

## CHURCH CONFESSING WORK IN THE EARLY CENTURIES OF CHRISTIANITY: FIRST LATIN APOLOGIES

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**ABSTRACT.** The value of Latin apologists was confirmed over the centuries due to their written confessions, where we find both the ground for the theological, spiritual and polemical argument, and honest assessment of contemporary realities. Realistic tone and moderate spirit give the advantage of a safe opening towards contemporary theology. From legal notions, to socio-moralizing records and to great profound theological arguments, this direction of theology provides an inexhaustible source of priceless help to define current reality. This is, because many of the cases and situations apologetically analysed in those times are still up to present true. On the other hand, if it were to talk about a specific methodology of the Latin apologists, we would definitely stop on the practicality of their works. From Tertullian to Minucius Felix, from St. Cyprian to Lactantius, the professing work of the Western Church aimed at highlighting the manhood truth, the only essential reality to religious metamorphoses undergone by human being.

**Keywords:** Christian apologetic, Latin apologists, Tertullian, St. Cyprian, Western Church, missionary, confession work

### Introduction

The circulation of ideas in the first centuries has special linguistic specificity and consistency reflected in the social, cultural and last but not least theological confluences. Educated people in western towns could understand and write *in Greek*. Similarly, those in the East knew *Latin* very well. Following this tradition, the profane literature of the time has developed in the first instance; many ancient works were translated from Greek to Latin and from Latin to Greek. This specificity has also passed to theological field, though, there were some notable differences. First centuries witnessed Latin as “official language of the royal administration and hence of the cities in the West. On the other hand, Greek

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was the language of culture in the Mediterranean world.”<sup>1</sup> This becomes obvious at a theological level, especially when it comes to terminology. Therefore, we can say that Latin apologetic theology inspired more from Roman law pragmatism. Without any sophisticated philosophical elaborations, Latin apologies have come forward mainly by direct analyses on the practical state that Christianity had in the first centuries. We start from this premise, since etymologically speaking, theological Latin is a language that forms implicitly during the time of apologists. Apologetic literature and also the whole Latin literature thus, begin with Tertullian. He is “*the father of Latin theology*”<sup>2</sup> This is particularly confirmed by the work they carry out in North Africa, where they rooted, better than in Rome, “the roots of Latin Christianity. This is why Africa’s land, enriched by its intelligence and reason, watered by the blood of its martyrs grew the tree of Western Christianity, until all nations of the earth rested itself”.

A major role in the formation of Latin theology specificity and therefore of first apologetics written accordingly, was that of the Carthaginian School. The first who makes himself noticed is Tertullian, the one who particularly influenced the polemic specificity, and at the same time arid, of Latin apologetics. This direction is partly reflected in the theology of St. Cyprian of Carthage and St. Augustine. The personality of the great apologist is also the key to understand Christianity in North Africa. From the tumultuous beginning of early Christianity to its peak, Tertullian’s missionary activity that he undertook here, bore great fruit in the Latin tradition. His confessing example was followed by Minucius Felix, by Arnobius or Lactantiu personalities “who gilded the early period of the Western Church’s teaching, together with its to nobles luminaries... Thus, early in the third century, the council chaired by Adripinus, bishop of Carthage, was attended by no less than 17 bishops of this province. This was then, followed by a merciless period of persecutions and thus the African Church was given blood baptism”<sup>3</sup>.

### **Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus**

*Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus* (c. 160-c. 225) is “one of the most troubled and original personalities of Latin literature.” Originally of a pagan family of Carthage, he was converted to Christianity in 193, being impressed by the sacrifice of martyrs. Tradition tells us that he was married, but did not have any

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<sup>1</sup> Aidan Nicols, *Rome and the Eastern Churches. A Study in Schism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010), 152.

<sup>2</sup> Charrington, *Christian Apologetics of the Second Century* (London, 1921), 38. “After him, father Constantin Voicu says, language is much improved by St. Cyprian of Carthage through his works. Starting with the IV<sup>th</sup> century it became the exclusive language of the West writers.” Constantin Voicu, *Patrologie*, vol. I, 24.

<sup>3</sup> Alexander Roberts and James Donalson, “The Writings of the Fathers down to AD. 325,” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. III (New York, 1918), 16.

children. Jerome speaks about his theological reputation, recalling the fact that he was also ordained a presbyter, serving in his hometown. In the late part of his life he became the adept of Montanus' heresy<sup>4</sup>. He was particularly attracted by "the rigor and austerity of the doctrines preached by Montanus, as a response to the laxness of Roman priests of his time. Exactly as Montanists, he considers Montanus as the Holy Spirit, the Comforter and Mediator, the Paraclete about whom the Saviour speaks in the Gospel of John. Montanus' prophecies were seen as a New Testament, which would complement and not cancel the Gospel."<sup>5</sup> The time of his death is not known precisely, but it is again St. Jerome who tells us that "*he lived to a decrepit old age.*"<sup>6</sup>

Stylianos Papadopoulos, the Greek patristic scholar, details more aspects specific to his work.<sup>7</sup> Thus, as a notable representative of Latin direction, Tertullian gave to the West "the linguistic tool, Christian Latin language, Latin theological terminology, which did not lack completely, as it was earlier believed, but it was not sufficient to the needs of the Church". He particularly emphasizes the polemical nature of his work, intensively supported by his practical abilities.

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<sup>4</sup> "Tertullian, the presbyter, is now regarded as chief of the Latin writers after Victor and Apollonius. He was born in the province of Carthage in Africa, and was the son of a proconsul or Centurion. He was a man of keen and vigorous character, he flourished chiefly in the reign of the emperor Severus and Antoninus Caracalla and wrote many volumes which we pass by because they are well known to most. I myself have seen a certain Paul an old man of Concordia, a town of Italy, who, while he himself was a very young man had been secretary to the blessed Cyprian who was already advanced in age. He said that he himself had seen how Cyprian was accustomed never to pass a day without reading Tertullian, and that he frequently said to him, "*Give me the master,*" meaning by this, Tertullian. He was presbyter of the church until middle life, afterwards driven by the envy and abuse of the clergy of the Roman church, he lapsed to the doctrine of Montanus, and mentions the New Prophecy in many of his books... He is said to have lived to a decrepit old age, and to have composed many small works, which are not extant". See in Ieronim, *Despre bărbații iluștri. Despre viețile Apostolilor. Despre cei doisprezece învățători* (București: Paideia, 1997), 48-49.

<sup>5</sup> Remus Rus, *Dicționar enciclopedic de literatură creștină din primul mileniu* (București: Lidia, 2003), 834.

<sup>6</sup> Ieronim, *Despre bărbații iluștri*, 49.

<sup>7</sup> Papadopoulos gives a full list of his works, even of those classified as unauthentic. There are mentioned in his Patrology 32 titles, all in Latin, noting that "those written in Greek were lost." The bibliography is presented chronologically. We mention here some of them, as follows: *Despre spectacole* (196); *Despre idolatrie* (196/197); *Despre îmbrăcămintea femeilor* (196/197); *Către neamuri* (197); *Împotriva iudeilor* (197); *Către martiri* (197); *Cuvânt de apărare – Apologeticum* (197); *Despre mântuirea sufletului* (198); *Despre botez* (198/203); *Despre rugăciune* (198/203); *Despre pocăință* (203); *Despre răbdare* (198/203); *Despre respingerea ereticilor* (203); *Împotriva lui Hermogene* (204); *Despre Trupul lui Hristos* (206); *Împotriva valentinienilor* (206-207); *Despre suflet* (206/207); *Despre învierea morților* (206/207); *Împotriva lui Marcion* (207/207); *Împotriva lui Praxes* (210-211) etc. Stylianos Papadopoulos, *Introducere, Secolele II și III* (București: Editura Bizantină, 2006), 344-347.

“*Legal* thinking and *rhetoric* art together with sophistry, says Papadopoulos, are the main weapons of Tertullian. All his argumentation is legal-sophistic, since God has to be thought more as lawgiver and salvation as obedience (*salutaris disciplina*) towards God. To pagan she highlights the legal situation of Christians and their full legality within society. Tertullian broadly introduced judicial aspect, and legal thought in Latin theology.” As regards philosophy, he has a contemptuous attitude but does not entirely eliminate it from his arguments. He often uses ideas or concepts taken from the Stoic philosophy of Middle Platonism.

Theology generated by Tertullian covers several important chapters of doctrine, thus apologetically falling.<sup>8</sup> It is highly important to mention here his teaching about the dogma of the Holy Trinity, managing to identify the three hypostases into the existential unity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.<sup>9</sup> Following the example of St. Justin Martyr, Tertullian often uses the prophecies of Old Testament in his theological approach. In this way, he refers to the oneness of God and thus he fights against Marcion’s heresy.<sup>10</sup> “If God is all-powerful, eternal, unborn, undone, without beginning and end, then He must necessarily be One.”<sup>11</sup> Confronting Hermogenes, he proved that “God is not the cause of evil”, showing that if “he is One, then the attribute of eternity can only be owned by One”<sup>12</sup>, and that therefore God is not responsible for the evil in the world”<sup>13</sup>. Against Valentinus the Gnostic’s heresy, which supported the theory of pleromatic emanationism in divinity, Tertullian wrote a satire.<sup>14</sup> Very important is also his Christology, stating that: “Wisdom and Logos are broadly speaking one and the same: Wisdom came from the Father before creation, but it also experienced and another rise to

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<sup>8</sup> In the context of his practical skills, his ability to theologize was considered as being inferior to his magisterial, elocutionary, philosophical and even pen craft attributes. He did not excel in presenting systematic theology, but being rather a supple debater, correcting through his writings and unrighteous opinions and law errors that Christianity faced.

<sup>9</sup> Tertullian is the second Christian apologist, after Theophilus of Antioch, who uses the term “Trinity” (gr.: *Tryas*). Moreover, he “distinguishes persons in the unitary Godhead and recognizes the reality of united natures of Christ. The person (*persona*) expresses the unity of being (*substantia*), and the divine nature of Christ does not make the human one vanishes away” (Papadopoulos, *Patrology*, vol. I, 342).

<sup>10</sup> The heretic Marcion (c. 100-160) promoted a theology characterized by Gnostic influences, trying to point out the difference between the God of the Old Law, who was considered evil and cruel and the One of the New Testament, who was considered full of love and compassion. On these grounds he rejected the Old Law wholly; he even made his point directly on the text of the Gospels (Rus, *Dicționar enciclopedic*, 538-540).

<sup>11</sup> *Împotriva lui Marcion* 1.3.2.

<sup>12</sup> *Împotriva lui Hermogene*, 16. 1-3.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 16. 3-4.

<sup>14</sup> Goffrey D. Dunn, “Tertullian,” in *The Early Church Fathers* (London and New York, 2004), 24.

become Logos. Son's providence was achieved through *flowing* from the spring, which is the Father, which is part of (not all) being"<sup>15</sup>. As about the Birth, Death and Resurrection of Christ the Saviour, Tertullian claims that they are real and actual events, "things that must be necessarily believed, precisely because they are absurd."<sup>16</sup>

Carthaginian theologian's best known apologetic work remains undoubtedly *Apologeticum*. This true "Word of defence" was written in 197/198, divided into 50 chapters. The paper is a synthesis of valuable apologetic arguments used in favour of Christians. The main style it was written into the paper, took into considers "the denial of the allegations according to which Christians threatened the prestige of the state, or pagan deities and authority (Majesty) of the Emperor"<sup>17</sup>. In this paper, Tertullian uses his practical knowledge. Although he was a very good knower of doctrinal teachings, being called as "the father of orthodox Christology"<sup>18</sup> in *Apologeticum* he relies more on a *realistic interpretation*.<sup>19</sup> He thus, proves the fact that "Christianity is no new philosophy, since it is not just mere speculation about the origin of man, but divine revelation, namely the truth revealed by God"<sup>20</sup>.

First, he exposes "*unjust hatred*" that the Romanian state had against the name of Christian. "This unfairness, says the great apologist is at once exaggerated and refuted by the same plea that seems to excuse it, namely ignorance. When therefore men hate because they do not know the character of what they hate, what is to hinder the thing hated from being of the sort they ought not to hate?"<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, Tertullian reveals deprivation of the right to defense; a right Christians were deprived of.<sup>22</sup> The sentence given upon them springs "out of necessity" self-imposing penalty. This attitude was far beyond the imperfectability of so-called "procedural error" this being the reason why the Carthaginian father answers back toughly against state authority: "The Christian alone may not be sought out, but he may be brought into court, as if searching out had any other object than prosecution!"<sup>23</sup> Tertullian grounds his approach by offering the

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<sup>15</sup> Papadopoulos, *Patrologie*, vol. I, 342.

<sup>16</sup> I.G. Coman, *Tertullian, Sabia lui Hristos. Sugestii pentru o metodică a misiunii creștine moderne* (București, 1939), 7.

<sup>17</sup> Papadopoulos, *Patrologie*, vol. I, 345.

<sup>18</sup> C. de Lisle Shortt, *The Influence of Philosophy on the Mind of Tertullian* (London, 1933), 100.

<sup>19</sup> Coman, *Tertullian, Sabia lui Hristos*, 17.

<sup>20</sup> Rus, *Dicționar enciclopedic*, 835.

<sup>21</sup> Tertullian, *Apologeticum*, I, 4, Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești 3 (București: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1981), 38.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 1-4.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 9.

counterexamples of the Roman emperors who adopted friendly attitude towards Christians.<sup>24</sup>

After clearing out the issue of these deliberateness errors, Tertullian “*unleashes*” his apology’s confessing side. He points out the fact that beyond the ungrounded accusations made to Christians by the fact that they “do not honour pagan gods” and do not “worship the emperor” is the testimony of cosmological reality. Logically, following the demonstrations reinforced by scholars as Pythagoras or Plato, Tertullian justifies himself by the fact that Christians have placed above all *their faith in the Supreme and Eternal Creator*. Through Him was “ordered, conceived and harmonized” the whole creation.<sup>25</sup>

“The object of our worship, says Tertullian, is *one God*, who through the word by which he commanded (that they should exist), the reason by which he arranged them, the power by which he could (carry out his will), fashioned out of nothing all this mass with all its apparatus of elements, bodies and spirits, for an ornament to his own greatness, whence it is that the Greeks also have applied the name *κόσμος, kosmos* (ornament) to the universe.”<sup>26</sup> In addition to those stated, he shows that under the testimony of natural revelation the truth of Holy Scripture is revealed to unbelievers. This understanding, from the outside to inside, became useful to those who recognized in the external environment the order that had been praised earlier by the nations’ wise people.<sup>27</sup>

By virtue of these demonstrations, Tertullian approaches the objective, really proving out the fact that “*Christ is God*.”<sup>28</sup> He is also *the Logos*, meaning “*The word, reason and His power*,” “the Son of God has his mother as the result of no unchastely; even she, whom he seems to have (for mother), had not married...” Moreover, the author highlights the *personal and existential relation between the*

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<sup>24</sup> In the year 174, in one of his campaigns, the emperor Marcus Aurelius passed through difficult times with his army, all enduring thirsty in the north of the Danube in Germany. They were all very close to death, but due to the prayers of Christians serving as soldiers, a big storm occurred and it started raining. Furthermore, the lightning that showed in the sky frightened so badly the enemies that they all fled. Since then, the emperor “never persecuted Christians, but ordained, more of them in his legions.” Tertullian even speaks of an annotation of the Roman emperor, where he himself accounts this great miracle. “Thus, although he did not openly abolish punishment incurred by such men, yet in another way he openly neutralized it, adding also a condemnation, and indeed a more shocking one, for their prosecutors.” (*Apologeticum*, V, 6). Along with the example of Marcus Aurelius, Tertullian also mentions Tiberius, who, after receiving a letter from Pilate, changed his initial attitude towards Christians, but there are also mentioned names as Trajan, Hadrian, Pius or Verus. See Jeremy Collier, *The Mediations of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus* (London: Griffith Faran & Co, 1931), XI.

<sup>25</sup> Tertullian, *Apologeticum*, XI, 4-5.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, XVII, 1.

<sup>27</sup> This is the reason why, “we should have to unlock the archives even of the most ancient peoples, the Egyptians, the Chaldeans, the Phoenicians” (*ibid.*, XIX, 5).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, XXI, 3.

*Son and His Father* without any clear difference within internal relation, which thus aims at unity of being. "Therefore, says Tertullian, we also ascribe Spirit as its true essence to word and reason and likewise to power, by which we have proclaimed that God has constructed everything, in which are present both word when declaring and reason when arranging and power when accomplishing. We have learnt that this Spirit came forth from God and by this forth-coming is begotten and has therefore been called Son of God and God from unity of nature. For Spirit is also God."<sup>29</sup>

A special place is reserved to *the arguments meant "to worship the emperor"* as one of the main accusations made against Christians was that "of their refusal to bring sacrifices" to him. In this respect, Tertullian argues that the sacrifices of Christians are much higher and more precious than those made by pagan priests on their idols' altars. But Christians pray "on behalf of the safety of the emperors a God who is everlasting, a God who is real, a God who is living, whom even the emperors themselves prefer should be propitious to them beyond all others. They know who gave them empire, they know, as human beings, who gave them life also; they feel that he is the only God, in whose power alone they are".<sup>30</sup> Therefore, the whole work of the Carthaginian apologists "a battle for the truth, in danger of death." His whole professing struggle "is victory, a victory that carries with it both the glory, of pleasing God, and the spoil, which is eternal life... therefore, he states, we have conquered, when we are killed. Thus we escape, when we are convicted."<sup>31</sup>

The context of its emergence and the contribution brought to the professing work of the Church, transformed Tertullian into a genuine pioneer. By his way of theologizing and polemic approach and he provided effective solutions in the fight against heresies, and by his apologetic attitude he threw light in the relation with society and that time's culture. Moreover, the language of his writing becomes a veritable vehicle for western theology. Therefore, the image of Tertullian remains representative to the majority of Latin apologists. Starting from Minucius Felix, St. Cyprian, Lactantius, Novatian, Jerome, to Christian poets Augustine and Vincent de Lerin, to the Medieval period, the Renaissance or the Reformation, Tertullian has always been present due to his ideas.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., XXI, 9-11.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., XXX, 1.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., L, 2-3.

<sup>32</sup> Tertullian professing work that enriched the service of the Church was primarily "very precise, its content strengthening the connecting ring of Christian faith and thus preparing the minds for fair judgment of those happened. For this reason, its influence in Christian circles is so obvious, even gaining great privilege to be translated into Greek" (John B. Delaunay, *Tertullian and his Apologetics. A Study of Early Christian Thought*, (University Press, 1914), 128.

## Marcus Minucius Felix

The second important name in the list of Latin apologists of the first centuries is *Marcus Minucius Felix*. A contemporary of Tertullian,<sup>33</sup> Jerome tells us that he “was a distinguished advocate of Rome, wrote a dialogue representing a discussion between a Christian and a Gentile, which is entitled *Octavius*.”<sup>34</sup> In turn, Lactantius places him “among the leading apologists of Christianity.”<sup>35</sup> In his youth he acquired quite great cultivation, being extremely familiar with the teachings of ancient philosophers, their work being his source of inspiration most often.

The composition of his work is in fact an apologetic assessment of contemporary realities, written in the key of Platonic dialogues. It seems that an essential contribution in his professing work was Tertullian’s influence<sup>36</sup> Differences in thinking and approach are nevertheless more than visible. Since the “great African paid no value to pagan religion and philosophy pagan, showing only great intransigence and hostility in relation to the past violently manifested in his many writings, Minucius Felix, he himself convinced that Christianity is something new, has a more conciliatory attitude towards paganism, demonstrating absolute superiority in all aspects of the new religion, so despised and persecuted over the old one.”<sup>37</sup> His most notable work is *Octavius*, although patrologists do not unanimously agree on its paternity issue. However, social and religious context of the capital of the Roman Empire and especially the interaction between Rome and the African Christianity reinforce Minucius Felix as its author.<sup>38</sup> It is structured as a dialogue which, according to some opinions, it would have been imaginary.

The three characters who appear here are: the author, Q. Caecilius Natalis and Octavius Januaris. The tone and the content of the paper used makes it special compared to the other apologetic writings of that time. This time, the recipients are no longer the Roman emperor, senators or people, but “educated men of letters and

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<sup>33</sup> His day of birth and death remained uncertain. It is known only the fact that the two met each other. The reason for conversion would have also been the suffering that Christians unjustly had to put up with the state. As a lawyer, it seems that Minucius saw many trials, after which Christians were obliged to find their right in the governors’ torture, in the arenas, in fighting with beasts or fire.

<sup>34</sup> Ieronim, *Despre bărbații iluștri*, LVIII, 52.

<sup>35</sup> Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* 5, 1, 21.

<sup>36</sup> There is indeed a strong parallelism between many quotations from Octavius and Tertullian’s works: *Apologeticum*, *Ad nationes*, *De anima* or *De corona*. Similarity goes beyond some words, ideas, expressions or arguments found at both apologists. We are talking here is about an entire reasoning, which is unlikely to be imagined fortuit. E. Amann, “Minucius Felix,” in *Dictionnaire de Theologie Chatolique*, vol. 10 B, 96.

<sup>37</sup> Bodogae, *Apologeți de limbă latină*, 343.

<sup>38</sup> W.C.A. Kerr, *Minucius Felix* (William Heinemann LTD: Chambridge, Massachusetts, 1957), 304.



arts, friends of wisdom and eloquence... The plan of the apology is very simple: the author, Marcus Minucius Felix, departs from Rome with two friends for a walk on the beach at Ostia, Octavius Januarius and the other one, the pagan Caecilius Natalis. After a sharp and long discussion on the value of the two religions, chaired by the author, the pagan converts himself.”<sup>39</sup>

Inspired by the style of the works of Cicero (*De natura deorum*), Minucius Felix’s apology first distinguishes by the complex antithesis between Christianity and paganism. His thought “impresses at the level of secular philosophy” skilfully valuing the most important sources of profane literature. The ideas of Plato, the Stoics, Cicero or Seneca are reflected in the pages of the Latin apologist. All the seare presented at the expense of Sacred Scripture, which “is completely absent from work.” “Central ideas of the work, says Stylianos Papadopoulos, monotheism and resurrection of the dead, are supported by logical and philosophical arguments. Based on this information, *Minucius must be considered as a religious philosopher and not as a Christian theologian.*”<sup>40</sup>

Based on these considerations, we will further try to identify the main apologetic coordinates of his thought, as they appear in his work, *Octavius*. Thus, in the first instance, after presenting the tradition and pagan rituals, *Caecilius* considers Christian religion as something impossible to prove in the way of actual realities. “Where is the one God, solitary, desolate, whom no free people, no kingdoms, and not even Roman superstition, have known? The lonely and miserable nationality of the Jews worshipped one God, and one peculiar to itself; but they worshipped him openly, with temples, with altars, with victims, and with ceremonies; and he has so little force or power, that he is enslaved, with his own special nation, to the Roman deities.”<sup>41</sup>

Under this tangible judgment, *Caecilius* will also attack the signs of God’s existence, showing that the universe “cannot overturn, breaking the sky and connection of all elements”.<sup>42</sup> In order to assert his ideas, *Caecilius* denies the possibility of a Christian philosophy. But all his statements against Christianity are generated by ignorance, and not by “cunning or malevolence,” being clarified one by one by *Octavius*. First, he points out the fact that truth must first rise in any discussion. He also emphasizes the simplicity by which Christian faith is illustrated. In this way, “the more unskilled the discourse, the more evident the reasoning, since it is not coloured by the pomp of eloquence and grace; but as it is, it is sustained by the rule of right.”<sup>43</sup> Simplicity praised by Octavius is immediately

<sup>39</sup> Bodogae, *Apologeți de limbă latină*, 345.

<sup>40</sup> Papadopoulos, *Patrologie*, vol. I, 315.

<sup>41</sup> *Octavius*, X, 3-4.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, XI, 1.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, XVI, 6.

implied by simple logical comparisons about the existence of human nature." Man, he asks rhetorically, is he whether collected together from the elements, or harmoniously formed of atoms, or rather made, formed, and animated by God? And it is this very thing which we cannot seek out and investigate without inquiry into the universe; since things are so coherent, so linked and associated together, that unless you diligently examine into the nature of divinity, you must be ignorant of that of humanity."<sup>44</sup> Due to this note, Octavius gets his interlocutor closer to *the divine origin of all existence*, which is simpler to be understood in its spiritual reality. Behold the heaven itself, how broadly it is expanded, how rapidly it is whirled around, either as it is distinguished in the night by its stars, or as it is lightened in the day by the sun, and you will know at once how the marvellous and divine balance of the Supreme Governor is engaged therein!"<sup>45</sup>

In order to point out God's greatness and His familiarity with our lives, Octavius relies on arguments of the works of great ancient philosophers. Thus Maro compares God with "the spirit within nourishes, and the mind infused stirs the heaven and the earth, and the other members of the world. Thence arises the race of men and of cattle, and every other kind of animal." He also refers to ideas and concepts of the works of Thales of Miletus, Anaximenes, Diogenes of Apollonia, Socrates, Pythagoras, Xenophon etc. When it is Plato's turn, Octavius states that "his discourse would be altogether heavenly, if it were not occasionally fouled by a mixture of merely civil belief. Therefore in his *Timaios* Plato's God is by His very name the parent of the world, the artificer of the soul, the fabricator of heavenly and earthly things, whom both to discover he declares is difficult, on account of His excessive and incredible power; and when you have discovered Him, impossible to speak of in public."<sup>46</sup>

The last chapter of the work, the fortieth, brings Caecilius' conversion that recognizes the superiority of the arguments of pagan religion in relation to the paganism it exercises. As a result, he converts, confessing that "*I both confess concerning providence, and I yield to God; and I agree concerning the sincerity of the way of life which is now mine.*"<sup>47</sup>

### St Cyprianus

St. Cyprian "is eminently the first Father and teacher that the Western Church had. If Tertullian is the first great theologian of the Latin West, St. Cyprian is its first Orthodox theologian, its first bishop theologian and its first martyr

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., XVII, 1-2.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., XVII, 5.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., XIX, 14.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., XL, 2.

bishop".<sup>48</sup> His full name *Caecilius Cyprianus quiet Thascius*<sup>49</sup>, the Holy Father was born between 200-210, his parents were pagans. He received Christian baptism in 245, having already assimilated great bringing up and already practicing as a teacher of rhetoric. Although he has never met Tertullian personally, he greatly admired him, considering him as his master for issues regarding theology. He first served as a priest in Carthage and was ordained shortly after baptism. In 248/249, St. Cyprian was appointed bishop of the region, being acknowledged "by the voice of the people and against a group of elderly priests, including one called Novatus". In the period of his service as a bishop he passed through numerous challenges, enduring alongside his flock the torture of Decius's (250) and Valerian's persecution.

The Holy Father took a stand in order to clear up the issue of those who had left the Church during these persecutions (*Lapsi*). In exchange for their readmission into the ecclesial community, St. Cyprian asks them to do penance. Another issue for which he finds solution, but which will temporarily take him out from the authority of Rome, is that of "the readmission of the heretics into the Church". The question was whether their baptism kept its significance or not. "St. Cyprian and the synods convoked on this occasion in Carthage (251 and 252) are in favour for the invalidation of heretical baptism. This view was also shared by the Eastern bishops, headed by Firmilian of Caesarea".<sup>50</sup> The rich professing work of the Holy Father is appalled by the crown of martyrdom, being beheaded on September 14<sup>th</sup>, 258.<sup>51</sup> Testimonies about his life and martyrdom are to be found in works as: *Acta Proconsularia, Vita Caecilii Cyprianis*, the notations of Jerome in *De viris illustribus* (67), as well as in his works and especially, his letters.<sup>52</sup>

Holy Father's ideas were mainly focused on Scripture and secondly on Tertullian's work. These two coordinates were "his support and strength in his march towards death: Yes magistrum – he said, when he asked for one of the

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<sup>48</sup> Papadoupulos, *Patrologie*, vol. I, 405.

<sup>49</sup> His first name, Caecilius, is borrowed from his mentor and confessor, the pious priest Caecilius of Carthage thanks to whom he converted to Christianity. "First name Thascius seems to illustrate Punic local idiom (lexical clack) of Latin Caprianus (from caper / goat), modification of Cyprian (from the island Cyprus)". See Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisori* (București: Sofia, 2011), 6.

<sup>50</sup> Constantin Băjău, „Constituția Bisericii în opera Sfântului Ciprian al Cartaginei,” *Analele Universității din Craiova, Seria „Teologie”* 5 (2000): 117.

<sup>51</sup> Rus, *Dicționar enciclopedic*, 139-140.

<sup>52</sup> In a very thorough study, carried out after 1700 years from the martyrdom of St. Cyprian, father Professor Ioan G. Coman gives details about the content of these works, at the same time reminding the fact that "the appreciation of some patristic writers or some contemporary Christians such as Firmilian of Caesarea Pontus, Cornelius of Rome, Caldonius, Lucius and other of his correspondents is relative and it is in no way highly conclusive" (Ioan G. Coman, „Personalitatea Sf. Ciprian,” *Studii Teologice* (1959): 256.

books of one his great ancestors needed for his daily reading, together with the Holy Scripture”.<sup>53</sup> He had also great knowledge of Latin profane literature, which he often used in *his apologies*. His written work includes treaties or tracts, homilies, polemical works and letters.<sup>54</sup> We will further analyse only his apologetic writings. The first work falling into this category, according to J. Tixeront’s catalogue entitled *Ad Donatum* (“To Donatus”) was probably written shortly after his conversion (246). St. Cyprian presents here, starting from his own experience, man’s moral transformation through Holy Baptism and direct cooperation with the grace of the Holy Spirit. *Ad Demetrianum* or “To Demetrius” (252) displays the attitude of the Holy Father to a pagan’s blasphemies. He blames the Christians for all the bad things that were happening in the world (famine, pestilence, war, drought).<sup>55</sup>

His arguments, greatly based on word of the Holy Scripture show that “unbelief is the cause of all evils, surely bringing upon the wrath of God.” Another apologetic paper, in the list of the work of the Holy Father, is *Quod idola nonsint Dii* (“That idols are not gods”). Most likely written before 250, the paper gets its inspiration from Tertullian’s *Apologeticum*. Of a questionable paternity, the apology toughly argues against the danger of idolatry, considering Christianity as a religion of genuine value, the only vehicle for spreading the truth. The Fourth notation of the Holy Father following this direction is *Testimonia ad Quirindum* (249-260). It is an apologetic trilogy of “great importance for the history of the text of Scripture, since it bears special reference to a gathering of biblical passages on the behaviour of Jews to the Lord, Christology (the first two books) and Christians’ moral life (the third book)”. The last apologetic work according to J. Tixeront’s catalog, is *Ad Fortunatum* (“To Fortunatus”) (257). Grounded on a scriptural basis thoroughly argued, the author succeeds, with the help of this paper in strengthening the Christians who were suffering during persecutions, explaining the invaluable benefit of martyrdom and of Christ’s servicing to blood.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Nicolae Chițescu, “Studiu introductiv,” in Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Despre unitatea Bisericii universale. Despre condiția muritoare a omului* (București: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 2013), 11.

<sup>54</sup> See the catalogue of his works at Pontius deacon *Vita Cypriani*, VII; PL, t 3, col. 1487-1488; Momensen, *Hermes*, 1886, t. XXI, 142; Sylianos Papadopoulos chronologically structures the work of the Holy Father, identifying as its specific “the classic and original style of the Latin orators”, the beauty of speech, the tone, which is “neat, calm, warm and rhymed”. Therefore, there are mentioned 16 titles (see *Patrologie*, vol. I, 413-416).

<sup>55</sup> At that time Carthage was going through a tough plague regarded as “the punishment for the deeds of Christians”, Rus, *Dicționar enciclopedic*, 140.

<sup>56</sup> J. Tixeront, *A Handbook of Patrology* (London: B. Herder Book Co., 1923), 121-122; Papadopoulos, *Patrologie*, vol. I, 413-415.

As a theologian he made himself remarked due to his significant contribution in the development of the ecclesiological concept of “*catholicity*”. Papadopoulos outlines the main coordinates of his theology visible and applied at an apologetic and professing level. “1. Perseverance in Tradition and clear dissociation between truth and religious custom. 2. Presentation of his thought as questioning of the Holy Scripture and using exceptionally low extra-church thought that, despite this, he had studied and known very well. 3. Guiding and enlightening the Holy Spirit.”<sup>57</sup> Defined by these coordinates, St. Cyprian stands out as one of the greatest theologians of the Christian West. Catholic theologian Joseph Tixeront does not place him among speculative theologians, considering him to be more a man of practical experience, “a bishop like St. Ambrose or St. Leon...get himself involved in doctrinal issues as far as people’s training demanded, watching over all in order to preserve the peace of their mind, since he thought that all soul’s energies must be directed towards inner change.

Moreover, an admirer and disciple of Tertullian, being as calm and balanced as intemperate his master was. His eloquence bearing a toga, had always solemn and professing character. Furthermore, due to his calm and self-control that he always displayed, the influence he had over his countrymen and the whole Church was overwhelming. If the chair of Rome was «*the chair of Peter*», also that of Carthage was in the fourth century, «*Cyprian’s chair*». This spirit characteristic to Rome as well as to the whole West multiplied within this practical genius and his extraordinary practical talent to lead the believer”.<sup>58</sup>

In apologetic terms, St. Cyprian’s contribution is invaluable. Ideas on moral, pastoral, anthropology and Christian ontology are complemented by competent dogmatic elaborations, which provide examples and practical solutions, worthy to be followed in a time of intense ague and social convulsion. It is noted, however, and is to be recorded his attitude towards the “*unity of the Catholic Church*.” Thus, his paper *De Catholicae Ecclesiae Unitate* offers still up to the present day answers and clarifications on issues of ecumenical and inter-religious order.<sup>59</sup> Holy father’ attitude could be generally characterized as uncompromising,

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<sup>57</sup> Papadopoulos, *Patrologie*, 406. Letters: 11, 3; 16, 4; 36, 1-2, 17-19; 57 etc.

<sup>58</sup> J. Tixeront, *History of Dogmas*, vol. I (Baden: St. Luis and Freiburg 1910), 356-357.

<sup>59</sup> During the Holy Father’s pastoring, the persecutions against Christians caused temporary split between Latin Churches. Rome and North Africa, where there was also Carthage’s Episcopal Chair, had reached consensus over certain doctrinal points, on the readmission “of the fallen ones.” Thus, in compliance with the old canons, “the apostates were excluded from the Church and they could be readmitted only after the repentance established by the hierarchy. But it was sought out a way to smooth the situation of those who had fallen from the faith by asking guarantees of their faith - or, according to some, based upon the Western principle of virtues’ reversibility - by the confessors, i.e. by those who, risking their lives, had confessed Christ before the pagan authorities, but had managed to remain alive only after imprisonment, torment, mutilation,

fighting against any form of schism and heresy, in which he saw the main dangers and most direct threats to the unity of ecclesial corpus. He is absolutely convinced that “*the Church, of whose representative he is, is the only true and it brings together only the righteous ones. As it regards the fallen, they have lost their souls even from this life.*”<sup>60</sup>

One of the main ideas of St. Cyprian’s work “On the unity of the Church” is given by the thorough scriptural argumentation, the images and symbols used as examples to clarify apologetic issues. His continuous professing attitude showing that it is the main positive influence that he has upon his believers. No matter what happens, the Christian must always be vigilant and hardworking in order to protect the Church by its enemies. “For it is not persecution alone that is to be feared; nor those things which advance by open attack to overwhelm and cast down the servants of God, says the Holy father.

Caution is easier where danger is manifest, and the mind is prepared beforehand for the contest when the adversary avows himself. The enemy is more to be feared and to be guarded against, when he creeps on us secretly; when, deceiving by the appearance of peace, he steals forward by hidden approaches, whence also he has received the name of the Serpent.”<sup>61</sup> He also asks from his believers to be steadfast *in the work of faith* by “*protecting the commandments of faith*” and the fulfilment of sacred teachings that the Lord shared by tradition. In this regard, the Holy Father points out the necessity of persevering in truth, the only sure guarantee of acquiring eternal life. “We ought therefore to stand fast on His words, to learn and do whatever He both taught and did.

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etc. The confessors offering to the fallen ones «a note of reconciliation» (*libellus pacis*), by which they were readmitted into the church. The abuses of this way of returning to Church committed by the apostates became scandalous for the true Christians: some confessors, pushed by mercy, interest or contempt towards the rules of the Church, did not make any difference between the apostates and did not give any importance to the hierarchs. St. Cyprian reminds of canonical tradition and the limit to which the mercy for the apostates can be extended, confessors and hierarchs’ right in this complex process. Hereafter, there followed a serious conflict between him and the community of believers on the one hand and some apostates and some confessors on the other. For neither all apostates always accepted a long and harsh public repentance as a condition of their readmission within the churches, nor the confessors and sometimes even the priests accepted the blame of having received too easily again those who had rejected Christ when facing of death.” In this context, given the inclination to split, created by some priests, the Holy Father’s approach permanently focused upon the unity of the Church. This present paper, written on this very occasion, offers a generous apology on the attribute of catholicity. Its entire content is illustrated by images and biblical symbols, wisely organized by the great hierarch in the context of times’ challenges (Chițescu, *Apologeți de limbă latină*, 428-429).

<sup>60</sup> Băjău, “Constituția Bisericii în opera Sfântului Ciprian al Cartaginei,” 118.

<sup>61</sup> Chițescu, *Apologeți de limbă latină*, 434.

But how can a man say that he believes in Christ, who does not do what Christ commanded him to do? Or whence shall he attain to the reward of faith, who will not keep the faith of the commandment? He must of necessity waver and wander; and, caught away by a spirit of error; like dust which is shaken by the wind, be blown about; *and he will make no advance in his walk towards salvation, because he does not keep the truth of the way of salvation.*"<sup>62</sup>

Chapter IV of the paper details the coordinates which define the "unity of the Church." "Faith stone" about which Christ the Saviour speaks in His conversation with the apostle Peter<sup>63</sup>, is the cornerstone of this synergistic work. Lord has thus ordained "the origin of that unity, as beginning from one. Assuredly the rest of the apostles were also the same as was Peter, endowed with a like partnership both of honour and power; but the beginning proceeds from unity. Which one Church, also, the Holy Spirit in the Song of Songs designated in the person of our Lord."<sup>64</sup> St. Cyprian's text was used by Roman Catholics since the Middle Ages, as ground for papal primacy. The next chapter greatly throws daylight upon this issue, the Holy Father characterizing the Bishopric (College of Bishops) as "one, each part of which is held by each one for the whole... As there are many rays of the sun, but one light; and many branches of a tree, but one strength based in its tenacious root".<sup>65</sup> *Faithfulness* is an attribute, which again the Carthaginian bishop refers to for the benefit of the Church's unity. This line of service can be only one, in the words of Jesus Christ: "*He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me, scatters.*" "This sacrament of unity, this bond of a concord inseparably cohering" is alike "*the coat of the Lord, Jesus Christ*" since "it is not at all divided nor cut, but is received as an entire garment, and is possessed as an uninjured and undivided robe by those who cast lots concerning Christ's garment, who should rather put on Christ."<sup>66</sup>

*Leaving this unit*, or better said deserting it, is the cause that leads to heresy. Lord allows these things, allowing the primary gift of freedom and at the same time wanting to witness "the sound faith of those that are approved may shine forth with manifest light".<sup>67</sup> Conception of falsehood preaching, those deceived by heretics self-excluded from the church community. "Although there can be no other baptism but one, they think that they can baptize; although they

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 435.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Mt. 16: 18-19: "And I say unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. "

<sup>64</sup> Chițescu, *Apologeti de limbă latină*, 437.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 438.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 439.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 441.

forsake the fountain of life, they promise the grace of living and saving water. Men are not washed among them, but rather are made foul; nor are sins purged away, but are even accumulated. Such a nativity does not generate sons to God, but to the devil. By a falsehood they are born, and they do not receive the promises of truth. Begotten of perfidy, they lose the grace of faith. *They cannot attain to the reward of peace, since they have broken the Lord's peace with the madness of discord.*<sup>68</sup>

St. Cyprian furthermore illustrates how inexpiable this sin is, since "is not even purged by suffering. *He cannot be a martyr who is not in the Church*; he cannot attain unto the kingdom who forsakes that which shall reign there."<sup>69</sup> In order to illustrate how serious the consequences for those who leave the Church are, the Holy Father used three examples from the Old Testament *Korah, Dathan and Abiram* are the ones "who endeavoured to claim to themselves the power of sacrificing in opposition to Moses and Aaron the priest, underwent immediate punishment for their attempts. The earth, breaking its fastenings, gaped open into a deep gulf, and the cleft of the receding ground swallowed up the men standing and living."<sup>70</sup> In the last part of his work (chap. XXI-XXII), the Holy Father criticizes "spiritual weaknesses and *confessors'* breaking rules."<sup>71</sup>

St. Cyprian of Carthage is also the author of the famous phrase: "extra Ecclesiam nulla salus" ("there is no salvation outside the Church").<sup>72</sup> In their deep dogmatic content, Carthaginian bishop's words still generate up to today ideological disputes about "the identification of gifted boundaries of the Church with its canonical ones". Thus, there are two clear directions regarding the practical manifestation of ecclesial life.

Given this situation, since "Eastern Church remained faithful to the thought of St. Cyprian (focusing on the importance of unity at the expense of schism), Western churches have followed the teaching of St. Augustine (who made the difference between the canonical boundaries of the Church and the gifted ones, that those who no longer found themselves within the canonical boundaries of the Church could still find themselves in terms of the gifted ones within the

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 442.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 444.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 447.

<sup>71</sup> These were "the Christians who did not give up to faith, but confessed the Lord with the price of their lives, but managed to remain alive, sometimes with injuries or with some body parts missing after persecution" (ibid., 448).

<sup>72</sup> This phrase is placed by the Holy Father in the context of absolute faithfulness through which the believer is connected to the ecclesiastic body. He calls the Church "The spouse of Christ, uncorrupted and pure" who "cannot be adulterous. She knows one home; she guards with chaste modesty the sanctity of one couch. She keeps us for God. She appoints the sons whom she has born for the kingdom. Whoever is separated from the Church and is joined to an adulteress, is separated from the promises of the Church; nor can he who forsakes the Church of Christ attain to the rewards of Christ. He is a stranger; he is profane; he is an enemy. He can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the Church for his mother" (ibid., 438-439).



Church in different ways).<sup>73</sup> Over time, the St. Cyprian's formulation was intensely debated during theological circles, eventually becoming the subject of debate within the Ecumenical Movement Churches.

Extremely quoted in the Western medium theological circles, the approach of the Metropolitan Kallistos Ware uses the principle of the divine hypostasis from a soteriological point of view. "*Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus.*" The whole meaning and absolute and direct interpretation of this aphorism lies in its tautology. Outside the Church there is no salvation, because salvation is in the Church. Could we say that someone who does not participate in the Church's life is truly doomed? Of course not. Much less if someone is in the Church he/she is certainly to be saved. As Augustine wisely noticed: «How many sheep that are in today, will be out, and how many wolves that are out now, will then be in!».<sup>74</sup> Since there is no separation between the «seen» and «unseen» church, in the same way there may be members of the Church who are not so visible, whose work is known only by God. If someone is to be saved, he/she must be a member of the Church but we could not say to what extent.<sup>75</sup>

But, for us Priest Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae's point of view is cherished as law, considering it more proper to bring light upon this issue. His Holiness starts from the idea that "the existence of Churches does not mean that God has exclusively limited work to them. The Son of God, he says, incarnated by assuming human nature which was not yet Church. The New Testament narrates cases when God work son humans directly, without the mediate preaching of the Apostles, i.e. the church (centurion in the Gospel, Saul, Cornelius etc.). St. Paul and general experience confirms the fact that that God exercises His judgment also upon those who do not belong to the Church when they do not fulfil His will written in their hearts (Romans 1, 18-22, 2, 14)".<sup>76</sup> There is absolutely out of question the possibility to expel those who do not live their life according to the canonical and sacramental rules generated by the Mystical Body of the Lord, represented by the Church.

St. Cyprian defends this identity and professes its necessity. He speaks in the context of pastoral needs he faces. Those who had left the Church and wished to return had to realize the value of sacramental things. For those who were now "*extra Ecclesiam*", he leaves room to come and be together in a real and practical way with the Saviour Christ. He also takes into account the dynamic of this

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<sup>73</sup> Adrian Boldișor, *Importanța și actualitatea dialogului interreligios pentru lumea contemporană: istorie, perspective, soluții* (Craiova: Editura Mitropoliei Olteniei, 2015), 168.

<sup>74</sup> „How many sheep there are without, how many wolves within!” / „Quam multae oves foris, quam multi lupi intus!” (Augustin, *Omilii la Ioan*, 45, 12).

<sup>75</sup> Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (Penguin Books: New York, 1993), 120.

<sup>76</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, „Coordonatele ecumenismului din punct de vedere orthodox,” *Ortodoxia* (1967): 527-528.

gracious work, but he increasingly emphasizes the soteriological purpose. Therefore, this is the reason why this issue theologically based still represents a hot debate today, when people talk more and more about “*the importance and necessity of interreligious dialogue for our contemporary world*”.<sup>77</sup>

### **Caecilius Firmianus Lactantius**

*Caecilius Firmianus Lactantius* (c. 240–c. 320) is also one of the greatest representatives of Latin patristic apologetics. A native of Roman Africa, he was born in the middle of the third century; his parents were pagan. He studied rhetoric in great detail, being the disciple of Arnobius the Elder of Sicca. He never succeeded in pleading in a forum as a lawyer or legal professional, having no oratorical talent. He became famous, however, as a teacher, teaching rhetoric first in Cartagena and then in Nicomedia in Bithynia, which was then the capital of the Eastern Empire, where he was personally requested by Diocletian. Conversion to Christianity happened in Bithynia, being impressed by the moil Christians had to endure. He personal describes this moment, which he considers to be crucial for his life and work. “*When I was teaching rhetorical learning in Bithynia, having been called there, and it had happened that at the same time the temple of God was overthrown, there were living at the same place two men who insulted the truth as it lay prostrate and overthrown.*”<sup>78</sup>

He describes here the beginning of persecution against Christians, pointing to the two pagans, a philosopher and a legal professional who had read anti-Christian imperial decree in the public square. “Thus pushed by their arrogant impiety but also by the power of truth itself – if not by God himself, apparently – I have got over me this mission, as by all the powers of my talent to reject the allegations against righteousness”.<sup>79</sup> Because of his beliefs, he was casted away from teaching. This state of being, “imposed or not, was the cause of some severe material deprivation since as a writer he did not earn much. His first writings of this period, after 303 were works of Christian Apologetics: «*On*

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<sup>77</sup> The continuous value of the interreligious dialogue was for theology “*the integrant part*” through which Christians were able to argue, “in the discussions with those of other faiths and ideologies, the attribute of man in as a possessor of “face” who tends to “likeness” of God, being created and living on earth as singular and free person. “The true dialogue occurs at the level of ultimate personal partners’ depth and as such it becomes a human phenomenon. He belongs to the person who opens to be understood and witnesses to make others understand. Challenged by some, ignored by others, often misunderstood and many times forgotten, dialogue is the centre of our Christian life with a past that is as old as our faith.” See Boldișor, *Importanța și actualitatea dialogului interreligios*, 7-8.

<sup>78</sup> *Divinae Institutionae* (DI), 5, 2, 2, 213.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 5, 4, 1, 217.

*the creating work of God*» (303 or 304, where his decision to become a Christian is not yet explained) and especially «*Divine institutes*» (304-313). Most likely, the crypto-Christian poem «*About phoenix*» was also written in this period (303-304).<sup>80</sup>

Later, probably around 310, Lactantius continued his activity as a teacher, being employed by St. Constantine the Great as a tutor for his son Crispus in Trier in Gaul.<sup>81</sup> During his stay in the court of the emperor he exercised an intense juridical influence. How profound this came to be it is not known, mere speculation being made in this regard. The day of his death remains uncertain. His fame was certainly in the context of his time, until the Renaissance. Jerome called him “the most eloquent man of his time, comparing him to wise Cicero; his treatises were summaries of Cicero’s thought ... Jerome also expressed his admiration to the way in which Lactantius used his eloquence, which was greatly illustrated by his work *Divine institutes*. In a letter addressed to Paulinus of Nola, it is still Jerome who says that Lactantius easily annihilated his opponents’ opinions (*facile aliena destruxit*) and unbendingly wrote against the pagans (*contra gentes scripsit fortissimo*)”.<sup>82</sup>

From *the work* of the great Latin apologist were preserved only the works with Christian value. All his writings primarily distinguish by the beauty of their linguistic style. The first apologetic writing was *De officio Dei* (“*Of the work of God*”, 303-304), meant for his trainee, Demetrianus. In all its 20 chapters, Lactantius takes a stand against some views of pagan philosophy, which disregarded “the human body and soul and drew conclusions based on their flaws against the theist-anthropocentric vision”.<sup>83</sup> As a counterbalance, he presents “the genesis of the human being, offering details about the soul and body, since the moment of its creation by God.”<sup>84</sup>

His work *On Divine Institutes*, composed of seven books, was completed in, in order to reject pagan philosophy attacks on Christianity. The topics developed here deals with the values of the Christian religion, righteousness, true worship and true faith, ending with the view on the eschatological Church’s doctrine. He makes quite little reference to the Holy Scripture, he brings up arguments from pagan prophecy and Hermetic literature. Biblical quotations that help him in his

<sup>80</sup> Dragoș Mârșanu, “Studiu introductiv,” in Lactanțiu, *Despre moartea persecutorilor* (București: Polirom, 2011), 21.

<sup>81</sup> This is the time when he starts works such as „*Despre Instituțiile Divine*” and „*Despre moartea persecutorilor*” (cca. 313-315), followed by „*Despre mânia*” (cca. 316) and by „*Epitumul Instituțiilor Divine*” (320). He intended to write works against the Jewish, but in the end he didn’t do it.

<sup>82</sup> Anthony Bowen and Peter Garnsey, “Introduction at Lactantius,” in *Divine Institutes* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 4.

<sup>83</sup> Voicu, *Patrologie*, vol. I, 280.

<sup>84</sup> Rus, *Dictionar enciclopedic*, 485.

argumentation are those used by Saint Cyprian in his work *De Testimonia*. As regarding the specificity of his work, it should be noted that in the first three books, he uses an emphatically polemical tone, concluding that “all polytheistic religions and pagan philosophies have the role to alienate man from God instead of getting him closer”. In the next four books, the author directly focuses on “the grounds of Christian faith.”<sup>85</sup>

In his writing *De ira Dei* (“*Of God’s wrath*”, approx. 314), Lactantius criticizes the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers’ critical actions to explain “divine wrath”. He thought that such thinking would vitiate Heaven and as such the existence of God, since due to his care for man Almighty “allows to be touched to the limit of anger against those who do evil. Who loves the righteous hates the wicked. Nobody loves life without hating death. God’s wrath can be tamed, although it remains eternal against those who eternally commit sins.”<sup>86</sup>

Lactantius’ post-persecutory apologetics is completed by his work *De mortibus persecutorum* (“*Of the death of the persecutors*” – DMP), written about 316. He started writing it in the East, Bithynia, and finished it in the West, Gaul. In this work, the Latin apologist describes actual situations and happenings of his time, intensely using the works of Suetonius, Decius, Valerian and Aurelia. “The selection of the persecutors, who came after Diocletian’s persecution, is sometimes difficult to understand since, it is obvious that their relationship with the Christians was not the only criterion taken into consideration. Lactantius’ senator-like attitude could generate a choice based on the relationship that the emperors had with the Senate; also, the local character of some of the persecutions could not meet, we can assume all the features characterizing DMP. Moreover, the real way the emperors died (violent or not) could make Lactantius choose between an emperor or, on the contrary, another”.<sup>87</sup> DMP is in fact a justification of the equity towards Christian truth in order to show its profundity compared to the vanities of the world. Lactantius’ professing thus, becomes a summary of what his predecessors had created, this time grounded upon the courage of deserved freedom.

In order to highlight *the specificity of his apologetics*, we will focus on the work *On Divine Institutes*, to which we previously referred to. This is the work where Lactantius offers a true synthesis of his theological thought, using the most important elements of his confession. His polemical attitude that pervades his work most often is complemented by honest arguments to the subjects he develops. The third book of his work thus provides relevant “criticism” on the

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<sup>85</sup> Claudiu T. Arieșan, *Studiu introductiv*, in Lactantius, *Instituțiile divine* (Timișoara: Editura Învierea, 2004), 9.

<sup>86</sup> Rus, *Dicționar enciclopedic*, 484-485.

<sup>87</sup> Mârșanu, *Studiu introductiv*, 29-30.

pagan philosophy transforming him into “the first Christian Latin writer that tries a direct, detailed and justified fight with it.”<sup>88</sup> He starts his approach by invoking the concept of truth, about which he says that it should be “more clear and without any embellishments, more powerful because it has sufficient ornament of itself.”<sup>89</sup> Since all realities bringing salvation pass by divine revelation “philosophical meditations are wandering”. These false realities need clarification “by arguments, that no one, induced by the honourable name of wisdom, or deceived by the splendour of empty eloquence, may prefer to give credence to human rather than to divine things.”<sup>90</sup> Beyond the pride of philosophers and scientists, Lactantius places humility and honest self-assessment, strengthened by faith in God. Therefore, he thinks that “wisdom consists in thinking neither that you know all things, which is the property of God; nor that you are ignorant of all things, which is the part of a beast.”<sup>91</sup> In the same line with philosophy’s deceiving, the Latin apologist also places those who have become its sharers. Unrelated to the spiritual ones, the thoughts of most of them do not seek either virtue or truth. “For knowledge is insufficient for the undertaking of that which is good and avoiding that which is evil, unless virtue also is added. For many of the philosophers, though they discussed the nature of good and evil things, yet from the compulsion of nature lived in a manner different from their discourse, because they were without virtue. *But virtue united with knowledge is wisdom.*”<sup>92</sup>

After carrying out harsh criticism of pagan philosophers, Lactantius highlights “the relation between wisdom and religion.” “*Chief good is in religion only*” as a unique and human characteristic chance to understand the divine.”<sup>93</sup> Where, then, is wisdom joined with religion? Lactantius asks himself. There, indeed, where the one God is worshipped, where life and every action is referred to one source, and to one supreme authority: in short, the teachers of wisdom are the same, who are also the priests of God.”<sup>94</sup> Following the same direction of thinking he concludes that “Christian wisdom is the only wisdom”. Since it managed to make people better, more virtuous, *sophia christiana* greatly exceeds *sophia prophana*. It hallows everybody and it is universally valid, thus becoming “*a force that perfects and saves the world.*”<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Coman, *Probleme de filosofie și literatură patristică*, 103.

<sup>89</sup> DI, Book III, 1, 3.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., Book III, 1, 11.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., Book III, 6, 14.

<sup>92</sup> Lactantius provides here the full list of philosophers who despised the value of virtue in their thoughts. He thus argues against the major theorists of moral philosophy Aristippus, Peripatetics and Stoics. They were all the promoters of a formal attitude on those whom they have influence upon. See Coman, *Probleme de filosofie și literatură patristică*, 108; DI, Cartea III, 8, 1-31.

<sup>93</sup> DI, Cartea III, 10, 1.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., Cartea IV, 3, 6-7.

<sup>95</sup> Coman, *Probleme de filosofie și literatură patristică*, 123.

Beyond the criticism made to pagan philosophy, Lactantius and does not forget to illustrate its positive elements. The great disadvantage of ancient *Sophia* is its truth spread by many currents, movements and conceptual approaches share. The whole character of truth can be found within the wholeness of philosophers. *Plato*, for example, "said that the world was made by God: the prophets speak the same; and the same is apparent from the *verses of the Sibyl*. They therefore are in error, who have said either that all things were produced of their own accord or from an assemblage of atoms; since so great a world, so adorned and of such magnitude, could neither have been made nor arranged and set in order without some most skilful author; and that very arrangement by which all things are perceived to be kept together and to be governed bespeaks an artificer with a most skilful mind... *The Stoics* say that the world, and all things which are in it, were made for the sake of men: the sacred writings teach us the same thing. Therefore, *Democritus* was in error, who thought that they were poured forth from the earth like worms, without any author or plan. For the reason of man's creation belongs to a divine mystery; and because he was unable to know this, he drew down man's life to nothing. *Aristo* asserted that men were born to the exercise of virtue; we are also reminded of and learn the same from the prophets... *Zeno* the Stoic taught that there were infernal regions, and that the abodes of the good were separated from the wicked; and that the former enjoyed peaceful and delightful regions, but that the latter suffered punishment in dark places, and in dreadful abysses of mire: the prophets show the same thing... As a conclusion, *the philosophers touched upon the whole truth, and every secret of our holy religion; but when others denied it, they were unable to defend that which they had found, because the system did not agree with the particulars; nor were they able to reduce to a summary those things which they had perceived to be true*".<sup>96</sup>

### **Instead of Conclusions: the actuality of Latin apologists**

In the knowledge of the Latin apologists the principal point of reflection is the Incarnated Logos. He is therefore the Mystic Ocean in which man receive his ontological blessing. The problem of interaction is also such actual in there works. In this concern, the actuality of their thinking is reflected today in our attitude against the secularization, globalization or atheism. With the help of their works he discovers today the sense of a spiritual approach with the rationality of creation. Only in this way we will be able to overcome the traps of an abstract theology that changes our conception about God and has no support for the spiritual effort of an ascetical experience in ourselves and in the creation. The

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<sup>96</sup> DI, Cartea VII, 7, 8-14.

Authentic Apologetic isn't satisfied to talk about God, but offers with anticipation the guaranty of a direct experience of God in our life, in the porous of spiritual and moral perfection in our entire nature.

Beyond the sensitive realities, contained in body and in the rational perception, the Holy Fathers placed the apophatically dimension of knowledge. In their kind of thinking, this real and new dimension of human life is activated through the act of confession. That is way the Latin apologetic can be useful part for the modern theology. Today we need to discover the values of: faith, truth, life, mercy and also the love of God and the real love for people. These are the examples that Latin apologist had promoted in their life and works. Therefore, in the virtue of his spiritual and confessional dimension, the Orthodox Apologetic has an apophatically purpose in the actual reality. It constitutes the living reception of truth, felled profoundly and directly in human's works, renewing not only the mind through different meanings, but also his life. In this way, the faith, like a view beyond the mind and understanding fulfil the spiritual man in his life and movement through the created world.

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