second Cyrus--the Persian monarch who had permitted the revival of the Temple nearly seven centuries earlier. Indeed, there was a strong Jewish tradition that Hadrian actually authorized such a step. The eminent Joshua ben Hananiah, who had probably succeeded Gamaliel II as the leader of Palestinian Jewry at Jamnia, and professed tolerant views allowing righteous Gentiles a portion in the world to come, was now granted an audience with Hadrian in person, apparently either at Antioch or Jerusalem, where tradition held that the emperor actually authorized not only the removal of Trajan's

statue from the Temple site but the actual rebuilding of the Temple itself."⁵³

As it turned out, the Jews were misguided in their hopes for Hadrian, since he proved to be a most enthusiastic Hellenist; yet it was only the Judaeans who faced serious problems from Hadrian's efforts to integrate them into the pagan world,⁵⁴ and even they would not have felt the effects of his aspirations and activities until at least the year 128, i.e., three years after O'Ceallaigh's supposed Hellenistic-Jewish author composed his apology for Judaism.⁵⁵

The second question is as follows: Why, if this work were actually intended as a "counterattack" upon polytheists, would a Hellenistic Jew have chosen to respond to these verbal or written assaults and to defend his religion in an apology addressed to an Emperor? Indeed neither the author nor his co-religionists were currently suffering at the hands of Rome, and Hadrian, like all Roman Emperors, was totally uninterested in the beliefs of his subjects, provided that these did not violate Roman law or jeopardize the peace of the Empire. What is more, if this work actually constitutes a Hellenistic-Jewish defence

⁵³ Michael Grant, The Jews in the Roman World (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), p. 244.

⁵⁴ I.e., Hadrian's ban on circumcision and the refoundation of Jerusalem as a Roman colony, Aelia Capitolina.

⁵⁵ Michael Grant, op. cit., p. 247.

addressed to an Emperor, it is highly suspicious that it is our only example of such a literary genre and that its existence is wholly unattested by any early Christian, or even Jewish, author.

As Jean Daniélou affirms, therefore, O'Ceallaigh's "position would seem to be untenable".⁵⁶ Indeed few of the arguments which he presents in favour of his theory actually stand up to close scrutiny, and many of the questions which his arguments raise are left unaddressed. It must be concluded, therefore, that Aristides' Apology was composed, not as a defence of Judaism as O'Ceallaigh suggests, but as a defence of Christianity as tradition has always affirmed.

The Apology as a Supplication to the Emperor?

The question which must now be addressed is whether or not Aristides actually intended his Apology to be presented to the Emperor. Many scholars would argue that Aristides' Apology, like all the early second-century Apologies, was intended to be read, and with any luck approved, by the Emperor to whom it is addressed. One such scholar is A. Bouché-Leclercq who, in his work L'Intolérance religieuse et la politique, attempts to demonstrate "en quoi...leurs plaidoyers étaient insuffisants aux yeux du pouvoir et pourquoi tant d'éloquence et de raison n'a rien changé à la

⁵⁶ Jean Daniélou, Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973), p. 11, n. 16.

politique des empereurs, qui, s'ils ont pris connaissance de ces écrits, comme on peut le supposer, semblent leur avoir opposé la question préalable".⁵⁷ J. Rendel Harris, moreover, with respect specifically to Aristides' Apology, has stated that "it is at least conceivable that it may have been presented to the Emperor, along with other Christian writings, during an unrecorded visit of his to his ancient seat of government in Smyrna",⁵⁸ while R.M. Grant asserts that "[d]uring Antoninus' reign the Apology of Aristides was revised and presented to the emperor, perhaps toward the beginning of his reign".⁵⁹

Yet there are at least two scholars who would take the opposite, and more likely, position that the early Christian defences were never intended for imperial eyes. E.R. Goodenough, for example, has stated, with regard to both Jewish and Christian apologies, that "in neither Christianity nor Judaism was it ever supposed that the august personages addressed would read the apology".⁶⁰

⁵⁷ A. Bouché-Leclercq, L'Intolérance religieuse et la politique (Paris: Librairie Hachette et Cie., 1912), pp. 4-5. Other scholars who hold this position include Harry Y. Gamble, Books and Readers in the Early Church (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 112; and Wolfram Kinzig, "Der 'Sitz im Leben' der Apologie in der Alten Kirche", ZKG 100, 1990, pp. 312-13.

⁵⁸ Harris, op. cit., p. 17.

⁵⁹ Grant, op. cit., p. 45.

⁶⁰ E.R. Goodenough, The Theology of Justin Martyr (Jena: Verlag Frommannsche Buchhandlung, 1923), p. 80.

Paolo Ubaldi, moreover, has maintained that the authors who addressed their works to the Emperors certainly did not have as their primary aim that the Emperors read their supplications and immediately cease their persecution, "for the Greeks were not that simple-minded!".⁶¹ Although neither of these scholars has argued his position at any length, the following examination of Aristides' Apology will clearly strengthen their assertions.

Unlike the defences of Justin Martyr and Athenagoras, Aristides' Apology contains no reference, either in the address or in the body of the work, to its precise literary form. There are, however, two obvious possibilities: that the Apology was written in the form of an imperial petition or libellus, or that it is one of the numerous hortatory or instructive works which were customarily presented to the Emperor. Both of these possibilities will be examined, therefore, and in each case it will be demonstrated that Aristides' Apology was inappropriate for imperial eyes.

a) The Apology as an Official Libellus?

As discussed in Chapter 1,⁶² it was both a common and a popular practice for Roman citizens to come before the Emperor with their requests, grievances, and legal disputes,

⁶¹ Paolo Ubaldi, as quoted by Michele Pellegrino, Studi su L'Antica Apologetica (Roma: Edizioni di "Storia e Letterature", 1947), pp. 1-2.

⁶² Vid. pp. 11-25.

and it was one of the Emperor's foremost obligations to consider and respond to the petitions of his subjects. However, it was incumbent upon petitioners, regardless of their rank or station, to formulate their requests in the accepted and recognized manner, i.e., Roman imperial administrators were expected to communicate with the Emperor by letter, representatives of a city or group of cities by an ambassadorial speech or legatio, and the Roman masses by a written petition or libellus. Since all that can be ascertained about Aristides is that he was a philosopher--as Jerome describes him, philosophus eloquentissimus et sub pristino habitu discipulus Christi ⁶³--it seems reasonable to assume that he was neither engaged in imperial administration nor heading an embassy, and that if he had intended to petition the Emperor, he would have composed his work in the form of a libellus. Aristides' Apology, however, provides little indication that it was ever intended as such.

Both the Armenian fragment and the Syriac version of the Apology contain a superscription to the Emperor--in fact, the Syriac version contains two--yet not one of these would have been appropriate in an official imperial petition. The heading in the Armenian fragment reads as follows: "To the Emperor Hadrian Caesar, from Aristides,

⁶³ As cited by Wolff, op. cit., p. 239.

philosopher of Athens".⁶⁴ Clearly such an address, if the work were really intended for the Emperor, is untypically brief and contracted. Harris, in fact, refers to it as a "summary", since it contains only that information which is provided by Eusebius; he even surmises that it may have been "immediately derived" from the Eusebian tradition.⁶⁵ Not only is the superscription inappropriately short, moreover, but when it is compared with imperial addresses found in other libelli, it becomes evident that the Armenian heading, as it stands, is disrespectful to the Emperor. In an address to Gordian III, for example, the petitioner not only lists the three names of the Emperor, but also adds several adjectives affirming his power and nobility: To the Emperor Caesar Marcus Antonius Gordianus, Pius, Felix, [and] August".⁶⁶ That it was proper and expected for a petitioner to address the Emperor in this way is evident from the subscriptio appended to the libellus in which Gordian describes himself in exactly the same terms.⁶⁷ Moreover, in a petition with two addressees, viz. Philip the Arab and his son, the format is the same: "To the Emperor Caesar Marcus Julius Philippus, Pius, Felix, and August, and to Marcus

⁶⁴ Harris, op. cit., p. 7.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ CIL III 12336. This is my own English translation.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Julius Philippus, Most Famous Caesar".⁶⁸ Indeed this address does little to support the idea that the Apology was intended for the imperial court.

The first address in the Syriac version of the Apology is also irregular and inappropriate. It reads as follows: "Again the Apology which Aristides the Philosopher made to Hadrian the King on Behalf of the Worship of God [Almighty]".⁶⁹ One can only agree with Harris that this superscription reads like "a mere literary heading, proper...for one out of a collection of apologies".⁷⁰ It, too, includes only the barest details concerning the Emperor, again omitting two of his praenomina. More significantly, however, it refers to him simply as "King" or basileus. While this word is applied to the Emperor in verse as early as Augustus, and appears in place of autokrator or "emperor" in prose and in inscriptions about the time of Hadrian, it was never used in formal titulature "until well into the Byzantine period".⁷¹ In other words, the accepted mode of address at the time that Aristides wrote his Apology was clearly autokrator, and it would have been highly improper for him to refer to the Emperor solely

⁶⁸ CIL III 14191. This is my own English translation.

⁶⁹ O'Ceallaigh, op. cit., p. 230.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Hugh J. Mason, Greek Terms for Roman Institutions: A Lexicon and Analysis (Toronto: A.M. Hakkert Ltd., 1974), p. 120.

as basileus.

What is also striking about the address is that the author refers to himself simply as "Aristides the philosopher". As discussed in Chapter 1, once the Emperor appended his reply or subscriptio to a libellus, the petitioner would have it witnessed for his own use. The subscriptio became, in other words, legal evidence or proof that the petitioner's request had been granted. Yet if the subscriptio was to be of any use as a legal document, it had to affirm not only the Emperor's decision, but also the petitioner's name--complete and unabridged--as the individual to whom that decision applied. It is hardly likely, therefore, that Aristides, once he had gone to the trouble and expense of requesting a judgement from the Emperor, would not have ensured the complete legality--and utility--of that judgement by providing his name in full. Indeed it is safe to assume that in second-century Athens there was more than one man named Aristides who considered himself a philosopher!

This heading is also unusual in that it provides the subject of the Apology, viz. the worship of Almighty God. As Wynne Williams attests, libelli "were usually headed with some such formula as 'to the Emperor X a request from Y';⁷² in other words, the subject of the petition did not appear.

⁷² Wynne Williams, "The Libellus Procedure and the Severan Papyri", Journal of Roman Studies, 64, 1974, p. 88.

This is clearly understandable, since including the question or problem under review would have been both redundant and time consuming. The Emperor was expected to consider the requests of his subjects in their entirety, and he would thus have been well informed, once he--or perhaps even his a libellis--had read the petition, of the specific problem and the desired solution. That it was not a common practice to include the subject of the petition, moreover, can be demonstrated from the address of the libellus to Gordian which reads: To the Emperor Caesar Marcus Antonius Gordianus, Pius, Felix [and] August, a petition from the villagers of Scaptopara".⁷³ Likewise in the heading of the libellus to Philip the Arab and his son, the word "petition" appears between the names of the addressee and the petitioner, and there is no reference to the problem being considered.⁷⁴ It must be concluded, therefore, that not only is this first Syriac superscription, like the heading in the Armenian fragment, too curt and disrespectful to have been an address appended to a genuine libellus, but it also deviates from the recognized and accepted format of such a supplication. In fact, as Harris suggests, this Syriac superscription reads more like a tag or a label by which the work is to be identified than as a proper address to the

⁷³ CIL III 12336.

⁷⁴ CIL III 14191.

Roman Emperor.⁷⁵

The second Syriac superscription imitates more closely the expected format of an address to the Emperor, and reads: "(Almighty) Caesar Titus Hadrian Antoninus, Worshipful, and Merciful, from Marcianus Aristides, philosopher of Athens".⁷⁶ Indeed it provides a Christian name for the author, i.e., Marcianus, and it refers to the Emperor in glowing terms as "Worshipful" and "Merciful", a dose of flattery, as we have seen, being desirable in such communications. The address, however, is not unproblematic. First, the words "worshipful" and "merciful" are written in the plural, even though the Apology clearly begins in the singular with the words: "I, O King...", and the singular is reiterated throughout the work. Second, the names of Antoninus Pius are grammatically incorrect, since they appear to be in neither the dative nor the vocative case.⁷⁷ Third, the punctuation is erroneous. The second address in this version directly follows the first, and the two read as follows: "Again the Apology which Aristides the Philosopher made to Hadrian the King on Behalf of the Worship of God (Almighty)"; and "(Almighty) Caesar Titus Hadrian Antoninus,

⁷⁵ Harris, op. cit., p. 7.

⁷⁶ O'Ceallaigh, op. cit., p. 240.

⁷⁷ The dative case would have been used if the work were intended to be handed in to the imperial court, and the vocative if it were intended to be presented before the Emperor.

Worshipful and Merciful, from Marcianus Aristides, philosopher of Athens". The punctuation in this version indicates that the word "Almighty" refers to the first word in the second address and thus applies to Caesar. It seems clear, however, from the fact that the same word is applied to God in the Jewish section of the Apology, that the original version applied the word "Almighty", not to Caesar at the beginning of the second address, but to God at the end of the first address.⁷⁸ As it stands, therefore, this heading seems to be both corrupt and ungrammatical; in fact, because of its many errors, O'Ceallaigh concludes that this second superscription was not part of the original work at all, but "a later interpolation".⁷⁹ It is hardly likely, therefore, that such an irregular address prefaced a petition which was intended to be read by the Emperor.

The lack of a complete and appropriate address, however, is not the most obvious omission in this work if one assumes that it was written in the form of an imperial libellus. The Apology, first of all, does not define, in any substantive way, the grievance or dispute upon which a judgement is being sought from the Emperor. The closest Aristides comes to mentioning such a problem is his vague suggestion in the Syriac version that the pagans are spreading false rumours about the Christians: "Now the

⁷⁸ O'Ceallaigh, op. cit., pp. 229-231.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Greeks, O King, as they follow base practises in intercourse with males, and a mother and a sister and a daughter, impute their monstrous impurity to the Christians" (XVII). Indeed this rather cryptic allusion to pagan slanders is hardly sufficient to allow the Emperor to comprehend the situation which requires his attention. In fact, it seems to be less a statement of a problem than an opportunity for Aristides to apprise the Emperor of the Christians' compassion, justice, and endurance in the face of ridicule. As he insists, directly following this statement, the Christians are "just and good, and the truth is set before their eyes, and their spirit is long-suffering; and, therefore, though they know the error of these (the Greeks), and are persecuted by them, they bear and endure; and for the most part they have compassion on them, as men who are destitute of knowledge. And on their side, they offer prayer that these may repent of their error...And assuredly the race of the Christians is more blessed than all the men who are upon the face of the earth" (XVII). Given that it is to the suppliant's benefit, when presenting a libellus, to convince the Emperor of his suffering and loss under current conditions, Aristides' so-called petition is clearly wide of the mark.

Moreover, if a petition was to be given due consideration by the Emperor, the particular request had to be brief and straightforward. According to Justin Martyr,

the libellus presented by the Roman woman accused by her husband of being a Christian contained two very explicit and pointed entreaties: "that she might be permitted first to set her household affairs in order, and then, after that was done she would defend herself against the accusation".⁸⁰ The Emperor, Justin states, gave his permission. A draft of a petition to Valerian and Gallienus likewise demonstrates the directness with which petitioners appealed to the Emperor. A grammaticus had the right to receive a salary from the city, but insisted that he was not being paid. He therefore asked the Emperor: "[that] your supreme Genius should order that there should be given to me an orchard in the city, within the walls, known as the Garden of Dictynus, along with the trees there, and the water for irrigation, an orchard which brings in 600 atticae on lease, so that I may have from this source what satisfies my needs...".⁸¹ Thus both these petitions include very specific and straightforward requests of the Emperor, while Aristides' Apology, in contrast, neither states, in any intelligible form, that a wrong has been committed, nor suggests, in any form at all, how this wrong might be redressed. Indeed these two glaring oversights would have made it impossible

⁸⁰ As translated by Thomas B. Falls, Saint Justin Martyr (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1965).

⁸¹ William Turpin, "Imperial Subscriptions and the Administration of Justice", Journal of Roman Studies, 81, 1991, pp. 108-9 and Note 45.

for the Emperor to consider and to pass judgement upon Aristides' Apology had it actually been submitted for his consideration.

b) The Apology Presented to the Emperor as a Learned Work?

Thus if Aristides' defence were actually intended as an official libellus, it was an inadequate, improper, and insulting effort. A second possibility, however, is supplied by Fergus Millar when he suggests that the Apology was one "of those exhortatory or informative works so commonly addressed to emperors in this period" for the purpose of securing financial benefits for their authors or even of influencing imperial policy.⁸² These works comprised poetical or prosaic compositions for the Emperor's amusement; writings containing specific requests; practical guides to conduct, such as Alexander of Aphrodisias' work On Fate; works on military science; detailed volumes of general information, such as Pliny's Natural History; medical treatises; writings on Greek vocabulary and grammar, such as the Onomastikon of "Pollux"; and works exhorting the Emperor to ideal conduct, such as two of the four orations of Dio of Prusa On Kingship.⁸³ Yet Aristides' Apology, once again, fails to meet the requisite criteria.

⁸² Fergus Millar, The Emperor in the Roman World (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1977), pp. 497-99.

⁸³ Ibid., pp. 497-8.

The Onomastikon of "Pollux" (Julius Polydeuces) is a work devoted to Greek grammar and vocabulary. Each of its books is prefaced by an exhortation to Commodus to a study of the subject.⁸⁴ While it is uncertain whether Commodus ever received this work or whether it would have been of interest to him, it was clearly of central concern to many writers, orators, and grammarians in the second-century Roman Empire,⁸⁵ and as such would have merited his sanction. Pliny's Natural History, moreover, which was addressed to Titus, contains detailed and current information on such subjects as Roman history, art, medicine, and literature; in other words, it was a work which clearly aided and enhanced an understanding of Roman society and culture. While it is entirely possible that Titus never read or even received this work, he would assuredly have sanctioned--and perhaps even praised--it for its noble efforts to explore important aspects of Roman life. Two of Dio of Prusa's four orations On Kingship were addressed to Trajan and were attempts to exhort him to an ideal of imperial conduct, viz. a fear of the gods and an attention to the needs of his subjects which paralleled Zeus' attention to the needs of all humanity. Indeed if, as Fergus Millar states, these two works were either sent to Trajan or delivered before him,⁸⁶ there is

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 497.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 498.

little doubt that they would have received his full support and approval.

Thus, although it is uncertain whether or not the Emperor so much as perused these various works, it seems clear, given that the aim of each one was to inspire, to inform, or to edify, that they would all have merited the Emperor's assent and admiration. Aristides' Apology, however, would have been found worthy of nothing but the Emperor's irritation. Four of its seventeen chapters, first of all, defend the Christian God and the Christian way of life, or, in O'Ceallaigh's words, "flaunt Christian insignia" (Chs. 1 and 15-17).⁸⁷ Indeed Hadrian would scarcely have sanctioned an exaggerated and boastful exposition of this new cult and its activities when it was his very law which made Christianity a legal offence. Moreover, the other thirteen chapters--by O'Ceallaigh's calculations, at least seven-eighths of the work--deal with paganism and Judaism, neither discussion being appropriate for the Emperor.⁸⁸ First, Aristides' Apology would have been of little interest to Hadrian, for far from offering new insights into the multitudinous pagan deities which it discussed, it simply reiterated information which he had doubtless known since childhood. Second, Hadrian would certainly have found the author's vicious denunciation of

⁸⁷ O'Ceallaigh, op. cit., p. 233.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

the pagan gods' horrendous bodies and vile behaviour not only distasteful but untenable, particularly since he himself had added to the number of the gods by deifying his consort Antinous in 124.⁸⁹ With respect to the Jews, moreover, it was Hadrian, as discussed earlier in this chapter, who ordered a ban on circumcision and who announced the refounding of Jerusalem as Aelia Capitolina after Capitoline Jupiter. He would hardly have been impressed, therefore, either by Aristides' account of the Jews' migration and exodus from Egypt and their worship of the One True God, or of his denunciation of circumcision, fasting, and service to angels. Since Aristides' Apology, therefore, unlike the various works by Roman historians, poets, orators, or grammarians, would more likely have aroused the Emperor's anger than secured benefits for its author, it is most unlikely that it was submitted for his perusal or sanction.

Conclusion

It seems evident, therefore, that Aristides' Apology was never intended to be presented to the Emperor either as an official imperial libellus or as a learned or edifying work. To what literary genre, therefore, does it belong? Euthymius inserted the Apology into his mediaeval Greek romance as a fictitious oration in favour of Christianity to

⁸⁹ Grant, op. cit., p. 38.

be delivered before the King and his courtiers. What is more, if Wolff is correct, he incorporated the Apology bodily--with little effort and with great success. It does not seem unreasonable to suggest, therefore, that the actual form of the Apology was exactly as it appears in The Life of Barlaam and Josaphat, viz. a speech in defence of Christianity to be presented at the imperial court.

This suggestion gains considerable strength when one compares Euthymius' version of the Apology with the Syriac text. Indeed even if one assumes that Euthymius knew only this longer, more convoluted version--and thus rejects Wolff's conclusion that he had before him the actual Greek text--he was able to use Aristides' defence with only four minor changes,⁹⁰ all of which were necessitated by the incorporation of the work into its new and much wider setting.⁹¹ First, by comparison with the Syriac version, Euthymius' work shows "traces of compression" and his description of the Christians at the end is "considerably curtailed";⁹² yet these modifications were undoubtedly prompted by Euthymius' desire for greater poignancy in Nachor's defence, since it was around this speech that the entire work revolved. Second, a brief passage at the end of the Syriac text, in which the Christians are defended

⁹⁰ Wolff, op. cit., p. 243.

⁹¹ Kay, op. cit., p. 261.

⁹² Robinson, op. cit., p. 70.

against the slanders of the pagans, does not appear in Euthymius' version; yet obviously such a defence was not applicable, or even comprehensible, to a tenth-century audience. Third, while there is a fourfold division of the races in the Syriac version, there is only a threefold division in Euthymius' work; yet a categorization of races which included barbarians and Greeks would, once again, have been unintelligible to a mediaeval audience. Finally, a short passage at the close of the Greek version, concerning the wisdom of the king's son in choosing Christianity, is absent from the Syriac text; yet such a statement was obviously necessary if Euthymius was to emphasize the moral of the story and to bring the work to a felicitous conclusion. Thus given the few minor changes which had to be made, it seems evident that Aristides' Apology provided exactly what Euthymius' novel required, *viz.* a long speech which defended Christianity and which cast aspersions on other religions. Indeed such a coincidence strongly suggests that this was the original literary form of the Apology.

That such orations were both received by and delivered before the Emperor, moreover, is affirmed by Aelius Aristides. In one of his speeches, he states that he sent to the Emperors Marcus Aurelius and Commodus "pieces from oratorical contests, lectures, and such things" (XIX.1), while in another he states that, by the grace of Asclepius,

he was "[m]ade a speaker before them and one prized as no one ever had been, and at that equally by the Emperors and by the princesses, and by the whole Imperial chorus"⁹³ (XLII 14).⁹⁴ Philostratus, in his Vitae Sophistarum (582-583), moreover, affirms that Aelius Aristides gave a declamation before Marcus Aurelius in Smyrna in 176, and adds that his presentation "displayed a marvelous and forceful technique".⁹⁵

Yet unlike the speeches of Aelius Aristides, which one may assume were actually delivered before the Emperor, the oration of Aristides, like that of Nachor, was purely imaginary. Clearly the addresses affixed to it are too curt and informal, while its actual content is too inappropriate and disrespectful for it ever to have been written for the Emperor's attention. Its fictive nature is also demonstrated by the remarkable facility and credibility with which Euthymius adapted it for his own use. Indeed the Apology was read throughout the Middle Ages in nearly twenty languages without anyone suspecting "the neat piece of literary carpentry".⁹⁶ Yet Aristides was not alone among

⁹³ I.e., the Roman Senate.

⁹⁴ Charles A. Behr, trans. P. Aelius Aristides. The Complete Works, Vol. 1 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986).

⁹⁵ As translated by Behr, ibid., p. 420.

⁹⁶ Wolff, op. cit., p. 238, n. 13.

the Apologists⁹⁷ in writing what can only be described as literary artifice. As will be demonstrated in the next Chapter, Justin Martyr was guilty of the same literary deception.

⁹⁷ Nor were the Apologists alone in antiquity in creating imaginary settings for their works. See Chapter 7, pp. 242-7.

CHAPTER 5

The Two Apologies of Justin Martyr

According to Eusebius, our earliest and most important source for his works, Justin Martyr left "many monuments of a mind well stored with learning, and devoted to sacred things, replete with matter profitable in every respect".¹ Of these "monuments", only his two Apologies and his Dialogue with Trypho remain extant. Scholars are generally agreed that Justin wrote his First Apology between 150 and 155,² and that he issued his Dialogue with Trypho soon after.³ They are very much in disagreement, however, as to the date of his Second Apology, since this is wholly dependent on an equally debatable question, viz. its relationship to the First.

The Number of Apologies

Justin Martyr's two Apologies have been preserved in two manuscripts, the Parisinus Regius 450, dated 1364, and

¹ Ecclesiastical History, IV.18, as translated by C.F. Cruse (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976).

² Vid. Arnold Ehrhardt, "Justin Martyr's Two Apologies", The Journal of Ecclesiastical History, No. 1, January-April 1953, p. 12; Charles Munier, "A Propos des Apologies de Justin", Revue des Sciences Religieuses, 61, October 1987, p. 182; André Wartelle, Justin Martyr (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1987), p. 22.

³ Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, ed. F.L. Cross and E.A. Livingstone (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), s.v., Justin Martyr.

the Claromontanus, dated 1541, which is a copy of the former. In both these manuscripts, the Apologies appear as independent compositions. The shorter of the two, which is addressed to the Roman Senate, precedes the longer, addressed to Antoninus Pius, his two sons, the Roman Senate, and the Roman people. However, since the shorter work seemingly makes reference to the longer, and is therefore later, it is now usually labelled the Second Apology, while the longer work is known as the First. Yet despite the seemingly obvious evidence of these manuscripts for two wholly separate Apologies, many scholars remain unconvinced. Indeed critical opinion on this issue generally falls into three categories: that the First and Second Apologies are completely distinct works; that the Second Apology is an appendix to the First, written in the wake of a particular incident in Rome; and that the two Apologies never existed separately and are one long and cohesive work.⁴ All three of these positions will be examined.

Eusebius makes three pointed references to Justin's Apologies in his Ecclesiastical History:

- (1) "The same Justin laboured powerfully against the Gentiles, and addressed other arguments, affording a defence for our faith, to the Emperor Antoninus, called Pius, and to the Senate of the Romans". (IV.11.11)
- (2) "...Justin, whom we mentioned a little earlier, after delivering to the rulers mentioned a second book in behalf of our opinions, was

⁴ Charles Munier, op. cit., p. 178.

adorned with divine martyrdom. (IV.16.1)

- (3) "Justin has left us treatises of an educated intelligence trained in theology...There is a treatise by him, on behalf of our opinions, addressed to Antoninus, surnamed Pius, and his children, and to the Roman Senate another, containing a second Apology for our defence, which he made to the successor and namesake of the above mentioned emperor, Antoninus Verus. (IV.18.1-2)⁵

In addition, Eusebius gives the address of Justin's First Apology, which corresponds almost exactly to what is found in our two extant manuscripts (IV.12.1), as well as an account of Ptolemaeus' martyrdom in Chapter 2 of our Second Apology, which he attributes to the First.

Scholars who ascribe to the first position, therefore, viz. that the two Apologies found in our manuscripts are two clearly distinguishable works, base their case on the evidence of Eusebius, who explicitly states that Justin wrote two separate addresses.⁶ According to Arnold Ehrhardt, moreover, Eusebius' second reference, which is followed by a quotation from the Second Apology of Justin's own expected martyrdom at the hands of Crescens, clearly indicates that the copy of the Second Apology to which Eusebius was referring was essentially the same as that

⁵ These three quotations are all from the Loeb edition: Eusebius, The Ecclesiastical History, trans. Kirsopp Lake (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1953).

⁶ E.g., Ehrhardt, op. cit., p. 3; Paul Keresztes, "The 'So-Called' Second Apology of Justin", Latomus 24, 1965, p. 868.

preserved in our own two manuscripts;⁷ while Paul Keresztes, by examining the "planned disposition" of the Second Apology,⁸ concludes that it is a "work of rhetoric, having all the signs of independence and completeness in itself".⁹

Yet such arguments are not entirely persuasive, given that Eusebius is singularly unclear as to the addressees of the Second Apology. Indeed Eusebius' first reference can be interpreted to mean either that Justin wrote one Apology to Antoninus Pius and another to the Roman Senate,¹⁰ or that Justin's First Apology was addressed to both Antoninus Pius and the Roman Senate.¹¹ The internal evidence, moreover, confuses the issue even further. Justin appeals in his Second Apology to "the Emperor Pius and the philosopher, son of Caesar"; Marcus Aurelius, however, although a philosopher, was not the son of Caesar, while Lucius, although the son of Caesar, was not a philosopher. It has been suggested, based on a codex of Eusebius, that a word has been omitted from the manuscripts and that this Apology has the same addressees as the First; that is, the Emperor Antoninus Pius; Marcus Aurelius, the philosopher; Lucius

⁷ Ehrhardt, op. cit., p. 3.

⁸ Keresztes, op. cit., p. 858.

⁹ Ibid., p. 867.

¹⁰ Erwin R. Goodenough, The Theology of Justin Martyr (Jena: Verlag Frommannsche Buchhandlung, 1923), p. 80.

¹¹ Ehrhardt, op. cit., p. 3; Keresztes, op. cit., p. 868.

Verus, son of Caesar; the Roman Senate; and the Roman people. Yet even this construction, as plausible as it is, is not entirely in keeping either with Eusebius' account or with our two extant manuscripts.¹²

Given the uncertainties surrounding this position, some scholars, following Adolf von Harnack, maintain that the Second Apology, written in urgent response to the unfortunate martyrdoms of Ptolemaeus and his two fellow Christians in Rome, was added to the First as an appendix or postscript.¹³ Clearly this position has much to recommend it, for it accounts for Eusebius' attestation of two separate Apologies, *i.e.*, he was simply not aware of the relation between the two, as well as for their seemingly similar addressees. In the Second Apology, moreover, Justin refers on at least three occasions to points he has discussed earlier, and in none of these instances can the references be found in the Second Apology, while in all three cases they can be reasonably identified in the First.¹⁴ Thus if Justin simply wrote an appendix to his

¹² Henry Scott Holland, A Dictionary of Christian Biography, ed. William Smith and Henry Wace (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1967), p. 564.

¹³ Adolf von Harnack, Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur bis Eusebius, 2. Teil: Chronologie I (Leipzig, 1897), pp. 274ff.; cf. Johannes Quasten, Patrology, Vol. 1, The Beginnings of Patristic Literature (Utrecht-Antwerp, Spectrum Publishers, 1966), p. 199; and Berthold Altaner, Patrology, trans. Hilda C. Graef (New York: Herder and Herder, 1961), p. 122;

¹⁴ Goodenough, op. cit., p. 85.

First Apology, it would not be inappropriate for him to refer his readers to his previous work without reiterating his argument. Yet this position, too, is not without difficulties. Indeed it requires that the Second Apology followed closely upon the First, for which there is no conclusive evidence, and also that Eusebius was confused, or at best imprecise, when he wrote that Justin composed two distinct works, a conclusion which is unlikely given that Eusebius is very definite--and very accurate--with regard to the addressees of the First Apology.

There is thus a third position. Some scholars maintain that the two Apologies are in fact both fragments of one long work, basing this view on the apparent correspondence of addressees, as well as on Justin's references in the Second Apology to discussions in the First.¹⁵ This view also relies on the fact that Eusebius ascribes a quotation from our First Apology to Justin's First Apology, while he quotes our Second Apology and states that he is quoting Justin's First. This is taken by some scholars to indicate that the work is really one long address and that a copyist detached the Second Apology so that the works which we possess would coincide with the two separate works mentioned

¹⁵ A.W.F. Blunt, The Apologies of Justin Martyr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), pp. xliv-xlvii; Fergus Millar, The Emperor in the Roman World (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1977), pp. 562-3; and more recently, Charles Munier, 1987, op. cit., p. 178, n.3; and R.M. Grant, Greek Apologists of the Second Century (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1988), p. 55.

by Eusebius.¹⁶ Moreover, according to Charles Munier, the most recent exponent of this view, "il s'agit d'un ensemble cohérent, dont la structure littéraire forme une unité parfaitement ordonnée et sciemment concertée".¹⁷ Yet this position also poses problems. Indeed it is certainly not unanimous among scholars that Justin's Apologies are in any sense perfectly ordered and logically composed. As Henry Scott Holland has stated with regard to all three of Justin's writings, they are "written loosely and unsystematically...without any scrupulous regard to the artistic or symmetrical appearance of the result produced".¹⁸ Moreover, the view that these works actually comprise one long address negates Eusebius' testimony of two separate Apologies even more blatantly than does the previous position. As will be discussed at the conclusion of this chapter, however, this position has the merit of resolving a number of intricate problems arising from both the internal and the external evidence.

None of these three theories, therefore, conclusively solves the enigma of the Second Apology. Indeed as A.W.F. Blunt has stated, "it is possible that complete agreement upon the point at issue will never be reached".¹⁹ As will

¹⁶ Goodenough, op. cit., p. 85.

¹⁷ Munier, op. cit., p. 181.

¹⁸ Scott Holland, op. cit., p. 566.

¹⁹ Blunt, op. cit., p. xlvi.

be demonstrated, moreover, all three positions pose practical problems for those scholars who maintain that Justin actually presented his Apologies to the Emperor. Since in our two extant manuscripts the Second Apology precedes the First, this is the order in which they will be considered in this chapter.

Justin's Second Apology

Many scholars would argue that the Second Apology was intended to be read and approved by its imperial addressees. As the eminent Aimé Puech has stated with respect specifically to Justin's Second Apology: "Lorsque Justin demande aux empereurs de donner à son Apologie l'estampille officielle, il n'a pas cru, en son âme naïve, qu'une telle demande pour téméraire qu'elle parût, fût absolument chimérique; même si un succès aussi peu vraisemblable ne pouvait être dû qu'à un miracle, le miracle du moins était, pour lui, possible". Indeed why not believe, he asks, that Justin and the other early apologists were desperately seeking a practical, positive outcome to their efforts?²⁰ More recently, Arnold Ehrhardt has concluded that, since Eusebius labelled this Apology a libellus, "we have to assume that Eusebius...meant to imply that Justin's Second Apology had been handed in to the imperial department a

²⁰ Aimé Puech, Les Apologues Grecs du IIe Siècle de notre Ère (Paris: Librairie Hachette et Cie., 1912), pp. 4-5.

libellis".²¹ Keresztes, moreover, on the basis of Justin's request that the Emperor sanction and subscribe his petition, likewise maintains "that the Second Apology was to be sent to the ruling Emperor, with the request that it might be approved by him and thus made public",²² an opinion which is shared by R.M. Grant.²³ Finally, in his recent edition of Justin's two Apologies, André Wartelle similarly asserts that, "[m]algré l'insuccès de ses devanciers [Quadratus et Aristides], Justin n'hésita pas à suivre leur exemple: l'exposition simple et entière de la vie et de la foi des chrétiens lui paraissait un devoir de conscience, afin que les autorités civiles soient éclairées et mises devant leurs responsabilités".²⁴

There are some strong indications in the Second Apology, moreover, that it was indeed intended as an imperial libellus. Justin refers to the Apology as a biblion or written petition, a term which originally referred to "any small written document or literary work", but as early as the late Republic began to be applied to "a

²¹ Ehrhardt, op. cit., p. 5.

²² Keresztes, op. cit., p. 866.

²³ Robert M. Grant, "Forms and Occasions of the Greek Apologists", Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni, 52, 1986, p. 216.

²⁴ Wartelle, op. cit., p. 21.

document presented to an office-holder for his attention".²⁵ Justin asks the Emperor, moreover, to "subscribe" and to "publish" his request so that others may be made aware of Christian practices, and both of these terms, as discussed in Chapter 1, were applicable to libelli. Ehrhard has pointed out, furthermore, that this Apology "is a strongly emotional, passionate harangue--up to chapter xii...[where a] break...occurs...followed by a jumble of dissociated remarks".²⁶ He explains this break and the confused last chapters of the work by referring to Roman administrative practice. Indeed an actual petition was made on a document, such as a codex or diptych, which was composed of an inner and an outer writing. The former contained the full account of the petitioner's case, which was handed in to and scrutinized by an a libellis, i.e., an officer of the imperial secretariat. This officer would then pass the petition to the Emperor, who would read at least the outer writing, i.e., a summary of the request, and subscribe his decision underneath it. Thus the last four disordered chapters of Justin's Apology, Ehrhardt maintains, form this outer writing of Justin's petition.

Yet despite this internal evidence, there are, as noted in Chapter 4, at least two scholars, E.R. Goodenough and

²⁵ Fergus Millar, The Emperor in the Roman World (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1977), p. 240.

²⁶ Ehrhardt, op. cit., p. 7.

Paolo Ubaldi, who would take the opposite, and more likely, position that the early Christian Apologies were never intended for imperial eyes. The following examination will affirm their assertions with respect to Justin's Second Apology.

A libellus had to be, above all else, well organized and clear. Libelli were presented to the Emperor for a variety of reasons²⁷, and numerous such petitions were presented to the Emperor on a regular basis. In an address to a member of Claudius' secretariat, Seneca depicts the innumerable petitioners who flocked to the Emperor each day:

"So many thousands of people have to be given an audience, so many libelli to be dealt with; such a crush of matters coming together from the whole world has to be sorted out, so that it can be admitted in due order to the mind of the most eminent Princeps. To you, I say, it is not permitted to weep; in order that you may hear the many who weep, and may attend to the tears of those who are struggling and long to reach the mercy of the most gentle Caesar, your tears must be dried".²⁸

What is more, there is evidence to suggest, pace Ehrhardt, that on many occasions the Emperor examined the entire petition. Both Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, for example, attest that they had read and been moved by libelli from private individuals which had been forwarded by provincial governors,²⁹ and it is implied in letters from Marcus

²⁷ Millar, op. cit., p. 240.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 250.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 241.

Aurelius and Lucius Verus, on the one hand, and from Marcus Aurelius and Commodus, on the other, that these Emperors had read the petitions for citizenship sent on by two procurators from Mauretania Tingitana.³⁰ Thus given the heavy volume of requests and their incalculable demands on the Emperor's time,³¹ it goes without saying that disordered and confused petitions would have been ruthlessly rejected--and Justin's Second Apology--if it were intended as a libellus--would certainly have been among them.

As Aimé Puech has pointed out, "[s]i on lit l'Apologie avec l'intention d'y chercher un plan régulier, on ne peut qu'être très sévère pour l'impuissance de l'auteur à bien composer...Justin se laisse souvent guider au lieu de suivre une voie rectiligne, par des associations d'idées, et se refuse rarement à une digression qui s'offre à lui."³² Indeed on at least three occasions, Justin is led, almost unwittingly, into digressions which do not, in any practical sense, advance his argument or further his aim. The first instance occurs very early in the Apology. Justin commences his work by stating his purpose in writing: to apprise his addressees of the cause of recent, unsettling events in Rome. He thus proceeds, quite logically, to recount the

³⁰ Ibid., p. 216.

³¹ As affirmed by Turpin, op. cit., p. 101.

³² As cited by Charles Munier, "La Structure Littéraire de l'Apologie de Justin", Revue des Sciences Religieuses 60, No. 1-2, 1986, p. 34.

disturbing story of a lascivious pagan husband whose vengeful nature impelled him to denounce both his Christian wife and her catechist, Ptolemaeus, to the Roman authorities. Directly following this narrative, however, Justin strays from his announced intent and embarks upon a chapter-long account of his own anticipated denunciation at the hands of the pagan Cynic, Crescens, "that lover of fanfare and ostentation" who is wholly ignorant of Christian teaching and unfit for the name of philosopher (3). Indeed it is difficult to comprehend how Justin is furthering his objective either by recounting mere suspicions of his own denunciation by Crescens, or by viciously attacking his opponent's personality and reputation.

A second digression occurs in Chapter 8, where the simple reference to the eternal fire which awaits evil demons propels Justin into a lengthy discussion of the accusation by philosophers that Christians continually speak about everlasting fire simply to frighten their audience into living a virtuous life. In this instance, it seems, Justin is aware that he is digressing from the topic under consideration, for he states at the conclusion of his discussion that he "must return to [his] subject" (IX). Yet this knowledge does little to deter him either from proceeding with the digression or from repeating unnecessarily an argument made only two chapters earlier (7), viz. that if sinners are not punished, then God is

unconcerned with virtue and vice, and legislators unjustly punish the transgressors of their laws. Indeed such a repetition is hardly likely to advance the purpose of his petition.

A third digression appears in Chapter 14. Justin requests that the Emperor subscribe and publish his pronouncement "so that others may know our customs and be released from the bonds of false beliefs and ignorance of good". This mention of false doctrines, however, seems to remind Justin of the unacceptable views being promulgated by his fellow countryman, Simon Magus, for he turns his attention very abruptly to Simon's "impious and deceitful teachings", although no mention of this Samaritan or his views had previously been made. As in the former instance, moreover, digression leads to repetition, for Justin reiterates his request to the Emperor, formulated only in the previous chapter (13), but with specific reference to Simon: "If you will only approve this writing, we will expose him in the eyes of all, so that, if at all possible, they may be converted".³³ Nor are these Justin's only repetitions. In chapters 10 and 13, for example, he makes the identical argument that legislators and philosophers prior to Christ had only a partial knowledge of the Logos and thus contradicted themselves, while he reiterates his

³³ To whom the pronoun "they" refers in this statement remains a mystery.

purpose in writing the Apology a total of four times--albeit with varying degrees of precision and clarity. Indeed such an ill-conceived and jumbled work can hardly have had, as its intended aim, to seek the approval of the Emperor.

Yet it is not only the disorganization of this Apology which makes its unsuitable as an imperial petition, but also its uncertainty with respect to its intended addressees. While the heading, "To the Roman Senate", is preserved in both Parisinus Regius 450 and Claromontanus, it can carry little weight, as Munier points out, since it has doubtless been amended and corrected by numerous copyists.³⁴ Yet there is nonetheless some credibility to this title, for in Chapter 1 Justin states: "The things that have lately taken place in your city...have forced me to compose this address for you Romans who are men of feelings like ours and are our brethren", an address which could refer either to the Roman Senate or the Roman people. Such a reference, however, is totally inconsistent with that in Chapter 2, for when recounting the unjust proceedings of Ptolemaeus' trial, Justin appeals to the urban prefect: "Your judgement, Urbicus, does not become the Roman Emperor". The confusion increases, moreover, when one considers that earlier in this chapter, when relating the story of the Christian matron denounced by her pagan husband, Justin invokes the Emperor: "And she presented a petition to you, O Emperor, asking that

³⁴ Munier, op. cit., 1987, p. 180, n.10.

she might be permitted first to set her...affairs in order". This reference to a single Emperor, moreover, is totally incompatible with all other imperial addresses in the Apology, for these imply more than one ruler: e.g., "We therefore beseech you [pl.] to publish this pronouncement" (14), and "If you [pl.] will only approve this writing" (15), and Justin does suggest in Chapter 2 that Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius are currently in power: "Your judgment, Urbicus, does not become the Emperor Pius, nor the Philosopher, son of Caesar", although, as already noted, this could be a reference not only to Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius, but also to Lucius Verus. Thus given these many and varied addressees, one is left with only two options: that Justin was either indecisive about the recipients of his Apology or extremely careless and sloppy in addressing them--neither of which is in any way suggestive of his having composed a work to be presented to the Emperor.

It cannot be argued, moreover, that Justin was simply incapable of composing an appropriate libellus, or even that he was ignorant of the conventional forms and procedures, since even the Emperor's humblest subjects submitted proper petitions. Indeed Millar cites several instances in which imperial tenants in remote towns and villages successfully petitioned the Emperor for aid against official oppression. In at least two of these cases, moreover, the petitioners

were fully aware not only of the acceptable procedures and protocol, but also of the advisability of stressing to the Emperor the loss to imperial accounts should their requests be denied.³⁵ If these simple rustics, therefore, could effectively petition for release from violent procurators and lessees, surely Justin--had he wished to do so--could have sought relief in the approved manner from unjust governors and urban prefects.

Nor can it be argued that the Apology preserved in our manuscripts is simply a draft of Justin's request, for we have what could very well be drafts of imperial libelli which exhibit the conventional style of address. An excellent example was composed by a retired athlete who was seeking the position of herald in the administration of the Heptanomia in Egypt--a decidedly unexalted post. Yet this petitioner was unmistakably clear as to the benefit which he sought and his own worthiness to receive it, and he sets these out very plainly at the beginning of his petition:

"For twenty-eight years until now I have been making the rounds as a competitor in the contests which are held for your victory and the eternity of your rule, and while making my living in these, have been offering incessant prayers to Olympian Zeus to preserve and increase your rule for long ages, and to grant me benevolence from you [the Emperors]. Since I am already passing the age of fifty and turning to old age, I approach you with this petition of mine requesting, if it please your heavenly fortune, to bestow upon me the position of Greek herald in the administration of the

³⁵ Millar, op. cit., pp. 541-543.

Heptanomia..".³⁶

Indeed if this aging athlete could produce a draft petition as lucid and direct as this, Justin too, had he so desired, could have written an intelligible--and thus inoffensive--request. Indeed it can only be concluded that Justin never intended, nor sought, to present his petition to the Emperor as an official libellus.

In addition to being well-organized and clear, a libellus had to be written, as Millar attests, "in suitably obsequious and appealing language".³⁷ Indeed an official petition was expected to propitiate the Emperor, recognizing, on the one hand, his absolute authority, if not his divinity, and on the other, his generosity and justice. One example of an appropriate and acceptable petition was sent, possibly to Severus and Caracalla, by a designated individual on behalf of a group of Lydian villagers who were being oppressed by imperial officials:

"In this state of fear [this was] the remedy which the above-mentioned village thought of, namely to petition through me to your great, heavenly and [most sacred] kingship...And thus we implore you, greatest and most divine of Emperors ever, to consider your laws and those of your ancestors and your peace-giving justice to all, and to shun, as you and all your royal ancestors have always shunned, collectiones who act in this way...".³⁸

Indeed this intermediary was obviously aware of the

³⁶ Ibid., p. 537.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 543.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 542.

necessity for encomiastic phrases in an imperial petition-- and he employed them unsparingly.

A second such example, sent by a grammaticus to Valerian and Gallienus, is addressed "To the [masters] of land and sea and every nation of men" and proceeds thus:

"Your heavenly magnanimity, great Emperors, which has extended its benevolence to the whole of your domain, the civilised world, and sent it forth to every corner, has given me too confidence to offer your heavenly genius a petition closely connected with both reason and justice. It is this. Your deified ancestors who have ruled at different times, rulers who irradiated their domain, the world, in virtue and culture, fixed, in proportion to the size of the cities, a number of public grammatici as well, offering...".³⁹

Again, there is little doubt that flattery, however exaggerated, was essential to an imperial libellus--in fact, this petitioner did not restrict his adulation to the current rulers, but included even their "deified ancestors".

Nor was such obsequiousness required only of the lower strata of society. Even Pliny, governor of Bithynia, who was as familiar with the Emperor Trajan as any of his subjects, addressed him in suitably eulogistic terms when seeking direction regarding the Christians:

"It is my custom to refer all my difficulties to you, Sir, for no one is better able to resolve my doubts and to inform my ignorance",⁴⁰

and when forwarding a petition to Rome:

³⁹ Ibid., p. 492.

⁴⁰ Pliny, Letters and Panegyricus II, trans. Betty Radice (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1969), XCVI.

"The people of Nicaea, Sir, have officially charged me by your immortal name and prosperity, which I must ever hold most sacred, to forward their petition to you".⁴¹

Indeed even a provincial governor was expected to recognize the Emperor's authority in the approved manner.

Propitiation of the Emperor was thus a categorical requirement of an official imperial petition--but it was clearly a requirement of which Justin, if he were composing such a request, was either ignorant or neglectful. When berating the deceitful and ignorant Crescens, for example, far from extolling their virtues, Justin admonishes the Emperors to live up to their exalted positions:

"And to show that I speak the truth, I am prepared, if our debate has not already been reported to you, to repeat it in your presence. Such a permission would be an act worthy of a royal ruler" (III).

At the conclusion of his address, moreover, Justin exhorts the Emperors to act with probity and justice, implying that they too, if they do not respond in an acceptable manner, will suffer in the eternal fire which awaits evil demons and sinful humanity:

"And may you also, as befits your piety and wisdom, judge the case with justice, for your own sakes" (XV).

Yet Justin is not satisfied with mere admonition. If one assumes that he was actually composing an imperial libellus, his address in Chapter 1 to "you Romans" would refer to his recipients, the Emperors, and thus his

⁴¹ Ibid., LXXXIII.

subsequent rebuke would be inconceivably insolent and insulting:

"The things that have lately taken place in your city under Urbicus...have forced me to compose this address for you Romans who are men of feelings like ours and are our brethren, even though you fail to realize it or refuse to admit it because of your pride in your so-called dignities" (1).

In Chapters 5 and 7, moreover, he describes how the angels, whom God has appointed over the universe, violated their privileged positions, "fell into sin with women and begot children who are called demons" (5). These angels and demons, he explains, seduce and enslave the human race--including even the rulers--by engendering "murders, wars, adulteries, and every species of sin" (5). But because of the Christian seed, God postpones the dissolution of the universe, through which the wicked spirits and sinful humanity would cease to exist, for if such were not the case, Justin charges the Emperors,

"it would be impossible for you to do the things you do and be influenced by evil demons" (7).

Justin is thus boldly accusing the Emperors both of ingratitude to the Christians who are enabling them to retain their exalted positions, and of obeisance to the bad demons and angels who cleverly and seditiously impel them to evil deeds, and in particular to an unjust persecution of the Christians.

In fact, it has been suggested by Elaine Pagels that Justin intended far more by these words than a mere

chastisement of the Emperors. In recounting the denunciations of the Christian woman and her catechist, she contends, Justin knows that he cannot blame the urban prefect who is a personal friend of the Emperor and simply following imperial orders; he thus draws upon the story of the fallen angels' exploitation of sinful humanity to condemn the entire Roman system as "a false government, a form of demonic tyranny".⁴² "Where outsiders might see the all-powerful emperor and his agents disposing of a handful of dissidents accused as Christians, Justin depicts a puppet-tyrant and his underlings, enslaved to demons and contending against those allied with the one invincible true God".⁴³ Justin is launching, she concludes, "nothing less than a frontal attack upon the theology of imperial power".⁴⁴ Indeed whether or not Justin intended to attack the foundation of Roman imperial power, the fact that his Apology even suggests that he did makes it patently clear that it was not intended for the Emperors' eyes.

Thus given that the Second Apology fails to fulfil two essential literary requirements of imperial petitions, *viz.* organization and obsequiousness, it seems evident that it was never intended to be presented to the Emperor as an

⁴² Elaine Pagels, "Christian Apologists and 'The Fall of the Angels': An Attack on Roman Imperial Power?", Harvard Theological Review 78:3-4, 1985, p. 301.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 306.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 304.

official libellus. Moreover, an examination of the First Apology will demonstrate that it, too, was not written to be read by its imperial addressees.

Justin's First Apology

Many scholars would contend that Justin's First Apology was actually intended to be delivered before its august addressees, viz. Antoninus Pius, his two sons Marcus and Lucius, the Roman Senate, and the Roman people. According to André Wartelle, for instance, despite the unsuccessful attempts of Quadratus and Aristides to enlighten the Emperor with their defences of Christianity, "Justin did not hesitate to follow their example".⁴⁵ Paul Keresztes, moreover, with respect specifically to Justin's First Apology, states that one cannot doubt with good reason that it was written to be delivered before its imperial addressees. "That all this very special effort of Justin is a mere literary fiction cannot be assumed with any probability, especially, since if he had wanted to write to the general public or to one or another section of it, he could and probably would have done so without using the fiction of an address to the Imperial court".⁴⁶

There is, moreover, both external and internal evidence

⁴⁵ Wartelle, op. cit., p. 21.

⁴⁶ Paul Keresztes, "The Literary Genre of Justin's First Apology", Vigiliae Christianae 19, 1965, p. 109.

to suggest that Justin's First Apology could well have been intended for an imperial audience. In his Ecclesiastical History, Eusebius refers to the Apology as logoi (IV.11.11), meaning a discourse or possibly an oration, and as logos or address (IV.18.2). Justin himself uses similar terms in his preface where he labels the Apology a prosphonesis or address and an enteuxis or petition, and in his conclusion where he uses the term exegesis or explanation. All three of these labels could indicate, Keresztes argues, that the work is not in fact an apologia, but rather an "advice"⁴⁷ or "deliberative address advising the addressees to change the current course of procedure at trials involving Christians and convicting them on the basis of the confession of the Christian name alone".⁴⁸ Indeed there is nothing to suggest, he insists, "that Justin could not write this advice, application, to the Emperor".⁴⁹

Yet despite this evidence to the contrary, several scholars take the opposite view that Justin's First Apology was never intended for imperial eyes. Indeed in addition to the two scholars already noted, viz. E.R. Goodenough and Paolo Ubaldi, Charles Munier refers to the Apology as a fiction littéraire, and he points to Justin's Dialogue With Trypho as an example of the same. Indeed Justin himself

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 108.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 106.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 109.

places his conversation with Trypho, he argues, as well as its publication, in approximately 135; yet this work makes clear reference to his First Apology which was not composed until at least 150.⁵⁰ An examination of the First Apology will further strengthen the position that Justin did not intend his defence to be presented to the Emperor.

The address prefixed to the Apology reads as follows:

"To the Emperor Titus Aelius Adrianus Antoninus Pius Augustus Caesar; to his son Verissimus the philosopher; to Lucius the philosopher, by birth son of Caesar and by adoption son of Pius, an admirer of learning; to the sacred Senate and to the whole Roman people; in behalf of those men of every race who are unjustly hated and mistreated: I, one of them, Justin the son of Priscus and grandson of Bacchius, of the city of Flavia Neapolis in Syria-Palestine, do present this address and petition."⁵¹

Despite its formality, precision, and encomium, however, this preface is not unproblematic if the Apology were actually intended to be presented at the imperial court. First, the address contains a serious error in official titulature as applied to Antoninus Pius. As Wartelle affirms, the correct and complete title for the Emperor is as follows: Imp(erator) Caes(ar), divi Hadriani f(ilius), divi Trajani nepos, divi Nervae pronepos, T. Aelius Hadrianus Antoninus Aug(ustus) Pius. One would thus expect to see the title Caesar, not following Augustus, where

⁵⁰ Munier, 1987, op. cit., p. 182 and n.19.

⁵¹ The translation is by Thomas B. Falls, Saint Justin Martyr (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1965).

Justin has placed it, but directly following Emperor,⁵² so that the address would read: To the Emperor Caesar Titus Aelius Adrianus Antoninus Pius Augustus. Second, as Grant points out, documents from Egypt dating from the reign of Antoninus Pius reveal that his two adopted sons, Marcus and Lucius, while no doubt close to the throne, were not associated with him in official titlature.⁵³ If Justin were in fact writing an official imperial "address" or "petition", therefore, the correct protocol would have been to direct the work solely to the Emperor and to exclude the two Caesars. Grant has suggested that Justin addressed Marcus and Lucius--and even referred to them as philosophoi--so that he could appeal to them as fellow philosophers and lovers of truth and thereby win their support for his petition.⁵⁴ Such a suggestion, however, seems implausible; surely the overriding concern of an imperial petitioner would be, not rhetorical intent, but accuracy and precision in official titlature. Third, the address to Marcus Aurelius fails to salute him as Caesar, despite the fact that he was publicly acclaimed as such in the year 140, at least ten years prior to the composition of Justin's work.⁵⁵

⁵² Wartelle, op. cit., p. 31.

⁵³ R.M. Grant, Greek Apologists of the Second Century (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1988), p. 52.

⁵⁴ Grant, op. cit., p. 52.

⁵⁵ Scott Holland, op. cit., p. 563.

As Wartelle thus points out, an appropriate title would be, for example, Verissimus Caesar, since this would correspond to Marcus' official title of M. Aurelius Caesar or M. Aelius Aurelius Verus Caesar.⁵⁶ It thus seems clear that, if Justin had actually intended to present his Apology to the Emperor (and his Caesars), these errors of both judgement and protocol with respect to the address would have eradicated any hope of its being received at the imperial court.

Like Justin's Second Apology, moreover, his First does not provide the coherence and organization required of an imperial petition. While an examination of almost any portion of Justin's defence would confirm this observation,⁵⁷ Chapters 54 through 65 contain four obvious digressions which very clearly demonstrate the unsuitability of Justin's Apology as an imperial petition or oration.

In Chapters 54 to 68, Justin proposes to demonstrate that, prior to Christ's incarnation, evil demons incited the poets and philosophers to invent stories that would anticipate this event and overturn his divinely appointed mission. He introduces this theme by describing the activities of the evil demons in their attempts to seduce humanity. After they had heard the prophets, he writes,

⁵⁶ Wartelle, op. cit., p. 31.

⁵⁷ Falls (op. cit., p. 59, n.1) states that in the development of his themes from Chapters 23 onwards, "Justin is guilty of many digressions".

announcing the advent of Christ and eternal punishment for sinners, the demons "produced many who were reputed to be sons of Jupiter", believing that they would be able to create a suspicion among the people that the prophecies of Christ were simply fabulous tales, just like the stories recounted by the poets (54). "However, not in one instance, even for any of the so-called sons of Jupiter, was the crucifixion imitated....[T]his did not occur to them, for...everything concerning the crucifixion was said symbolically" (55). It is at this point that Justin launches into the first of his digressions, despite the fact that he has scarcely begun his denunciation of the poets. Indeed no doubt prompted by his fleeting reference to the crucifixion, Justin is propelled, almost involuntarily, into a discussion of the significance and importance of the sign of the cross in everyday life (55). Neither the sea, nor the earth, nor man's form, nor the very symbols on the banners and trophies of the Romans, he insists, could be regulated without this figure of the cross. In fact, after the death of Emperors, it is customary to put their images upon this symbol and to claim that they are gods.

Justin returns, in the next chapter, to his primary subject and points out that, once the evil demons had learned of Christ's coming through the Prophets, they produced other men, such as Simon Magus and Menander, to lead humanity astray through magic (56). Yet there is hope,

he attests, that the followers of these men will eventually be converted, for the demons are unable to convince individuals that there will not be a future punishment for sinners (57). Justin then points out how the demons have also introduced Marcion of Pontus who "even now" urges the weak to deny God and his Son and to worship another god and another son. Indeed these "spirits" have caused many to believe this man, he contends, and "they even try to trip those who rise to the contemplation of divine things" (58). It is this brief reference to the philosophers, however, which propels Justin into his second digression, viz. a lengthy harangue on Plato's plagiarization of the Prophets (59-60). Plato borrowed from the teachings of the Christians, he insists, the notions that God changed shapeless matter to create the world and that the power next to God was placed in the universe in the form of the letter "X". He concludes from this obvious appropriation of ideas that Christians do not hold the same views as others, but that others simply imitate theirs. In fact, he tells the Emperor, "You can hear and learn these things from persons among us who do not even know the letters of the alphabet...So you can readily see that things are not the result of human wisdom, but are the pronouncements of the power of God" (60).

This mention of God's pronouncements, however, leads Justin into his third digression, viz. a consideration of

what exactly it is that Christians believe and practice. He commences his discussion with an examination of Christian baptism, a "washing" in which "we obtain in the water the forgiveness of past sins" (62). He then considers how the evil demons have attempted to imitate this sacrament by insisting that those who come to the temples with libations and burnt offerings sprinkle themselves with water (62). Moreover, the priests insist that the worshippers remove their shoes prior to entering the temple, just as Moses was instructed by Christ to remove his shoes before approaching the burning bush. It is this fleeting reference to Christ speaking to Moses, however, which launches Justin into his fourth digression--in fact, a digression within a digression--in which he gives a lengthy and rather combative denunciation of the Jews for failing to recognize that it was Christ, and not God as they adamantly insist, who spoke to Moses out of the fire (63). It is only in Chapter 65, that Justin returns to his discussion of Christian doctrine and practice.

In his First Apology, therefore, as Scott Holland has so aptly stated, Justin is "acting under the spur of the higher impulse".⁵⁸ Indeed his style is free and loose--an outpouring of his most fervently held convictions--and his progression from one argument to another is at the whim of his most recent thought. What is more, this Apology

⁵⁸ Scott Holland, op. cit., p. 566.

contains, as does his Second, innumerable repetitions. One of the most obvious is his reference, in Chapter 26, to the wicked beliefs and practices of Simon Magus and Menander, which is repeated in Chapter 56; moreover, following both of these references Justin makes the same point that all those who do not follow the teachings of Christ will be subjected to the terrors of eternal punishment (Chs. 28 and 57).

Other repetitions include: the ill-treatment of Christians at the hands of pagans (4 and 7); the injustice of the charge of atheism against Christians (6 and 13); the evil deeds of Marcion (26 and 58); the eternal punishment of the Emperor (18, 21, 45, and 68); the ability of the pagans to kill Christians, but not to harm them (2, 11, 19, and 57); the antiquity of Moses in relation to the Greek authors (Chs. 44, 54, 59, and 60); and, of course, the evil demons as the source of the world's wickedness--a point to which Justin refers in at least twelve chapters⁵⁹ (most notably Chs. 5, 12, 14, 21, 28, 58, and 66).

Justin's Apology, therefore, could only have been inappropriate and even insulting as an imperial oration. Indeed no Emperor would have spent his limited time on a supplication as unclear, disorganized, and repetitive as this, and presumably no suppliant, given the fear and uncertainty surrounding a visit to the imperial court, would have dared to present this address before the Emperor.

⁵⁹ As noted by Falls, op. cit., p. 37, chapter 5, n.1.

Yet Justin's Apology was insulting not only for its lack of organization, but also for its content. Indeed just as in his Second Apology, Justin dispenses with any semblance of flattery--and even of civility--when addressing the imperial figures. He throws into question the piety and justice of the Emperor and his Caesars (2), and he demands that his addressees investigate the accusations against the Christians. If these can be shown to be true, he charges them, then the guilty persons should be punished. This is your duty if you are to prove yourselves good judges and blameless before God (3). Yet even if, "like thoughtless men", you should "prefer popular opinion to truth", you will not succeed in your persecution, for the Christians have the support of Christ who is more kingly and just than any ruler (12). What is more, should you reject our petition, "you can do nothing more...than kill us, which does no real harm to us, but does bring the eternal punishment of fire to you and to all who unjustly hate and do not repent" (45). It will then be too late for you to heed our words, for we will exclaim, "Let God's will be done". (68). He thus admonishes them not to be the willing dupes of the evil demons, for these spirits "strive to make you their slaves and servants...and [to] turn you from reading and understanding thoroughly what we have said" (14).

Clearly Justin's First Apology, like his Second, is far from the benign, propitiatory, and even encomiastic orations

which the Emperor was accustomed to receive from his subjects. In fact, as Elaine Pagels observes, while "claiming to be exemplary citizens, Justin and his fellows attack the whole basis of Roman imperial power, denouncing its divine patrons as demons, and its rulers--even those most distinguished for their wise and tolerant reigns--as unwitting agents of demonic tyranny".⁶⁰ Indeed it is hardly likely, given what appears to be Justin's aggressive and even combative intention and approach, that his two defences were addresses which he intended to make--or indeed did make--before the Emperor and his two Caesars.

d) Conclusion

When Justin's First and Second Apologies are thus treated as two wholly separate compositions, it becomes evident that neither could have been intended for imperial eyes. Moreover, if these two works are considered to be part of one long Apology, or even if the Second was an appendix to the First, there is even less likelihood that it was presented to the Emperor, for the combined work, as Millar attests, would be considerably longer than any imperial petition of which we have evidence.⁶¹ Yet this latter position, i.e., that the two Apologies originally formed some sort of unity, does seem to make the most sense

⁶⁰ Pagels, op. cit., p. 312.

⁶¹ Millar, op. cit., p. 563.

of both the internal and the external evidence. Pace Munier⁶² and Keresztes⁶³ who have attempted to demonstrate their cohesive structure, Justin's two Apologies are disordered and confused addresses with little focus and even less direction. Yet when the Second Apology is considered in the light of the First, the following four difficulties disappear: first, that the Second Apology bears an address solely to the Roman Senate, while the body of the work contains interjections to the Roman people, to the urban prefect, and to one or more Emperors, i.e., to those who comprise the address of the First Apology; second, that in his Ecclesiastical History, Eusebius ascribes quotations from our Second Apology to Justin's First Apology (IV.xvii) --a rather unexpected error from one who was surprisingly accurate regarding both the addressees of the First Apology and the account of Ptolemaeus' martyrdom in the Second; third, that in his Second Apology Justin hearkens back to the First on at least three occasions (Chs. 4, 6, and 8) without any indication that he is referring to a separate work; and fourth, that in his Second Apology Justin introduces the false teacher, Simon Magus, in a seemingly abrupt and disconnected manner, except that Justin makes two references to Simon in his First Apology (Chs. 26 and 56). Indeed when one considers the Second Apology as an integral

⁶² Munier, 1986, op. cit., pp. 34-54.

⁶³ Keresztes, 1965, op. cit., pp. 858-69.

part of the First, it gains considerably in unity and rationality.

For this position to be wholly viable, however, one final point must be addressed, viz. that Eusebius was mistaken when he attributed to Justin two separate Apologies. Yet is this the only conclusion which can be drawn from the evidence? While it is certainly possible that Eusebius made an error in this respect, it is highly unlikely that he did so given his consistency and accuracy on other matters pertaining to Justin. What is much more plausible, therefore, is that the Second Apology to which Eusebius is referring is no longer extant, and that our First and Second Apologies are both parts of a longer composition which was known to Eusebius as the First Apology.⁶⁴ As Blunt suggests, the later separation of the work could have been due either to accident or to the fact that two editions, i.e., the First Apology separately and then the First Apology with the Second appended to it, were circulating simultaneously and thus causing confusion.

If these two writings, therefore, were originally part of one longer composition, to what literary genre does the work belong? In an effort to discredit the position which accepts the unity of the two works, Ehrhardt maintains that

⁶⁴ Adolf von Harnack has suggested that Justin never wrote a second Apology and that Eusebius, who affirms that he did, was ascribing to Justin the Embassy of Athenagoras (as cited by A.W.F. Blunt, op. cit., p. xlv). There is, however, little evidence to support such an hypothesis.

Eusebius confirmed two distinct literary styles for the Apologies when he used two very different terms to characterize them, viz. logos or address and logoi or oration for the First Apology, and biblidion or written petition for the Second.⁶⁵ Yet Ehrhardt fails to consider that Justin himself uses various terms to describe both his Apologies, and that, in at least one instance, he applies the same term to them both. As already noted, he refers to his First Apology as logos (address), logoi (address or oration), prosphonesis (address), enteuxis (petition), and exegeesis (explanation). He labels his Second Apology, however, not only biblidion (written petition), but also logoi (address or oration)--the identical term which he uses of the First Apology. Indeed such a free and irregular use of terms to denote each of these works strongly suggests that neither Apology can be given a specific label or tag, but that each was written in the same rather loose form of a "petition" or "address" to be presented at the imperial court.

As discussed in the previous chapter, that such addresses were presented before the Emperor is attested by Aelius Aristides who was himself made "a speaker" before Marcus Aurelius. Yet while such an assessment may explain the literary form of this work, and particularly its august addressees, it does not account for the calumnies contained

⁶⁵ Ehrhardt, op. cit., pp. 4-5.

within it--calumnies which no ruler, and certainly no Roman Emperor, would condone. There are models for such abusive appeals to rulers, however, in a much earlier source, viz. the prophets of the Old Testament. In I Kings 21:20, for example, Elijah directs a tirade at Ahab, the Jewish King, in which he charges him with "do[ing] what is evil in the sight of the Lord", while in Micah 3:1-2, the prophet chastizes the "heads of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel" with the words: "Is it not for you to know justice?--you who hate the good and love the evil".⁶⁶

Yet an even stronger model, and certainly one more in keeping with Justin's background, is the Greek philosopher who was traditionally accorded the right to instruct and reprove his rulers. This prerogative, known as parrhesia, was exercised particularly by the Cynic philosophers, as Diogenes Laertius' account of the Cynic philosopher Diogenes makes clear. On one occasion, when Diogenes was sunning himself in the Craneum, "Alexander [the Great] came and stood over him and said, 'Ask of me any boon you like.' To which he replied, 'Stand out of my light.'"⁶⁷ On another, "Alexander stood opposite him and asked, 'Are you not afraid of me?' 'Why, what are you?' said he, 'a good thing or a

⁶⁶ These quotations are both taken from the Revised Standard Version.

⁶⁷ Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, trans. R.D. Hicks (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1958), VI.38.

bad?' Upon Alexander replying, 'A good thing,' 'Who then' said Diogenes, 'is afraid of the good?'"⁶⁸

For Justin, however, there was one philosopher who stood out from the rest in exercising parrhesia. Some legislators and philosophers, Justin states, tried "to think out and prove things by reason. Socrates, the most ardent of all in this regard, was accused of the very crimes that are imputed to us. They claimed that he introduced new deities and rejected the state-sponsored gods. But what he did was to ostracize Homer and the other poets, and to instruct men to expel the evil demons and those who perpetrated the deeds narrated by the poets" (I.8). Indeed to Justin's mind, Socrates is clearly the most poignant model both of Jesus' boldness in confronting unjust authorities and of his willingness to surrender his life for his beliefs. In fact, Justin refers to him as a Christian, since he, too, like every person who lives by reason, has a vague knowledge of Christ who is the Logos in every person (2 Apol. 10).⁶⁹

Justin's Apology,⁷⁰ therefore, like that of Aristides, was modelled after the addresses or petitions which an

⁶⁸ Ibid., VI.68.

⁶⁹ Pagels, op. cit., p. 305.

⁷⁰ Given my conclusion that the First and Second Apologies are both part of one long composition, I shall henceforth, where appropriate, refer to this work as Justin's Apology.

orator like Aelius Aristides directed to the Emperor. Unlike these latter works, however, Justin's Apology was a literary fiction, the critical content of which reveals the possible influence of the Jewish Old Testament prophets, but the more likely influence of the parrhesia of the Greek philosophers, and in particular of Socrates for whom Justin had a special regard. Yet Aristides and Justin were not alone among the Apologists in writing literary artifice.⁷¹ As will be discussed in the next Chapter, the setting of Athenagoras' Legatio, a defence composed approximately a quarter of a century later, was also imaginary.

⁷¹ Nor were the Apologists alone in antiquity in writing literary fiction, as will be discussed in Chapter 7.

CHAPTER 6

The Embassy of Athenagoras

Very little is known for certain about Athenagoras. Methodius of Olympus (d. ca. 311), Bishop of Lucia and ardent opponent of Origen, quotes a line from the Embassy in his de Resurrectione Animarum and cites Athenagoras as author, but supplies no further information.¹ Epiphanius (c. 315-403), in his Panarion, and Photius (c. 810-c.895), in his Bibliotheca, both copy the fragment from Methodius and ascribe the authorship to Athenagoras, but again provide no additional data.²

The first substantial reference to Athenagoras is made by Philip of Side in his fifth-century history. Only a few brief fragments of this work survive, but one of them states that Athenagoras, a philosopher, was seized by the power of the Holy Spirit and transformed, after the manner of St. Paul, from a persecutor of Christianity to a defender of the Faith. He was the first scholarch of the catechetical school at Alexandria and flourished during the reigns of Hadrian and Antoninus Pius to whom he addressed his Embassy. He was, in addition, the teacher of Clement of Alexandria,

¹ Leslie W. Barnard, Athenagoras: A Study in Second Century Christian Apologetic (Paris: Beauchesne, 1972), p. 13.

² Ibid.

who was, in turn, the teacher of Pantaenus.³

This description, however, must be viewed with considerable suspicion, since Philip was strongly criticized in antiquity, both by the church historian Socrates (c.380-450) and by Photius, as an unreliable historian.⁴ Moreover, his account of Athenagoras contains two rather dubious statements. He maintains, first of all, that Clement of Alexandria was the pupil of Athenagoras at the catechetical school and that Pantaenus was the pupil of Clement. This account of the succession, however, is at marked variance with that of Eusebius who claims that Pantaenus was the teacher of Clement.⁵ Secondly, Philip states that the Embassy was addressed to Hadrian and Antoninus Pius. Athenagoras himself, however, maintains that the current Emperors were co-ruling as father and son (18.2), and both Hadrian and Antoninus Pius reigned as sole Emperor.⁶ Moreover, Athenagoras' reference to the deification of Hadrian's consort Antinous as due to "your predecessors" precludes the possibility that the work was addressed to Hadrian.⁷

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., p. 14.

⁵ Ecclesiastical History 6.6.

⁶ William R. Schoedel, ed. and trans., Athenagoras: Legatio and de Resurrectione (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p. x.

⁷ Barnard, op. cit., p. 14.

The only other source of information about Athenagoras is the earliest manuscript of the apology, codex Parisinus Graecus 451, which professes to have been written in 914 "by the hand of Baanes, the secretary for Arethas, archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia". It provides the following title: "An Embassy on behalf of Christians by Athenagoras, an Athenian Christian philosopher".⁸ Unfortunately, however, this title cannot be entirely trusted, since its authorship is uncertain at best. As Bernard Pouderon points out, it could easily have been attributed to the work by a copyist on the basis of its content, and it does differ considerably from the title provided by Philip of Side.⁹

Thus not even the origin of Athenagoras is secure. L.J. Barnard contends that he was an Alexandrian, and he defends Philip's statement that Athenagoras headed the catechetical school in that city by pointing out: a) that the academy was still in existence in Philip's own day; b) that Philip himself was a member of it; and c) that Philip could have been instrumental in having it transferred from Alexandria to Side, his place of birth, during his lifetime. He further argues that Athenagoras' use of at least two Philonic terms in his Embassy suggests Alexandrian connections, since only early Christian writers associated

⁸ Schoedel, op. cit., p. x.

⁹ Bernard Pouderon, Athénagore d'Athènes, Philosophe Chrétien (Paris: Beauchesne, 1989), p. 23, n. 13.

with Alexandria copied Philo directly.¹⁰

T.D. Barnes, however, assuming the authenticity of the title appended to the Arethas manuscript, contends not only that Athenagoras was an Athenian, but also that he presented his Embassy to the Emperor Marcus Aurelius and his son Commodus in Athens in the course of an imperial eastern tour.¹¹ He argues, furthermore, that the numerous errors in Philip's testimony render it unreliable, and that if Athenagoras were actually the head of the Alexandrian catechetical school, he would have been known to Eusebius and presumably mentioned in his History.

Another possibility is that Athenagoras was a native of Asia Minor. In his Embassy, Athenagoras cites as examples of heroic cults instituted by his contemporaries those of Alexander Abonutichus, Neryllinus, and Peregrinus Proteus, all three of whom originated from north of Anatolia. Athenagoras also locates the statues of these individuals in the cities of Troy and Parium. As Pouderon points out, therefore, Athenagoras' choice of these three individuals, from among a thousand other possibilities, suggests that Athenagoras had a special interest, or even that he undertook some professional or apostolic activity, in this

¹⁰ Barnard, op. cit., pp. 14-15.

¹¹ T.D. Barnes, "The Embassy of Athenagoras", Journal of Theological Studies, 26, 1975, pp. 113-14.

part of the world.¹²

Yet while there is considerable scholarly dissent regarding the origin of Athenagoras, there is widespread consensus that the Embassy was written in the period between 176 and 180.¹³ Scholars are also generally agreed that the Embassy, as its title implies, was written as an ambassadorial speech. Moreover, immediately following the title in the Arethas manuscript is an address which reads: "To the emperors Marcus Aurelius Antoninus and Lucius Aurelius Commodus, victors of Armenia and Sarmatia, and, above all, philosophers"; on the basis of this address, therefore, most scholars conclude that this ambassadorial speech was intended to be presented, or perhaps was actually presented, to Marcus Aurelius and his son Commodus. The following discussion will examine the various grounds for supporting this view.

Was the Apology Intended for the Imperial Court?

Arguments purporting to demonstrate that Athenagoras actually composed a formal speech with a view to addressing the two reigning Emperors are many. T.D. Barnes affirms

¹² Pouderon, op. cit., p. 30; vid. W.H.C. Frend, Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), p. 273, pp. 285-6, and Barnard, op. cit., p. 17.

¹³ Barnes, op. cit., p. 113; Barnard, op. cit., p. 19; Pouderon, op. cit., p. 62; Robert M. Grant, "Five Apologists and Marcus Aurelius", Vigiliae Christianae, 42, 1988, p. 8.

that Athenagoras "at least writes as if he really did intend to present his work openly and perhaps even recite it in the imperial presence".¹⁴ Moreover, he proposes a specific date and place for its delivery, viz. September 176 in Athens, for it was there in the early autumn of that year that Marcus Aurelius and Commodus were initiated into the Eleusinian Mysteries.¹⁵ Yet Barnes places the actual or intended delivery of the apology in Athens solely on the basis of the title in the Arethas manuscript, notwithstanding its very insecure origins.¹⁶ His choice of date, moreover, viz. September 176, is also problematic, for the salutation refers to Commodus as "emperor", and he was not hailed as such until November of that year. Barnes contends that ascribing the title "emperor" two months before the actual event was not a serious blunder, as Commodus had been Caesar since 166 and had been recognized as his father's successor since 175;¹⁷ yet this does not alter the fact that such an error is inexcusable and unexpected from someone seeking imperial favours. Indeed Barnes' proposal is extremely insecure, if for no other reason than that it depends solely on the coincidence of two uncertainties, viz. Athenagoras being both an Athenian and

¹⁴ Barnes, op. cit., p. 111.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 112.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 113.

¹⁷ Ibid.

in Athens at the time of the imperial eastern tour.

R.M. Grant was at one time inclined to accept Philip of Side's designation of Athenagoras as an Alexandrian.¹⁸ Now, however, taking his cue from Barnes, he not only affirms that Athenagoras' work was written as an ambassadorial speech to be delivered before the Emperors, but he also supports the date and city proposed by Barnes for its delivery.¹⁹ He adds, moreover, that Athenagoras, in prematurely addressing Commodus as Emperor, either anticipated the latter's imperial status or revised his Embassy at a later date to accommodate it, suggestions which are both speculative and facile.²⁰ Grant is obviously trying to force the evidence into agreeing with Barnes' reconstruction by attributing to Athenagoras either premonition or emendation, neither of which is persuasive.

L.W. Barnard bases his argument that Athenagoras "may have addressed the Emperor face to face" on two passages in the eleventh chapter of the Embassy.²¹ In the first passage, Athenagoras maintains that he is giving an exact account of Christian teaching so that the Emperors might not be swayed by irrational opinion and might come to know the

¹⁸ R.M. Grant, From Augustus to Constantine (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 112.

¹⁹ R.M. Grant, Greek Apologists of the Second Century (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1988), p. 100.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Barnard, op. cit., pp. 22-23.

truth. This passage, according to Barnard, "presents no difficulties", i.e., it strongly suggests that Athenagoras delivered his address in the imperial presence.²²

Yet the second passage is not as straightforward. C.C. Richardson has argued that Athenagoras attempted, by means of ellipses, parentheses and anacolutha, to give his apology "the air of a speech which was actually delivered", and thus did not "give his apology as a public oration in the emperor's presence".²³ Consequently, he translates the second passage in question as follows: "Although what I have said has raised a loud clamour, permit me here to proceed freely, since I am making my defence to Emperors who are philosophers".²⁴ According to this translation, Athenagoras is pretending that what he has said has led to a hostile reaction from the audience. Barnard responds, however, that this translation is inaccurate and that the passage demonstrates, not that Athenagoras was using a rhetorical device, but that he actually delivered his Embassy to the Emperors. He demonstrates this by carefully examining the Greek text and by pointing out that the passage directly preceding it contains a reference to Matthew 5:44-45/Luke 6:27-28. Barnard thus offers this

²² Ibid., p. 22.

²³ Cyril C. Richardson, ed. and trans., Early Christian Fathers (New York: The Macmillan Company 1970), pp. 292-3.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 310.

paraphrase of the passage: "The word...here has been cried out so loudly that nobody could fail to hear it, so let me say straight what it actually means, as philosopher-Emperors must want the truth, i.e., Jesus has spelt it out and repeated it so that it is practically cried out loud at you in the passage from the Gospels just quoted."²⁵ Barnard concludes, therefore, that Athenagoras is asking permission of the Emperors to interpret the passage from Matthew/Luke which he has just quoted in a manner appropriate to philosophers, since the Word of God has been heard throughout the whole world and no one could have failed to hear it. This interpretation, Barnard argues, "hardly reads like a rhetorical device put in by Athenagoras as part of the 'stage-setting' of his apology", and as such it supports the argument that Athenagoras actually addressed the Emperors.²⁶

With respect to both passages, however, Barnard is clearly begging the question--simply because these texts do not read like stage directions does not guarantee that they are not. Indeed a direct address to the Emperor can be a rhetorical device just as easily as pretending to hear the shouts of the audience. Moreover, if Athenagoras were actually speaking before Marcus Aurelius, it is hardly likely that he would gain either the attention or the

²⁵ Barnard, op. cit., p. 23.

²⁶ Ibid.

interest of this confirmed Stoic philosopher by offering to interpret the Word of God or by making scriptural allusions.

Fergus Millar approaches the question from a different perspective. Having made a detailed examination of the relationship between Roman Emperors and their subjects, Millar contends that the work is in the accepted form of the many petitions addressed to the Emperors, and that, by "entitling his work Presbeia--Embassy--[Athenagoras] unambiguously relates his work to the standard form in which communities and organized bodies approached the emperors, namely by sending representatives to make a speech before them".²⁷ Millar, however, has obviously been seduced by the title "Embassy" into complacently accepting that it was provided by Athenagoras himself, although there is no conclusive evidence to support this.

At one time William R. Schoedel avoided translating "presbeia" as "embassy", insisting that it was a translation "adopted by those who [saw] the work as an address intended to be delivered before the emperors in person"; he thus used the more general term, "plea".²⁸ More recently, however, he has agreed that "there is good reason to think that [it] was written to be presented to the emperor or delivered before

²⁷ Fergus Millar, The Emperor in the Roman World (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1977), pp. 564-5.

²⁸ This is a more general term in the sense that it does not imply an "official" presentation to the Emperor; Schoedel, op. cit., p. xii.

him and that its author would have served as ambassador for the embattled Christian community".²⁹ Schoedel bases this latter view, to a large extent, on similarities which he has detected between Athenagoras' Embassy and the imperial speeches of various Jewish ambassadors as reported by Josephus and Philo. He maintains that the addresses of the Jewish envoys contained both defence and petition, the former being emphasized when the appeal was likely to be contested by a counter-embassy, and the latter when it was not.³⁰ Since Athenagoras' Embassy is "defence...enclosed in the language of the petition", and was presumably not contested by another party,³¹ he has suggested that the apology represents "a mixed form" peculiar to Christians and Jews, which grew out of the exigencies of their social and religious situation and which was thus previously unknown in the Graeco-Roman world.³²

An important aspect of Schoedel's argument, however, rests on the assumption that valid parallels can be drawn between the Jewish and the Christian situation in the Roman Empire at this time. Such an assumption is surely false, however, for Christianity, under second-century Roman law,

²⁹ William R. Schoedel, "Apologetic Literature and Ambassadorial Activities", Harvard Theological Review, 82, 1989, p. 74.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 61.

³¹ Ibid., p. 70.

³² Ibid., p. 78.

was a serious criminal offence. In fact, as T.D. Barnes has pointed out in his collection of the primary evidence for the legal basis on which Christians were condemned prior to 250, Trajan's instructions to Pliny regarding Christians brought before him placed Christianity "in a totally different category from all other crimes. What is illegal is being a Christian."³³ Moreover, whether or not one accepts the genuineness of Hadrian's rescript to Minucius Fundanus, proconsul of Asia from 122-123, his ruling clearly "makes no change in the legal position [of Christians] as defined by Trajan."³⁴ Nor was this position altered during the reign of Marcus Aurelius, for the condemnation of Christians for the name only is a major theme in Athenagoras' Embassy (1.2-2.6).

The Jewish situation, however, was significantly different. Tertullian describes Judaism as a religio licita or permitted religion (Apol. XXI.1), and this is certainly borne out by judicial rulings at the time. Antoninus Pius, for example, lifting a general ban which Hadrian had placed on this practice, authorized the Jews to circumcise their sons, a custom which pagans found both repugnant and unethical and which contravened their social and legal

³³ T.D. Barnes, "Legislation Against the Christians", Journal of Roman Studies, 58, 1968, p. 37. Vid. also Chapter 2 of this thesis, pp. 67-77.

³⁴ Ibid.

norms.³⁵ Moreover, according to the jurists Ulpian and Modestinus, the Jews were freed from the burden of certain duties that profaned their religion, while non-Jewish citizens were required to fulfil them. This clearly indicates that the State not only took positive steps to avoid violating the Jewish faith, but even acted in its favour in some instances.³⁶ The Jews, therefore, as adherents of an accepted and legal religion, could despatch embassies to the Emperor to present their grievances and petitions under due process of law. The Christians, however, belonged to an illicit and proscribed society, and would hardly have been granted imperial hearings in order to plead for their faith.³⁷ In fact, even when Christians were placed on trial, they were prevented from defending or explaining their religion in court.³⁸

As is evident from the preceding discussion, the arguments attempting to demonstrate that Athenagoras composed an imperial address which he intended to deliver personally do not survive careful examination. There are,

³⁵ Amnon Linder, ed., trans., and comm., The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, (1987), p. 67.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 68.

³⁷ Robin Lane Fox, Pagans and Christians (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1987), pp. 305-6.

³⁸ P.A. Brunt, "Marcus Aurelius and the Christians", Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History (Bruxelles: Collection Latomus, 1979), p. 507 and n. 74.

however, several scholars who take the opposite and more likely position that Athenagoras did not intend to recite his Embassy before the Emperors--and that he clearly never did. These include, not only C.C. Richardson, but also P.A. Brunt, who states, with respect to the apologies addressed to Marcus Aurelius, "I do not suppose that Marcus so much as read the apologists' effusions, but if he did, they can hardly have impressed him favourably".³⁹ Robin Lane Fox, moreover, referring specifically to Athenagoras' Embassy, contends:

"We can be fairly certain that no second-century Emperor bothered to read these long apologies. One of them, Athenagoras' Embassy, was cast in the form of a speech, but it is not credible that a Christian was allowed to weary the Emperor's patience by delivering it in his presence while his faith was a criminal offence. The setting is a literary fiction".⁴⁰

The following arguments will confirm these assertions.

The address prefixed to the Embassy contains a number of major flaws which preclude the possibility that it was intended as a formal speech to the Emperors. First, the

³⁹ Ibid., p. 516.

⁴⁰ Lane Fox, op. cit., pp. 305-6. To the list of those who deny that Athenagoras' Embassy was delivered before the Emperors may be added those scholars who have described it with greater or lesser conviction as an "open letter". These include W.H.C. Frend, The Rise of Christianity (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), p. 234; Bernard Pouderon, op. cit., p. 62; and Jean Danielou, Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973), p. 9.

official titulature does not conform to accepted usage."⁴¹ If, as is generally conceded,⁴² the apology was written in the year 176, the title "victor of Armenia" is improperly ascribed to Marcus Aurelius. As Barnes points out, this title derives from a preliminary campaign of the Parthian war of 163, for which Marcus Aurelius also assumed the more prestigious titles of "victor of Parthia" and "victor of Media". It would thus have been inappropriate to use only the title "victor of Armenia".⁴³ Moreover, as Barnes attests, "if Athenagoras intended to observe the strictest constitutional niceties", the omission of the title "Augustus" with regard to Marcus Aurelius is "improper", particularly as he had been both Emperor and Augustus since 7 March 161.⁴⁴ It is thus implausible that, if Athenagoras had actually intended to present his Embassy to the

⁴¹ Schoedel, op. cit., 1972, pp. xi-xii.

⁴² In addition to Barnes, vid. Grant, op. cit., 1988, p. 100; Barnard, op. cit., p. 19; W.R. Schoedel, "Christian 'Atheism' and the Peace of the Roman Empire", Church History, 42, 1973 p. 309.

⁴³ Scholars have thus resorted either to emending the text to read "victors of Germany", a title appearing on Roman imperial coinage between 175 and 178, or to accepting the authority of unofficial papyri and inscriptions, which use the title "victor of Armenia" with regard to Marcus Aurelius from 169 onwards and even, in some instances, with regard to Commodus (Schoedel, op. cit., 1972, p. xi). Yet whichever option one chooses, the fact remains that the title "victor of Armenia" is problematic for those who maintain that Athenagoras' Embassy was written to be delivered before the Emperors.

⁴⁴ Barnes, op. cit., 1975, pp. 112-3.

Emperors, he would not have informed himself beforehand of the correct and accepted titulature. In fact, if embassies to the Emperor were as commonplace and numerous as Millar suggests, it is unlikely that Athenagoras was ignorant of accepted practice.⁴⁵ Millar cites the case of the inhabitants of a remote village in Thrace who were able to send to Gordian III in 238 a libellus or written petition using "the conventional forms to express their request".⁴⁶ Indeed if these simple peasants could compose an appropriate petition, it is improbable that Athenagoras--a "bookish man", as Schoedel describes him⁴⁷--would be either unaware of accepted practice or unwilling to follow it.

Second, not only the titulature, but also the form of the address poses difficulties. Schoedel points out that the normal epistolary style of address, appearing in some orations of Aelius Aristides, follows the pattern "N. to N. greeting". Since Athenagoras' apology follows this pattern "as far as it goes", i.e., the name of the recipient is present, but not the name of the sender and the greeting, Schoedel deduces that it "was obviously intended to conform to this [epistolary] formula...[but] the name of the sender and the greeting have fallen away".⁴⁸ Such a conclusion,

⁴⁵ Millar, op. cit., pp. 379-80.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 543.

⁴⁷ Schoedel, op. cit., 1972, p. xiv.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. xii.

however, is unlikely. First, the form upon which Schoedel bases his argument is an "epistolary form", and not even he, in either 1972 or 1989, suggested that Athenagoras was writing an epistle. Second, even if this difficulty is ignored, it cannot be assumed from the presence of a salutation that the name of the sender and a word of greeting were also once in evidence simply because this coincides nicely with accepted practice. After all, Athenagoras did not concern himself with accuracy and precision regarding the Emperors' titles. Third, while it is clearly possible that the name of the sender has been lost, since this is placed at the beginning of an address, it is much less likely that the greeting has likewise disappeared, since it follows the name of the recipient--and that remains intact. Clearly Athenagoras fails to conform to accepted practice in either the titulature or the style of his address, and this is an injudicious oversight by one seeking imperial favours.

Yet as Schoedel has pointed out, Athenagoras' apology does follow certain prescriptions, viz. those of Menander Rhetor.⁴⁹ This third-century writer composed a handbook for panegyrists outlining the requirements for imperial

⁴⁹ W.R. Schoedel, "In Praise of the King: A Rhetorical Pattern in Athenagoras", in Donald F. Winslow, ed., Disciplina Nostra: Essays in Memory of Robert F. Evans, Patristic Monograph Series 6, (Cambridge, MA: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1979), pp. 69-90; vid. Schoedel, op. cit., 1989, pp. 55-57.

orations,⁵⁰ and there are close parallels between Athenagoras' Embassy and at least two of these addresses. The first is the king's speech, which is pure encomium of a king or emperor. Menander suggests that rhetors presenting such an oration should offer a concluding prayer that the Emperor's kingdom should long continue and be handed on to his children (377.19-30), and Athenagoras mentions, at the close of the Embassy, the prayers offered by Christians for the Emperors "that the succession to the kingdom may proceed from father to son...and that [their] reign may grow and increase" (37.2).⁵¹ As befits an encomium to the reigning monarch, moreover, Menander recommends that the rhetor "propitiate the emperor with words as we do the divine power with hymns and praises" (369.5-7), and throughout his apology Athenagoras stresses the Emperors' "love of learning and truth" (2.6), their wisdom which "is greater than that of all others" (31.3), and the equity which they "show to all" (2.4).

Menander's second example, the ambassador's speech, or the address delivered by an ambassador on behalf of an aggrieved or oppressed city, exhibits even more parallels with Athenagoras' Embassy. When delivering such an oration,

⁵⁰ All references to Menander Rhetor, unless otherwise noted, will be to the edition by D.A. Russell and N.G. Wilson, Menander Rhetor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981).

⁵¹ Schoedel, op. cit., 1989, p. 56. All citations from Athenagoras' Embassy, unless otherwise noted, will be from Schoedel's edition, op. cit., 1972.

Menander recommends that the rhetor "amplify at every point the topic of the emperor's humanity, saying that he is merciful and pities those who plead with him" (423.7-10). Athenagoras thus remarks on the "gentle and mild natures" of the Emperors and their "peaceableness and humanity toward all" (1.2).⁵² Menander proposes, furthermore, that the ambassador speak "of the blessings of peace" (423.13-14), while Athenagoras duly points out that "the whole empire enjoys a profound peace through [the Emperors'] wisdom" (1.2). The closest analogy, however, occurs at the conclusion of his apology, where Athenagoras asks the Emperors to "nod [ἐκίνασαντες] [their] royal heads in assent" (37.1), partially according with Menander's suggestion to ask the Emperor "to nod [ἐκίνασας] his head to receive the decree" (424.1-2).⁵³

Given these parallels, it is obvious that the formula for the ambassadorial speech and, to a lesser extent, the king's speech, influenced Athenagoras' apology. It is thus tempting to conclude that the Embassy, since it follows some of the guidelines laid down by Menander, was written to be delivered in the imperial presence, presumably by Athenagoras himself. Yet two major considerations militate against this. First of all, at the end of his

⁵² Schoedel, op. cit., 1989, p. 56.

⁵³ R.M. Grant, "Five Apologists and Marcus Aurelius", 1988, op. cit., pp. 8-9. This translation of Menander is provided by Grant.

recommendations for an ambassadorial speech, Menander writes: "then ask [the Emperor] to nod his head to accept the decree" (424.1-2). An ambassador was a delegate chosen by a recognized body to present its petition before the Emperor. His task was thus to obtain an imperial hearing, to deliver a brief speech outlining the difficulties faced by the specific body he represented and the restitution it desired, and to present to the Emperor a signed decree to this effect.⁵⁴ No mention is made by Athenagoras, however, about possessing a decree or desiring the Emperor to accept it. As Millar points out, "[d]ocumentary and other evidence, primarily the imperial letters which regularly followed, frequently refers to this public presentation of the decree...[and] the emperors themselves frequently refer to their reading the decree".⁵⁵ Thus the presentation of this document was an essential aspect of an embassy, without which it is unlikely that the Emperors would have received Athenagoras.

Secondly, in his rules for the ambassador's speech, Menander recommends that the rhetor "should say what has been prescribed for the Crown Speech, but amplify at every point the topic of the emperor's humanity" (423.7-10). A crown speech was made by a representative of a community when presenting a gold crown to the Emperor as a mark of

⁵⁴ Millar, op. cit., p. 217.

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 217-8.

continuing loyalty.⁵⁶ As an Emperor would receive many such token visits,⁵⁷ the crown speech could not be long, and in fact Menander recommends that it not exceed 150 to 200 hexameter lines (423.3-5). Thus if, as Menander suggests, the ambassador's speech should follow the prescriptions for the crown speech with the mere addition of references to the Emperor's humanity, it too would have been short and precise, if for no other reason than that the Emperor received many embassies as well. Athenagoras' apology, however, stretches to 41 pages in Schoedel's edition.⁵⁸ It is thus obvious that, if Athenagoras composed his apology as a formal ambassadorial speech and attempted to follow--even notionally--the guidelines of Menander, he made a serious error of length which would have precluded his appearance before the Emperors.

⁵⁶ Millar, op. cit., pp. 140-2.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 141.

⁵⁸ Schoedel, op. cit., 1989, p. 57. While Schoedel has pointed out that the length of Athenagoras' address coincides with the length of forensic speeches made by the accuser and defendant at important hearings before the Emperor, he correctly discounts this analogy on the grounds that no apparent accusations have been laid against the Christians in the Embassy and no specific issues have been raised on which judgement is required (Schoedel, op. cit., 1989, pp. 57-9). Schoedel also rejects the ambassadorial speech as a model for Athenagoras' apology on the grounds that the purpose of the ambassadorial speech, i.e., to obtain relief from disaster within a community, is far too narrow, and that, because of this narrowness of purpose, this form of speech has a different structure from that of Athenagoras' Embassy (Schoedel, op. cit., 1989, pp. 56-7). He does not explain, however, how the two structures differ.

Yet it is not only the form, but also the content of Athenagoras' Embassy which deviates from that of a formal imperial address delivered by an envoy. Millar contends that Marcus Aurelius and Commodus heard many petitions in the course of their Eastern tour, but it seems implausible to suggest that they would have been inclined to listen to, let alone consider, such an unbalanced,⁵⁹ confused,⁶⁰ and inappropriately addressed work. Grant has rightly stated that the Embassy, like all the second-century Greek apologies, lacked "intellectual power" and thus did not "present Christianity in a way which could convince imperial officials of its seriousness and importance",⁶¹ while Brunt has pointed out that Marcus Aurelius, a philosopher in his own right, had little enough leisure to read the philosophical works that were of interest to him, let alone the ones that were not.⁶² Indeed A.S.L. Farquharson describes the probable scenario most aptly:

The busy monarch, if he found time to read [the] addresses of Justin and Athenagoras], would soon founder upon what was, to his view, not merely irrational but positively absurd. Burning with

⁵⁹ Athenagoras' apology deals with three charges against the Christians, but all the charges do not receive equal treatment; atheism, Chs. 4.1-30.6; Thyestean banquets and Oedipoean incest, Chs. 31.1-36.3.

⁶⁰ E.g., Athenagoras' philosophical discussion of the belief that God is One in Chapter 8.

⁶¹ R.M. Grant, "The Chronology of the Greek Apologists", Vigiliae Christianae, 9, 1955, p. 31.

⁶² Brunt, op. cit., p. 506.

simple conviction, they proceed without argument and leap to unwarranted conclusions, and by comparison with their prophesying[,] the philosophic emperor, whose culture and humanity they so naively invoke, was indeed the wisest fool in Heathendom. For it must have seemed a crooked and extravagant superstition, as it did to the good governor Pliny, which rested itself upon such dogmas as the resurrection of the body, the worship of the Cross, and the terrors of hell.⁶³

Athenagoras' apology, moreover, is simply too vague to have been written as a proper ambassadorial speech.⁶⁴ First of all, Athenagoras does not indicate upon whose behalf he is acting as ambassador. Indeed embassies were sent to the Emperor to represent a city, a koinon or common council of cities, or a synodus or company of athletes or performers, and only delegates commissioned by one of these recognized bodies could come before the imperial presence.⁶⁵ As it was thus necessary to state upon whose authority one was presenting an ambassadorial speech, it is significant that Athenagoras, if he were in fact composing such an address, omitted this vital piece of information. Moreover, as Millar points out, if a group of churches had despatched Athenagoras to represent its interests before the Emperors,

⁶³ A.S.L. Farquharson, Marcus Aurelius: His Life and His World (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1975), pp. 146-7.

⁶⁴ Schoedel alludes to this point in the introduction to his edition of Athenagoras' Embassy (op. cit., 1972, p. xii), but he does not pursue it. At the time, however, he was of the opinion that Athenagoras' apology was not a formal ambassadorial speech.

⁶⁵ Millar, op. cit., p. 564.

this would mean that it had attained a recognized status comparable to that of a city,⁶⁶ and this is highly unlikely given the legal status of Christianity at the time.

Athenagoras, furthermore, is singularly unclear as to what he is requesting from the Emperors. While he has certainly delineated the grievances of the Christians and outlined the abuses which they suffer, he has not specified his objective in writing the apology, *i.e.*, how he wishes the Emperors to remedy the situation. The closest he comes to a precise request is to petition the Emperors "to bring to an end by law [$\nu\acute{o}\mu\omega$] the abuse we suffer" (2.1), while earlier he asks that they "show some concern also for us that there may be an end to our slaughter at the hands of lying informers" (1.3). Certainly a request to "show some concern" leaves the Emperors' options wide open, and even a petition to end the abuse "by law" is weak and imprecise, for the word nomos or "law" is a term wide enough to encompass both "the law of Christ" and the "law of Moses".⁶⁷ Indeed given that the Romans were very explicit in their legal terminology, in both Latin and Greek, Athenagoras' choice of nomos is not only unclear, but also unhelpful.

Although no Jewish ambassadorial speeches remain, a comparison of Athenagoras' apology with three passages from Josephus which reconstruct such addresses will help to

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Galatians 6:2 and Luke 2:22, respectively.

expose the imprecise nature of Athenagoras' request.⁶⁸ In fact, these are the same three passages which Schoedel uses to demonstrate the peculiar blend of petition and apology found in both Jewish imperial addresses and Athenagoras' Embassy. In the first passage, according to Josephus, the high priest Hyrcanus and the Jewish nation sent an embassy to Antony, petitioning him to request the provincial governors to free the Jews taken captive illegally by Cassius and to restore their confiscated territory. Antony acceded to their request and wrote immediately to Hyrcanus and the Jews (XIV.304). From this account, then, two important points can be made: first, the embassy to Antony was commissioned by Hyrcanus and the Jewish nation--indeed it was to Hyrcanus and the Jews that Antony sent his reply; second, the ambassador, although unnamed, made definite requests that Antony force the provincial governors both to free the Jews and to return their property. In the second passage, Josephus states that Nicholas of Damascus, representing oppressed Jews from the cities of Ionia, petitioned Agrippa that they might be relieved from the abuses thrust upon them by the Greeks and allowed both to observe their own customs and to retain their present rights (XVI.47). Again, there is no doubt that the ambassador,

⁶⁸ All citations to Josephus will be from the following edition: Josephus, Jewish Antiquities, trans. Ralph Marcus (London: William Heinemann Ltd., Vol. 7, 1957, Vol. 8, 1963).

Nicholas of Damascus, is representing an identified group, the Jews of Ionia, who have very basic and specific requests. In the third example, Josephus states that a delegation of fifty Jews, sent by Varus and the Jewish nation, arrived in Rome asking for release from kingship and incorporation into the province of Syria (XVII.300-14). Again it is clear that the envoys were representing Varus and the Jewish nation and that they made clear and unambiguous requests. Thus in contrast to Athenagoras' apology, each of these passages explicitly states the purpose of the embassy, *i.e.*, restitution of rights, customs, and/or property, and the authority behind it, *i.e.*, a legal and defined group.

The same formality and precision in addressing the Emperor can be demonstrated from the surviving evidence of pagan embassies. As discussed in Chapter 1, once an ambassador obtained a hearing with the Emperor, presented a brief speech, and submitted his decree, he had only to await the reply. This usually took the form of an official imperial letter, addressed to the city or other body that commissioned the embassy, which the same envoy would then take back with him. If the reply were favourable, it would likely be inscribed on tablets, which would then be placed in the local marketplace for the information and edification of the citizens.⁶⁹ While no pagan ambassadorial speech is

⁶⁹ Millar, *op. cit.*, pp. 217-8.

extant--or even an account of one, such as Josephus provides of Jewish speeches--there do remain inscriptions of imperial replies to embassies, and these offer valuable insight into the content of ambassadorial speeches.

One excellent example of an imperial letter was written by Hadrian to "the archons, the boule, and the people of Stratonicea", a small town in Lydia, in reply to an embassy undertaken by Claudius Candidus.⁷⁰ In his reply, Hadrian instructs the proconsul, Stertinius Quartinus, and the procurator, Pompeius Severus, to ensure that the city collects revenues from the countryside, and that Tiberius Claudius Socrates either repairs his derelict house or hands it over to a villager.⁷¹ It is thus evident from this letter that the speech of the ambassador was very explicit on a number of details: for example, who commissioned the embassy, who undertook it, and who was responsible for carrying out the Emperor's instructions. It is also evident that the embassy made very explicit requests, *i.e.*, that it would get the tax revenues from its district, and that Socrates' house would be repaired.

By comparison, however, Athenagoras' apology offers virtually no specific information. Not only does it fail to indicate who undertook the embassy and who commissioned it,

⁷⁰ G. Dittenberg, Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum, Vol. 2, 4th edition (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1960), no. 837.

⁷¹ This is my own English paraphrase and summary.

but the only description Athenagoras gives of the individuals responsible for the abuse and suffering of the Christians is that they were "lying informers". Moreover, there is not even an indication of how far-reaching the persecution was, i.e., whether it was restricted to Athens, or perhaps to Alexandria, or whether it affected the whole empire. Indeed if Athenagoras' apology were intended as an official ambassadorial speech, it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for Marcus Aurelius and Commodus to send their customary letter of reply, for they would have virtually no information upon which to base a decision. In fact, they would not even know to whom the letter should be addressed.

That no ambassadorial speeches remain, moreover, either pagan or Jewish, clearly signifies their ephemeral nature. It was not the address which was of value--certainly not once it was delivered--but rather the Emperor's reply, which stated his decision and gave his instructions for the city or body which authorized the embassy. The survival of Athenagoras' apology, therefore, gives substantial support to the argument that it was not an official ambassadorial speech. Indeed if it were, it would long since have perished, and what would remain, if anything, would be the favourable reply of the Emperors inscribed on tablets and preserved for posterity.

Conclusion

It is evident, therefore, that Athenagoras' Embassy was never recited before Marcus Aurelius and Commodus, and was never intended to be. The address contains serious errors which would not appear in an official imperial oration, and the work fails to comply with Menander's most basic prescription for the ambassadorial speech--a limit of 200 hexameter lines. Indeed the Emperors had neither the leisure for nor the interest in a protracted defence of a proscribed religion, a defence which was too vague to be considered and too imprecise to be answered.

Yet if Athenagoras' apology was not intended to be recited in the imperial court, to what literary genre does it belong? It seems clear that Athenagoras' Embassy is a rhetorical work composed in the style of an ambassadorial speech. This was an obvious form to adopt, for in the autumn of 175 Marcus Aurelius and his family began an eastern tour of the Empire,⁷² and an ambassadorial speech--or at least the pretence of one--would clearly provide the work with a credible dramatic setting. In fact, it is even possible that addressing a speech to the travelling Emperors would give the work a high profile and a specious importance which would attract, not only Christians who wished to reaffirm their faith, but also Jews and pagans who, although

⁷² Paul Barrow Watson, Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1884, reprinted 1971), p. 218.

interested in this strange new religion, were fearful of repercussions from the Roman authorities if they indulged their curiosity.⁷³ It is not surprising, moreover, that Athenagoras chose to address his apology to Marcus Aurelius in particular, for the work is primarily a philosophical treatise on Christianity and the Emperor was a confirmed philosopher who "found strength in his Stoic dogmata".⁷⁴

Thus it seems that the settings of the four extant Christian apologies addressed to the reigning Emperors are all literary fiction.⁷⁵ Aristides' Apology was written in the form of an imperial oration, Justin's Apology was composed in the rather loose form of an imperial address or written petition, while Athenagoras' Embassy imitated an ambassadorial speech. Yet if the imperial court was not the intended audience of these works, to whom were they directed and for what purpose? After a brief discussion of the prevalence of such rhetorical writing in the ancient world, Chapter 7 will consider these two crucial questions.

⁷³ Paolo Ubaldi, as quoted by Michele Pellegrino, Studi su L'Antica Apologetica (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letterature, 1947), p. 2.

⁷⁴ Brunt, op. cit., p. 506.

⁷⁵ The apologists were not the only classical writers to engage in literary artifice, as will be demonstrated in the next Chapter.

CHAPTER 7

Second-Century Apologies Addressed to Emperors: Their Form and Function

a) Form

As the previous three chapters thus demonstrate, the apologies of Aristides, Justin Martyr, and Athenagoras, although containing direct addresses to the reigning Emperor, were never intended for imperial eyes. The superscriptions of all four works contain gross errors in imperial titulature and serious deviations in form which would never appear in official petitions or orations. Their content, moreover, is at best unflattering and at worst offensive both to the Emperor himself and to the religion which he sanctioned and promoted, a fact which makes it most unlikely, as demonstrated in Chapter 1, that the Apologists could have presented such addresses with impunity at the imperial court.

Yet regardless of the form or content of these apologies, there is little possibility that second-century Christians were directly addressing the Emperor under any pretext or in any capacity. As evidenced in Chapter 2, Rome's policy toward Christians was uncompromising and severe--Christians were tried and convicted simply for being Christians--and it is thus implausible that they would have been permitted to address petitions to the Emperor. This view gains even greater credence, moreover, when one

considers the findings of Fergus Millar, based on an in-depth study of the relations between the Emperor and his subjects, that there were no official relations between church and state until well into the third century, i.e., until Gallienus, probably in the year 260, issued an edict prohibiting persecution against the hated sectarians.¹ Indeed once Christians were no longer labelled criminals simply because they were Christians, they could begin to have a normal association with Rome; in other words, they were able to present petitions to the Emperor on practical or personal matters. It is surely not coincidental, then, that the earliest evidence of an Emperor replying to representatives of the Christian church is a rescript of Gallienus to bishops in Egypt on the subject of church property.² In this rescript, probably necessitated by the refusal of Egyptian officials to cease their persecution, Gallienus decrees that "[other] people should retire from the [Christian] places of worship",³ clearly indicating that Christians were now in a legal position to petition the Emperor for their rights. Christianity, no longer proscribed, was an acceptable religion, and Christians were able, as pagan citizens had always been, to take advantage

¹ Fergus Millar, The Emperor in the Roman World, (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1977), p. 571.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., p. 572.

of the close relations between the Emperor and his subjects to present their petitions and orations at the imperial court.

Prior to the end of persecution in 260,⁴ therefore, the only form of petition which Christians could write was purely fictional, of which the apologies of Aristides, Justin Martyr, and Athenagoras are the extant examples. Yet the Christian apologists were not alone in antiquity in writing literary artifice. Composing fictitious apologetic speeches or orations, and even making allusions to the presumed circumstances under which they were heard, was clearly a common and accepted literary form in the ancient world. Plato, for instance, injects into his Apology the notion that the crowds are reacting noisily to Socrates' speech by having him entreat the audience to "remain quiet as I begged you, hear me without uproar at what I have to say" (30C).⁵ Philostratus likewise inserts into the apology of Apollonius of Tyana the idea that the Emperor is impatiently urging Apollonius on to his next point by having him remark: "I observe you beckoning with your hand for me to do so" (VIII.vii.x.).⁶

⁴ Persecution ceased until the Great Persecution of Diocletian and Galerius in the early fourth century.

⁵ As translated by W.H.D. Rouse in Great Dialogues of Plato (New York: New American Library, Inc., 1956), p. 436.

⁶ As translated by F.C. Conybeare in Philostratus: The Life of Apollonius of Tyana (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1912).

Such rhetorical devices, moreover, are found not only in apologetic writings, but also in philosophical, biographical, and historical works. The setting of Cicero's De natura deorum, for example, is an imaginary gathering of philosophers: Velleius, an Epicurean; Balbus, a Stoic; Cotta, an Academic; and Cicero himself, who recounts their fictitious discussion on the nature of the gods. Plato, in his Republic, likewise indulges in literary fiction when he portrays Socrates as having been accosted by several friends while paying his respects to the goddess Bendis at the Peiraeus. Socrates is invited back to the house of Polemarchus where a discussion on the meaning of justice ensues.

C.B.R. Pelling points out, moreover, that Plutarch, in his Biographies, does "interesting things" with his historical material: "[s]ometimes he criticizes it explicitly, ...making it clear why he is favouring one version or rejecting another; more often, he simply tacitly rewrites it, elaborating, reordering, giving different emphases, often revising the detail".⁷ Pelling's term for this "tacit" manipulation of material is "creative reconstruction".⁸ Critics of Thucydides' History also maintain that, "although there are doubtless differences

⁷ C.B.R. Pelling, "Truth and Fiction in Plutarch's Lives", Antonine Literature, ed. D.A. Russell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 35.

⁸ Ibid., p. 38.

between one speech and another depending on the oral evidence available to Thucydides, the majority of each speech in his work is the creation of the historian himself".⁹ Indeed both Thucydides and Tacitus, according to A.J. Woodman, "are...rhetorical in the sense that they manipulate factual truths for dramatic purposes".¹⁰ Nor are classical historians the only ones to indulge in such imaginative historiography, for Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History reveals similar rhetorical elements. His highly-coloured treatment of the Battle of the Milvian Bridge (IX.ix), for instance, which depicts Maxentius as the epitome of evil and Constantine as the paragon of piety and truth, is intended primarily to show the workings of divine providence in history and cannot, on that account, be taken as an objective account of the events.

Antiquity also provides examples of imperial speeches which follow the prescriptions of Menander Rhetor, but which were almost certainly not intended to be delivered. Synesius' de Regno, for instance, is an oration on kingship addressed to the Emperor Arcadius. As Alan Cameron points out, however, the tone of the work is "too dangerously offensive to be delivered".¹¹ Indeed could Synesius, he

⁹ A.J. Woodman, Rhetoric in Classical Historiography (London: Croom Helm, 1988), p. 13.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 199.

¹¹ Alan Cameron, Barbarians and Politics at the Court of Arcadius (Berkeley: University of California Press,

asks, "really have delivered his blistering criticisms of Arcadius and his court before--Arcadius and his court?".¹² The evidence strongly suggests that he could not--and indeed did not.¹³

Libanius, too, provides examples of speeches in which the circumstances are quite imaginary. In fact, his Oratio 15 is closely analogous to Athenagoras' Embassy. In the proem to this speech, Libanius depicts himself as heading an embassy to the Emperor Julian in the hopes of restoring relations between him and the city of Antioch. As Cameron points out, however, in the course of the speech "Libanius begs the emperor not to interrupt him, apostrophizing him throughout and speculating at the end as to how he will dare return to Antioch if unsuccessful. Yet the truth is there was no embassy, Libanius never left Antioch, and the speech was never delivered"--at least not to Julian.¹⁴ It was "recited in private before a few friends Libanius could trust".¹⁵ As J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz attests, if Libanius had intended the speech to be read by Julian, the only way

1993), p. 132.

¹² Ibid., p. 127.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 127ff.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 132.

¹⁵ Ibid.

he could have done so was through a messenger.¹⁶

Libanius also composed a funeral speech for his uncle Phasganius in which he thought it necessary to include material offensive to the Caesar Julian. He dealt with this delicate issue, however, by dividing his speech into three parts. The first two he delivered before large audiences; the third he allowed to be heard by only a few choice friends. As he writes in Epistle 33 (283), "After I had accommodated these on a few seats, I shut the doors and read the oration, requesting the hearers to admire in silence any part of the speech that might seem fine, and not to draw the attention of a crowd by loud applause. And so far--may Nemesis remain kind--no frightening consequence has resulted".¹⁷

Indeed it is significant that Libanius was actually fearful of imperial retribution for his writings, for he and the Emperor Julian were on very good terms. This is evidenced by the conclusion of two of Julian's letters to Libanius which read: "Farewell, brother, most dear and most beloved!".¹⁸ The Emperor Theodosius, too, was well disposed towards Libanius. As J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz points out, Theodosius certainly "distinguished him. He allowed

¹⁶ J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, Antioch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 26.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Rowland Smith, Julian's Gods (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 41.

Libanius' bastard son, Cimon, to inherit. He conferred on Libanius an honorary praetorian prefecture, and sent him letters on at least two occasions".¹⁹ Thus if Libanius, in his privileged position, was wary of the Emperors' reaction to his speeches, it is implausible that Aristides, Justin, and Athenagoras--who had no special relationship with their imperial addressees and who were adherents and defenders of a notorious, illegal, and despised religious sect--could have delivered their apologies with impunity. Clearly the settings of these apologies, as of many works of antiquity, are wholly imaginary.

b) Function

Yet if the Christian Apologies were not written for the eyes and/or ears of the Emperor, it is necessary to consider the following: 1) what was the intended audience of these works? and 2) what purpose were they meant to serve? Given their close interconnectedness, these two questions will be treated together in the following discussion.

Those scholars who have endeavoured to tackle these two questions generally fall into one of four main categories. The first comprises those who insist that the Apologies, since they were addressed to the reigning Emperor, were written to be read and sanctioned by him. They thus unanimously agree that the purpose of these works was to

¹⁹ Liebeschuetz, op. cit., p. 28.

bring to the Emperor's attention the plight of the Christians and to persuade him to alter official policy towards them. A. Bouché-Leclercq, for instance, expresses surprise that the eloquence and rationality of the Apologies did not succeed in convincing the Emperor to change his attitude towards Christianity,²⁰ while Aimé Puech maintains that Justin and the other Apologists clearly thought it possible that the Emperor would read their supplications and, on the basis of their arguments, order a reversal of state policy.²¹ In a similar vein, Paul Keresztes has stated, with respect to Justin's First Apology, that "its one and only purpose was to "advis[e]...the Emperor to change the current course of justice in Asia".²²

There is, however, as Chapters 4 through 6 attest, one obvious flaw in the notion that the Apologies were directed solely, or even primarily, to the Emperor: it takes their literary form wholly at face value. Indeed what Pelling has discovered with respect to Plutarch applies equally to the Apologists: they "adapt[ed] the truth for literary purposes" and they were well aware that they were doing

²⁰ A. Bouché-Leclercq, L'Intolérance Religieuse et la Politique (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, Editeur, 1924), p. 264.

²¹ Aimé Puech, Les Apologistes Grecs du IIe Siècle de Notre Ère (Paris: Librairie Hachette et Cie., 1912), p. 4.

²² Paul Keresztes, "The Literary Genre of Justin's First Apology", Vigiliae Christianae, 19, 1965, p. 109.

so.²³ It is not, he writes, "that the concept of truth was itself different...It is simply that the boundary between truth and falsehood was less important than that between acceptable and unacceptable fabrication, between things which were 'true enough' and things which were not".²⁴ To assume, therefore, that Christian authors in late antiquity adhered, in any significant way--or indeed in any way at all--to twentieth-century definitions of "truth" and "fiction", would be both anachronistic and extremely dangerous.

The second category consists of those scholars who contend that the Apologies were written for a much wider audience, *i.e.*, they were written for publication and circulation among the general populace. Henry Chadwick, for example, states that Justin is "writing to defend Christianity from outside attack and addressing himself, at least in the Apologies, to a prospective pagan audience".²⁵ Paolo Ubaldi, an eminent Italian scholar, goes into greater detail.²⁶ These works, he writes, certainly did not have as

²³ Pelling, op. cit., p. 39.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 42-3.

²⁵ Henry Chadwick, "Justin Martyr's Defence of Christianity", The John Rylands Library, 47, 1965, p. 275.

²⁶ Paolo Ubaldi's work, Athenagora: La Supplica per i cristiani (Torino: 1933), is unavailable, but his views are recounted by Michele Pellegrino in Studi su l'Antica Apologetica (Roma: Edizioni di 'Storia e Letterature', 1947), pp. 1-2.

their supreme aim that the Emperor read and commend them, for the Greeks were not that simple-minded! Rather they used this fictional literary form to increase the appeal of the Apologies, hoping, by such a novel approach, to attract a larger number and variety of readers. While undoubtedly they directed their works to the pagans, especially the cultivated ones, whom they hoped to bring to a greater appreciation of the high moral value of Christianity, they also aimed them at the Jews, who would have been able to understand the force of Christianity, since it was grounded in the life and teachings of Jesus which were not unknown to them, as well as at the Christians, who would have been strengthened in the faith by the Apologists' words. One can never repeat enough, he insists, that the Apologists used their works to explain to the world at large this new religion which it so despised.²⁷

The third category, which is by far the largest, is composed of those scholars who take the more cautious approach and argue that the Apologies were directed both to the Emperor and to the public. Paul Keresztes, for example, with respect specifically to Justin's Second Apology, states that the purpose of the work was "to serve the interests of

²⁷ W.H.C. Frend agrees with Ubaldi that the Apologies were intended primarily for the public, but he offers no grounds for this opinion: the Apologies, he writes, are "open letters" addressed to the Emperor or to pagan magistrates, but their "real target" is "literate provincial opinion" (The Rise of Christianity, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984, p. 234).

the addressees...by freeing them of their anti-Christian prejudices"²⁸, and to inform the people about Christian doctrines that they "may be delivered from their erroneous notions about them and may change their attitude".²⁹

It is Jean Daniélou, however, who has considered this position in the greatest depth. For the most part, he states, these works are "official documents", i.e., imperial petitions, whose purpose was "first of all to demand parity of treatment for Christians with the other citizens of the Empire".³⁰ Yet this was not their only audience nor their only function, for they were "primarily appeals to public opinion; they were written for publication".³¹ Indeed they are similiar, he explains, to "the present-day manifesto or 'open letter', addressed to a head of government and sent to the Press over a large number of signatures to demand the release of a political prisoner".³² They are, in fact, the "missionary literature of the second century, the presentation of the Gospel to the pagan world".³³

This becomes manifest, he argues, when one examines the

²⁸ Paul Keresztes, "The 'So-Called' Second Apology of Justin, Latomus, 24, 1965, p. 859.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 866.

³⁰ Jean Daniélou, Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973), p. 7.

³¹ Ibid., p. 9.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

internal evidence. The concluding passage from Aristides' Apology, for example, clearly demonstrates a missionary purpose: "And truly, that which is spoken by the mouth of Christians comes from God, and their teaching is the gateway to light. Therefore let all those who have not known God approach that gate, and hearken to words which do not pass away... (XVII,8)".³⁴ The conclusion of Justin's Second Apology, moreover, combines both the forensic and the missionary themes inherent in the work: "But if you sanction this document, we will make it available to all, so that, if possible, they may change their minds. For this was our sole purpose in composing these words...that all men everywhere may be found worthy of the truth (XV,2-4)".³⁵ Indeed this Apology, Daniélou insists, was "a missionary document"; it was submitted to the Emperor for his sanction, but it was undoubtedly destined for publication even without it.³⁶

Yet whether or not one contends that the Apologies were also submitted to the Emperor, the notion that their primary

³⁴ Ibid., p. 12. Daniélou also refers to the following passages in Aristides' Apology: 16.5 and 17.3-4.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 13. Daniélou also refers to the following passages in Justin's Apologies: I Apol. 3.4, 10.5, 14.3, 57.1, 44.13, 45.5, 53.12, 55.8, and II Apol. 13.1-2.

³⁶ Ibid. Daniélou, however, considers only those passages which imply a missionary intent, ignoring the considerable number which are blatantly hostile to both pagans and paganism and which would thus have done more to repel than to attract potential converts.

target was the general public is highly implausible given the haphazard methods of book publication and distribution in the early Empire. Indeed an examination of the two principal systems by which books were published and circulated in the second century will clearly demonstrate that the apologies did not even infiltrate pagan society, let alone influence popular opinion.

According to Harry Y. Gamble in his recent work entitled Books and Readers in the Early Church, authors in antiquity who wished to make their works public could do so by one of two methods. The first relied heavily upon a network of social relations. Once an author had read his work before a few like-minded individuals and revised it on the basis of their suggestions and criticisms, he would generally distribute fair and accurate copies, carefully prepared at his own expense and under his own supervision, among friends and acquaintances as gifts. The recipients of the work would then make their texts available to others for duplication, who in turn would do the same, and thus the number of copies in circulation multiplied. Indeed the verb "to publish" in Latin (edere) and in Greek (ekdidonai) meant simply "to give out", and did not, as it does now, involve placing in the hands of the public a considerable number of identical copies at one time.³⁷

³⁷ Harry Y. Gamble, Books and Readers in the Early Church (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 83-4.

The second method involved the commercial book trade. Authors would deposit a text of their work with a bookseller, who in turn would make copies for sale. The evidence, although sketchy, suggests that most book dealers in the second century operated on a small scale. Their normal practice would probably have been to pay authors, if anything, a flat fee for their compositions, and to produce single copies of their works for individual customers, charging them enough to cover business expenses and to net a small profit. Presumably if a work was well known or the author popular, a book dealer could and did make additional copies in anticipation of increased demand, but there is no evidence to suggest that this was done as a matter of course.³⁸

Although the book trade became more prominent in the early Empire than at any time previously, the majority of authors still opted for the first, more traditional method of publication,³⁹ and Christian authors were no exception. As Gamble writes:

"[N]o differentiating features of early Christianity require us to think that the publication and circulation of early Christian texts proceeded along unique or idiosyncratic lines. Without evidence to the contrary, it ought to be supposed that...this literature was not commercially produced but was transcribed privately, that is, by Christians

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 87-88.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 92.

themselves".⁴⁰

The following two examples from the second century well illustrate his point.

The Shepherd of Hermas provides explicit directions as to how the text was to be published and circulated. Although the work itself is fictional, this account, nonetheless, is an accurate reflection of the usual process of book dissemination. Hermas is instructed, along with a number of elders, to read the original text aloud in the Church at Rome. He is further enjoined to make two copies for distribution to two Christians from very different communities. The first was to go to a certain Clement, the supposed corresponding secretary of the Roman church, whose responsibility it was to make and send to distant churches copies of documents intended for distribution. The second was to go to an unknown woman named Grapte, who would use the work to exhort the widows and orphans in her care. Thus given the explicitness of these instructions, there can be little doubt that the work was intended to be published and distributed privately.⁴¹ As Gamble points out, such publication traditionally "depended on the motives and interests of individuals and small groups"⁴²--in this instance, the Roman Christians who gathered to hear the

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 93-4.

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 108-9.

⁴² Ibid., p. 83.

latest Christian text read aloud--"and subsequent copies of the work circulated along paths of friendship or personal acquaintance"⁴³--in this case, communities of Christians throughout the Empire.

The Martyrdom of Polycarp is also an excellent example of the private publication and distribution of a second-century Christian text. The Church at Philomelium requested an account of Polycarp's martyrdom from the Church at Smyrna and received it in the form of a letter. Once again, as the work itself attests, publication took place in the context of social relations, *i.e.*, the letter was addressed "to the colony of God's Church at Philomelium",⁴⁴ with the intention that it be read aloud at a church meeting. It was then distributed along an internal social network, *i.e.*, once it was read to the Philomelian Christians, it was to be "sen[t]...on to [the] brethren further away, for them too to glorify the Lord".

Since the vast majority of early Christian texts, therefore, was published and distributed, like these two works, on a strictly private basis, it is highly likely, as Gamble confirms, that the Apologies were as well.⁴⁵ Yet if

⁴³ Ibid., p. 85.

⁴⁴ Citations from the Martyrdom of Polycarp are taken from: The Apostolic Fathers, trans. Maxwell Staniforth, Early Christian Writings (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1982).

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 112.

this is the case, one must seriously question the general scholarly view that they were intended to be disseminated among the wider pagan public. Indeed the method of book publication and circulation which prevailed in the second century was wholly unsuited, on at least three counts, to an ambitious propagandistic endeavour among the pagans.

First, an author who published his work in the traditional manner effectively forfeited any further control over his text; in other words, he was unable to direct his work to a particular sector of the reading populace. Once his work was made public, anyone in possession of a copy could make it available for transcription to others, who in turn could do the same, and thus it slipped slowly but steadily beyond his grasp.⁴⁶ As Victor Tcherikover has pointed out, moreover, "the main condition for the distribution of a book within a society was, [sic] that the author should be rooted in that society".⁴⁷ Since an apologist could not ensure that his defence would be distributed within pagan circles, and since he refused to participate in pagan religious or social life and was regarded with suspicion and hatred by the pagan public, it is unlikely that a Christian apology would have even penetrated pagan society, let alone circulated widely within

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 84-5.

⁴⁷ Victor Tcherikover, "Jewish Apologetic Literature Reconsidered", Eos, 48, 1956, p. 173.

it. As the apologist himself well knew, his defence would be distributed at the initiative of its readers and not, as scholars have assumed, at the initiative of its author.⁴⁸

Second, the number of copies of an Apology which would have circulated in the early Empire would not have been sufficient to make a serious impact on pagan opinion. Once the text was distributed among the apologist's close friends, further transcription would have been dependent, almost entirely, upon the interest which the work elicited within that limited social circle.⁴⁹ Indeed only those individuals who had either heard or heard of the apologist's literary work and been inspired by his message--and no evidence suggests that this number was inordinate--would have had the text transcribed for their personal use.⁵⁰ Even the booksellers reproduced only sufficient copies of a work to supply immediate or anticipated demand, since copyists were costly and the market for books narrowly restricted to those who had both the ability to read and the

⁴⁸ Gamble, op. cit., p. 85.

⁴⁹ Eusebius maintains that Origen (H.E. VI.23) and Malchion (H.E. VII.29) both employed shorthand writers and copyists to transcribe their works. It must be remembered, however, that Origen's patron, Ambrose, furnished him with "the most ample supplies of all necessary means", and that Malchion was the head of the Greek school of sciences in Antioch. Both authors, in other words, were in privileged positions vis-à-vis their writing, and must be considered, therefore, the exception, not the rule.

⁵⁰ Gamble, op. cit., pp. 83-5.

wealth to purchase.⁵¹ Any individuals, moreover, who chose to reproduce the text would have had to invest considerable time, if not money, to do so. They would have had not only to locate and to borrow an available exemplar, but also to duplicate the work themselves or to employ copyists or slaves to undertake the task for them,⁵² and since all transcription at that time was by hand, this was a tedious and time-consuming endeavour. Given the numerous obstacles, therefore, which would have been encountered in the transcription and distribution of a Christian defence in the early Empire, it can only be concluded that the number of copies of an Apology which would have been available in the second century was insufficient either effectively or substantially to influence pagan opinion.

Third, since most texts in the first two centuries, as Gamble attests, were disseminated along internal social networks,⁵³ an Apology would have circulated almost exclusively within Christian communities throughout the Empire, and not, as scholars have assumed, within pagan circles. Indeed this was the method of distribution not only of The Shepherd of Hermas and the Martyrdom of Polycarp, but also of a number of New Testament books. In

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 87-8.

⁵² Martin Goodman, Mission and Conversion (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 66.

⁵³ Gamble, op. cit., p. 85.

the late first century, Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch were each acquainted with a number of Pauline letters, as were Polycarp of Smyrna and the author of 2 Peter approximately fifty years later. The Gospels, too, circulated widely within early Christian communities, particularly Mark's Gospel, which was familiar both to Matthew and to Luke "whose different concerns suggest that they were as distant from each other geographically as culturally".⁵⁴ The Apocalypse of John, moreover, contains a dire warning to "every one who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if any one adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book; if any one takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city which are described in this book" (Rev. 22:18-19). This admonition, as Gamble points out, cannot refer to the reproduction of the text for the seven Churches to which it is addressed, for this would have been the responsibility either of the author or of the copyists directly under his supervision. Rather, Gamble writes, "the author looks toward the free circulation of the text beyond his own control, to its general dissemination within the wider Christian community".⁵⁵

Even non-canonical writings were being disseminated

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 102.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 105.

throughout the Churches at this time, as evidenced by the letters of Ignatius, which were collected by Polycarp, transcribed from the manuscripts in Smyrna, and forwarded to the Church at Philippi upon request.⁵⁶ Indeed all these texts passed from one Christian community to another, and then again to another, with little indication that they were also disseminated among the pagans. While Celsus and Crescens had clearly read some Christian texts--almost certainly the Gospels and perhaps even the Apologies--they were both active and committed opponents of Christianity and thus naturally impelled to seek out--solely in order to refute--the most current Christian literature. They were, in other words, the exception, not the rule.⁵⁷ It is implausible, therefore, that an Apologist would write his defence with a view to altering pagan opinion when the chances of its reaching a pagan audience were minimal at best. Indeed, unless they had close personal ties to a Christian enthusiast, the average Greek and Roman would have

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 111.

⁵⁷ According to Gamble, the fact that pagan authors often criticized Christian writings as lacking in literary quality indicates that they were "often read, if not always appreciated, beyond the boundaries of Christian communities" (Gamble, op. cit., p. 103). That is to assume, however, that no one criticized Christian works who had not had the opportunity to read them. Given, however, that pagan society was rife with rumours regarding this strange new religion, it is not impossible--in fact, it is highly likely--that this criticism, too, was a piece of anti-Christian gossip which gained wide credence and circulation in the first two centuries.

been unaware of the Christian defences, let alone able or willing to procure copies.

Yet if the Christian Apologies were intended for neither the Emperor nor the general public, to whom were they directed? Tertullian, a third-century Latin apologist, maintained that "no one turns to our literature who is not already Christian".⁵⁸ Ramsay MacMullen has interpreted this statement to mean that, at least for Tertullian, "the New Testament and apparently the Apologists like Tertullian himself, Justin, Origen, Minucius Felix and the rest should not be counted as either visible or audible to a pagan audience".⁵⁹ The Apologies, in other words, "served chiefly for internal consumption".⁶⁰ A.D. Nock, in his monumental work on conversion published in 1933 holds the same opinion. There is no indication, he writes, "that [the Christian Apologies] were read by any save Christians or men on the way to be such or professed students of the movement such as

⁵⁸ As cited by Ramsay MacMullen, "Two Types of Conversion to Early Christianity", Vigiliae Christianae, 37, 1983, p. 177.

⁵⁹ Ibid. MacMullen adds that the "pagan Celsus in the later second century had read the Bible, if only to refute it. On the other hand, he himself was so instantly forgotten that one of the best-read men of a somewhat later day, Origen, could find no trace of him. Celsus appears to have been quite a minor oddity, then".

⁶⁰ Ramsay MacMullen, Christianizing the Roman Empire (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 21.

Celsus".⁶¹ K. Aland similarly states that the Apologies were distributed--exclusively or almost exclusively--among Christians themselves,⁶² while Robin Lane Fox states that "the main audience for [the Christian defences] was probably people of the apologists' own persuasion, Christians, not pagans".⁶³ None of these scholars, however, has argued this position at any length.

That the Christian Apologies were written to be circulated among Christians themselves is clearly the most plausible view. First, it makes the most sense of our findings in Chapter 2; Christians were being delated by their pagan neighbours and relatives and would thus have been loath to distribute Christian literature to those who could easily denounce them to the authorities as Christians. Second, it coincides totally with the evidence presented by Gamble on book publication and distribution in the second century. Third, it is entirely in line with the conclusions of Victor Tcherikover regarding the intended audience of Hellenistic-Jewish literature. In his well-known article of 1956, he examines, from an historical perspective, the prevailing scholarly opinion that Jewish Alexandrian

⁶¹ A.D. Nock, Conversion (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 192.

⁶² K. Aland, Über den Glaubenswechsel in der Geschichte des Christentums (Berlin, 1961), p. 32.

⁶³ Robin Lane Fox, Pagans and Christians (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1987), p. 515.

literature was directed primarily to the Greeks, and he discounts this view for three fundamental reasons.

First, like Gamble, Tcherikover looks at the methods of book publication and distribution which were in operation at the time and he, too, concludes "that only a small number of copies, those sent by the author himself to his friends, reached those persons, whom the author particularly intended to know his books. All other copies spread among the public without any supervision on the part of the author or on the part of anyone else".⁶⁴ Indeed given such conditions, he asks, how could the Jews have engaged in literary propaganda among the Greeks on any significant scale?⁶⁵

Tcherikover next considers the pseudonyms assumed by Jewish-Hellenistic authors and concludes that these were seldom sufficiently illustrious to have been intended as a means of infiltrating Greek literary circles; they were rather "an integral part of a certain literary plan".⁶⁶ This is demonstrated very clearly in the so-called Letter of Aristeas. Since the author of this letter was representing the Septuagint as having been initiated by the Gentiles themselves, he was required to present the author both as a Greek and as the hero of the story. Such a forgery, Tcherikover states, is nothing more than "a literary

⁶⁴ Tcherikover, op. cit., p. 173.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 175.

convention".⁶⁷ It was also common in antiquity, he argues, to compose entire works and to attribute these to some well-known figure of the past, as exemplified by the Sibylline Oracles. Since the more solemn the style of a Greek author, the more it resembled the style of the Bible and the easier it was to imitate, the Sybilline Oracles became extremely popular with Jewish authors. Indeed the literary form of these works provided an excellent opportunity to compose patriotic poetry, to predict the destruction of Israel's enemies, to foretell the approach of salvation, and to extol the Jewish God and his Law. Why, Tcherikover asks, "should we seek here propaganda and a wish to make proselytes?".⁶⁸

Finally, turning to the content of Hellenistic-Jewish literature, Tcherikover questions its suitability for the Greek reader. Based on the apparent ignorance of Jewish history and religion demonstrated by Greek authors, he concludes that they read neither the Jewish Scriptures nor, by extension, the Jewish commentaries or exegetical works.⁶⁹ He then divides Jewish apologetic literature into two groups: polemic against paganism and encomium of Judaism. With respect to the former, he points out that the polemical methods employed in these writings generally imitated those of the prophets in referring to the pagan gods as idols of

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 175-6.

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 177-8.

wood and stone. Such an approach to the Greek gods, he writes, "would be quite natural for the Jewish readers, but alien to the Gentiles...Polemics in the spirit of the prophets could not, therefore, be used against Greeks, and it is very doubtful whether it would have made any impression upon them".⁷⁰ With respect to the latter, Tcherikover points out that the praise of Judaism resulted from a desire on the part of the Jews to hear their own religion extolled. Indeed, "[w]hen aggressive antisemitism turned Jewish religion into something contemptible, the Jews found an everlasting source of consolation in the idea that their Law was pure and perfect. With the increase of antisemitic writings,...there grew also the number of Jewish writers who tried to prove to their brethren how ancient and superior their tradition was, and how deep the abyss between the pure doctrine of Moses and the pagan cults".⁷¹ Is it not then reasonable to suppose, he asks, that the Jews themselves desired to hear and to sing the praises of their religion in their own literature?

For Tcherikover, therefore, the Hellenistic-Jewish writings were directed "not outwards, but inwards", i.e., not to the Greeks, but to the Jews themselves.⁷² Such a conclusion is clearly instructive for the present

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 182.

⁷¹ Ibid., pp. 180-1.

⁷² Ibid., p. 171.

examination of the Christian Apologies, for there were significant parallels between Christianity and Judaism in the second century which strongly suggest that Christians, too, directed their literature to their own adherents. For example, both Judaism and Christianity were monotheistic religions and thus totally exclusive, rejecting all false and inferior gods and, as such, any form of synthesis with the Graeco-Roman pantheon. They were both, moreover, religions of the Book, in fact of the same Book, viz. the Old Testament, and thus they shared similar views on certain social and moral issues.

Yet Jews and Christians shared more than common religious and social beliefs; they also shared a common need to segregate themselves from the blasphemy and immorality of the Graeco-Roman world and thus to establish their own religious communities. Indeed Jewish and Christian Apologies clearly attest to the hostility of the two groups toward pagan religion and their determination to dissociate themselves from pagan society. This segregation led, in turn, to the common accusation by pagans that Jews and Christians were guilty of odium humani generis, i.e., "hatred of the human race". This is clearly attested by the Roman historian Tacitus. With respect to the Jews, he writes:

Jewish worship is vindicated by its antiquity, but their other customs are perverse and disgusting. Toward each other they observe strict fidelity (honesty) and mercy but the rest of mankind they

hate and view as enemies. They separate themselves from others and do not even have intercourse with non-Jewish women...".⁷³

With respect to the Christians, he uses a similar phrase:

"Therefore, first [those Christians] who confessed were arrested, then at their disclosure an immense multitude was convicted not for setting the fire but because of their hatred of the human race".⁷⁴

Given the self-imposed separation of Jews and Christians, therefore, as well as the pagan attitude towards such detachment, it would have been extraordinary if either religious group had actively endeavoured to distribute its apologetic literature within pagan society. Indeed, as Martin Goodman attests in his book Mission and Conversion, neither Jews nor Christians made serious or coordinated efforts to entice outsiders to join their religious communities. With respect to the Jews, Goodman points out that, if they "were really eager to win converts, the easiest way to increase their number might have been to remove some of the more onerous requirements laid upon proselytes";⁷⁵ however, this seems not to have occurred. The religious rite which scholars traditionally assume to have been the most objectionable in Judaism is

⁷³ Histories 55, as cited by Stephen Benko, "Pagan Criticism of Christianity During the First Two Centuries A.D.", Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt, 23.2 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), p. 1064.

⁷⁴ Annals 15.44, as cited by Stephen Benko, ibid., pp. 1062-3.

⁷⁵ Martin Goodman, Mission and Conversion, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 67.

circumcision,⁷⁶ and the evidence for uncircumcised proselytes, he points out, is negligible at best and "should be discounted".⁷⁷ Metilius, the Roman garrison commander in Jerusalem in 66 C.E. demonstrated the importance of this rite when he stated his intention to behave as a Jew "even as far as undergoing circumcision".⁷⁸ Certainly for Josephus the issue was clear-cut: those proselytes who were unwilling or unable to follow the Law as it was laid down were considered to be Apostates.⁷⁹

Christians were no more lenient towards prospective members of their communities than were the Jews. Like Judaism, Christianity demanded of its catechumens a number of specific religious duties--in particular, faith and baptism--and it tolerated no exceptions. It also produced its own list of taboos which was "every bit as restrictive as the dietary rules which confined Jews but in the case of Christians most concerned with the governance of, or abstention from, sexual relations".⁸⁰ As Paul attests in I Corinthians 5:13, any individual who refused to follow the rules or who brought disrepute upon the Name was to be expelled from the community. "Drive out[, he writes], the

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 81.

⁷⁸ As cited by Goodman, ibid., p. 82.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 81.

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 104-5.

wicked person from among you". Thus while "Christians welcomed converts into their communities with a warmth far distinguished from the ambivalence of contemporary Jews",⁸¹ they did not do so at all costs. As affirmed by all early Christian literature, Christianity was "a race apart",⁸² and as such it was unwilling to forfeit its uniqueness for the sake of numbers.

Given, therefore, that both Jewish and Christian communities in the early Empire were exclusive and uncompromising, it hardly seems plausible that the Christian Apologies were intended to be distributed as proselytic works among the pagans any more than were Jewish defences. Moreover, the unlikelihood that Christians penetrated pagan society to seek out potential converts is pointed out by Rodney Stark in his new book The Rise of Christianity. The statistics on Christian growth, he writes, "would seem to require that Christianity arose through preexisting networks. For that to have occurred requires converts to have come from communities united by attachments. These networks need not have been rooted in highly stable communities. But the network assumption is not compatible with an image of proselytizers seeking out most converts along the streets and highways, or calling them forth from the crowds in the marketplaces. In addition, network growth

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 105.

⁸² Ibid., p. 100.

requires that missionaries from a new faith already have, or easily can form, strong attachments to such networks".⁸³

Given the isolation and alienation of Christians in the early Empire, it is unlikely that Christian apologists were able to form such strong attachments within Graeco-Roman communities. What is much more likely, as Stark points out, is that Christianity, like most new religious movements, attracted converts through social networks. In other words, those who became members of a Christian community in the first two centuries were more often than not friends or relatives of those who were already members. Conversion, Stark states, "is not about seeking or embracing an ideology; it is about bringing one's religious behavior into alignment with that of one's friends and family members".⁸⁴

Thus the evidence strongly supports the view expressed by Nock, MacMullen, Aland, and Lane Fox that the Christian Apologies were intended for a Christian audience. The question which must now be considered is: What purpose were the Apologies meant to serve within the Christian community? As pointed out in Chapter 3, a definition of the term "apology" must include the two essential components of attack and defence, and the Christian Apologies unquestionably fulfill this requirement. Adherents of

⁸³ Rodney Stark, The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 56.

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 16-17.

Christianity were being oppressed on three levels-- intellectual, popular, and legal--and these works represent attempts on the part of three philosophical Christian authors to defend their faith against this outside attack. Yet other, more extraneous, elements also play a role in any apologetic enterprise; in fact, they play a particularly significant role in the Christian defences because they provide definite clues as to the purpose or purposes of these works in the early Church. The three elements which are of particular importance with regard to the Apologies are admonition, affirmation, and instruction, each of which will be examined in turn.

The Apologies, first of all, were undoubtedly an important means of admonishing converts, both new and old, against the evils and errors of paganism. Aristides, for instance, in his discussion of the Chaldaeans, the Greeks, and the Egyptians, is intent upon revealing the gross error of these peoples in attributing godlike qualities to perishable objects and substances and in indulging in vile and immoral practices under the guise of religion. Justin, too, condemns pagan beliefs and practices as both erroneous and licentious, and he blames the foolishness and depravity of the pagans upon evil demons who "strive for nothing else than to alienate men from God" (58). In like manner, Athenagoras examines in considerable depth those gods who "were made by men" (16.5) and who "came into being as we do"

(18.3), and he concludes unequivocally that such gods are worthless, their forms are ugly, and their deeds are "impious nonsense" (21.4). "[W]hat man of discernment habituated to reflection[, he asks,] would believe that a viper was the offspring of a god?" (20.4). If "gods differ in no way from the vilest beasts..., they are not gods" (20.4). Indeed these Apologies effectively admonished Christians--particularly those who were wavering in their faith--against both the errors and irrationality of pagan beliefs and the evils and immorality of pagan practices.

The Apologies, moreover, were no doubt an important means of confirming Christian truths. Given that second-century Christians lived in fear of incrimination, incarceration, and execution and were thus tempted, on a daily basis, to revert to their ancestral--and much safer--religion, the Apologies would have provided that much needed reassurance that the Gospel for which they might forfeit their lives was true. Aristides' Apology, for example, provides a convincing and heartfelt demonstration of the purity, righteousness, and genuine knowledge of Christianity. Christians, he writes, "more than all the nations on the earth have found the truth" (15). Christianity "is the way of the truth which leads those who travel therein to the everlasting kingdom promised through Christ in the life to come..." (15). Justin Martyr is at great pains to prove the superiority of Christianity to

paganism and of Christians to pagans. Indeed all those, he writes, "who lived by reason are Christians...they who lived before Christ and did not live by reason were useless men, enemies of Christ, and murderers of those who did not live by reason. But those who have lived reasonably, and still do, are Christians, and are fearless and untroubled" (46). Athenagoras, too, strives to demonstrate that Christians, far from being atheists, worship a God far superior to the deities of the Greeks, "a God who is uncreated, eternal, invisible, impassible, incomprehensible, and infinite...and who created, adorned, and now rules the universe through the Word that issues from him" (10). There is thus little doubt that such testimonies would have gone a long way towards assuaging the fears of vacillating Christians and encouraging them to stand firm in the faith. As Tcherikover asks with regard to the Jews, therefore, we may also ask with regard to the Christians: Is it not reasonable to suppose that they desired to hear and to sing the praises of their own faith, i.e., to have its superiority and truth affirmed, in their own literature?

The Apologies would also have served as useful instructional tools within the Church. As Kirt Aland has suggested, these defences were distributed among the clergy and other learned members of the Church, who would then adapt them to a level more appropriate to that of the wide mass of Christians and explain them, in "bite-size pieces",

to those who sought help or guidance.⁸⁵ Once they were able to comprehend the complex ideas of the apologists, these same Christians would then spread them further, instructing, in turn, their friends and relatives.⁸⁶ Indeed an examination of the Apologies reveals that they would have proved most valuable as a means of teaching catechumens and other interested persons. Aristides, for instance, devotes two chapters of his Apology (Chs. 15-16), viz. his entire section on the Christians, to a discussion of Christ's incarnation, ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection, while Justin Martyr's First Apology is unique among Christian writings in that it contravenes the disciplina arcana and explains the Christian sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist (Chs. 61 and 65-7). Athenagoras, moreover, examines the Christian understanding of God, viz. "a God who is uncreated, eternal, invisible, impassible, incomprehensible, and infinite, who can be apprehended by mind and reason alone, who is encompassed by light, beauty, spirit, and indescribable power, and who created, adorned, and now rules the universe through the Word that issues from him" (Ch. 10). In fact, as he himself attests, "I go through our teaching] in detail" (Ch. 11.1), "bring[ing] forward God the Father, God the Son, and the Holy Spirit...Nor does our teaching concerning the Godhead stop

⁸⁵ Aland, op. cit., p. 32.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

there, but we also say that there is a host of angels and ministers whom God...set in their places through the Word that issues from him" (10.5).

Yet the Apologies would have been highly valuable tools for the education not only of catechumens and those seeking spiritual and moral guidance, but also of those who, taunted and derided by pagans in the course of their daily lives, required verbal weaponry to help repel the assault.⁸⁷ Indeed, given that these works comprise, in effect, a variety of arguments in favour of Christianity and are directed, ostensibly, to a pagan Emperor, they would no doubt have been a useful and persuasive tool in any pagan-Christian encounter. Indeed, in his fictional Life of Barlaam and Josaphat, Euthymius used the Apology of Aristides as verbal ammunition against the derisions and rebukes of King Abenner and his court. In his First Apology, moreover, Justin not only indulges freely in Old Testament interpretation, but he also focusses primarily on the fulfillment by Jesus of Old Testament prophecy (23), one of the primary arguments of early Christians in their confrontations with pagans. Athenagoras, in like manner, devotes over two-thirds of his Legatio to a rebuttal of the charge of atheism, probably the foremost criticism of the pagans against this new-fangled religion. Indeed these Apologies would no doubt have greatly aided and abetted the

⁸⁷ Aland, op. cit., p. 32.

Christian counter-attack against pagan ridicule and abuse, providing Christians, both new and old, learned and unlearned, with a battery of arguments by which they could verbally refute their pagan opponents.

While it is obviously impossible to state for certain the precise purpose--if indeed there was one--for which the apologists composed their defences, these three suggestions are both reasonable and credible. The early Christians were unquestionably tempted to revert to their former beliefs in the face of ridicule and denunciation, and therefore required admonition against the falsity and perversity of paganism and affirmation that Christianity held the truths for which they were searching. They were also in need of both instruction in the faith and ammunition against the verbal abuse with which they were regularly bombarded, and these works would clearly have supplied both the knowledge and the confidence which they required. Indeed, while the Apologies were ostensibly pleas to the Emperor to bring to an end the unjust denunciations and trials of Christians, in reality they were moral, spiritual, and educational supports intended to help Christians understand the complexities of their faith and thus to repel these pagan assaults.

CONCLUSION

Notwithstanding Edward Gibbon's eloquent words, the second-century was not a particularly "happy period" for the vast majority of Christians. Indeed it was in this century that the need for Christian Apology first arose, and Aristides, Justin Martyr, and Athenagoras, three authors cum philosophers, were among those who defended the faith against its two major opponents: the imperial court and the pagan populace.

In the case of the former, the reaction to Christianity was swift and harsh. Although generally accepting of new cults and unperturbed by the addition of new gods to her pantheon, Rome quickly pronounced this new superstition a religio illicita. After all, Christians held clandestine meetings in the dead of night, seldom disclosing the nature of their activities, and they distanced themselves from the rest of society, never participating in pagan rites. Surely the Bacchanalian debacle of 186 B.C.E. and the more recent encounter with the Druids had provided sufficient proof that subversive cults whose members met secretly after dark were inherently evil! Rome thus strove to combat this pernicious superstition by legislating punishment for the Name alone-- and that punishment was execution.

Yet the legal response of the Roman State was not the only adverse reaction to the new religion. Both the upper

and lower echelons of pagan society took aim, each in its own way, against this latest threat to peace and security. Indeed respected and prominent members of the pagan intelligentsia attacked Christianity in their learned works --usually depending, for literary ammunition, upon pagan gossip and hearsay. The lower segments of society were no less antagonistic; in fact, they were more menacing because they were more subtle and crafty. After all, denouncing to the authorities as Christian a neighbour, relative, or colleague against whom one harboured a grudge was an ingenious--and foolproof--means of settling an old score.

Written defences of Christianity were thus required by the Church to address this threefold opposition, and the literary form which the Apologists chose was the official imperial petition or oration. In other words, they wrote Apologies, addressed to the Roman Emperor, which ostensibly urged him to cease the hostilities towards the Christians. Notwithstanding the traditional scholarly view that this literary form originated from Hellenistic-Jewish apology, or the less prevalent ideas that it was an extension of various New Testament writings or of Aristotle's Protrepticus, the Christian Apologists, in composing their works, clearly followed Plato's lead. Indeed they portray themselves in their defences in the same way as Plato, in his famous Apology, portrays the philosopher Socrates, i.e., as defending unpopular ideas and ideals before the one body

which could end the injustice being perpetrated both against him and, by extension, against those who supported his teachings.

In reality, however, the Christian defences, like Plato's Apology, are literary fiction. Indeed, if they had been written as actual imperial supplications, they would have included at least four fundamental prerequisites: 1) accurate and formal imperial titulature; 2) a brief description of the particular grievance being addressed, viz. arbitrary denunciations by pagans and unjust trials by Roman governors;¹ 3) clear and deferential arguments in favour of the Christian position, probably including a statement of the law; and 4) a straightforward and specific request for the desired ruling, viz. that Christianity be deemed a legitimate religion and that Christians be afforded the same rights and privileges as the pagans and Jews enjoyed. Clearly the Christian defences were too long, too unfocussed, and too offensive to have ever been intended, pace traditional scholarly opinion, as official petitions to the Roman Emperor to obtain relief from persecution. The setting of these four Apologies is purely imaginary.

Nor were these works intended, as some scholars have suggested, as a proselytizing tool among the pagans. Indeed the pagan masses could only have been angered by the

¹ Justin's lengthy and condemnatory narration of the Roman woman's marital difficulties and their consequences was hardly appropriate as an imperial petition.

derogatory nature of the Christians' arguments, and the pagan intelligentsia unimpressed by the literary quality of the works. More importantly, moreover, the second-century system of book publication and distribution, as Harry Y. Gamble confirms, would have prevented the infiltration of these works into Graeco-Roman society. Not only was the circulation of a text, be it Christian or pagan, painfully slow and haphazard, but it was also beyond its author's control. For an author to compose a work for circulation within a specific sector of society, therefore, and particularly one in which he himself had no roots, was both an absurd and a futile endeavour. Clearly only those pagans, like Celsus, with an axe to grind against the Christians and thus a motive for acquiring Christian texts would have been aware of, let alone interested in, the Christian Apologies.

The only reasonable option, therefore, is that the Apologies were composed for the Christians themselves. As Gamble points out, by far the majority of second-century texts was distributed along internal social networks, and in the case of the Apologies, that network was the Christian community. These works, moreover, would clearly have fulfilled some pressing social, spiritual, and educational needs within the Church at that time. They would have provided, first of all, an excellent means not only of warning Christians against the evils and errors of

polytheism, but also of instilling into wavering converts the truth and superiority of Christianity. On a more concrete level, they would also have served as tools with which the clergy and other learned Christians could instruct the wide mass of converts, who in turn could instruct their relatives and friends. Indeed the Apologies, with their repeated attacks upon the perversities of the gods, would have amply armed Christians with the appropriate knowledge and awareness to withstand and even to refute the verbal assaults of their opponents. Yet even more importantly, these Christian defences, with their frequent attestations of the love of Christ and their promises of eternal salvation, would have furnished many confused and frightened Christians, in the face of delation and execution, with the assurance that they were following the path, not of death, but of life.

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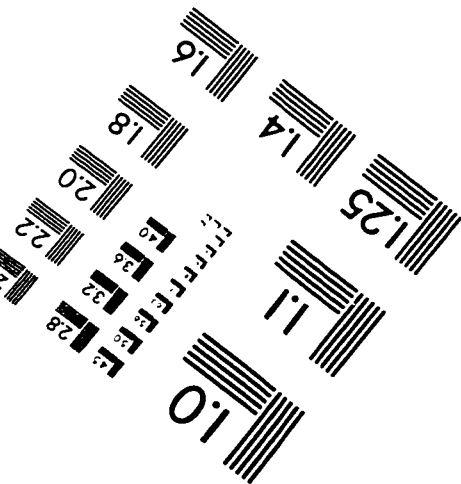
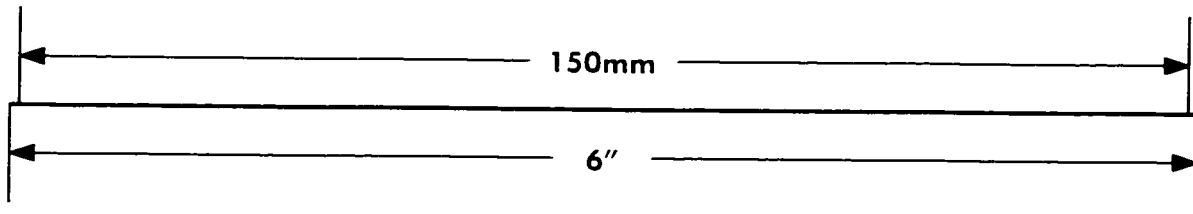
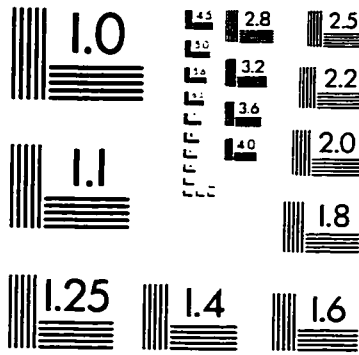
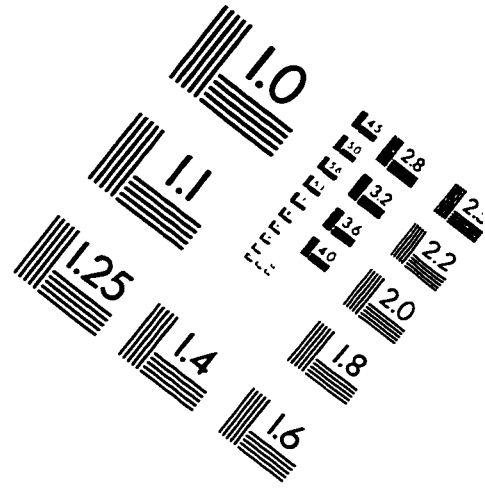
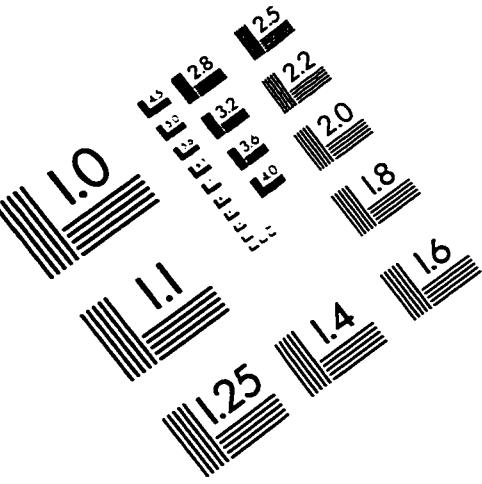
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