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JULIUS FIRMICUS MATERNUS: DE ERRORE
PROFANARUM RELIGIONUM. INTRODUCTION,
TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY

by

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ABSTRACT

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Julius Firmicus Maternus, author of De Errore Profanarum Religionum and Mathesis, is an important but oftentimes overlooked writer from the middle of the fourth century. He is known to us only from the two works which he left behind, the former being a Christian polemic against pagan religion and the latter, a work he wrote while still a pagan, being on the subject of astrology. It is his Christian work which is the topic of this thesis.

The middle of the fourth century when Firmicus wrote his work, A.D. 346-350, was a time of religious change and struggle in the Roman Empire. Within Christianity there were still troubles over the issues which precipitated the Council of Nicea. Outside of the church, paganism, though on the defensive, was still strong. Legislation had been passed against the pagan cults but it was not being enforced. So, about A.D. 348, a Roman Senator, Julius Firmicus Maternus, wrote a letter Concerning the Error of Profane

Religions to the Emperors Constans and Constantius.

The first section of this work, chapters 1-17, presents the various gods of antiquity. Firmicus ridicules these by depicting the crimes and immorality of the gods, by showing that the pagan gods were nothing more than personified elements or processes of nature. His arguments are basically those found in previous Christian writers. In the last portion of this work, chapters 18-29, Firmicus relates the "passwords" used in the mystery cults for recognition and transmission of secret knowledge. Most of these "passwords," which are preserved for us in Greek, contain motifs or words which are similar to motifs and words found in Christianity; e.g., rock, bridegroom, eucharist, redemption from suffering. Firmicus sees these as attempts of Satan to trick mortal man and keep him from believing in Christ. This, too, is a motif found in previous Christian writers. However, in spite of Firmicus' Christian polemic, most scholars believe that Firmicus is very valuable and reliable as a source for the pagan beliefs of late antiquity.

In addition to his value as a source of pagan religion, Firmicus is also very important to us for his statements concerning the relationship between church and state in the fourth century. In Firmicus, we find for the first time the articulation of the view that the Emperor is a servant of God whose purpose is to destroy paganism and all its visible forms. Firmicus also believes that forced conversion is beneficial to the individual. Although

the pagans may now object to the forced used on them, after they are saved, they will thank the Emperor for forcing them to embrace Christianity.

Firmicus' views take on added significance when one realizes that he was probably representative of popular Christianity. As a recent convert, Firmicus may well represent what the average, patriotic Christian layman of the fourth century believed should be the relationship between Christianity and the Roman Empire.

This thesis was begun as an attempt to present to the English reading student of late antiquity a faithful translation of an important, but usually overlooked, writer from the fourth century. In addition, I have included a small introduction and helpful commentary; however, it is always best to let the writer speak for himself.

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SIGNS USED IN THIS TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY:

1. [] lacuna, all suggestions are taken from Ziegler's text.
2. no reconstruction attempted.
3. ***** varying amounts of the text are missing, but reconstruction is fairly accurate.
4. A.N.F. Ante-Nicene Fathers
5. N.P.N.F. Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers
6. L.C.L. Loeb Classical Library
7. O.C.D. Oxford Classical Dictionary

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a product of two interests. The first was a desire to make available an English translation of Julius Firmicus Maternus' work, De Errore Profanarum Religionum. The second interest was to investigate a work which is valuable as a source for our knowledge of the pagan religions of late antiquity. The latter reason is especially appropriate in light of the recent interest in Religionsgeschichte aroused by the discoveries at Qumran and Nag Hammadi.

As a Christian writer, Firmicus Maternus is valuable because he wrote against the popular religion of his day.¹

G. van der Leuw emphasized this when he wrote

Finally all authorities agree in praising F. because he chose as the object of his attack neither dead mythology nor lofty theory, but (with insignificant exceptions) living religions.²

Julius Firmicus Maternus is known to us only through the

¹F. Cumont, Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism (Open Court Publishing Company, Chicago, 1911), pp. 203-204.

²G. van der Leuw, "The Symbola in Firmicus Maternus," Egyptian Religion (1933), Vol. 1, p. 63.

two works of antiquity which bear his name³; all ancient writers fail to mention him. There are two works from the middle of the fourth century which bear his name, Mathesis which was written before his conversion to Christianity, and De Errore Profanarum Religionum which was written after his conversion. The former is a work on astrology, the largest which we possess from antiquity. Rather than being original, it is a compendium of the astrology of his day. Book one of the Mathesis is an apology for astrology, while the last seven books are actual explanation of astrology. Although we cannot date the entire work with certainty, we do know, from internal evidence, that Book one was written between July 17, 334 and May 22, 337.⁴

His second work and the one of real interest to us in this thesis, was written approximately ten years after the first one. Once again, internal evidence leads us to the date. Firmicus' Christian work was addressed to the Emperors Constantius and Constans (20:7). Since Constans died in

³Another work (although it is anonymous) has been attributed to Firmicus. Firmicus' authorship was attached to Consulatationes Zacchaei et Apollonii by D. G. Morin. However, this thesis has been rejected by most. (O.C.D., p. 363)

⁴K. Ziegler, De Errore Profanarum Religionum, Einleitung und kritische Apparat, Hueber, Munchen, (1953), p. 5.

January 350, this would set the terminus ante quem, while the victorious expedition to Britain (28:6) in 343 would set the terminus post quem. Some have also suggested that Firmicus' statement that "the Persian desires have collapsed" (29:3) is a reference to the defeat of the Persians at Nisibis in 346.⁵

It is from these two works that we gain our knowledge of Firmicus' life. He was most likely born in the first part of the fourth century. His homeland was Sicily (Mathesis, 1 proem. 4), Syracuse in particular (Mathesis 6:30:26). In both works, Firmicus' name is followed by the letters V. C. (Vir Classissimus) which indicated senatorial rank. However, Gilbert Heuten has suggested that it could possibly mean Vir Consularis or provincial governor.⁶

The work De Errore Profanarum Religionum is preserved in only one manuscript which is now located in the Vatican library, Palatinus Latinus 165. The manuscript was first edited by Matthias Flacius Illyricus in Argentina in 1562. The handwriting of the manuscript dates from the tenth century.⁷ Any possible variants in the text arise from one of the three later handwritings which appear in the margin. Since its discovery,

⁵Ibid., p. 6.

⁶G. Heuten, De Errore Profanarum Religionum, L'Universite de Bruxelles (1938), p. 5.

⁷K. Ziegler, Op. Cit., pp. 20-21.

the work has appeared in several editions:

Julii Firmici Materni V.C. De Errore Profanarum Religionum ad Constantium et Constantem Augustos liber. Matthias Flacius Illyricus, 1562.

Julius Firmicus De Errore Profanarum Religionum. Giovanni da Wower, 1603.

Julius Firmicus De Errore Profanarum Religionum. Latinorum Oberthueriana, 1783 (divided into chapters for first time).

Julius Firmicus Maternus De Errore Profanarum Religionum. (ap. Migne PL Vol. 12) Frederich Muentzer, 1845.

Julius Firmicus Maternus De Errore Profanarum Religionum. (ap. Bibliotheca Patrum Ecclesiarum Latinarum Vol. 13) F. Oehler, 1847.

Julius Firmicus Maternus De Errore Profanarum Religionum. C. Bursian, 1856.

Julius Firmicus Maternus De Errore Profanarum Religionum. (ap. Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiarum Latinarum Vol. 2) C. Halm, 1867.

Firmicus Maternus, De Errore Profanarum Religionum. K. Ziegler, 1907.

Julius Firmicus Maternus, De Errore Profanarum Religionum. Gilbert Heuten, 1938.

Julii Firmici Materni De Errore Profanarum Religionum. A Pastorino, 1956.⁸

The best translations of De Errore Profanarum Religionum are:

German-Vom Irrtum der heidnischen Religionem,
K. Ziegler, Das Wort der Antike Band 3, 1953.

⁸It is upon this text that I base my translation.

French-De l'Erreur des Religions Profanes,
G. Heuten, Travaux de la Faculte de Philosophie
et Lettres de l'Universite de Bruxelles Tome 8,
1938.

Italian-L'Errore Delle Religioni Profane,
A. Pastorino, 1969.

Since Firmicus is such a storehouse of facts about the pagan religions, we need to inquire about his sources. His own personal experiences and observations formed a significant portion of his source. When speaking about Mithra, he writes, "his prophet. . .transmitted to us." His is displayed best in his knowledge of the pagan symbols. Firmicus was familiar with earlier Christian writers. Although there are many "parallels" in Firmicus to the earlier Fathers,⁹ more direct dependence can be seen in Minucius Felix' Octavius and Tertullians Against the Nations and Apology.¹⁰ Even though Firmicus is not mentioned in antiquity, G. Heuten believes that Firmicus exerted some influence upon the later anonymous work, Quaestiones Veteris et Novi Testamenti.¹¹

⁹C. H. Moore, Julius Firmicus Maternus-der Heide und der Christ. This work has the most extensive material on "Quellen und Litteraturkenntniss" to date (pp. 29-51).

¹⁰Ibid., p. 29; F. Boll, "Firmicus Maternus," Real-Encyclopadie der klassischen Alterumwissenschaft, Vol. 6: 2378-79.

¹¹G. Heuten, Op. Cit., pp. 191-193.

Another important source for Firmicus is the Bible. His work contains seventy references to the Bible, fifty-nine are actual quotations, while the rest are allusions.¹² Firmicus quotes freely and at length from the apocryphal book, Epistle of Jeremiah. Firmicus was greatly influenced by Biblical and extra-Biblical apocalyptic literature. He quotes extensively from Daniel and Revelation and is familiar with apocalyptic images such as the heavenly Watchers (1 Enoch 12:2; 39:12).

Firmicus Maternus was also acquainted with a large body of pagan literature. These include the obvious quotations from Homer (6:8), Porphyry (13:4), and Livy (6:9) as well as the probable dependence upon the De Natura Deorum of Cicero and Ovid's Metamorphoses.¹³

Firmicus' apologetic method is, in most respects, similar to the one of those who preceded him. L. M. Prindle has recognized six types of arguments used by Firmicus and those who preceded him to argue against pagan beliefs. They are:

- On the crimes of the gods.
- On the physical or allegorical interpretation of myth.
- On the cult of the physical elements.

¹²E. J. Martin, "Biblical Text of Firmicus Maternus," Journal of Theological Studies, Vol. 24, p. 318.

¹³C. H. Moore, Op. Cit., p. 31; F. Boll, Op. Cit., 2378-79.

On the doctrine of Euhemerus and his school.
 On the worship of idols.
 On demons and their activities.¹⁴

The intent of Firmicus' work is obvious: he wants paganism amputated and the best way to do that is by convincing the Emperors at the root (16:4-5). Five years prior to Firmicus' work, the following law was passed under Emperor Constantius Augustus:

Superstition shall cease; the madness of sacrifices shall be abolished. If any man. . . should dare to perform sacrifices, he shall suffer the infliction of a suitable punishment.¹⁵

However, we know from pagan sources that Constantius was very tolerant with paganism and this most likely incited Firmicus to write his polemical work. Symmachus, a pagan Senator, writes that

He (Constantius) made no diminution in the privileges of the Vestal Virgins; he filled the priesthood with aristocrats; he did not refuse financial support for the Roman ceremonies.¹⁶

Since Firmicus' work received no attention in antiquity, we can assume that it had little effect upon its recipients.

¹⁴L. M. Prindle, "A Summary of his dissertation Quaestiones de Libello quem Julius Firmicus Maternus scripsit de Errore Profanarum Religionum," Harvard Studies in Classical Philology, 1922, p. 181.

¹⁵Theodosian Code 16:10:2.

¹⁶Symmachus, Relationes 3:7.

However, it is important to note that this

work gave expression, apparently for the first time, to certain ideas of the proper relation between church and state which were of great importance in the Middle Ages.¹⁷

His view that involuntary conversions were satisfactory (16:4-5) seems to be a new idea. The earlier Fathers realized that forced conversions were not beneficial (Lact. Div. Inst. 5:20:9; Tertullian Apol. 24:6).¹⁸ This attitude, first articulated by Firmicus, was best described by Prindle when he wrote

When Christianity became prosperous and powerful enough to persecute in its turn, it evolved a political philosophy to account for its prosperity and to justify its acts of persecution. This philosophy first found full expression in the work of Firmicus Maternus.¹⁹

Without a doubt, the symbols found in Concerning the Error of Profane Religions are the most important aspect of this work. Firmicus preserves twelve Greek phrases, including the title of Porphyry's book, a passage from Homer and an etymology

¹⁷L. M. Prindle, Op. Cit., p. 181.

¹⁸C. A. Forbes, "Firmicus Maternus and the Secular Arm," Classical Journal, Vol. 55, 1960, p. 148.

¹⁹L. M. Prindle, Op. Cit., p. 182.

for Serapis. The other nine Greek statements are:

1. εὗρήκαμεν συγχαίρομεν (2:9, p. 8).
2. Μύστα Βοοκλοπίης, συνδέξιε πατρος Ἀγαυοῦ
(5:2, p. 17).
3. Τὸν ἀμέριστον καὶ τὸν μεμερισμένον νοῦν
(7:8, p. 33).
4. Ἐκ τυμπάνου βέβρωκα ἔκ κνυβάλου πέπωκα
γεγονά μύστης Ἀτρεῶς (18:1, p. 59).
5. δε νύμφε, χαῖρε νύμφε χαῖρε νέον
φῶς (19:1, p. 64).
6. Θεὸς ἔκ πέτρας (20:1, p. 68; 20:5,
p. 71).
7. αἰαὶ δίκερως δίμορφε (21:2, p. 73).
8. Θαρρεῖτε μύσται τοῦ Θεοῦ σεσωμένον, ἔσται
γὰρ ἡμῶν ἔκ πόνων σωτηρία (22:1, p. 76).
9. Ταῦρος δράκοντος καὶ ταύρον δράκων πατήρ
(26:1, p. 88).

Statement one is found in other sources in antiquity (see Footnote No. 14 in annotation) while number two is found only in Firmicus. Statement three is a Platonic concept which Firmicus relates to the allegorical understanding of myth.

However, it is statements four through nine which are important. It is these which Firmicus calls signs or passwords

(signa, symbola). Much has been written about the meaning of symbola in antiquity. How does symbola differ from signa?

G. E. Mylonas makes the distinction that "symbols" are like the Christian "credo," a confession of faith and proof of acts accomplished. The signa is a password, a statement used for recognition.²⁰ However, since meanings change with time, we must concentrate on the use of the terms in late antiquity.²¹

In Arnobius, we find

The infamy of your Eleusia is declared
both by their base beginnings and by the
records of ancient literature, by the
very signa. . . which you use when ques-
tioned in receiving the sacred things
(adv. Gent. 5:26, A.N.F.).

On the other hand, Clement of Alexandria understands that the sign of the Bacchic orgies is a consecrated serpent (Protrep. 2:18), an object, not a saying.

An enlightening use of the term signa is found in Apuleius. In his Apology (55), he writes

I have been initiated into various of
the Greek mysteries, and preserve with
utmost care certain emblems (signa) and

²⁰G. E. Mylonas, Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries, Princeton University Press, 1961, p. 295.

²¹T. Friedrich, In Julii Firmicii Materni de Errone Profanarum Religionum Libellum Quaestiones, 1905, pp. 27-51.

mementoes (monumentum) of my initiation
with which the priests presented me.

Here Apuleius seems to refer to an object as the signa.

However, in the next paragraph he writes (56)

If any of you that are here present
had any part with me in these solemn
ceremonies, give a sign (signa) and you
shall hear what it is I keep thus. For
no thought of personal safety shall in-
duce me to reveal to the uninitiated the
secrets that I have received and sworn
to conceal.²²

Here he seems to have vocal signa in mind. This passage from
Apuleius as well as the other writers cited would seem to indi-
cate some ambiguity in antiquity about an exact use of the term.
Since there seems to be confusion in antiquity concerning the
meaning of the symbols, ought we not investigate how Firmicus
understands signa and symbola? In introducing the symbola,
Firmicus says

It pleases me. . .to explain those signs
(signa) and symbols (symbola) by which the
mass of wretched humans recognize each
other in these superstitions. For they
have a particular sign (signa) and a par-
ticular response (responsa), in which
instruction of the devil is transmitted
to them in the meetings of these very
sacrileges.

In light of this explanation, Greek statements one, two,

²² The Apologia and Florida of Apuleius of Madaura, trans.
by H. E. Butler, Oxford Press, 1909, pp. 96-98.

and three could not be grouped with the latter symbols. The former are statements of faith, while the latter statements four through nine are passwords.²³ The eighth statement in Firmicus' work is the most famous and regrettably, the only one which relates the setting in which the password was spoken, or in this case whispered.²⁴

The following is a summary of the twenty-nine chapters of this work.

1. The four elements and their nature. Introduction to chapters two through five.

2. Discusses the Egyptian's worship of water and the Isis-Osiris cult.

3. Discusses the worship of earth and the Magna Deum Mater cult.

²³G. van der Leuw incorrectly states that statements one and two are "like the symbols in character" Op. Cit., p. 65. He also misunderstands statement eight when he writes that "it is certainly not intended as a password; . . . it is a sort of Verily the Lord is risen!" p. 68. When is "Verily the Lord is risen" whispered into the believer's ear as this statement was (22:1 p. 76). G. van der Leuw again misunderstands symbola when he writes that they "cannot have been used as a badge. . . my brother cannot approach me pronouncing a symbol; for if I did not happen to belong to his society, he would have divulged his symbol." Ibid., p. 71. Apuleius' actions would argue against the necessity of that conclusion.

²⁴The most recent study indicates that this statement is taken from the Osiris religion. Thomas Michels, "Salbung und Symbolum in einem Mysterienkult bei Firmicus Maternus: De Errore Profanarum Religionum C. 22-25," Heuresis ed. by T. Michels Otto Muller Verlag, Salzburg.

4. Discusses the worship of air and the cult of Venus.
5. Discusses the worship of fire which is related to the Mithra cult. Two pages of manuscript are missing from this chapter. Presents a Platonic-Mithraic view of the soul.
6. Discusses the two Liber cults. The first associated with the Orphic rites, the second with the Bacchic rites. Finds support for his anti-pagan polemic in the edict against the Bacchinalia and Lycurgus' persecution of Liber.
7. Discusses the Ceres-Persephone-Pluto myth which was central at Eleusis.
8. A speech by the sun in which he complains that the pagan religions use him, against his will, in their myths.
9. Discusses the relationship of Mars, Adonis and Vulcan to Venus. Mars turning into a swine is related to the Biblical story of Jesus casting out the demon and putting them into swine.
10. Discusses the origins of the Cyprian Venus cult and part of the Sebazius cult.
11. Discusses the Corybantes who worship fratercide. This is shortest chapter.
12. Discusses the many sins found among the pagan gods. Presents the theory that the gods were made in man's image.
13. Discusses the Serapis cult which Firmicus traces back to the Joseph-in-Egypt story found in Genesis. Includes a quotation from Porphyry.
14. Discusses the Penates gods, their association to

meals and the true meal found in the Lord's Supper. Also discusses the Vestal Virgins and introduces popular etymologies to explain the gods.

15. Discusses the origin, development and failure of the Palladium.

16. Discusses the five Minervas of antiquity and introduces the topic of Church-State relations for the first time. Discusses the value of forced conversions.

17. Using popular etymologies of his day, he explains the origins of the Sun, Moon, Neptune, Proserpina, Ceres, Mars, Minerva, and Apollo. Also includes his understanding of the development of the pagan religions.

18. This chapter introduces the symbols. Attis cult is the topic of this chapter. Again, Firmicus introduces the Lord's Supper.

19. Discusses the symbol of the Iacchus cult and proves that Christ, not Iacchus, is the Bridegroom of the church.

20. Discusses again the Mithra mystery. Proves that Christ, not Mithra, is a fulfillment of Old Testament passages. Mentions again the Emperor's responsibility to extinguish paganism.

21. Discusses the horned god of Orphic theology. Relates the two horns to the two horizontal pieces of the cross of Christ and shows the latter's superiority.

22. Discusses the symbol of what is probably the Osiris mystery. Describes the rite associated with the symbol.

23. Discusses the anointing in the mysteries with the anointing of Christ.

24. Presents Firmicus' eschatology; Christ's descent into Hades and the cosmological significance of it and discusses Christ's entry into Heaven.

25. Discusses Adam, Eve, and the tree in the garden in typological manner. The wood of the tree is contrasted with the wood of the cross.

26. Discusses the serpent in the mysteries and its relation to the serpent in the garden of Eden. Mentions also Leviathan.

27. Discusses the wood of the cross vis a vis trees used in the Phrygian, Isian and Prosephina cults. Shows how wood was used by God in Old Testament to procure salvation. Compares the Lamb of God with taurobolium and criobolium.

28. Discusses and polemicises against idols. Quotes extensively from Epistle of Jeremiah and strongly pleads for the Emperors to act against the pagans.

29. Reminds the Emperors how good God has been to them and they should accordingly abolish paganism. The work closes with Firmicus reminding them that God will give them "victories, wealth, peace, plenty, well-being and triumphs, so that, having

been advanced by divine majesty, you may rule the whole earth with a successful rule."

In annotating the material in the above chapters, I have dealt mainly with parallels which would enlighten the statements which appear in Firmicus' work. I have also attempted to mention all those places where he is our only source for that material. Obviously, many more parallels could have been cited than were. However, because of the size of the work, I listed those which I thought were the most crucial. It will be readily noticeable also that I have picked the "religious" material, for the most part, to comment upon. Much more could have been said about Firmicus' Biblical text and his view of Scripture. More could have been said about Firmicus' Christian theology; his view of the Eucharist, Baptism, Holy Spirit, church and state, but these were not the focus of this thesis.

CHAPTER I¹

That which the Creator God accomplished¹ in the creation
of man, as we previously mentioned, with annual warnings
about lost men,, particularly must be revealed.
In evidence of the truth², with clear proofs and with testi-
monies of² examples, we will show that it² was invented and
perfected² through the devil to pervert² by blemished thinking
of the spirit, by the hope of future good luck, and by twisted
reasoning wretched men entangled with perpetual disasters.

No one is to be found who doubts that there are four
principle elements of creation². These are fire, air, water,
and earth. However, these elements are different or perhaps
contrary in their own property. Hence, the nations are in
error, who since² they attribute pre-eminence to the elements

¹K. Ziegler has noted that the first two pages or about one hundred lines are missing from the text. K. Ziegler, Vom Irrtum der heidnischen Religionen. Munchen: Max Hueber Verlag, 1953, p. 38.

²G. Heuten takes this to be divina dispositio which he inserts in the lacuna following "must be revealed" (Heuten, p. 41). F. Illyricus takes it to be divinatio which he inserts before "we will show" (A. Pastorino, Julii Fermici Materni De Errore Profanarum Religionum. Italy: 1956.

even now reck-on fire as if it were the greatest god, as if
 **** ***
 the others had their essence from its very heat. They do not
 know that all elements are joined by reason of their own con-
 trary nature and that these elements have God as their Creator.
 It is He who created and arranged everything with its own
 place and order, which we conceive by mind or by thinking, or
 doubtlessly which we also perceive with our eyes, put together
 and arranged by the divine power of his own Word.³ **** *****

³The concept of the four elements was pre-Socratic, but it was Empedocles who first taught that the essence of everything derived from the four elements rather than, as his predecessors, from one element. It was Empedocles who took the first steps toward the view that Τεσσαρα δὴ πάντων βιβύματα πρῶτον ἔασι (Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta by H. von Arnim, 1903 Vol. 2, No. 413). Firmicus expresses basically the same idea as the one above when he writes his pre-Christian work on astrology entitled Mathesis. In the introduction to Book three, he writes, "For the Maker composed the body of man as he composed the body of the world, from a union of the four elements, which are fire, earth, air and water." In Chapter one of Book seven, Firmicus also writes, "It was god who formed the sun and moon, who compresses the waves of the sea between sure boundaries of the earth, who ignites fire for the everlasting essence of perpetual divinity, who upholds the earth having been arranged with equal moderation in the center. . .who waters the earth with perennial fountains. . .and who composed the structure of all things from the diversity of the four elements, which were joined from their contrary and opposing nature." The "order" of the creation of god was already present in Firmicus long before his conversion. Belief in the order of the stars, constellations, heavenly signs and decrees was inseparably bound to astrology (Mathesis 2:27:10-2, 7:1:18-19). Good luck (felicitas) and disaster (calamitas) were meaningful and often technical terms in astrology. If one is born under the wrong sign he is either plagued by calamitas or benefitted by felicitas. Often man's response was a desire "to be born Again" (Mathesis 5:3:27; see also Apuleius' The Golden Ass 11:21).

CHAPTER 2

The inhabitants of Egypt, [understanding the benefits] 1
of water, worship it. They pray to the water; they venerate the
**** ** *** *****
water with a superstitious succession of prayers. However, in
***** ***** * *****
their sacred rites, which they call mysteries, they add tragic
funerals and fearful struggles of a deadly disaster. The
***** ***** ** * *****
disaster was that one committed incest and adultery with his
sister and his crime was avenged by the husband with harsh
punishments. Isis is the sister, Osiris⁴ is the brother and
Typhon is the husband. When he learned that his wife Isis had 2
been corrupted by the incestuous passions of her brother, he
killed Osiris and mutilated him joint by joint and threw the
writhing members of his poor body over all the banks of the Nile
river.⁵

Isis, after rejecting Typhon and in order to bury her
brother and consort, summoned as allies her sister Nephthys and

⁴Outside of this chapter Osiris is also mentioned in
8:3 and 27:1.

⁵Firmicus' account is, for the most, the standard account
found in antiquity. K. Ziegler notes on Firmicus' statement that
Typhon is the husband: "Irrtum des Firmicus. In allen ubrigen
Berichten ist Osiris der (Bruder und) Gatte der Isis." However,
Ziegler's view that this account and explanation are shallow is
too severe (K. Ziegler, Op. Cit., p. 55).

Anubis the hunter to herself. It is for this reason that a dog's head was placed on him, because he, with the skill of a tracking hound found the parts of the mutilated body. When Osiris was found in this way, Isis delivered him for burial.

Naturally, they were kings as they were also powerful kings among the Egyptians. But Osiris, apart from the incest which he committed with his sister, was just and for this reason was worshipped. Typhon, however, was fanatic, arrogant and outrageous and for this reason was shunned.⁶

This is the focal point of the Isian rite; they have an idol of Osiris buried in the holiest part of the temple; they bewail this with annual mournings; they shave their heads to lament the pitiable ruin of their king by means of the unsightliness of a disgraced head; they beat their chest, they lacerate their arms; and they tear open the scars of old wounds so that through

⁶This is Firmicus' first use of euhemerism. The process is explained by Diodorus Siculus as "Regarding terrestrial gods many and varying accounts have been handed down by the writers of history and of mythology; of the historians Euhemerus, who composed Sacred History, has written a special treatise about them, while, of the writers of myths, Homer and Hesiod and Orpheus and the others of their kind have invented rather monstrous stories about the gods (Diodorus Siculus 6:1:1, L.C.L.). As one could well imagine, the early Christians found great use of this method in ridiculing paganism. Whereas Plutarch sees this as a cause of atheism (De Isis et Osiris 23), Augustine considers Euhemerus as one who "not with the garrulity of a fable teller, but with the gravity of a historian who had diligently investigated the matter, wrote that all such gods had been men and mortals" (Augustine De civitate Dei. 6:7, N. & P. N. F.).

their annual mournings the destruction of that deadly and pitiable death is reborn in their souls.⁷

And when they had accomplished these things on certain days, then they pretend that they search for the remains of the mutilated body of Osiris and when they find it they rejoice as if the sorrow was appeased. O wretched and fallen mankind! In order to annually send funeral offerings in honour of your dead kings, while neglecting the Greatest God who created all things with temperance of divine workmanship, you destroy your hope as well as your life. You are not corrected by the splendor of the light which is revealed to you, nor do you seek the signs of a regained liberty. Neither do you acknowledge the hope of salvation returned to you, nor do you, from repentance, request the forgiveness of past crimes.

In vain you believe that this water which you worship will some time be beneficial to you. There is another water by which renewed men are born again.⁸ Another force dries up this water

⁷One aspect of the Isian religion which should also be mentioned is that of sexual abstinence. Ovid mentions that a headache and the festival of Isis were devices used by women to deny men of sex (Amores 1:8:70-75).

⁸Tertullian writes "Happy is our sacrament of water, in that by washing away the sins of our early blindness, we are set free and admitted into eternal life. . . . But we, little fishes, after the example of our ΙΧΘΥΣ Jesus Christ, are born in water" (De Baptismo 1:1 Ante Nicene Fathers see also De Baptismo 5:1 for Isian rite).

which you worship every year by the drying up of the river bed, or the mournful blood of your king pollutes it. You despise that water which is on fire⁹; it is adorned with the greatness of a spirit that ought to be revered, so that healthy sanity flows from this water over the old scars of conscience for believing men.

But in these funerals and mournings, which are funerals indeed, which were done, and of which there are remains extant today; for the crematory of Osiris is in Egypt today and the remains of his cremated body are perceivable.¹⁰ The defenders of

⁹In all probability Firmicus is alluding to passages in the Gospels which refer to baptism of fire (Matt. 3:11, Luke 3:16). A later non-canonical Gospel relates that when Jesus was baptised, fire descended and encompassed the water when Jesus ascended from it (Evangelium Ebioniforum ap. Justin Dialog 88; For an exhaustive study, see F. J. Dolger Antike und Christentum, "Nilwasser und Taufwasser. Eine religionsgeschichtliche Auseinandersetzung zwischen einem Isisvereher und einem Christen des vierten Jahrhunderts nach Firmicus Maternus." Vol. 5, 1936.

¹⁰Many various stories were extant in antiquity which dealt with the remains of Osiris' body. Diodorus relates that "Although the priests of Osiris had from the earliest times received the account of his death as a matter not to be divulged, in the course of years it came about that through some of their number this hidden knowledge was published. . . . Typhon then divided the body of the slain man (Osiris) into twenty-six pieces and gave one portion to each of the band of murders" (Diodorus Siculus 1:21:1-2, L.C.L.). Plutarch states that "of the parts of Osiris's body the only one which Isis did not find was the male member, for the reason that this had been tossed into the river, and the lepidotus, the sea brim, and the pike had fed upon it; . . . But Isis made a replica of the member to take its place, and consecrated the phallus" (De Isis et Osiris 18, L.C.L.).

them wish to produce a scientific explanation,¹¹ saying that Osiris is the seed of the fruits, that Isis is the earth, and that Typhon is the heat, because fruits which are ripened by heat are gathered for the life of men and, being divided, they are separated from a participation in the earth and when winter approaches they are planted again; they wish this to be the death of Osiris when they put back the fruits. Indeed, this is the discovery of Osiris when the fruits conceived from fertilizing nourishment of the earth begin again to be generated with yearly production.¹²

Grant that this is the true explanation for those rites of yours; grant that because of the fruits prayers are returned to divinity. Why do you add incest, why adultery, why do you add

7

¹¹Firmicus' reference physica ratio is to the phenomenon related to "myths of return." Though this idea was present hundreds of years earlier in the ancient Near East, it received its philosophical refinement from pagan theologians like Plutarch. This idea related parts of the "myth" to processes in nature, primarily the vegetation cycle (this appears also in the other Hellenistic mystery religions). Firmicus uses this idea again in this work and other references will be made as we come to them.

¹²Other versions of the myth accomplished the same "theology" by associating Osiris with the sun and Isis with the moon since they give nourishment and "increase to all things by means of a system of three seasons. . . . Moreover, practically all the physical matter which is essential to the generation of all things is furnished by these gods." (Diodorus Siculus 1:11: 5, L.C.L.)

destruction consisting of wretched punishment? Why do you show a bad example from your own sacred rites to men erring and desiring to sin openly? The scientific explanation which you mentioned is obscured by a different type. Moreover, why should that which is known to all be hidden?¹³ Why do you bewail the fruits? Why do you mourn over the "re-multiplying" seeds? All these things were given by the divine liberality of the Greatest God for the livelihood of the human race. On account of this, thanksgivings must be given to the Greatest God and the gracious gift of the Greatest God must not be mourned.

8

Weep rather because you do wrong and always moan your sins with renewed mournings! Do not seek another's funeral with yearly sacred rites, rather prepare consolations every year for your own funerals! O wretched man! You rejoice that you have found something--though I do not know what--when you destroy your own soul yearly on account of these sacred rites. You find nothing there except an image--which you yourself set up--which time and again you either search for or mourn over.

9

Search rather for the hope of salvation! Search for a gleam of light! Search for that which either commends or restores

¹³G. E. Mylonas uses this very argument in attempting to show that all attempts to reveal the secret of the mysteries failed. Although his study is on the Eleusinian Mystery, the principle would apply to all. Why would it be a crime to reveal what is known in nature? G. E. Mylonas, Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries (Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1961) pp. 275ff, 287-316.

you to the Greatest God, and when you shall have found the true way of salvation, rejoice and then with the excited freedom of speech proclaim, "We have found, we rejoice together."¹⁴ Shout this, when after your repentance, you are freed from these disasters by the kindness of the Greatest God.

¹⁴ Here we have the first of several statements preserved in Greek: Εὕρηκαμεν συγχαίρομεν. This statement of Firmicus is supported by three other authors in antiquity: Schol. Juvenal 8:29; Seneca Apocolocyntosis 13; Athenagoras Supplicatio pro Christianorum c. 22 (cited in Eine Mithrasliturgie by A. Dieterich, B. G. Teubner, Berlin, 1910, p. 216). This proverbial saying was characteristic of the Hilaria on Nov. 3, when Osiris was found.

CHAPTER 3

The Phrygians, who inhabit Pessinus around the banks of the river Gallus, attribute the origin of all the other elements to the earth.¹⁵ They wish the earth to be the mother of all. Then, in order to make themselves an annual order of sacred rites for themselves, and with annual mournings, they consecrated the love of the rich woman who was once their queen and who tyrannically wanted to take vengeance upon the scorn of the loved youth. In order to satisfy the wrathful woman or rather to seek solace for the penitent one,¹⁶ they boast that the one whom a short time before they buried, now lived again. And since the spirit of the woman was burning from the impatience of excessive love, they built a temple for the dead youth.¹⁷

¹⁵Pessinus was the home of the goddess described in this chapter, namely Mater deum magna, the Great Mother of the Gods. However, during the Second Punic War she was brought to Rome and remained there (Livy 29:10).

¹⁶Cybele, the Great Mother, was remorseful after Attis' death.

¹⁷Several different traditions exist about the myth of Attis and Cybele (Ovid, Fasti 4:215-246; Sallustius De Diis et Mundo 4; Catullus Attis, Julian, Orationes 5). However, the basic myth is that Cybele loved the youth Attis who, for the love of a Nymph, shunned her love. Cybele kills the nymph and Attis in sorrow castrates himself. Later traditions have his death from which he is resurrected (perhaps borrowed from the Adonis myth). The sacraments of the cult will be discussed in chapter 18.

Then, what the wrathful woman had done, because of the injustice of her rejected beauty, they want the priest appointed by them to suffer. Thus in the annual sacred rites, the procession of this very funeral is prepared with honor for the earth, so that when men are persuaded that they worship the earth, they are actually worshipping the ruin of a wretched funeral.

Also here, most holy Emperors, in order that this error may be kept secret, they also want these sacred rites to be made up of a scientific explanation.¹⁸ They want the earth to love the fruits.¹⁹ In fact, they wish Attis to be this very thing which is born from the fruits. Moreover, they want the

2

¹⁸Again we see the phrase "scientific explanation." The best way to understand this would be to cite Sallustius' (fourth cent.) scientific explanation of the myth. "The Mother of the gods is a life giving goddess, and therefore she is called mother, while Attis is creator of things that come into being. . . . Since the myth is so intimately related to the universe, we imitate the latter in its order and keep a festival therefore" (A. D. Nock Sallustius, Concerning the Gods and the Universe, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1926, p. 9). Porphyry writes "Ἀττίς τῇ τῶν καρπῶν ἀναλογία" (cited in Heuten, p. 143). The same idea can be easily found in Iamblichus and Julian. However, it needs to be mentioned that all of the above writers were Neo-Platonist and when they mentioned generative powers, they also include the generation of matter as well as fruits since the former was a problem in Platonic theology.

¹⁹That is, Cybele to love Attis.

punishment which he sustained to be that which the reaper does to the ripening fruit with the sickle.²⁰ They liken his death to the planting of the gathered seed and his renewed life to the sown seed which are reborn with annual regularity.

Now I wish for them to respond to my inquiring. Why combine this innocence of the seeds and fruits with a funeral, with death, with pride, with punishment and with love? Seriously, is there not anything else which one can say? Is there anything, which in giving thanks to the Greatest God for the fruits, wretched mankind might do? You howl in order to rejoice. And when you saw true reason, you did not repent that you had sometimes done this. But you do this so that occupied with annual mournings you may always escape life and search for death. 3

Let them tell me! How did it benefit the fruits when they renew their bemoaning with annual howls, having been reborn to groan over the disaster of a funeral, which they say is composed by scientific explanation? You moan and bewail, and hide your wailings by another explanation. The farmer knows when to plow. He knows when to commit the grains to the furrows, and he knows when to collect the crops ripened by the flames of the sun. 4

²⁰An allusion to the castration of Attis. This was also necessary for his priests the Galli (Lucian De Syria Dea 50-51; see also A. D. Nock "Ennuuchs in Ancient Religion," Archiv fur Religionswissenschaft Vol. 23, pp. 25-33.

He knows when to grind up the dried grain. This is scientific reason. These are true sacrifices which are fulfilled with the annual labor of men with healthy minds.²¹

Divinity seeks this innocence, so that men may serve the ordained laws of nature in the collecting of fruits. Why are myths²² about wretched death sought for in the order of nature? Why is that which ought not to be hidden, hidden with tears? Hence it is necessary for them to confess that these sacred rites are not in honor of the fruits, but were composed in honor of another death. For those who allot primary respect to this element say 5 that the earth is the mother of all the gods. In fact, we neither refuse nor deny that she is the mother of their gods since they always make their own gods from things collected from this earth or from rocks or from wood.²³

²¹As before, Firmicus attacks the mysteries by showing that what they consider a mystery is known to all (See Footnote 13).

²²It needs to be noted that Neo-Platonism, because of its negative view of matter, also believed that the gods were above nature and not inseparably bound to it. "For the essence of the gods is in no way dependent upon the realm of nature" (Jamblichus, The Egyptian Mysteries, trans. by A. Wilder, The American School of Metaphysics, Greenwich, Conn., p. 192, see also pp. 193, 208-10).

²³A trite argument in antiquity used against the superficiality of idols. The argument appears in Jewish, Christian, and Neo-Platonic writings. It is also present in the poets. One example from Horace will suffice. "Once I was a fig stump, useless wood: a carpenter, wanting a stool or a god, preferred me Priapus." (Satirae 1:8; cited in Sexual Life in Ancient Rome, O. Kiefer, Panther Books, London, 1969, pp. 127-28).

The seas flow about the whole earth, and again, having been enclosed it is drawn together by the circle of the encircling ocean. Also, it is covered by the circular sublimity of the sky; it is blown throughout by the winds; it is sprinkled with rains and confesses its own fears with the quivers of perpetual movement. Consider what awaits you who worship these things, when your gods, by everyday confessions, betray to you their own infirmities.

CHAPTER 4

The Assyrians and part of the Africans wish air to have the leadership of the elements and venerate this with an imagined allegorical representation.²⁵ For they consecrated this same thing--that is air--with the name of Juno or the Virgin Venus, supposing that at one time virginity was satisfying to Venus.²⁶ Naturally they want Juno--lest even here incest be lacking--to become a wife from the sister of Jupiter. Indeed, they made this element into a woman, having been influenced by a devotion that I am ignorant of. 1

Because air is placed between the seas and sky, they address it with effeminate voices of the priests.²⁷ Tell me! Is this a divinity which searches for the female in the male? Is this a divinity to whom the chorus of his own priests is unable to serve him unless they make their own face like a woman, polish their skin and shame the masculine sex with female ornaments?²⁸ 2

²⁵The method used to interpret non-vegetation gods.

²⁶Juno was identified with air in antiquity (Cicero De Nature Deorum 2:66; see Pastorino, pp. 48-52 for the identification with the Syrian Aphrodite and the Syro-Phoenician Isthara-Ashtarte).

²⁷The voice was effeminate since it worshipped air which was placed half way between the Sky (male) and the Earth (female).

²⁸It is hard to identify exactly who Firmicus is discussing.

One is able to see wretched mockeries, with public lamentation, in these very temples. Men endure feminine things and uncover this stain of an impure and lewd body with a boastful display.²⁹ They make public their own evil deeds and confess with the maximum stain of delight the crime of their defiled body.

They fix their cared-for hair like that of a woman, and having dressed in delicate robes, it is with difficulty, with a tired neck, that they uphold their head.³⁰ And then when they have made themselves all together different from men, having been inspired with a song from the flutes, they call to their own goddess so that having been filled with a heinous spirit they predict the future, so to speak, to credulous men. What is this monster, or what is this beast? They deny that they are men, and they are not women. They wish that they were believed to be women, but a certain aspect of the body attests otherwise.³¹ It

It may be that he has confused the priest of this cult with those in the preceding chapter (Galli of Cybele).

²⁹Firmicus is referring to homosexuality rather than to wearing of clothes since he mentions lewd bodies.

³⁰In an amusing work from late antiquity entitled "A Eulogy of Baldness," written by Synesius, we read "let it be said that these effeminate wretches all make a cult of their hair. . . . But we can recognize by his hair a young man under the influence of unnatural passion." (21, Essays and Hymns of Synesius of Cyrene, trans. A. Fitzgerald, Vol. 2 (Oxford University Press; London, 1930, pp. 271-272)

³¹Since in the preceding part of this paragraph Firmicus

must also be considered what kind of divinity it is which is thus charmed by the association of an impure body, which follows after lewd members and which is pleased by the polluted contamination of the body.

Be ashamed before the Greatest, O wretched men! God made you to be different from that. When your group approaches the judgment seat of the examining God, you will bring nothing with you which the God who made you can acknowledge.³² Abandon the error of such a disaster, and forsake once and for all the inclination of an unholy mind! Do not condemn the body, which God made, with the unholy law of the devil! Come to the aid of your disaster while time still permits it! God freely forgives and his mercy is rich.

After leaving the ninety-nine sheep, he searches for the one which is lost. When the prodigal son returns, the father gives clothes and prepares dinner.³³ I do not want the large

has stated that "they have made themselves all together different from men" the "certain aspect" may not refer to the presence of the male member, but the lack of the female breast.

³²An allusion to 2 Corinthians 5:10.

³³The first definite reference (Luke 15:11-32) to the New Testament writings (for Firmicus' Biblical text, see p. v) in Firmicus.

number of crimes to make you despair. The Greatest God, through his own Son Jesus Christ our Lord, acquits those who are willing, and freely forgives those who repent. He does not demand much in order to forgive. With only faith and repentance you are able to redeem whatever you destroyed on account of the wicked persuasion of the devil.

CHAPTER 5

The Persian and all the Magicians who live within the Persian region, prefer fire and think that fire ought to be preferred to all elements.³⁴ Thus, they divide fire in two properties, transferring its nature to each of the two sexes, reckoning the essence of fire to the image of a man and a woman.³⁵

They arrange a certain woman with a triple face, encumbering her with monstrous serpents.³⁶ Therefore, they made this image so that it differs not in any respect from its author, the devil, but so that their own goddess, sprouting with serpents, might be adorned with the blemished marks of the devil.³⁷

³⁴Many sources from antiquity mention the fire worship of Mithraism, which also had the sun as its god.

³⁵The female goddess in the Mithra religion is very dubious. Herodotus mentions it also (Historia 1:131), but that it was the three-faced goddess Hecate is doubtful.

³⁶Most authors take this as a reference to Hecate. In light of what is to follow, each of the faces will represent a certain part of the tripartite soul. The following material on this subject will be, for the most, taken from the definitive article by K. Ziegler "Zur neuplatonischen Theologie," Archiv fur Religionswissenschaft, Vol. 13, 1910, pp. 247-269.

³⁷Firminus uses this snake-devil motif frequently in this work.

In fact, while worshipping a man, an ox thief,³⁸ they transfer his sacred rites to the property of fire. Just as his prophet, speaking, transmitted to us "O initiate of the ox stealer, fortunate one of the noble father."³⁹ They call him Mithra. In fact, they transmit his sacred rites in hidden caves,⁴⁰ so that they avoid the grace of the splendid and clear light, having been submerged in the shady filth of darkness.⁴¹

³⁸The ox played an important role in the Mithra religion. Mithra's combat with the ox was the most extraordinary event in Mithra's struggles (Cumont, The Mysteries of Mithra, Dover Press, New York, 1956, pp. 132-34). Porphyry, a Neo-Platonicist writes of Mithra, "And all souls when they come to birth are bull-begotten, and the god who secretly promotes birth is a stealer of bulls" De Antro Nympharum (A. S. Geden, Select Passages Illustrating Mithraism, Macmillan Co., New York, 1925, p. 48).

³⁹ μύστα βοοκλοπίνης συνδέει πατρός ἀγανοῦ
For possible variants of this reading, see Pastorino, pp. 64-65.

⁴⁰Caves and underground rooms played an important role in mystery religions. This is especially true of the Mithra mystery. Again, Porphyry leaves many interesting statements. "Thus also the Persians, mystically signifying the descent of the soul into the sublunary regions, and its regression from it, initiate the mystic. . . in a place which they denominate a cavern." (De Antro Nympharum, p. 175, Select Works of Porphyry, trans. by T. Taylor, London, 1923, the remaining translations will be from this book). "Caves, therefore, in the most remote periods of antiquity, were consecrated to the gods, before temples were erected to them. . . . But wherever Mithra was known, they propitiated the god in a cavern," p. 185.

⁴¹Firmicus may well be alluding to the Orphic view of Hell as mud, filth, and mire as well as a more obvious allusion to the insides of a cave. If taurobolium was practiced in the Mithra cult (see Cumont, Op. Cit., pp. 86-87, 180-181), then this could also be an allusion to the pit into which the initiate went for this bloody rite.

O true deification of divinity! O the lies of the pagan law must be avoided! You believe he is a god whose wrongdoings you confess,⁴² and thus, you who say that the sacred rites are performed correctly in these temples with the Persian rites of the Magicians, why do you praise only these Persian rites. If you suppose that this is worthy of the Roman name to serve the laws and the sacred rites of the Persians. . . .⁴³

⁴⁴. . .having been armed with a bronze shield and covered with a breastplate, who is consecrated on the top of the highest citadel.⁴⁵

There is also a third part which--in the rough and secret part of the woods--is allotted the rule over the wild beasts.⁴⁶

⁴²We are not sure what wrongdoings of Mithra Firmicus had in mind.

⁴³Here and elsewhere Firmicus displays a strong feeling for Rome and the Empire.

⁴⁴The two preceding pages are missing (Ziegler, Op. Cit., p. 247).

⁴⁵Ziegler takes this as a reference to the Acropolis of Athens and cites Lucretius 6:749 as a "Parallel-stelle," Ibid., pp. 248-49.

⁴⁶After refuting Muller's idea that "woods" = matter, (which is lexicographically possible; Ziegler shows that this third refers allegorically to Artemis (p. 252) who without doubt was considered goddess of the remote parts of the woods as well as a "Lady of the wild beasts" (Oxford Classical Dictionary, p. 104). He identifies her with the second part (the first part being in the missing pages) of the soul mens or VOÛS.

The last part of the tripartite division⁴⁷ is the one which points out the ways of the lusts and the deformed desires and the enticements of perverted passion. It is for this reason that they assign one part of the soul to the head so that it may seem to contain the anger of man in a certain way. They place

 the other part in the heart so that it appears to contain a variety of different understandings which with multiple intentions we conceive in the manner of woods. A third part is assembled in the liver, from whence lust and passion are born.⁴⁸ For therein the gathered fecundity of the productive seeds draws out the desire of passion by natural stimulus.

Diligently observe then why this very division is accomplished so that the reason of truth might easily fight this

 fiction. If the soul is divided and is separated from its own essence by a different kind of power, and having been dissolved with respect to its own category; it begins to be that which it
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⁴⁷The tripartite soul was usually divided into ira mens, libido (Θυμός, νοῦς, ἐπιθυμία) being Athena, Artemis and Aphrodite respectively (Ziegler, Op. Cit., p. 252).

⁴⁸Firmicus follows Cicero (Tusculan 4:50 in using ira for the Greek Θυμός which was located in the head (Plato Resp. 4, pp. 436-441C; cited in Th Friedrich, In Firmici Materni De Errone Profanarum Religionum Libellum Quaestiones, 1905, Bonn, pp. 6-7). This concept of the tripartite soul was also Pythagorean (Diogenes Laertius 8:30 and Iamblichus Protrepticus c. 5, cited in Th. Friedrich, pp. 7-8).

was not and ceases to be what it had been. For one is mind, one
 *** *** *** *****
 is anger, and another is lust. Therefore, this very separation
 dissolves the soul and allows the greatest loss from this very
 division. Neither does this thing totally preserve its own
 appearance or form, which having been separated is divided into
 three contrary parts, and to speak more truly, is made mortal

 on account of this very division.

For everything which is able to be divided is body. More-
 over, it is necessary that it be mortal. If, therefore, the
 soul is divided it is a body: if it is a body, it is also

 necessary that this very thing be mortal. These are the out-
 standing and noticeable lies of this error. The maximum benefit
 is conferred to us on account of its consecration. With the
 fantasies of these sacred rites of theirs, the soul seems to be

 mortal.

CHAPTER 6

And so, most holy emperors, these are the elements which 1
are consecrated by ruined men. And indeed, even now other superstitions remain, the secrets of which must be exposed.⁴⁹ Those of Liber and Libera, all of which must be made known, particularly to your sacred minds, so that you learn that in these very profane religions the deaths of men have been consecrated.

And so, Liber was the son of Jove, evidently the king of Crete. This Liber,⁵⁰ since he was born from an adulterous

⁴⁹The revealing of the secrets of the mystery religions was a serious offence throughout all of antiquity. Alcibiades is probably one of the best examples from antiquity about the penalty for revealing the mysteries. His property was confiscated and he was publically cursed by the priests (Plutarch Vita Alcibiades 22, Andoc. De Myst. 11-18). Pausanias, after viewing the interior of an Eleusinian temple reports, "My dream forbade the description of the things within the wall of the sanctuary and the uninitiated are of course not permitted to learn" 1:38:7, Loeb Classical Library).

⁵⁰There was some confusion in antiquity as to the varying traditions about Liber. Diodorus Siculus (3:62:3-10) reports five Libers as does Cicero (De Natura Deorum 3:58). However, the first Liber which Firmicus treats is the one which was central to Orphic theology. This Orphic Liber is number four in Cicero's list. It should also be mentioned that Firmicus' account is the "chief witness" (W. K. C. Guthrie, Orpheus and Greek Religion, Norton & Co., New York, 1966, p. 111) for the Orphic rite. Although there are varying traditions about the Orphic myth, the Sache is the dismemberment of the child Dionysus (M. P. Nilsson, "Early Orphism and Kindred Religious Movements," Harvard Theological Review, 1935, p. 202). One major misnomer about Orphism is the title Zagreus for Dionysus. Guthrie (Ibid., p. 113) points

mother,⁵¹ he was brought up around his father more zealously than was proper. The wife of Jove whose name was Juno, excited with the violence of a step-mother's spirit, prepared treachery on all sides for the death of the infant. The father, setting out for a journey, and since he knew the hidden indignation of his wife, and in order that nothing be done by treachery by his angered wife, entrusted the protection of his son to--what seemed to him--suitable guards.

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Then Juno having been given an opportune time for the ambush, and having been inflamed more strongly by the fact that the father, when setting out had given the throne and sceptre of the kingdom to the boy, she first of all corrupted the guards with royal rewards and gifts. Next, she stationed her guards, who are called Titans, in the inner parts of the palace. She allured the boyish mind with playthings and with a mirror of great workmanship, so that after leaving the king's throne he was led to the place of ambush by the desire of his childish mind.

out that "the word Zagreus is not found either in the Hymns of Orpheus, or in any other Orphic writings that are extant."

⁵¹Here Firmicus combines part of the myth relating to another one of the Libers. The reference is to the adultery between Jove and Semele (Ovid, Metamorphoses 3:253-315).

Having been intercepted at that place, he was cut to pieces, and, so that no evidence of death might be found, the mob of guards divided among themselves the limbs which had been cut up piece by piece.

Next, so that one crime might be added to another, since the cruelty of the tyrant was feared vehemently, they ate the members of the boy which had been cooked in various ways, so that they might feast upon a banquet of a human cadaver, a thing unheard of until that day. The sister, whose name was Minerva, and who had a part in this crime, saved the heart which had been allotted to her, both in order that there might be visible evidence for the accusations,⁵² and to have means by which to mitigate the brunt of her father's anger.

To Jove, when he returned, his daughter recounted the evil deed step by step. Then the father moved by harsh sorrow, indeed killed the Titans after having tortured them by various methods. Neither did he pass over any torment or punishment in the revenge of his son. Being enraged,⁵³ he vindicated the death of his son,

⁵²In other accounts Jove discovers the crime by smelling Liber be cooked (Clement of Alexandria Protrepticus 2:17ff, Arnobius, Adversus Gent. 5:19).

⁵³Perhaps a play on words since Firmicus uses bacchatus (which comes from the name of the god Bacchus) for enraged.

such as he was, through all types of punishments. And he vindicated his son in whatever ways were open not only to the feelings of a father, but also to the power of a tyrant.⁵⁴

Then, because the father was no longer able to bear the torments of a sorrowful mind and because the sorrow springing from the loss of a child was not mitigated by any solace, he made an image of him from gypsum by the sculptor's art. The heart of the boy--by which the evil deed had been detected by the sister's bringing it--he placed in the section of the image in which the lineaments of the chest were formed. After this, he built a temple instead of a tomb and appointed the boy's instructor Silenus as priest.⁵⁵

The Cretans, in order to mitigate the rage of the furious tyrant, made the days of the funeral into festive days and

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⁵⁴Some ancient writers mention their punishment as being cast into Tartarus (Pausanias 8:37:5).

⁵⁵Silenus was the personification of the Sileni or Satyrs (Pausanias 1:23:5) who reared and accompanies Liber at all the festivities. Ovid best describes him when he writes, "Thou too Silenus, burnest for the nymphs, insatiate licher! 'Tis wantonness alone forbids thee to grow old," (Fasti 1:413-414, L.C.L.; Macrobius Saturnalia 1:8:9).

founded an annual sacred rite with a dedication every year. In the rite, they did everything in the order, which the dying boy both did and suffered.⁵⁶ They ripped a live bull with their teeth, recalling the cruel banquet with annual celebrations. And screaming with discordant noises through the remote parts of the forest, they imitate the insanity of an unbalanced mind in order that it might be believed that the awful crime was committed not through deceit, but through insanity.⁵⁷ The box⁵⁸ in which the

⁵⁶This is a central motif in several Hellenistic religions (Christianity included). Herodotus reports that "they enact by night the story of the god's suffering, a rite which the Egyptians call the mysteries" (2:170-171). However, Firmicus is not referring to an initiation rite such as a ritual bath, etc. Rather, he mentions four re-enactments which are: devouring of the child, the insanity involved, the use of the box in which the heart was placed, and the toys used to deceive the child.

⁵⁷The apparent insanity of the Bacchic followers is a common place in antiquity.

⁵⁸Firmicus' term for box, cista, possessed a technical meaning in the mysteries. It referred to the container for the sacra res. Catullus writes that some "celebrated the hidden orgies, with the hollow boxes, orgies which in vain the impious desired to hear" (64: 259-260, L.C.L.). Seneca writes, "Together were we want to. . .join in virgin dances, to hear the mysteries in Theban baskets hidden." (Her. Oet. 595 L.C.L.). Arnobius relates a portion of what he believes to be part of a cultic ritual when he writes, "I have fasted, and drunk the draught, I have taken of the mystic box and put into the wicker basket" (Adversus Gentiles 5:26 A.N.F.). Other references for this meaning of cista are Ovid Ars Amatoria 2:601-610; Apuleius, Metamorphoses 6:2, 11:11; Ovid Metamorphoses 2:554-555; Tib. 1:7:48; Valerius Flaccus Argon., 2:256-277).

sister secretly concealed the heart is brought forward. With songs of the flutes and with the jingling of cymbals, they counterfeit the child's playthings by which the boy had been tricked. And so, in honor of the tyrant, he who was unable to have a burial, was made a god by a servile people.

There was another Liber at Thebes who was a tyrant distinguished by his ability in the magic arts. This Liber, when he had captured the women's minds, with certain charms and spells, by virtue of his own decision, imposed cruel deeds upon raving women in order to have noble women enslaved in mind as helpers in his passions and crimes.⁵⁹ He who did such wicked crimes, and even demanded such a crime from a mother against her son or sisters against their brother, is presented everyday upon the stages⁶⁰ by the writers of tragedy so that the most wretched cruelties of this wicked tyrant are always reborn in the minds of the audience by the sorrowful retellings.

Lycurgus, having been protected by a sober union of men, drove him away from the kingdom and expelled him from his

⁵⁹It is women who are usually the followers of Liber. There was tension between this cult and men.

⁶⁰Though perhaps influenced by Christians, the pagan Emperor Julian instructed pagan priests not to attend the theatre (Letter to a Priest 304B).

fatherland.⁶¹ For effeminate Liber was unable to hold out against the consensus of men any longer. It is sung repeatedly in the gymnasiums of the Greeks that he was an effeminate homosexual,⁶² and served the passions of lovers. Lycurgus was not content with only his flight and exile, but fearing that fleeing and having been received by others, he might plant the lustful seeds of his own crimes in another region, he armed himself with a sword and pursued the shame of the fatherland with a threatening edict. Then Liber, after tossing off the fillets which he attached to the viney circles of his crowns, fleeing with his effeminate group--for only those followed him who were his associates in defiled deeds, crimes, and passions--through all the shores of the neighboring sea, he wandered with the greatest anxiety of hopelessness.

⁶¹Firmicus' reference to Lycurgus is found in Iliad 6:130-140. However, Firmicus fails to mention that this act so displeased the gods that they struck Lycurgus blind.

⁶²Firmicus' word for homosexual is cinaedus. Most editors believe that effeminatus is a gloss (Pastorino, p. 91). W. F. Otto in Dionysus: Myth and Cult (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1965, p. 176) writes, "In Aeschylus (frag. 61) he is contemptuously called 'the womanly one' (ὁ γύναιος); in Euripides (Bacchae 353), the 'womanly stranger' (Ἰθνηλὺς μορφος). At times he is also called 'man-womanish' (ἀρσενόθνηλυσ)." ."

At that place, among intoxicated old men⁶³ and inebriated girls⁶⁴ and just when the procession of wickedness was preceding him--one hideous with a black cloak,⁶⁵ the other terrible with a visible snake,⁶⁶ another with a bloody mouth while he plucks to pieces⁶⁷ the living members of a sheep--he was seized by Lycurgus. He was thrown into the sea from the nearest rocky cliff--which made a huge ledge among the impassable rocks--so that the torn body, tossed a long time by the flowing seas, might recall the minds of the wandering people to the order of sanity and sobriety by stern punishment. Homer mentions this destruction of Liber in order to disclose his flight and anxiety and to show his death:

⁶³Probably a reference to the Sileni.

⁶⁴A reference to the Maenads.

⁶⁵In the Dionysus Melanaigis cult the story is told that Dionysys was once rejected while wearing a black goatskin (W. F. Otto, Op. Cit., p. 173).

⁶⁶The snake was one of important items in the Liber cult.

⁶⁷The rending of the live animal was central to the Liber cult. Often it was a fawn or cow.

Dionysus, being afraid, jumped into the billows of the sea. And Thetis took the frightened one into her bosom. For a strong trembling by the threat of a strong man seized him.⁶⁸

One imitates you, O Lycurgus, even our proconsul Postumius.⁶⁹ He follows your sober rules of life. Neither does he depart from your wholesome laws. For, just as we discover in the history books,⁷⁰ the wicked deeds of the Bacchanalia were defeated by a certain youth Aebutius, who gave information.⁷¹

 Up to that time, the mores in the city of Rome were pure and no one sought foreign superstitions with their lax customs.⁷²

At that time, neither did the senate fail the consul, nor did the laws fail the state, nor did the consul fail the laws.⁷³

⁶⁸Iliad 6:135-137.

⁶⁹Postumus was Consul in 186 B.C. (Livy 39:9).

⁷⁰Firmicus is referring to Livy 39:8-19.

⁷¹Livy writes, "Spurius Postumius returned to Rome a considerable time later: on his motion with reference to the rewards for Publius Aebutius" (39:19).

⁷²It is hard to understand how Firmicus can make this statement since Cybele was brought to Rome in 205-204 B.C. unless he means that it was not fully recognized.

⁷³Firmicus is using this as an appeal for the Roman authorities to co-operate in the extinction of the mysteries.

But after investigating everyone who was transmitting the wicked lies of this sacred rite, with a severe, in fact a Roman examination by torture, capital punishment was decreed against everyone according to the decree of the council. Nor did the vindicating sword of the consul rest for a long time, until this evil had been amputated at the roots. O the punishment worthy of the Roman name! O the praiseworthy firmness of ancient virtue! A consul did not wish to spare his own citizens when the foreign vices were corrected in order to purge the fatherland.

CHAPTER 7

The death of the daughter, having been consecrated by the
 Hennecian woman Ceres,⁷⁴ follows this contamination of the sacred
 rites and imitates the order of a funeral. For whatever a father
 in Crete had done regarding his son, all this Ceres had
 instituted at Henna, when her daughter was lost and she was un-
 able to bear the sorrow of a mother.⁷⁵ As far as it may be
 done, I shall briefly relate these things in a short account.

The Greeks call Cere's one and only daughter Persephone,
 while we, with our changed language call her Proserpina. Many
 sought her as a consort for marriage. The anxious mother judged
 the merits of these individuals, and when at that time the feel-
 ing of the mother appeared uncertain to everyone, a rich country
 man, who was named Pluto because of his riches, raped the virgin
 whom he found near Percus. This he did with a rash flame of
 passion when he was no longer able to bear the delays of post-
 ponement and when he was burning with the flames of perverted love.

⁷⁴The following story is commonly known as the Rape of
 Persephone. The Greek counterpart of Ceres is Demeter.

⁷⁵Firmicus is trying to show that the Elusinian mystery
 (Ceres and Persephone) was formed just like Dionysian mystery of
 the preceding chapter.

Nevertheless, Percus is a pleasing and delightful enough lake situated in the city limits of Henna, whose pleasantness is born from the varieties of flowers. For throughout the year, again and again, it is crowned with successions of flowers. And there you will find an equal variety of hyacinthus blooming on the stalk. There you will find the leaves of the narcissus or that which from above paints the golden rose. There white hederas gently crawl upon the earth, and the red marjoram is found pleasantly with the purple violets. Neither do the white lilies abandon the garland. An absolutely perfect place to allure as well as to hold the girlish mind by its own pleasantness.⁷⁶

2

When near sundown, the virgin had been found by Pluto at this place, she was raped by force and with torn clothes and mangled hair was placed upon a cart and carried off. Her trimmed nails were of no use against this country lover. Neither her screaming and yelling, nor the clamor of the other girls helped. Then, since no one from the city went to the rescue, one girl running quickly--quicker by this very fear--announced the rape of the virgin to the mother.

3

⁷⁶Henna was a favorite place of Ceres. Ovid also mentions the flowers that are there (Fasti 4:420-441).

The indignant mother leads an armed band against the rapist. The arrival of the woman does not escape Pluto's notice, but as he looks backward toward the city and observes the endless number of troops coming with the mother, he, on account of his desperation begins a deadly plan. He steers the team by which the cart was drawn through the middle of the lake. Then it is sunk to the deepest of the depths. Then sinking at that place with his loved virgin, he provided the wretched mother with a grim spectacle about the death of her daughter.

The Hennians, in order to be able to find comfort for their maternal sorrows in some sphere, made up the story that the king of the underworld had raped the virgin. And so that faith might follow these fictions, they boasted that he emerged with the virgin at another place near Syracuse. And with expenses contributed, they meticulously built a temple--naturally to the virgin and the rapist--and they resolved to have annual prayers in the temple. But the sorrow of a mother is not overcome by any means nor are the torments of womanly impatience cured. But, truly believing that her daughter was seen near Syracuse, and with her own overseer, Triptolemus,⁷⁷

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⁷⁷Triptolemus was the legendary missionary for Demeter. His function was to go unto all the world and teach humanity how to raise cereals (Mylonas Ibid., p. 2).

as leader, she, with funeral clothes and unkempt disarray, travels by nightly journeys toward the shores of the city Syracuse.

Neither was there lacking at that place one who would deceive the credulous mother about her disasters. A certain Pandarus says that he had seen the rapist board a ship with the virgin not far from Pachynus. This convinced the woman, especially since she desired to hear that her daughter was living with any kind of son in law. She rewarded the citizens with innumerable gifts. The Syracusians, aroused by the liberality of the woman, consecrated the rape of the virgin, and softening the sorrow of the mother, they improved the procession of the wretched funeral by the improvement of the temples.

5

This, however, did not placate the mother, but after boarding the ship she searched up and down foreign shores for her daughter. Having been tossed about by the tempestuous waves, she arrived at the location of an Attic city. And at that place, having been received with hospitality by the inhabitants, she distributed the hitherto unknown what. The location received its name from the fatherland and from the arrival of the woman, for it is called Eleusis,⁷⁸ because to

⁷⁸Firmicus has the Greek word ἑλευσις in mind. It means an arrival.

that place Ceres had come after leaving Henna. Thus after dispensing the wheat she had brought, she taught them the science of collecting fruits.

After her death, on account of the benefit that is born from the abundant fruit, she was buried in the place, was consecrated, and at the same time, together with her daughter, was called by a divine name. For truly, the shallowness of the Greeks loves to call by divine name those who brought something to them or those who either by counsel or by virtue have helped them.⁷⁹ And thus the kindness of the benefits is repaid by these people with the results that they call gods and believe that those are gods who at one time benefitted them.⁸⁰ Thus, Nysa does not doubt about Liber nor does Sparta wonder about new constellations. The gloomy Oeta burned and

⁷⁹Wheat played an important role in the cult. Although it may be somewhat exaggerated, Hippolytus' statement reveals a basic truth about the Eleusinian mystery when he writes, "The Athenians, when they initiate into the Eleusinia exhibit in silence to the epoptai the mighty and marvellous and most epoptic mystery, an ear of cut-wheat" (Refutation of all Heresies 10:2).

⁸⁰Cicero writes, "But there are many gods whose existence as with sound reason been affirmed both by the wisest of the Greeks and by our own forebearers, and who have received names, because of the blessings they have vouchsafed to mortals. For it was generally felt that whatever contributed significantly to the welfare of mankind must be impelled by divine love for men." De Natura Deorum 2:23:60).

consecrated Hercules, and even now the burial mound of the dead Jove is worshipped by foolish Cretans.

However, most holy emperors, it is added to the weight of this profane error that it defends those people--that is Liber and Proserpina--as if with a more ancient authority. For the fictions of the Greeks wish to equate Liber with the sun, and calling Proserpina, indeed, Libera, they imagine that she is the moon. How absurd and how wretched this is from the very rationality of truth we are able to ascertain. Who sees the sun as a boy, who deceives, kills, lacerates, divides, and eats upon his members?⁸¹ Who raped the moon? Who conceals and makes it the wife of Pluto? But again, they wish to shield this very error with a scientific explanation. They suppose by this explanation that they are able to worship the mind, τὸν ἀμέριστον καὶ τὸν μεμερισμένον that is the mind undivided and divided.⁸²

Tell me O wretched mortal divinities, why do you add sorrows to the natural things? Why do you pollute the character of God with the horror of cruel death? Why was it necessary to have such harsh and cruel torment? What does this

⁸¹That is, eat upon the sun.

⁸²See Plato Timaeus 35A, cited in Pastorino, p. 109.

belief mean, that the order of sorrowful disasters is linked with divine matters or that the nature of constellations--which the Greatest God made with certain laws--is yoked with sorrowful disasters of mankind.⁸³ You mix the terrestrial with the celestial, the fallen with the sublime, the shadowy with the illuminated, dedicating the sorrows and trouble of men with divine honors.

⁸³ A repudiation of astrology.

CHAPTER 8

If, after assembling all of mankind, the sun, in a formal meeting should speak, he would move your hopelessness with the speech. O you fallen men, rebelling everyday in various ways against the Greatest God! Who impelled you to such a great wickedness so that with the profane error of heinous passion you say that I live and die by your decision? O that the myths of your insane mind would proceed in a standard manner or in one way! O that the dishonesty of your infamous minds would proceed without insulting me! Now, boasting in dangers, you also do not spare me, nor does your speech have any reverence. Moreover, while shaming me, you hurry to your own ruin and death.

Others among the Egyptians, with a stubborn passion of the mind, submerge me under the waves and rapid whirlpools of the Nile.⁸⁴ Others after castrating themselves moan loudly.⁸⁵ Having died by a cruel death, others either cook me in a jar

⁸⁴Probably an allusion to the Isis-Osiris religion since Osiris was sometimes identified with the sun.

⁸⁵Perhaps a reference to the priest of Cybele, the Galli. Attis was identified with the sun in some cults (Pastorino, p. 113).

or pierce the torn members of my body with seven spits.⁸⁶ One
 One who was a little pleasing to me--with a winning talk--
 dreamed up that I was a charioteer of a team of four horses.

Once and for all, reject the destruction of such madness and having come together with a salutary belief, search out the true way of salvation! Whosoever contemplates or dreams up these things, whosoever pollutes the mysteries with unholy belief, whosoever dreams up such things about the brilliant work of God, is an enemy of God, for his evil deed is not simple nor is it accompanied by the usual punishment.

Mourn your dead and yourselves destined to die by a
 similar death! Send offerings in honor of the dead to your
 kings as you wish and comfort their bereavements with another
 type of remedy! Mourn Liber! Mourn Proserpina! Mourn Attis!
 Mourn Osiris! But do this without the insult of my dignity.
 I do not want you to lead me through their tombs and ashes, I
 do not want my name to furnish fuel for your error. I was
 made by God at the beginning of day. This alone is sufficient
 for me, the dignity of an honest job.

God made me to be different, he commands me to be
 different, and yet you divide me at your pleasure and lacerate

⁸⁶An allusion to the rending of Liber (see Clem. of Alexandria Protrepticus 2:18).

me according to the greed of your decision. I am simply what I appear to be, and I do not want you to conceive anything about me except that which you see. If rejecting your errors you drink simply and faithfully the grace of God, God is pleased. He embraces it with pleasure, and it leads men toward the way of salvation."

Indeed, most holy emperors, let this which I spoke in my character forming speech⁸⁷ suffice. And now, having been shaped by the teaching of sacred readings, I summon together all lost men by means of a religious speech. If these are gods which you worship, why mourn over them? Why weep bitterly over them with yearly lamentations? If they are worthy of tears and sorrow, why pile divine honor upon them? And so, do one or the other! If they are gods, do not be willing to lament over them, or if you decide that they are deserving of tears and sorrow, then do not desire to call them gods lest the majesty of the divine name be polluted with your tears and lamentations.

But since the ruined mind, having been entangled with the lures of evil lust, is not able to be recalled by any reason, let me pursue the remainder, so that when all things

⁸⁷Firmicus' expression for character forming, ethopoeiacus, is found only in this one passage. It is derived from the Greek word ἠθοποιεῖς, which is not used extensively. The

have been published and revealed which profane wickedness has consecrated, the compassion of God by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may lift the fallen, recall the fleeing to himself, make strong the doubters, correct the erring and, that which is best of all, give life to the dying.

Thesaurus Linguae Latinae defines it as "mores describens sive effengens."

CHAPTER 9

In many cities of the East--already this evil has also
 reached us⁸⁸--Adonis is lamented as if the husband of Venus,
 and his assassin and wound are pointed out by the bystanders.
 For Mars, changing his form and appearance into a wild pig,
 to protect for himself the first place in the love of Venus,
 he struck the youth who rushed rashly against him. If Adonis
 were a god, why didn't he know the plot of his rival? If he
 was a man, why did he compete with a more superior person?

1

But also I heard that another had a marital relation-
 ship with Venus. Vulcan, unless I am deceived, was asserted
 to be the husband of Venus by these worshippers of the gods.
 O the ridiculous persuasion of vain men! An adulterer placed
 between two husbands is seized by one⁸⁹ and conquers the other.
 But look what a body the adulterous god chose for himself to
 overcome the husband. He who had the ability of changing his
 body, wished to be a pig. He ought rather to assume the form
 and shape of a lion. But those who know the nature of animals

2

⁸⁸It was already at Rome in Ovid's time (Ars Amatoria
 1:75, Metamorphoses 10:725).

⁸⁹A reference to Vulcan, Ovid Metamorphoses 4:169-189).

consider the lion to preserve the virtues of modesty from that savagery of wild emotions. Deservedly, the shape of the lion is rejected by the adulterer and the sensual animal is chosen.

Now at this point, let us deal with the secrets of the Gospel tradition. After casting out the demons, the Lord gave them to a herd of swines, not unjustly, so that the unclean spirit was seized by a worthy death through the various deaths of the swine, having been tossed about upon the hard cliffs and waves among the sensual animals.⁹⁰

3

⁹⁰ Matt. 8:30-32; Mk. 5:11-13; Lk. 8:32-33.

CHAPTER 10

I hear that Cinyras⁹¹ gave a temple of Cyprus to a friendly prostitute--Venus was her name. Also he initiated many into the rites of the Cyprian Venus and anointed many with vain consecrations. He also decided that whoever wished to be initiated into the secret rite of Venus, which he himself established, give to the goddess a payment of one as.⁹² We all ought to know what type of secret rite it is that is done in silence. On account of this very disgrace, we are not unable to explicate it more clearly.⁹³ The lover Cinyras observed the prostitute's laws well: he ordered that a donation be given by his own priests to the consecrated Venus as to a harlot.

Worshipping the Sebazius Jove, when they initiate, they coil a snake through their breast. Even now the vices of the first error advance and that which destroys man is worshipped

⁹¹Cinyras was ancestor of the Cinyrades, priests of Aphrodite-Astrate (Tacitus Historia 2:3). Through incest (unknown to him) with his daughter, Adonis was born.

⁹²Originally a pound of copper, but by later times it had devalued greatly.

⁹³An obvious reference to sacred prostitution in which the act becomes the mystery.

and the cleverness and wicked cruelty of the deadly snake is adored.⁹⁴

⁹⁴Clement of Alexandria (Protrepticus 2:17) and Arnobius (Adversus Gentiles 5:3) both report the same. The "first error" mentioned probably refers to the Genesis account to which he refers later in this work.

CHAPTER 11

In the sacred rites of the Corybantes, fratricide⁹⁵ is worshipped. For one brother is destroyed by two, and in order that a court of justice may not uncover the murder of the dead brother, he is worshipped below the foot of Mt. Olympus by the brothers who killed him. The foolish persuasion of the Macedonians worship the same brother. It is Cabirus whom the Thessalonians formerly worshipped with bloody hands. And thus it must be considered what type of divinity this is which fratricidal madness invented in order to conceal it fratricide.

⁹⁵Here Firmicus uses parricidium which can refer to more than the killing of one's father or ancestors.

CHAPTER 12

Therefore, whoever venerates these sacred rites with a devoted mind, to whomever the fearful contamination of this superstition seems good, either he seeks comfort for his own troubles, or he praises with silent knowledge the evil deeds of the gods, wishing this, searching for that and at any rate desiring this especially, with the result that what pleases him also pleases his own gods and with the result that a similarity of character leads him toward such a conduct of life.⁹⁶

One who is charmed by adultery, considers Jove and thence finds the encouragement for his own passion. He approves, imitates, and praises because his own god disguises himself in the form of a swan,⁹⁷ rapes in the form of a bull,⁹⁸ and plays in the form of a satyr.⁹⁹ The result is that

⁹⁶This is nothing more than the view which was found as early as Xenophanes that affirms that men made god in their own image.

⁹⁷This adultery was with Leda.

⁹⁸This adultery was with Europa.

⁹⁹This adultery was with Antiope.

he¹⁰⁰ is accustomed to being liberal in his own wrongdoings because one¹⁰¹ corrupted the protected virgin generously with flowing gold.¹⁰²

Another is charmed by the embraces of boys. Let him see Ganymedes search in the bosom of Jove! Let him see Hercules searching for Hyla with impatient love! Let him learn about Apollo having been captured by desire for Hyacinthus! Let one see Chrysippus, let another see Pelops! Thus, one is able, on account of his own gods, to mention something which is lawful for him that today is punished severely by Roman laws.

It is too difficult to enumerate all of their adulteries. Who seduced Aymone,¹⁰³ who Alope,¹⁰⁴ who Menalippe,¹⁰⁵ who Chione,¹⁰⁶ and Hippothoe?¹⁰⁷ Certainly your god is said

3

¹⁰⁰I.e., the pagan.

¹⁰¹I.e., the god.

¹⁰²This adultery was with Danae. Catalogues of adulteries were also found in pagan literature (Ovid, Metamorphoses 6: 100-125).

¹⁰³Seduced by Poseidon.

¹⁰⁴Seduced by Poseidon.

¹⁰⁵Seduced by Aeolus.

¹⁰⁶Seduced by Apollo and Herme.

¹⁰⁷Seduced by Poseidon.

to have done these things. The one whom they wish to correct with seven oracles¹⁰⁸ the sins of erring men, loves Sterope, rapes Aethyssa, ravishes Zeuxippe, searches for Prothorn and caressed Arsinoia with adulterous desire. Nevertheless, from that flock of corrupted women, one girl evaded and defeated the amorous god. The god prophesying and predicting the future was not able to win or ravish Dafne.

Another allows for himself effeminate things and seeks solace for his womanish body.¹⁰⁹ Let him see Liber paying to his own lover, even after death, the reward of promised passion by the false and disgraceful union.¹¹⁰

4

If one is armed with an overwhelming fire of desire for the destruction of a father by death, let him take an example from Jove. Whoever longs for a brother's blood, the Corybantes follow this way of life. Those desiring incest

¹⁰⁸This reference is to Apollo.

¹⁰⁹Livy reports that the followers of Liber were women and men very much like women (39:15:10-12).

¹¹⁰Heuten (p. 167) sees this as an allusion to Porcymnos in Clement of Alexandria Proptreticus 2.

take their example from Jove. He lay with his mother, married his sister as a wife, and, in order to completely satisfy the evil deed of incest, he also accosted his daughter with a spirit of corruption.

With hostile screaming, some pursue the weakest and desire to torment their opponent with cruel savagery. Let him learn the order of cruel torments from the fate of Marsys¹¹¹ tormented by Apollo. Someone desires another man's property and he attempts to satisfy this with the death of the master. Let one look at Hercules, who after the death of Geryane drove the Spanish oxen. If one rejoices in the indiscriminate slaughter of men, let him diligently examine the perverted passions of Mars. The majority of sinners collected the seeds of nearly every wickedness from their own gods.¹¹² And so that the damned soul may be able to commit the evil deed with safety, it defends itself with the previous examples of evil deeds done by a stronger authority.

¹¹¹Marsys was flayed by Apollo.

¹¹²Xenophanes realized this when he wrote, "Homer and Hesiod have described to the gods all things that are a shame and disgrace among mortals, stealing and adulteries, and deceivings of one another." (Rex Warner, The Greek Philosophers (Mentor Book: New York, 1958), p. 24).

If a seducer inquires about the price of debauchery, if he longs to learn the method of inciting, let him see the gold of Jove in the breast of the corrupted woman. If a public traitor desires to betray for himself the entrusted guardianship of the kingdom, let him look to those who betrayed Saturn to his son. If one prone for injustice seeks to know how long the law of hospitality may be offered or how long the laws of friendship may be tossed about, or how long the sacred friendship of the table may be violated, let him behold the order of evil deeds he learns concerning the slaughter of Tantalus.

O dismal solace of a most wicket lust! O the lamentable persuasion of men! O the bloody thoughts about unfortunate imitation! You made a stage out of heaven, and you led erring souls over the rough cliffs with a cruel disaster, since the way toward sin is shown from the examples of the gods to men desirous of evil deeds. But in this very condition of sin, in this very confession of wickedness, let us give thanks to those who also introduced to our ignorance the destruction and deaths of their very god, with the result that we learn everything through many obstacles. For even among the ancients, although the honorable dignity of our Lord Jesus Christ was not yet permitted to illuminate the earth, there was religious firmness in spurning the superstitions.

The most and even temperate Diomedes wounded Venus. He wounded and conquered Mars. Mars, being powerful, was condemned to temporary exile by an edict of Otus and Efealta and underwent the iron chains of fetter. Jove lamented Sarpendon in Troy, and Neptune did not receive payment from the insolent king for the constructed walls.¹¹³ Apollo grazed the flocks of another king, and another announces to the sun, who sees all things, the death of the slaughtered cattle.

Sparta buried Castor and Pollux, Hercules burned at Oeta. And elsewhere Aesculapius¹¹⁴ was struck by lightning. Vulcan, thrown down by his father, broke his foot. Liber died fleeing Lycurgus. Venus was discovered in adultery, and she followed--after the wedding of the god--the bed of the man Anchiase. Saturn, fearing an account of his kingdom, devoured his sons, and as a fleeing fugitive, he hid in Italy from his son. Because of the love of Catamitus,¹¹⁵ Juno was spurned and Luna descended to Endymion.¹¹⁶ And against the will of the

¹¹³Refers to the King of Troy.

¹¹⁴Latin form of the Greek Asclepius.

¹¹⁵Catamitus is ancient form for Ganymedes (Heuten, p. 143).

¹¹⁶Endymion was a mythological man whom the moon (Luna) loved. She would have to descend in order to make love with him.

wife and daughter of Troy, Jove, the one who brings aid, unwillingly slept.

O disgraceful confession! O dismal and lamentable misfortunes! O the miserable condition of harsh slavery! The profane power of tyrants attracted holy men to the worship of these gods, even men believing in the one God. And so another evil was added to this evil, death was decreed to the unwilling. Transfer your temples to the theaters, so that the secrets of these very religions might be acted out on stage, and in order that wickedness may not omit anything, make their actors priests. Another more fitting location for these very religions is not yet to be found. Let there the cheap masses keep singing of the loves of the gods! Let there the fortunes and deaths be imitated! There from the examples of the gods and from the impure criminal magistrates, the lost mind will better learn adultery and evil.

CHAPTER 13

Learn also, Sacrosant Emperors, of the venerable
divinity from Alexandria, where its beginnings started, so
that when the inept frailness of this one is detected, our
trifling speech may be recalled to the origin of truth. When
the destruction by the hot weather--the shriveling fruits of
the wretched famine--was imminent in Egypt, a young man was
born from the devout line of a patriarch and interpreted the
dream of the king. He revealed everything that was imminent.
Joseph, the son of Jacob, was put into prison because of his
modesty. After the interpretation of the dream, he was the
partner in the kingship. For by the foresight of a divine
mind, he overcame seven years of poverty by seven years of
collecting and saving fruits.¹¹⁷

Then after his death, the Egyptians made temples to him
according to the ancestral patterns of their own race. And in
order that posterity might learn the gratitude of a just
stewardship, a peck by which he distributed the crops to the
starving was placed over his head. So that he might be wor-
shipped, he even received a more holy name from the first

¹¹⁷This story is found in Genesis, ch. 39-41.

author of his family. For since he was a great-grandson of Sarah who at age ninety, by the favor of God, gave birth to a son for Abraham.¹¹⁸ He is called Serapis in the Greek language, that is Σάπας παῖς. This was against his will, so he was called this after his death.¹¹⁹

In fact, neither was this pious soul, having been ordained by the Greatest God, able to be led toward this evil deed, so that by his own name he displayed the snare of this error to superstitious men, especially since he knew that these things were among the sacrosanct laws of God, lest any man venerate or worship such a thing.

This man is worshipped in Egypt. He is honored. The crowd of temple servants protect his image, and erring, the people protect the sacred ritual, established today with contentious animosity and on behalf of the memory of antiquity in honor of the most pure and modest of men.

But also, in this very image, just as in other images, the unclean spirits of the demons are gathered because of continual sacrifices.¹²⁰ Sacrifices and the blood flowing from

¹¹⁸This story is found in Genesis 21:1-7.

¹¹⁹This etymology is found also in Tertullian Adversus Natura 2:8.

¹²⁰Minucius Felix writes, "These unclean spirits or demons, as it has been shown. . . have their lurking places under statues and consecrated images." (Octavius 27:1)

the continual slaughter of beasts accomplishes nothing except that the essence of the demons--who are born by procreation of the devil--is nourished from this very blood.¹²¹ For thus it was Porphyry--defender of the sacred rites, enemy of God, opponent of the truth, master of wicked arts--who transmitted this to us for obvious approval.¹²² For example, in his book entitled Concerning the Philosophy of Oracles,¹²³ while boasting about the god's power, he admits its weakness. For example, in the first parts of the book, which are located in the introduction, he said: "Serapis having been called and gathered into the body of a man, he responded thus."

Let damned men tell me now, who is more powerful, one who calls, commands, and imprisons or one who is called, obeys and who is imprisoned when he came into the body of a man receiving him by the authority of one ordering? We give thanks for your book, Porphyry. You transmitted to us the essence of your gods. We learned through you how long your gods were

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¹²¹"Consider the practice of Israelites; are not those who eat the sacrifices partners of the altar? . . . I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons" (1 Corinthians 10:18-20, R.S.V.).

¹²²In his astrological work, Firmicus refers to Porphyry as "our Porphyry" (Mathesis 2:208:13).

¹²³ περὶ τῆς ἐκ λόγίων φιλοσοφίας

enslaved to commanding men. Your Serapis is named and originated from a man, and when he had come, immediately, having been ordered, he was imprisoned and perhaps the necessity of speaking was commanded to him unwillingly.

Thus among us, the lashes of religious speech scourge your gods when they begin to harm men. In this way, your gods, having been set up in the body of a man, are tormented by the Word of God, with the fire of a spiritual flame.¹²⁴ And those who are worshipped among you as if gods, are associated with human authority by us of religious faith by the grace of Christ. And fighting the racks, they undergo cures and having been conquered, they are subdued by avenging punishments.

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¹²⁴Firmicus may well have some sort of exorcism in mind. Torment is a standard term used in the New Testament for exorcism (torqueo--Matt. 8:29; Mk. 5:7; Luke 8:28). Julian, the Emperor, in criticising the Christians, complains about their hissing at demons (Letter 19).

CHAPTER 14

I shall try to explain what the Penates are, lest
 anything seems to be overlooked by me. Those who think that
 ***** ** ** ***** *** *****
 life is nothing else except the licentiousness of eating and
 ***** *****
 drinking compose these gods for themselves from the baseness
 of their own passion, consecrating the nourishments of the
 body which are brought together from everyday meals with this
 name on behalf of the salvation of mankind. Since the in-
 firmity of the body is restored through this banquet, they or-
 dained that nourishment was the only god, not knowing the
 truth of the divine oracles.

1

Truly, when the Lord Jesus Christ, being troubled,
 fought with the devil on behalf of our salvation, with the
 divine brilliance of his own majesty and in order to liberate
 men out of his jaws, which he used to carry men away, he
 shattered him with this response. For when the devil said to
 him

2

If you are the son of God, make these
 very stones into bread,

the Lord responding said,

Man shall not live by bread alone,
 but by every word of God.¹²⁵

¹²⁵Matt. 4:3; Luke 4:3.

And thus, not knowing the essence of mankind, they consecrated everyday meals with this name. For everything which men feed up is called a provision (penus): hence, also a provision's (penarius) store room. Also, the Penates gods were composed with wretched knowledge by contemptible and ruined men.

However, learn who Vesta is, so that you do not consider her another piece from antiquity or with the greatest religious fear, a discovery. She is the domestic fire which serves daily needs upon hearths. Therefore, let her have cooks not wretched virgins as priestesses who either despise the ashes of that fire, or they are forced to sin with a prostitute body, or persevering in virginity, they destroy the honest dignity of a glorious name.¹²⁶

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¹²⁶Pastorino (p. 160), Heuten (p. 8) and Ziegler (p. 59) all agree that this passage is incoherent.

CHAPTER 15

Hear also about the divinity of the Palladium. The
 image is made from the bones of Pelops. It is recited that
 this was done by Abaris the Scythian. Consider now what sort
 of a thing that is which the barbaric Scythian consecrated.
 Is not anything among the Scythians composed by human reason?
 And is that savage clan of men--roaming about always with a
 cruel and inhumane brutality--able to devise anything correct
 in the establishing of religions?

Abaris sold this image to the Trojans, promising use-
 less things to foolish men. A god was sold in order to benefit
 the buyer, and the buyer worshipped in supplication that which
 a short time before he had seen auctioned. However, the
 essence of this very image is from the bones of Pelops. If
 you desire, O Abaris, wretched men to worship bones, at least
 gather the remains of a purer and more chaste man. Let there
 be added to the idol which you make, merit from the man's
 virtues. Pelops was among the sweethearts of a lover,¹²⁷ and
 for a long time he endured the ruin of a prostituted disgrace.

¹²⁷Deliciae (sweethearts) was a term used to describe
 the child involved in paedestry.

But neither was he lacking crimes of an adult. By deceit he sought the daughter of the traitor whom he killed. Actually he lied and attacked this traitor, and lest he pay the promised rewards, he threw this same man down a steep cliff.¹²⁸ Behold whose bones were selected in order to make a god who protected the cities and kingdoms.

However, at no time did he protect nor was he a benefit. 3
And whatever expects aid from him sees the fate of the cities in which he existed. Troy was burned by the Greeks, Rome by the Galls. And the Palladium was protected on all sides from fire, but it was not rescued by personal virtues, but by a human guard. In fact, at each of these places, men liberated it, and it was transferred lest it be burned by human flames. To such divinity, human protection was necessary, and lest it be burned it sought human aid. The Palladium is carried away from the fire, but not rescued from it.¹²⁹ The verdict stands, the punishment remains, the fire remains, the fire is imminent, the fire which it is not able to escape surges on.

¹²⁸This refers to Pelops' murder of Myrtilus, son of Tantalus.

¹²⁹He means that the fires of hell will eventually burn it.

Already the flame of heaven is kindled. Already the coming of the divine punishment is appearing. Already the destruction of future disaster is announced. In this flame, the Palladium will not be able to find a hiding place. This very fire searches out hidden things, seeks the concealed things, and whatever has ruined erring men with empty beliefs, it encircles with a swift devastation of flames. "Truly," he said, "the day of the Lord comes as a burning oven."¹³⁰ You have heard what is coming. You have heard. There is nothing which you accumulated that is able to be laid up in the storehouses of the Lord. You shall burn as stubble, whose cheap worthlessness is preserved in ashes and embers, which the ravenous fire feeds upon with the compelling violence of its spirit.

This is your end and your destruction. This is the punishment which God appointed for deceived men; that he burn with perpetual fires the one who either deceived or destroyed wretched men contrary to the will of God.

I wish--sensibly and diligently--to inquire of which Minerva they wish it to be the statue. For indeed, there are many Minervas.¹³¹ Neither does anyone disagree in this matter.

¹³⁰Malachi 4:1.

¹³¹The many Minervas are also found in Cicero De Natura Deorum 3:59; Clement of Alexandria Protrepticus 2:28.

Let us speak of the birth, education, fluency, and intentions of each one, so that from all of these the Palladium may be found which was consecrated with the name of this Minerva.

CHAPTER 16

Antiquity transmits to us who read, that there were
five Minervas. One is the daughter of Vulcan who founded
Athens, which was accompanied by boorish crowds from agri-
cultural settings to the order of associating with cities.
There was another in Egypt who was the daughter of King Nilus,
a teacher of weaving arts. Indeed, the third one was born
from father Saturn, but they recall that she was a female
warrior. For she never maintained the modesty of the feminine
sex among them, but always she followed the arms and the
clamor of wars and the blood thirsty study of war. The fourth
one was the daughter of Jove, King of Crete, who brought
murdered Liber to her father. The fifth was descended from
Pallas as father and a Titan mother and was called Pallas by
the people after the name of her father. She, with insanity
of parricidal furor and insane rashness, impulsively murdered
father Pallas with a cruel death, and neither was she content
simply with the death of her father. In order to enjoy her
own evil deeds longer, and in order to triumph cruelly over
the death of her father, she was decorated with the clothes of
his body with the result that she made public the evil crime of
parricide by a cruel display.

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The Palladium is consecrated--O sacrilege--by this name. This is Pallas who is worshipped! This is Pallas who is preserved by pontifical law, and whose evil deed ought to have been severely condemned! Yet, her image is adored in supplication. Add on the fire! Increase the flames, so that she may learn to burn with your daily sacrifices. For what else does a parricide deserve, if it is not to be burned with perpetual succession of flames before the judgment of God burns her daily with avenging flames?

These ought to be called tombs, most holy emperors, not temples. They ought rather to be called the funeral pyres of wretched men. For in honor of damned men, wretched slavery built temples instead of tombs for men. Here the ashes of burned bodies are preserved. Here the cinders of dead men are stored by an impious rule in order to revive the misfortune of the harsh deaths by the daily blood of the victims, with the result that having been renewed, the sad and lamentable conclusion is reborn with annual mournings, so that the wretched mind of man may learn to worship and perform parricide or incest or murder from the ritual of the sacred rites.

These things, most holy emperors, must be amputated deeply and destroyed, and they must be corrected by the most severe laws of your edicts, lest any longer the wretched error of this belief defile the Roman world, lest the wickedness of

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this custom grow strong, lest whatever rules upon the earth any longer attempt to destroy a man of God.¹³² Certain men do not desire this. They fight against this, and with increasing desire they long for their own destruction. However, comfort the destitute! Rescue the perishing!

The Greatest God entrusted this authority to you for this purpose: that through you the wound of this injury might be healed. We know the danger of their evil deeds. The punishments of this error are known, but it is better to liberate the unwilling than to concede destruction to the willing. Those who are ill often take delight in what is harmful, and when an adverse state of health possesses the body of a man, they desire, on account of suffering, perverse things contrary to their own safety. A mind captured by the fault of weakness always desires the aids of sickness and, rejecting the medicine, has contempt for the doctor, spits out the remedies of medicine, and also hastens his own destruction with great haste. Now if the severity of the sickness gets worse, they search for a stronger medicine and on behalf of the safety of the man, the anxious medicine makes itself stronger.

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¹³²At this time the church was under no danger from persecution, nor was it to be under such a threat in its near future.

Harsh foods and strong drinks are forced upon the unwilling, and if the disease becomes stronger, fire and also a sword are applied. If a man, having been restored with sanity and safety comes to himself, no matter what he involuntarily endures by the fault of a sick body, he confesses that all of this was done on behalf of his own safety by the judgment of a sound mind.¹³³

¹³³ Could be translated: he confesses by the judgment of a sound mind that all this was done on behalf of his own safety.

CHAPTER 17

Hear also, most sacrosanct Princeps, even the names of the gods and by which reason they were composed. This light which by the command of God returns the day to men--after the shadows are put to flight--which arranges the order of its course through a space of twelve hours, they wished that it be called sun (Sol) not because it is alone (solus) as some wish, since there are also the sky and the moon and the many other constellations which we can see, some of which at any time shine forth in a stationary place as if fixed, hung, and perpetual. Others scattered throughout the entire sky transverse a wandering course with certain deviations. However, for this reason it is called the sun (Sol), because when it had risen, it alone (solus) shone after the remaining stars were hidden.¹³⁴

The moon (Luna) also, this same Lucina,¹³⁵ received her name from the nocturnal light (lumen).¹³⁶ Also certain ones wished that she be called Diana, since shining through the night to men, she almost made it another day (dies).¹³⁷ Those

¹³⁴Cicero De Natura Deorum 2:68.

¹³⁵Her function was to make the children see the light of day. She was assimilated with Juno (Q.C.D. p. 471).

¹³⁶Cf. Cicero De Natura Deorum 2:68.

¹³⁷Cicero De Natura Deorum 2:69.

sailing the sea, wished that Neptune (Neptunus) be named from swimming (natandus) and from that which they were freely doing, making up the essence of the name.¹³⁸ They say that father Dis is every earthly and natural power, since this is the nature of the earth that everything goes into it and returns, proceeding from it. Such a thing indicates the riches (divitas) and the wealth of the earth.¹³⁹

They wish to call the essence of the fruits Proserpina, since fruits are abundant (prosum) to men when they begin to sow (sero).¹⁴⁰ They name this very earth Ceres. They borrow this name from tending (gero) the crops.¹⁴¹ Mars received his name from the chances of war as if it changes great things (magna vertat).¹⁴² Minerva similarly is a warlike name as in either 'to diminish' (minuo) or 'to threaten' (mineo).¹⁴³ The loveliness (venustas) of humans was named Venus.¹⁴⁴ They contrived the name Apollo in the Greek language as if he

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¹³⁸Cicero De Natura Deorum 2:66.

¹³⁹Cicero De Natura Deorum 2:66.

¹⁴⁰Cf. Cicero De Natura Deorum 2:66.

¹⁴¹Cicero De Natura Deorum 2:67.

¹⁴²Cicero De Natura Deorum 2:67.

¹⁴³Cicero De Natura Deorum 2:67.

¹⁴⁴Cf. Cicero De Natura Deorum 2:69.

destroyed (perdo) or ruined (amitto) everything entrusted to him.¹⁴⁵ Certain ones also say that Apollo is the sun, since daily, by nature, in his setting he destroys (perdo) the splendor of his lights. However, the Greeks say "apollin"¹⁴⁶ as to destroy (perdo).

You see how this confused error contrives those invent-

 ed and fictitious gods, how both the names and the forms of
 the gods were produced by us for old wives tales, But, truth

 uncovered and the reason of a sound mind discovered all of
 these, so that after every investigation and disclosure
 which sacrilegious error had hidden, renewed truth shown forth.

Truly, all these things were badly composed; first a terror to mortals and following that they were used as if a novelty, as if a certain contempt was born from admiration in men recovering from a long sickness. Thus little by little the mind dared to diligently inquire into what amazed it, and immediately the mind sent an alert mentality into the secrets of the fictions and the empty superstitions. At that time, with collective reason from continual meditations about these

¹⁴⁵ The Greek word that Firmicus has in mind is

ἁπόλλυμι .

¹⁴⁶ For Apollo as sun, see Cicero De Natura Deorum 2:68.

hidden things, the mind arrives at the cause so that first human beings learned the wretched lies of the profane religions, next they despise them, and thirdly they object to them.

CHAPTER 18

It pleases me, at this time, to explain those signs or pass words by which the mass of wretched humans recognize each other in these superstitions. For they have a particular sign and a particular response, in which instruction of the devil is transmitted to them in the meetings of these very sacri-leges.¹⁴⁷

In a certain temple, so that a man about to die¹⁴⁸ may be able to be admitted into the inner parts, he says: "I ate from the tambourine, I drank out of the cymbol, and I have thoroughly learned the secret things of religion,"¹⁴⁹ which is spoken in the Greek language as: "I ate out of the tambourine, I drank from the cymbol, an initiate born of Attis."¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷For discussion of signs, see Introduction, pp.

¹⁴⁸This could refer to either a pagan form of "extreme unction" performed shortly before death or it could be a reference to one's dying with the god. However, if the latter were the case, he would probably not already know the signs.

¹⁴⁹Found also in Clement of Alexandria Protreptias 2:15.

¹⁵⁰Here Firmicus gives the sign in Greek--ἐκ τυμπάνου βέβρωκα, ἐκ κυμβάλου πέπωκα γεγονά μύστης Ἀττεως. Notice the parallel between "thoroughly learned" and "an initiate born of Attis."

O wretched man, you evilly confess the crimes committed. 2
 You drank the harsh venom of a poison, and you licked the
 lethal cup by the instinct of the forbidden fury. Death and
 punishment always follow this food. That which you say you
 have drank strangles the vital blood veins unto death and con-
 fuses the seat of the soul by the polluted continuation of
 evil deeds.

There is another food which lavishly bestows salvation
 and life. There is another food which commends and returns
 men to the Greatest God. There is another food which gives
 relief to the weak, recalls the erring, lifts up the fallen,
 and lavishly bestows the signs of immortality to the dying.
 Seek the cup of Christ, the bread of Christ, so that with
 earthly fragility disdained, the essence of man may be fed
 with the immortal food.

However, what is this bread or what cup does wisdom 3
 proclaim with a great voice in the Book of Solomon? For he
 said, "Come, eat my bread and drink my wine which I have
 mixed."¹⁵¹ And Melchizedek, King of Salem and priest to the
 Greatest God, when Abraham returned, offered a gift of blessing
 with bread and wine.¹⁵² When he had blessed Jacob and when

¹⁵¹Proverbs 9:5.

¹⁵²Genesis 14:18-20.

Esau had sought this same blessing from his father, Isaac, his father responded to him, "I have made him your lord," he said, "and all his brothers I have given to him for servants and with wheat and wine I have sustained him." Then Esau wept with lamentation over his own wretched fate, since he lost the gift of future wheat and wine, that is good fortune.¹⁵³ Moreover, this very divine bread was offered to consecrated men by God. 4
The Holy Spirit spoke through Isaiah,

The Lord says: Behold those who serve
me shall eat, but you shall be hungry.
Behold, those who serve me shall laugh,
you shall be disturbed and God shall
kill you.¹⁵⁴

Not only is this very bread from the Greatest God denied to sacrilegious and impious men, but the punishment which is promised and the destruction of a harsh death is also decreed so that the destruction of divine censure is heaped upon parched throats.

Worshipful responses of the thirty-third Psalm also 5
follows this same idea. For the Holy Spirit says through David:

¹⁵³Genesis 27:37-38. Firmicus' statement "with wheat and wine I sustained him" is found here first (E. J. Martin, "The Biblical Text of Firmicus Maternus," The Journal of Theological Studies, Vol. 24, 1922-23, p. 323.).

¹⁵⁴Isaiah 65:13-14.

"Taste and see that the Lord is sweet."¹⁵⁵ The heavenly nourishment is sweet, the food of God is sweet, neither does it contain in itself the dismal torment of wretched famine, and it also drives out the venom of the preceding poison from the marrow of men.

Thus, the following responses of the oracle declare these things, for he said:

O fear the Lord you his saints, since
there is not want for them who fear
him. Rich men are destitute and
hungry, but those who search after
the Lord are lacking in no good thing.¹⁵⁶

You having been dressed in a stately robe proceed in
such a way, you whose head is weighed down by gold or by
laurels, this foul lack of decency follows your own error, and
the heavy weight of poverty hangs heavy over your own neck.¹⁵⁷

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¹⁵⁵Psalm 34:8.

¹⁵⁶Psalm 34:9.

¹⁵⁷K. Ziegler notes, "Da in dem ganzen Kapitel stets der Attismyste angeredet wird, so meint Heuten 178, aus der Stelle schliessen zu durfen, dass nicht nur die Priester des Kybele-Attis-Kultes---was bekannt ist---, sondern auch die Mysten kostbare Purpurgewander und goldenen Kopfputz mit Lorbeer getragen hatten. Aber das ist, weil uberscharfe Interpretation, nicht bundig (Op. Cit., p. 61).

You despise that pauper who is wealthy and rich. Abraham prepares a place for this man in his bosom. At that time, among the intervening space of flames, you will request a slight drop of dripping water from him to soothe the wounds of your own conscience. Lazarus, though willing, will not be able to give or to obtain a balm for your suffering.¹⁵⁸ For with equal grace, what is appropriate is measured out to everyone. Life is conferred upon this one because of the evil things in this age, but for you the perpetual punishment of torment is decided because of the good things in this age.¹⁵⁹

Nevertheless, so that it might be learned more clearly what is this bread through which the destructions of wretched death are conquered, this very Lord designated by his holy and reverent mouth, lest through diverse traditions the hopes of men be deceived by perverse interpretations.¹⁶⁰ For he said in the Gospel according to John,

¹⁵⁸Luke 16:19-26.

¹⁵⁹This is a concept found in Apocalyptic literature which states that whatever one experiences in this age, will be reversed in the age to come (Luke 6:20-26).

¹⁶⁰Firmicus has in mind, not heretics within the church, but the false interpretation of the Bible by the mysteries. Christian apologists often believed that all similarities between Christianity and the mysteries were inventions of the devil.

I am the bread of life, whoever shall
 have come to me will not be hungry,
 whoever shall have believed in me shall
 not be thirsty anymore.¹⁶¹

Likewise, in the following passage he signified this same
 thing in a similar manner, for he said, "If anyone thirsts,
 let him come, and whoever believes in me, let him drink."¹⁶²
 And, again this very one, in order to transmit the essence
 of his majesty to the believing, says: "except you shall have
 eaten the flesh of the Son of Man and shall have drank his
 blood, you shall not have life in you."¹⁶³

Therefore, have nothing to do with the food from the
 tambourine. O wretched mortal gods! Seek the grace of the
 saving food, drink the immortal cup! Christ calls you to the
 light by his own banquets, and he makes alive sluggish members
 and limbs putrified by a perverse poison. Renew the damned
 men with heavenly food so that whatever is in you that dies can
 be reborn by divine grace. You know what is fitting for you
 to do. Choose that which you wish. From the former way death
 is born. From the latter way immortal life is given.

¹⁶¹John 6:35.

¹⁶²John 7:37.

¹⁶³John 6:53.

CHAPTER 19

"...and bridegroom, rejoice bridegroom, rejoice new light!"¹⁶⁴ Thus, why do you, O destructive persuasion, cast down wretched men into the depths? Why do you promise signs of false hope to him? There is no light in you, neither is there any other one who deserves to be called the bridegroom.

There is one light, there is one bridegroom. Christ accepted the honor of these names. You are unable to transfer the glory of different fortune to yourself, neither are you able to be adorned with the splendor of heavenly lights. You lie in darkness and squalor. There filth, squalor, fog, shadows, and the horror of a perpetual night rules. If you want at least a thin ray of light to shine upon you, lift your face, uncover your closed eyes and after leaving those things, consult him who said, "I am the light of the world."¹⁶⁵

In his divine teachings, it is taught that in earthly existence, he shines upon our work everyday. However, he is not able to shine unless spotless decorations of our conscience protect us and unless a whole and pure life commend us. Then

¹⁶⁴Most studies relate this password, δε νύμφε χαίρε νύμφε χαίρε νέον φῶς, to Iacchus and Ceres (Th. Friedrich, Op. Cit., pp. 44-47).

¹⁶⁵John 8:12.

the grace of the true light rises over us. Then the author of light makes intercession for us. Then we are able to see and to accept the true light.

But so that the depravity of the sacriligious voice might be restrained, and so that it is proved that Christ is the bridegroom, that the church is the bride from which spiritual sons are born every day to the venerable father, I shall confirm with oracles who is truly the bridegroom of the sacred readings. In this hidden proof, let the venerable things of the prophets be revealed! Let the faith of the holy oracles stand on our side! Joel when admonished by the Divine Spirit spoke thus:

Sound the war trumpets in Zion,
sanctify the fast, make know the
cure, gather the people, sanctify
the church, gather the elders,
and gather the small ones still
nursing. Let the bridegroom proceed
from his own bedchamber and the
bride from her own bridal chamber.¹⁶⁶

Jeremiah signified the same thing with similar reason when he threatened Jerusalem with a savage oracle: "And I shall carry away the voice of mirth, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride."¹⁶⁷ The Holy Spirit also predicted through the Psalms the coming of the bridegroom. In the

¹⁶⁶Joel 2:15-16.

¹⁶⁷Jeremiah 7:34.

eighteenth Psalm, this oracle is found, for it says:

And he rejoices just as a bridegroom
going forth from his own bedchamber
and just as a gaint running down the
road. His departure from the heights
of heaven and his return all the way
to the heights of heaven, and no one
is able to hide from his warmth.¹⁶⁸

Let the more hidden secrets be revealed! In the
Apocalypse, that is the Revelation, we discover who the bride-
groom is. For thus it is written:

Come, I shall show the new bride,
the wife of the lamb, to you. And
in the Spirit he led me to a great
mountain and showed to me the holy
city Jerusalem descending from
heaven.¹⁶⁹

It must also be reported what the gospel teachings transmitted
to us concerning this matter. Namely, we discover in the Gospel
according to John that this was noted:

. . .you are witnesses to me that I
said to those who were sent to me
from Jerusalem that I am not the
Christ, but that I was sent before
Him. He who has the bride is the
bridegroom, but the friend of the
bridegroom is he who stands and
hears him and rejoices with joy on
account of the voice of the bridegroom.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸Psalm 19:5-6. It should be noted that in the Old
Testament, this was used as a hymn about the sun. The imagery
used is that of the rising and setting sun.

¹⁶⁹Revelation 21:9-10.

¹⁷⁰John 1:19, 3:28-29.

The mystery of this matter was revealed. The chorus of wise virgins expected the return of this bridegroom. Holy virginity carried to him the lights with vigilant diligence. The gift of happy rewards is promised to the servants who await the bridegroom. For we find in the Gospel according to Luke:

Let your loins be girded and your lamps burning, and be like men awaiting their Lord when he returns from the wedding so that when he shall have come and knocked they open to him. Happy shall be the servants whom the lord, when he returns, shall find watching.¹⁷¹

Behold how the bridegroom is displayed by the oracles of the venerable answers!

Since you have been placed among hard fortunes, why do you apply the blessed term to yourself? If, after having been redeemed, you wish to follow the light of the bridegroom, throw away the errors and having been made anxious by vigilant diligence, restrain the previous evil deeds of your life by religious devotion.

Then, since the bridegroom shall have found you watching in his name, since he shall have recognized the merits of your faith, he will give you the greatest reward, he will give you a

¹⁷¹Luke 12:35-37.

pure gift: You shall enter with him into the bridal chamber of heaven. You shall see the palace of the world, and so that you may be able to be a true participant, the gift of immortality shall be conferred upon you by the most kind and most just Lord.¹⁷²

¹⁷²Even though "bridal chamber" was an important term for the Gnostics, Firmicus' eschatology, with its futuristic emphasis, is not Gnostic.

CHAPTER 20

The sign of another profane sacrament is "God out of a rock." Why do you, with an adulterated confession, transfer this holy and venerable secret to profane celebrations? There is another stone which God promised he would send for the establishing of the foundations of the promised Jerusalem. Christ was made known for us by the sign of the venerable rock. Why do you transfer by deceptive secret the dignity of this venerable name to the blemished superstitions? Destruction and disastrous collapse of the crumbling roof follows your stone. Having been laid by the hand of God, our stone built, confirmed, erected, constructed, and carefully adorned the gift of a restored work with the splendor of perpetual immortality. For, when commanded by the Holy Spirit, Isaiah spoke about this:

Thus says the Lord, behold I lay
in the foundation wall of Zion, a
costly stone, an elect, very great
and honored and whoever shall
believe on it will not be troubled.¹⁷³

There is a similar expression also in the Psalms, for in the one hundred and seventeenth Psalm the Holy Spirit said:

The stone, which the builders

¹⁷³Isaiah 28:16.

rejected, this very one has become
the head of the corner. This very
stone was made by the Lord, and it
is marvellous in our eyes.¹⁷⁴

Through many prophets the Holy Spirit demonstrated the significance of this very name. For Zechariah, the prophet, said:

Behold I bring my child whose name
is 'rising' for the stone which I¹⁷⁵
set before the face of Joshua,
upon this very stone are seven
eyes.¹⁷⁶

But, so that it will be established more clearly, let
us disclose the more ancient secrets of the venerable scriptures. In Deuteronomy it is expressed in this fashion: "And you will write on this stone the whole law."¹⁷⁷ Even Joshua, the son of Nave, particularly understood this, by the command of divinity, for he said:

And he took the great stone and
set it up in front of the Lord.
And Joshua said to the people:
'Behold, this very stone shall be
for testimony among you, since it
heard all which was spoken by the

¹⁷⁴Psalm 118:22-23.

¹⁷⁵Latin Ortus.

¹⁷⁶Zechariah 3:8-9.

¹⁷⁷Deuteronomy 27:8.

Lord when he spoke to you, and it shall be a witness against you in the latter days, since you shall have withdrawn from your Lord.¹⁷⁸

That, however, it is through this rock, that is our Lord Jesus Christ, that both these very gods and the multitude of the temples will fall, was clearly expressed by Daniel in his venerable oracle. For when he said:

4

And behold, an image, a very great image, and the contemplation of which is fearful, and it stood loftily before you. Its head was from fine gold, its breast and arms of silver, its stomach and thighs of bronze, its feet, however, were made partly from iron and partly from clay. At a given moment, a stone was cut from a mountain without the use of hands, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay and broke them into pieces. And the iron, clay, bronze, silver, and the gold were treated alike and were crumbled like chaff, like dust upon the threshing floor in summer. And the wind carried them away so that nothing will remain of them. And the stone which struck the image made a great mountain and filled the whole earth.¹⁷⁹

Whereupon the earth is there a place which the name of Christ has not possessed? Where the sun rises and where it sets, where the North Star rises, where the South sets,¹⁸⁰ the

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¹⁷⁸Joshua 24:26-27.

¹⁷⁹Daniel 2:31-35.

¹⁸⁰Firmicus uses septentrio for North star, and auster for south.

majesty of his venerable name fills everything. And yet, still the dying members of idolatry are permitted to linger in some regions.¹⁸¹ Nevertheless, with respect to this, the situation is such that when all the earth is cleansed, this destructive evil will be amputated at the root. Concerning the stone of idolatry about which they say, "God from the rock," which oracle of the prophets responds? Moreover, whom does the stone support or benefit? However, this holy stone, that is Christ, sustains the foundations of the faithful, even more,¹⁸² having been placed at the corner, he joined the sections of the two walls with equal balance. That is, he combined the strengths of the Old and New Testaments into one. Even more, certainly he joined together the diversity of body and soul through the conferring of immortality on man. Even more, he proclaimed the law, even more he asserted testimony against sinners. Even more, what is more important, he struck the image of the devil, in order that after conquering and prostrating him, and after turning him into ashes and cinders, and

6

¹⁸¹Sallustius, a contemporary of Firmicus, wrote about Christians, "Again, the fact that unbelief has risen in certain parts of the earth and will often occur hereafter should not disturb men of sense." (Sallustius, Op. Cit., p. 108)

¹⁸²I have translated aut as "even more" since Firmicus is not using it in a disjunctive manner.

after erecting the apex of his own sublimity the pure rule of his dominion will shine.¹⁸³

Now you, Constantius and Constans, Most Sacred Emperors, the strength of your venerable faith must be beseeched. He who in every action, so far as he is able, follows the will of the Greatest God, is higher than men, and, having been separated from the earthly fragility, unites himself to the fellowship of heavenly things. Only a little is lacking that by your laws the devil might fall down prostrate on the earth and the destructive contamination of existing idolatry might perish. The venom of this poison has vanished and day by day the essence of the profane passion dies out.

Raise the standard of faith! Divinity reserved this for you. By the favor of the Eminent God, you are victors over all of your enemies by whose works the Roman Empire was disfigured. Raise the banner of the venerable law! Sanctify and proclaim that which benefits!

Let there be fortune and good luck for the State, because you have prostrated the army of the enemy among a

¹⁸³There is some doubt as to the verb in this clause. Ziegler inserts eröffnen in his translation (Ziegler, Op. Cit., p. 36).

multitude of slain victims.¹⁸⁴ Fortunate are you whom God

 made to be participants of his kingdom and will. The gracious

 divinity of Christ reserved for your hands the destruction
 of profane temples and the tearing down of idolatry. He¹⁸⁵
 opposed spiritual evils. You conquered earthly evils. Raise
 the trophy of victory, and let the huge list of triumphants
 be brought forward! Rejoicing over the slaughter of profane
 things, exult more strongly, exult confidently! Your good
 fortune is yoked with the power of God. By Christ's fighting,
 you conquered on behalf of the salvation of men.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴Instead of "victims," Ziegler inserts an adjective
 to modify "army." He translates this sentence "dass ihr unter
 Haufen getoteter Feinde das gottlose Heer niedergestreckt habt!"

(Ziegler, Op. Cit., p. 36).

¹⁸⁵I. e., Christ.

¹⁸⁶Another possibility is "By Christ's fighting on behalf
 of the salvation of men, you have conquered."

CHAPTER 21

Let all symbols of a profane religion be supplied in
 order that we may show that the most worthless enemy of man-
 kind transferred the holy and venerable oracles of the
 prophets to the contaminated wickedness of their own madness.

For thus we find that it is said, "Alas, two-horned,
 two formed one."¹⁸⁷ This god of yours is not two formed, but
 many formed; for the form of the poisoned face is changed into
 many forms of appearance. He is the snake and the scorpion
 who is treaded upon by the sure footstep of the faithful.¹⁸⁸
 This evil snake, whose head deceived mortals seek, that coiled
 dragon, who is led along by a fish hook,¹⁸⁹ who being captured
 is imprisoned. This god of yours is adorned with the hair of
 Lernaean snake.¹⁹⁰ Do not you see that the crowd of dying
 snakes follow the pierced leader? Thus why do you spring forth

¹⁸⁷The Greek ἀλλὰ δίκερως δίμορε
 is usually identified with Dionysus the Bull which was important
 to the Orphic Cult (Pastorino, pp. 215-216; Ziegler Op. Cit., 61;
 Heuten, p. 182).

¹⁸⁸A common Biblical motif found in Psalm 91:13; Mark
 16:18.

¹⁸⁹A reference to Leviathan in Job. 40:24-41:2.

¹⁹⁰Lerna was a swamp in Argolis.

with new born Hydras?¹⁹¹ Why do you establish for yourself this offspring full of evil?

We learned the way of you death, we know by what antidote the poisons of you art may be conquered. We drink the immortal blood of Christ, the blood of Christ is combined with our blood. This is the saving antidote against your evil deeds, the antidote which daily keeps away the deadly venom from the tempted people of God. Who has seen this god with horns whom they mourn? What are these horns which he boasts that he has? There are other horns which are mentioned by the prophet when commanded by the Holy spirit, which you, O Devil, think you are able to transfer to your blemished face.

Whence do you search for ornament and glory for yourself? The horns point to nothing except the venerable sign of the cross. The world is sustained by one extended directly from this sign. The earth is held together, and from the joining of the two laterally extended horns, the east is touched and the west is upheld with the result that the whole world is made firm by this tripartite stability. The fixed roots of the immortal work are held by the foundation.¹⁹²

¹⁹¹Hydra was a snake which lived at Lerna and was destroyed by Hercules.

¹⁹²Many parallels to this cosmic significance of the cross can be found in Christian literature. Just one short

A venerable oracle of a prophet transmitted this secret to us. In fact, we find that in Habbakak it was thus written:

His power has covered the heavens,
and the earth is filled with his
praise and his splendor will be like
the sun. The horns shall be in his
hands, and there the power of his
glory is established and he will
establish his own love. The word
shall march and go before his steps.¹⁹³

Behold the venerable horns of the cross! Behold the
immortal summit of holy power! Behold the divine union of
the glorious work! You, O Christ, support the universe and
the earth with outstretched hands, you the heavenly kingdom.
On your immortal shoulders rests our salvation. You Lord,
bear the sign of eternal life. You proclaimed this to us with
venerable inspiration through the prophets. In fact, Isaiah
said: "Behold, to you a son is born, the rule is upon his
shoulders, and his name is called a message of great counsel."¹⁹⁴

These are the horns of the cross, by which everything

example will be cited. "There is a place which we believe to be the center of the world. The Jews give it the name of Golgotha." Pseudo-Cyprian, Carmen de Pascha vel de Lingo Vitae. (cited in H. Rahner, S.J., Greek Myths and Christian Mystery. Burns and Oates, London, 1963, p. 62; Rahner writes a whole chapter on this idea, pp. 46-68).

¹⁹³Habakkuk 3:3-5.

¹⁹⁴Isaiah 6:9.

is similarly supported and held together. The life of man makes good use of these horns. In order that Amalech might be conquered, Moses imitated these horns with outstretched hands.¹⁹⁵ In order that he might obtain more easily that which he urgently requested, he made himself a cross from a branch.¹⁹⁶ Rush to these horns with hastened speed, flee toward these horns with humble veneration. Let justice, equanimity, modesty, mercy, patience and faith transfix you to these horns, so that exhibiting these venerable insignia, rejoicing in the majesty of a consecrated brow, you might participate in the burial and the life of Christ.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁵Exodus 17:9-11.

¹⁹⁶Numbers 21:8-9.

¹⁹⁷A common motif found in the mystery religions as well as Christianity.

CHAPTER 22

We also mention another symbol, in order that the evil crimes of a contaminated mind might be revealed. The whole sequence of it must be told, so that it might be evident among all that the law of the divine arrangement was disturbed by the perverted imitation of the devil. On a certain night, the image is placed face up on a bier¹⁹⁸ and is lamented by many with divided mournings.¹⁹⁹ Then, when they have satisfied themselves with this imagined lamentation, a light is brought in. At that time, the throat of all who mourned was anointed by the priest.²⁰⁰ After this anointing, the priest, whispered the following in a slow muttering, "Rejoice initiates, since the god is redeemed. For salvation from suffering shall be

¹⁹⁸This refers to an image of the god. Most believe that this ceremony described is that of the Isis-Osiris religion.

¹⁹⁹"Divided" could mean either laments done antiphonally or just that there were breaks in their mourning.

²⁰⁰Though faux (throat) can mean other than throat, that is probably its meaning here.

ours."²⁰¹

Why do you encourage wretched men to rejoice? Why do you urge deceived men to be glad? What hope, what salvation do you promise to them in sorrowful belief? Why do you arouse them with a false promise? Death is the sign of your god.²⁰² His life does not appear. Neither has a divine oracle proclaimed at any time his resurrection, nor did he show himself to men after his death in order that one might believe in him. No proof of this event did he send in advance. Neither by preceding examples did he show that this was going to happen.

You bury an idol, you bewail the idol, you carry an idol from the tomb, and when you have done this, you O wretched one, rejoice. You redeem your own god, you put together the members of stone.²⁰³ You arrange the lifeless stone. Your god might give thanks to you, might repay you with similar gifts and might desire for you to become his participants. May you thus die as he dies and live as he lives.

²⁰¹The Greek sign Θαρρεῖτε μύστα τοῦ θεοῦ τερωσμένου, ἔσται γὰρ ἡμῖν ἐκ πόνων σωτηρία could refer to Attis, Adonis, or Osiris.

²⁰²Could also be translated, "The death of your god is known."

²⁰³He is referring to the assembling of the disassembled god Osiris.

In respect to the anointing of the throat with Balsam, who does not see through the senselessness of this act and scorn it? Therefore, the devil has his own anointed ones,²⁰⁴ and because he himself is the anti-Christ, he leads wretched men, by an evil association, toward the dishonor of his name.

This anointing is reserved for the dead, is reserved for those who are going to die in order that those whom you caught with your snares, having been smeared with the poisonous ointment, you might plunge them forever into a sorrowful and fateful destruction.

²⁰⁴The Latin word used is christi.

CHAPTER 23

There is another ointment which God the Father handed
 down to his only son, and which the son bestows by means of
 the divine majesty of his divinity to those believing. The
 ointment of Christ is prepared by an immortal composition and
 is tempered with spiritual perfumes of essences. This oint-
 ment frees the putrid limbs of men from mortal snares, so that
 after burying the first man, immediately from the same man,
 another is fortunately born. And, so that this will be more
 clearly explained, the secrets of the sacred writings must be
 revealed. 1

For David, in order to transmit the gift of this anoint-
 ing said: "More handsome in appearance than the sons of men,
 grace is poured upon your lips. On that account he blessed
 you forever. O most powerful one, gird your sword upon your
 thigh. Go forth in your appearance and excellence. Proceed
 prosperously and reign on account of truth, meekness and jus-
 tice; and your right hand will marvellously teach you. Your
 arrows are sharp. O most Powerful one, in the heart of the
 enemies of the king, the masses will fall down before you. Your
 throne, O God, is forever.²⁰⁵ The sceptre of your kingdom is 2

²⁰⁵Often translated "your divine throne is forever."

the honest sceptre. You have loved justice, you have hated iniquity, on account of this, your God anointed you with oil of gladness more than your equals. Myrrh and aloes and cassia for your clothes, from the ivory palaces from which they have made you glad."²⁰⁶

We examined the secrets of the immortal anointing, and the order of the divine arrangement was shown to us. The eternal kingdom and the diadem of heaven were given to our Lord together with the majesty of anointing. However, who this is who accepted the authority of ruling the world, who is adorned by the majesty of this venerable name, another oracle tells us. For this same David said:

3

Why have the Gentiles raged and
the people meditated over vain
things? The kings of the earth
took a stand, and the rulers came
together against the Lord and
his holy one.²⁰⁷

O sacrilegious belief, why do you glorify yourself in this way? Why do you surround wretched men with unbridled rashness? The anointing of Christ gives the kingdom of heaven. Your anointing arouses the flames of Gehenna.

²⁰⁶Psalm 45:3-8.

²⁰⁷Psalm 2:1-2.

CHAPTER 24

But what that priest composes with an impure mouth and
the polluted contamination of words, shall be discussed with
diligent inquiry. Since his own god has been liberated, he
persuades the participants to be of good courage and to have
the assurance of good hope. O with what wretched and grievous
snares vain cleverness involves itself! Who liberated your
god? For whom has it been beneficial that he suffered? Learn,
learn that which you do not know, learn that which you do not
see! Christ the son of God, so that he may free mankind from
the snares of death, truly underwent all these things in order
to remove the yoke of harsh captivity, to return man to the
Father, to unite men with God with fortunate reconciliation
after mitigating the offenses, to demonstrate by his own
example the fruit of the promised resurrection.

The Son of God did that which he before had promised. He
closed the doors of the palace of hell, and when death had
been trodden under foot, he cast down the necessity of a harsh
law.²⁰⁸ During three days, the mass of the just was examined
and gathered by him, lest any longer the depravity of death
rule over them, lest the merit of the just waste away from long

²⁰⁸The harsh law being the necessity of death.

hopelessness. He dashed to pieces the eternal bolts and the iron doors collapsed at the command of Christ. Behold, the earth quaked, and when the stability of its foundations had been shaken, it acknowledged the divinity of the living Christ. Before the appointed time, a circular motion of the world hastens the day, and the sun, with a hurried journey turns into night, while the time of the day's hours is not yet completed. Behold the highest points of the curtain are torn, and the darkness of the night hides the circle of the earth with yet darker shadows.²⁰⁹ All the elements were confounded by the struggling Christ at that time when he first armed the human body against the tyranny of death. For three days the struggle was going on in this very conflict, until death, with the power of its own wickedness overcome, was shattered.²¹⁰ O religious man, O man of Christ, why do you despair and become weak with usual impatience? Can you not bear a delay of three days? Do you confess your anxiety and desperation with new

3

²⁰⁹ An obvious reference to the story found in the Gospels. Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:44-45. Notice that Matthew has him conquer death at his resurrection, not after three days (Matthew 27:52-53.).

²¹⁰ Firmicus presents a vivid picture of the four elements of the human body (See Chapter I) being conquered by Christ. These elements were also identified with beings who lived in the air (see Colossians 2:8, 20; Galations 4:9.).

supplications? The Holy Spirit, with a venerable voice, signified that you would do this on that day, since through David he said:

We are considered just as sheep for slaughter. Arise, why do you sleep, O Lord? Arise and do not ruin us forever. Why do you turn your face away? You forgot our affliction and tribulation, since our soul is crushed into the dust, our belly sticks to the earth. Arise O Lord, bring aid to us and liberate us on account of your name.²¹¹

Behold, after three days, a brighter day than usual
arises, and the gift of former light, having been returned to
the sun, the omnipotent God-Christ is adorned with the more
splendid rays of the sun. The saving divinity rejoices and
the multitude of justified and sanctified people follow his
triumphal chariot. Then, with elated joy, elated mortality
shouts, "Death where is your sting?"²¹² Then hastening ahead,
the saving divinity commands the heavenly gates to open for
him: "Open, open, break the immortal bolt: God-Christ, after
trampling on death, recalls to heaven men whom he had taken
up."²¹³ The holy prophet prophesied this with a venerable

4

²¹¹Psalm 44:23-26.

²¹²1 Corinthian 15:55.

²¹³Perhaps a portion of a hymn in the early church.

voice, and from the prophetic mouth the voice of one commanding is heard. For the Holy Spirit, in order to show to us the freedom of the commanding Christ, said: "Lift up the gates of your leader and lift up, O you eternal gates, and the King of Glory shall enter."²¹⁴

This was commanded to unknowing angels, for they also were unable to know at what time the Word of God descended to the earth. Therefore, those angels also responded with an anxious question: "Who is this King of Glory?" To those who asked, Christ responds with the clear majesty of his divinity: "The Lord strong and powerful, the Lord powerful in battle."²¹⁵ Immediately, the Son of God was recognized by the Guardians of heaven, and they recognized whatever had previously eluded them.²¹⁶ They saw the spoils of the prostrate enemy, and remembering the order of the first enactment,²¹⁷ these also

²¹⁴Psalm 24:7.

²¹⁵The question and the response are found in Psalm 24:8.

²¹⁶These Guardians are perhaps the Watchers in Jewish apocalyptic (1 Enoch 12:2,3; 39:12, 13; 20:1).

²¹⁷Cf. Mark 3:27. Also a reference to the Watchers who were thrown from heaven (Zadokite Document 3:4).

shout together with those ascending with the similarly repeated cry: "Lift up the gates, you who were given charge over them, and be lifted up, O you eternal gates, and the King of Glory shall enter."²¹⁸

When the son returned, the father gave back to him the throne of the kingdom with equal authority, so that he commands, rules, possesses and reigns with the eternal majesty of his divinity. Hear what the Holy Spirit commanded Daniel to say concerning this.

6

I saw in a vision the night, and behold, one coming on the clouds of heaven like a son of man, and he came all the way to the Ancient of Days, and he stood before his face, and those who stood there presented him, and royal power was given to him. And all the kings of the earth by race and all fame served him, and his power which is eternal does not pass away, and his kingdom shall not be destroyed."²¹⁹

These same things are shown to us in the holy Revelation, for in the Apocalypse we find it thus written:

7

And turning also I looked back in order to see the voice which spoke with me,

²¹⁸The Naasenni used this passage to describe the ascension of the soul to heaven. It is through the gates of heaven that one is born again and receives immortality (Hippolytus, Refutation of all Heresies 5:3).

²¹⁹Daniel 7:13-14.

and I saw seven golden candlesticks,
 and in the middle of the candlesticks
 one like the Son of Man, clothes to
 his feet and girded about his breast
 with a golden girdle. Moreover, his
 head and hair were white like white
 wool, like snow, his eyes were like
 a flaming fire, his feet like brass
 refined in the furnace, and his voice
 like the sound of many waters, and he
 had seven stars in his right hand,
 and from his mouth a two-edged sword
 and his face shone like the sun in
 its strength. And when I had seen
 him, I fell at his feet as one dead,
 and he placed his right hand upon me
 saying 'Fear not; I am the First and
 the Last and the living who was dead,
 and behold, I am alive for ever more
 and I have the keys of death and the
 underworld.'²²⁰

Also, after the resurrection, when he gave certain
 commandments to his disciples he concluded the list of immortal
 commandments with this law:

All authority in heaven and on earth
 has been given to me. Go therefore
 and teach all nations, baptizing them
 into the name of the Father and the
 Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them
 to observe all things whatsoever I
 taught you.²²¹

Moreover, that God the Father, making Him a participant in the
 kingdom, handed over to him the seat of the royal throne, is
 taught in the oracle:

²²⁰Revelation 1:12-19.

²²¹Matthew 28:18-20.

The Lord said to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I shall place your enemies under your feet like a foot-stool.' The Lord shall send the sceptre of your strength from Zion, and you shall rule in the midst of your enemies. With you is the dominion in the day of your strength, in the beauty of the saints. From the womb, I begat you before the morning star. The Lord has sworn an oath and will not repent of it.²²²

These are the enemies of God, Most Holy Emperors, those who disturb the order of truth with a contrary law, who by instinct of perverse passion compose sacrilegious prayers, who always venerate either wood or stone with the furor of a profane mind. Having arrived at this point, we ought to explain the order of the holy instruction, so that whatever the prophetic teaching has transmitted to us who are searching the holy word of God may be explained particularly, in order to refute the sins of the profane error, lest the order of truth be investigated too indiscreetly by us, just as we mentioned²²³ those things which were fabricated transmitted such sacrileges

to the erring.

²²²Psalm 110:1-4.

²²³In order to make better sense out of this sentence, Heuten erases the expression, "we mentioned," p. 107.

CHAPTER 25

You, Lordly Emperor, lend me the endurance of your holy
 ears in order that we may make clear all that we entrust to
 your mercy. Why God, that is the Son of God, took it upon
 himself to become man, will be shown to your piety with brief
 and true explanation. 1

When God created the first man, that is Adam, according
 to his image, he gave him a certain law of the commandments.
 He was deceived through the woman, that is Eve, by the per-
 suasions of the devil and lost the dignity of the glory pro-
 mised to him. There was a tree in paradise, through which he
 lost the gift of the rewards promised him by God.²²⁴

Man was made from the dust of the virgin earth. For 2
 as the Scripture says, "It had not yet rained upon the earth."²²⁵
 By trespassing the commandments of God, he afflicted mankind
 with the chains of mortality.²²⁶ It was necessary that all

²²⁴Genesis 3:1-6.

²²⁵Genesis 2:5.

²²⁶Romans 5:12ff.

this be reformed and completely corrected, and a reform of the lineage ought to reform the beginnings. Adam, created from the dust of the virgin earth, lost the promised life through his own transgression.²²⁷ Through the Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit, Christ was born and received immortality and the Kingdom. A tree of wood offered the injurious food to the deceived; the wood of the cross restored life by its immortal union. Adam had contempt for God, Christ obeyed God. Thus, with divine disposition, what Adam lost, Christ found.

For after a long time, in the most recent space of time, 3
that is like the last week of the ages, the Word of the Lord united itself with a human body, in order to redeem men, to conquer death, and to unite the frailty of the human body with divine immortality. For what would the great multitude of saints do? What hope of salvation is there for them? What reward of merits is there, if it was held in bondage with inescapable snares of mortality, under the one and the same condition of fate? Nothing of the mercy and majesty of God would be promised to Abel, nothing to Enoch, nothing to Noah, nothing to Shem, nothing to Abraham, nothing to Isaac, and nothing to Jacob. They, likewise, after such merits of faith, would go condemned

²²⁷Romans 5:18-19.

at the same time with all the rest, and the one destruction by death would seize all the saints of God. Neither would piety have a reward from God if one and the same condition of death swallows up everyone.

But God had promised to Abraham a kingdom brighter than the stars. Therefore, the Virgin Mary, a descendant of the race of Abraham conceived in order that the descendants of the men spoken of above, might be united by the bond of immortal fellowship, so that in this way mankind might arrive at the kingdom of immortality by the merit of obedience of one, who was man and also at the same time God, joined by the equal association of fellowship. And thus, Most Holy Emperors, since we have done enough for curious ears, let us describe the rest if perhaps purifying speech be able to cleanse the filth of polluted ears.

CHAPTER 26

At this point, another symbol follows which is trans-
mitted to credulous ears of wretched men as a great thing.
"The bull is father of a dragon and the dragon is father of a
bull."²²⁸ Finally, O Devil, you have revealed to us character-
istics of your blemished name, finally you confessed the in-
famous name with your own voice. I know who you were, what
you dared. I know what the blemished persuasion of your evil
deed has accomplished. It was what you earnestly promised to
Eve when you deceived her, when you said to her: "You shall be
like Gods."²²⁹ Already, at that time, you were preparing
temples for yourself and your followers. You were making
shrines, and you were consecrating the filth of your poisonous
mouth with negarious ceremonies.

You slithered into temples, and feasted upon the wretched
blood of slain sacrifices, neither the gore nor the half-burned
members of cremated carcasses was lacking to your venom. Also,

²²⁸This symbol ταῦρος δράκοντος καὶ ταύρου δράκων
πατήρ is also mentioned in Clement of Alexandria
Protrepticus 2:16. It is a symbol of the Orphic-Dionysus
cult, the bull being Sebazius-Jove (Dieterich, Op. Cit., pp.
155, 215).

²²⁹Genesis 3:5.

you frequently stained yourself with the blood of human sacrifices, and your madness and the venom of your dried throat were nourished by the gore at the temple of Latiaris, or even more by that at the altar of Carthage.²³⁰

While doing these things, you boast that you are beneficial to wretched men with the result that you kill with your cruelty, deceive with your persuasion, and destroy with your promise. In this way, you provide for your followers, O assassin! Flee, O wretched men, flee and desert this very contamination with all possible speed! It is a serpent which you worshipped. He is unable to hide. He himself has confessed the peculiarity of his own name. Punishment follows the accused who has confessed.

Hear what the holy prophet spoke by divine instigation! 3
The faithfulness of Isaiah transmits this oracle to us:

In that day God will bring down his
great, holy and strong sword on the
dragon, the great and coiled serpent,
and shall kill the dragon.²³¹

The will of God is the essence of a perfected deed. The

²³⁰Temple of Jupiter Latiaris, located on a mountain outside of city of Albans. The same report is found in Tatian's Oration 29.

²³¹Isaiah 27:1.

judgment regarding the death of the dragon has gone forth! Whatever God shall have said, has happened. The solace of the dying dragon is this, that a great multitude of the damned will accompany his destruction. If you ask about the day of his death: He was crushed at the time when he saw the God-man, when the divinity of Christ appeared to us.

After that day, whoever shall have followed the ways of this serpent must die with the serpent. This very one imagined and conceived these very gods which you worship. If your stubborn spirits shall have remained in that very error, you shall also burn equally with your gods. So that whatever your founders deserved from divine punishment, it is also transferred to your destruction on account of your participation in the fellowship. Believe me! The devil neglects nothing which could either oppress or destroy wretched man. For that purpose, through all forms he turns himself with a manifold diversity, and for that purpose he composed himself with trickery of different types in order to murder men ensnared with various and multiple deceptions.

CHAPTER 27

The wretched tormentor, O wickedness, arranged his sacred rites to be always renewed through wood, so that, since he knew that the life of man, affixed to the wood of the cross, would be bound by the union of perpetual immortality, he might deceive men who were about to perish by an imitation of wood.

In the sacred rites of the Phrygians, which they call that of the Mother Goddess, year after year a pine tree is cut down and the image of a young man is bound to the middle of the tree.²³² In the sacred rites of Isis, the trunk of a pine tree is cut down. The middle portion of this trunk is delicately carved out and therein an idol of Osiris, made from seeds, is buried.²³³ In the sacred rites of Proserpina, a felled tree is shaped in the image and form of a virgin, and

²³² Arnobius writes, "For what is the meaning of that pine which on fixed days you always bring into the sanctuary of the mother of the gods? Is it not in imitation of that tree, beneath which the raging and ill-fated youth laid hands upon himself." A.N.F. Adversus Gentes 5:16.

²³³ W. Spiegelberg cites this as a reference to the statement found in Plutarch De Isis et Osiris 15 that the chest which contained the body of Osiris, was washed ashore and landed in a clump of heather (ἐρείκη). The heather embraced the chest and hid it within its trunk. "The king of the country admired the great size of the plant, and cut off the portion that enfolded the chest (which was now hidden from sight)" L.C.L. "Das Isis-Mysterium bei Firmicus Maternus," Archiv fur Religionswissenschaft, Vol. 19, pp. 194-95.

when it has been brought into the city, it is mourned for forty nights. However, on the fortieth night it is burned.²³⁴ But those other woods about which I spoke, a similar fire consumes. For, also after a year, the flame devours the pyre made of these very woods. You erred, O wretched man, and you erred exceedingly. That fire of yours will not be able to be any benefit to you. In vain, you deceived yourself with this flame; you always renew this fire by your own fictions. The fire which exacts the punishments for your evil deeds, rages with the perpetual succession of torments.

Learn the order of this divine and liberating wood in order to know that you are able to be helped in no manner!²³⁵ Mankind was liberated from catastrophe by the wooden ark.²³⁶ Abraham placed the wood upon the shoulders of his only son;²³⁷ the wooden rod protected the people of God fleeing from Egypt.²³⁸

²³⁴There is no other account of this rite.

²³⁵Ziegler adds alia and translates it, "to be helped in no other manner." Ziegler, Op. Cit., p. 76.

²³⁶Genesis 6:14-8:17.

²³⁷Genesis 22:6, the "only" is an obvious result of Firmicus' Christology since it is neither in the original text nor is it historically true.

²³⁸Exodus 14:21.

Wood returned the sweet taste to the bitter springs of Marah.²³⁹ Saving water is brought forth from the spiritual rock by the wooden rod;²⁴⁰ so that Amalek might be conquered, Moses stretched out with outstretched hands on the rod.²⁴¹ The Patriarch dreamed of an angel leaning on wooden ladder and he saw that on the same ladder some ascended and others descended;²⁴² and the law of God is entrusted to the wooden ark.²⁴³ The result is, by all these, the salvation of men arrives at the wood of the cross as if by a kind of progression. On that account, the wood of the cross upholds the machinery of heaven,²⁴⁴ strengthens the foundations of the

²³⁹Exodus 15:23-25. Marah is the Hebrew word for bitter.

²⁴⁰Exodus 17:6. For spiritual interpretation, see 1 Corinthians 10:1-5.

²⁴¹Exodus 17:8-13.

²⁴²Genesis 28:12.

²⁴³Exodus 40:20.

²⁴⁴Once again Firmicus mentions the cosmic significance of the cross. This idea is found as early as Ignatius. He uses μηχανή (=machina) which he identifies with the cross of Christ (Ephesians 9:1). There is also an early reference to the Acts of John (before A.D. 150) which relates: "he showed me a cross of light. . .it is the marking off of all things, and the firm uplifting of things fixed out of things unstable." The New Testament Apocrypha, translated by M. R. James, Oxford Press, London, 1924, pp. 254-55. See also Rahner, H. Op. Cit., pp. 47-68.

earth, and it leads men, who have been attached to it, to life
 The wood of the devil burns always and dies, and it leads
 credulous men to the lowest parts of Tartarus together with
 its own embers.

What sort this is must also be treated with ̄diligent̄ 4
 reason. Consecrating his own tree, the devil causes a ram to
 be sacrificed upon the roots of the fallen tree in the dead
 of the night. Who persuaded you of this, O Evil One? Whence
 did you learn this with injurious passion? Do you always
 compose yourself with nefarious passion against the Greatest
 God? For that reason the harsh judgment of divinity threw
 you with your base lowliness down from heaven; for that reason
 eternal punishment is decreed against you by the decision of
 God because new wickedness is always added day after day to
 your wicked deeds and because you attempt to deceive men of
 God with fraudulent persuasion. See what an enemy, full of
 derision, won for itself!

By the order of God, a ram was given to Abraham, when
 he was about to sacrifice his son, and it was caught in the
 branches of a nearby tree.²⁴⁵ The Greatest God, about to 5
 liberate his own people from the tyrant of Egypt ordered the
 ram to be slain at night, and he ordered the posts to be

²⁴⁵Genesis 22:13.

smeared with its blood. He ordered this to be done by a certain number of men at nightly feasts, and he placed the name Pascha on this sacrifice.²⁴⁶ Moreover, the foreknowledge of the divine majesty invented this for an image of the future in order to show us the true Pascha through signs.

For that reason, when the prophet predicted the passion of our Lord, when commanded by the Holy Spirit, he said:

Just as a sheep is led to the
slaughter and just as a lamb before
the one shearing it, thus he did
not open his mouth. His judgment
was taken away in humiliation:
Who has recounted his nativity,
since his life was removed from
the earth?²⁴⁷

Another prophet also said these same things in a similar
oracle:

O Lord, give me a sign and I
shall know; then I saw their
meditations. I, just as a lamb
without malice was led to the
slaughter. They planned a
conspiracy against me saying,
'let us send a tree in his bread
and destroy his life from the
earth!'²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶Exodus 12:21-27. The first Christian reference to this is in I Corinthians 5:7.

²⁴⁷Isaiah 53:7-8. This was one of the earliest Christological understandings in the early church.

²⁴⁸Jeremiah 11:18-19.

Moreover, it is shown to us by the holy Revelation
that our Lord is called the Lamb. For in the Apocalypse we
discover that it is written:

7

And I saw, in the middle of the throne and the four creatures and in the middle of the elders, a lamb standing as if dead, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent upon the face of the earth. And he came and took the book from the right hand of one sitting on the throne, and when he had taken the book, four creatures and the twenty-four elders prostrated themselves before the lamb, each having a golden harp full of the incense for supplication which are the prayers of the saints, and they sang a new song saying: 'You are worthy to accept the book and open its seal, since you were killed and you redeemed us for God through your blood, and from every tribe and tongue and people and nation you have made them priests and a kingdom for our God, and they shall reign above the earth.'²⁴⁹

John also names the Son of God with the name of the
Lamb, so that he himself corresponds to the prophetic promise.
In fact, he said in the Gospel:

8

On another day, John saw Jesus coming toward him and said:
'Behold the lamb of God, behold the one who takes away the sins of the world.'²⁵⁰

²⁴⁹Revelation 5:6-10.

²⁵⁰John 1:29.

The venerable blood of this very lamb is poured out on behalf of the salvation of mankind, so that the Son of God might redeem his holy people with the shedding of his precious blood, so that those who are liberated by the blood of Christ might be consecrated beforehand by the majesty of his immortal blood.

Let blood shed upon idols save no one, and let the gore of sheep neither deceive nor destroy wretched men! This very blood pollutes, it does not redeem, and it ruins men through various misfortunes in death. Wretched are the men who are stained by the shedding of sacrilegious blood. This taurobolium orcribolium pours upon you with the polluted stain of blood.²⁵¹

²⁵¹This rite is best described by Prudentius (Peristephanon 10:1101-50). The high priest is placed in a pit covered with a wooden grate. A bull is lain on top of the grate and the high priest "throws back his face, he puts his cheeks in the way of the blood. . .he washes his eyes with the fluid. . .moistens his tongue." After the ceremony all worship him because "profane blood. . .washed him."

CHAPTER 28

And thus, let that filth which you collected be washed
away; search after pure fountains; search after clear waters,
so that the blood of Christ, with the Holy Spirit, might
whiten you after many sins. However, so that a full persuasion
might recall wretched men to a healthy mind, and so that no
evidence of the preceding pestilence is left for the cured
and healthy minds, there is a need for a greater authority.

And thus, what idols are or what real essence they have
is demonstrated by the voice of the prophets and also by the
divine voice of God. Everything must be mentioned, especially
so that it be realized that this was not prophesied by our
rashness, but transmitted to us by divine direction and was
indicated by a voice from heaven. What their essence is is
pointed out by the venerable voice of wisdom, for it says in
the book of Solomon:

They have considered all the idols
of the nations--who have neither
the use of eyes for seeing nor
nostrils for breathing air, nor
ears for hearing, nor fingers of
hands for feeling--as gods, and
moreover, their feet are clumsy
for walking. Indeed, a man made
those and one who has borrowed
the breath of life composed them.
Moreover, no one shall be able to
form a god for himself. For since

he is mortal, he forms a dead
god with lawless hands. However,
he is better than those gods
which he worships, since he him-
self indeed lived, but they never
lived.²⁵²

What more do we seek? Wisdom addressed us with a
divine voice and it taught whatever it had seen in the hidden
things of God,²⁵³ and he pointed out that which was helpful,
lest weak and fallen mortality hasten to its ruin and death.

The Holy Spirit admonishes with this same idea in
Psalms for we find in the one hundred and thirty-fourth Psalm
that it is written:

3

The idols of the nations are of
silver and gold, a work of man's
hands. They have a mouth and do
not speak, they have eyes and do
not see, they have ears and do
not hear; nor is there any breath
in their mouth. Those who made
them are similar to them.²⁵⁴

If a maker who, to show off his talent, either fashioned

²⁵²Wisdom of Solomon 15:15-17. Firmicus first quotation
from the Apocrypha.

²⁵³"Hidden things" was an important motif in Jewish
apocalyptic as well as in the church (2 Enoch 1:1f; 2 Corinthians
12:4; Ephesians 3:10; 1 Peter 1:12.)

²⁵⁴Psalms 135:15-18.

or poured an image, is slain by the divine censure of a curse, it must be considered what he--who calls a god that which the other man sold--ought to expect.

Also Jeremiah, when ordered by God gave instructions to the people; he addressed the people with this speech:

4

However, say in your heart, 'it is necessary to adore you O Lord.' Nevertheless, my messenger is with you; moreover, I shall search out your spirits by the law. Their tongue was smoothed by a workman, also they themselves coated with gold and silver are false and are not able to speak. And by taking gold, they made crowns for the heads of their own gods just as for a young girl loving ornaments. Moreover, sometimes the priests take the gold and silver from their own gods and spend it on themselves. They also will give from this even to public harlots and decorate as men, those gods of gold, silver and wood with clothes.²⁵⁵

In the following, he also adds this to shake off all doubts of trepidation.

Above its body and head, night owls, swallows and birds alike fly about. From this you shall know that they are not gods. Therefore, do not fear them. The gold which they have about them for appearance, will not shine unless someone else has wiped off the rust. To be sure, neither

²⁵⁵Epistle of Jeremiah 6:5-10.

did they feel it when they were melted. They were bought at a price but there is no spirit in them. Without feet, they are carried about on shoulders.²⁵⁶

He also adds this in order that the established mind may be strengthened more strongly. "And thus, knowing these things, that they are not gods, you shall not fear them."²⁵⁷ And in order to show the wretched disgrace of their priests, he adds:

In their temples, the priests sit, having their tunics rent and their heads and beards shaved, and their heads uncovered. Moreover, they roar and shout against their gods just as the dead in Gehenna.²⁵⁸

However, that the kings and nations are going to pronounce these things, this same prophet, with a presaging voice signified. For he said:

After this, it shall be known to all the nations and kings that they are false, that they are not gods and that there is no work of God among them. They shall not raise up a king for any reason, neither shall they give rain to men. Also, they shall not pronounce justice, and neither shall they liberate a country from injustice since

²⁵⁶Ibid., 6:21-25.

²⁵⁷Ibid., 6:28.

²⁵⁸Ibid., 6:30-31.

they are able to do nothing.
 And when a fire shall fall upon
 the temple of the wooden and
 golden and silver gods, the
 priests of these shall be
 liberated. Moreover, these
 themselves, just as beams of
 wood in the middle shall be
 completely burned. Moreover,
 they shall not resist a king
 and war. How must it be judged
 or confessed that they are gods?
 And they, the wooden and golden
 and silver gods, from who those
 who are strong carry off the
 gold and silver which covered
 them, shall liberate themselves
 neither from robbers nor from
 thieves.²⁵⁹

Tear down, tear down without fear, the ornaments of
 the temples, Most Holy Emperors! Let the fire of money or
 flame of metals²⁶⁰ consume those gods. Hand over all the
 offerings for your use and ownership! After the destructions
 of the temples, you are advanced greatly by the power of God.
 You have conquered enemies, you have extended the empire, and
 so that greater glory might be added to your virtues, after
 changing and scorning the order of the seasons, in winter--
 that which is never done and will never be done--you braved
 the churning and tossing waves of the ocean. The wave of the
 sea, still nearly unknown to us trembled below your oars and

6

²⁵⁹Ibid., 6:50-57.

²⁶⁰An allusion to the intensity of heat needed to melt metals.

Britain grew frightened at the unexpected face of emperor.²⁶¹
 The elements, having been conquered, give way before your
 powers.²⁶²

The decrees of a sacrosanct law declares that God
 orders that idols not be made. Truly we find that this is
 thus written in Exodus: "You shall not make for yourselves
 either gods of gold or gods of silver."²⁶³ And again, in the
 same book I find the voice of God commanding: "You shall not
 make an idol for yourself, nor an image of anything."²⁶⁴
 The Holy Spirit indicates their shame to wretched men, since
 he desires to recall and not to destroy the erring. And he
 said through Isaiah: "You shall be utterly confounded, you
 who believe upon carved images, who say to molten images 'you
 are our gods.'"²⁶⁵

²⁶¹Allusion to the expedition to Britain in A.D. 343.

²⁶²Here Firmicus applies the soteriological significance
 of the conquering of the elements, which he previously men-
 tioned in 24:2 (p. 81), to the power and victories of the
 Emperor.

²⁶³Exodus 20:23.

²⁶⁴Ibid., 20:4.

²⁶⁵Isaiah 42:17.

He also gives a law which the consecrated people guard with eternal devotion.²⁶⁶ And thus he orders: "You shall adore the Lord and him only shall you serve."²⁶⁷ And in Deuteronomy are learned similar commandments of God. Truly it says: "You shall have no other gods before me."²⁶⁸ Also it adds so that the weight of his own majesty might penetrate their minds:

See, that I am and that there is
no god beside me. I shall kill
and I shall make to live. I shall
wound and I shall make well and
there is none other that can de-
liver from my hand.²⁶⁹

Also, in the Apocalypse, this same thing is shown by a
holy revelation. Truly it is thus written:

8

And I saw another angel flying
in the middle heaven, having the
eternal gospel to proclaim to
those on the earth, through all

²⁶⁶ Although this could refer to the Jews, it is most likely a reference to Firmicus' belief that Christians should live both by the Old and New Testaments (20:6; p. 71).

²⁶⁷ Deuteronomy 6:13.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 5:7.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 32:39.

nations, tribes, tongues, and people, speaking with a loud voice: Fear God more and give him glory since the hour of his judgment has come and adore him who made heaven and earth, the sea and everything that is in them.²⁷⁰

Also our Lord Jesus Christ, guarding the paternal institutes of the law, made known the same thing by a venerable ordinance. Indeed he said:

Hear O Israel, the Lord your God is one and you shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart and your whole soul and your strength. This is the first, and the second is like it; you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two precepts hang all the law and the prophets.²⁷¹

Moreover, a holy conclusion follows this divine and venerable precept of the immortal Lord. For he adds, in order to show more clearly the way of salvation and speaks thus: "However, this is eternal life, to know you, the only true Lord and him whom you sent, Jesus Christ."²⁷² You know the order of the sacred commandments, what you ought to follow,

9

²⁷⁰Revelation 14:6-8.

²⁷¹Matthew 22:37-40; Mark 12:29-31.

²⁷²John 17:3.

what you ought to flee, you have learned by the venerable and immortal voice. Hear again what destruction awaits those scorning, with what misfortunes the necessity of the venerable binds them. Truly, the conclusion of the venerable commandments is collected in these words: "One sacrificing to any gods except the only god shall be destroyed."²⁷³ If the fearful punishment strikes only the sacrilegious man, if the harshness of the law threatens only the man sinning, he might well persist toward his sacrilege with the rashness of obstinate madness. But now he threatens his offspring and descendants and he does this so that no part of the most evil seed remain and lest a trace of a profane race remain. "One sacrificing to the gods," he said, "shall be destroyed."²⁷⁴ Consider what you are doing O wretched and mournful belief! Your wickedness damns many, it will destroy many, and through all the essence of your type, the full punishment is divided. Moreover, why the authority of ordained law is violent against the ones sacrificing is shown with manifest significance in Deuteronomy. For we find it thus written: "They sacrificed

10

²⁷³Exodus 22:20.

²⁷⁴Exodus 22:20.

to demons and not to God."²⁷⁵ Do not hand over to contaminated and polluted spirits, nor seek aid from inferiors; do not beg from these whom you already, by the grace of God, ought to command.

Behold, this very demon which you worship trembles
 when he has heard the names of God and his Christ and in order
 to respond to us who are questioning, with difficulty he
 collected the stammering words. He, hanging on to a man is
 cut to pieces, burned, and flogged and immediately confesses
 the evil deeds done.²⁷⁶ An interdict of the venerable law
 orders that you do not worship him, that you do not supplicate
 him and do not, being prostrated, bend your knees to him. On
 account of this, there is the severity of punishment, on
 account of this, the fearful sentence of censure must be feared,
 since when liberty was conceded by the indulgence of God, you
 rather chose the yoke of servitude. The Greatest God does not
 cease to fight this crime with a saving voice, but his sympathy
 hastens to correct erring men with a frequent threat.

Hear through Isaiah the prophet what the divine voice
 says: "They entreated the gods whom they made with their hands,

²⁷⁵Deuteronomy 32:7

²⁷⁶An obvious allusion to forced conversions.

and man is crooked and man is low and I shall not relieve them."²⁷⁷

You, also, O profane men, an angry deity addresses you and he assembles your errors until now with a sacred voice. For he says in the following, through the same prophet: "You did pour libations to those and offer sacrifices to those. Shall I not be offended over these things spoke the Lord."²⁷⁸ Even now, a saving God, with delayed severity postponed his indignation, so that²⁷⁹ it perhaps may displease you to sin, so that you may leave behind the destruction of the sacrilegious desire by some means. Behold, in this very impulse of indignation, he again persuades with a controlled voice and restrains the impulses of his anger. Truly he said through Jeremiah the prophet:

Do not desire to walk after other gods in order to serve them, and do not worship them and do not, by the works of your hands, anger me toward your destruction.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁷Isaiah 2:8-9.

²⁷⁸Ibid., 57:6.

²⁷⁹This "so that" and the one following it are expressed by ne rather than ut in Latin. Usually it would be translated "lest," but that does not seem to fit the context.

²⁸⁰Jeremiah 25:6.

Why thus do you stop up your ears which are inclined toward sacrilege? Why thus do you hasten to your death and destruction with the passion of obstinate insanity? God made you free, it is in your hand either to live or to perish. Why do you cast yourself down upon rough places? Having been located on a slippery path and placed on a slope, at some time, check your tottering footsteps! Behold, the judgment is brought forth, behold, the punishment is decreed. For a long time divine moderation spared your crimes, for a long time he looked upon your evil with forbearance. You arrived at this uncertainty where hope and where prayers fail, and in order to be instructed more clearly, learn the destruction by censure.

On this matter, the whole order of response is in the Apocalypse. Indeed, it is written thus:

If one adores the beast and his image and receives the mark on his forehead and hand, this very one drinks from the wine of God's wrath, mixed in the cup of his wrath, and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in front of the eyes of the Lamb, and the smoke from their torment shall rise forever. And neither shall they have peace by night or by day, anyone who adores the beast and his image.²⁸¹

²⁸¹ Revelation 14:9-11.

CHAPTER 29

But you, Most Holy Emperors, necessity orders to
 avenge and punish this evil, and this is ordered to you by the
 law of the Greatest God so that everywhere your severity
 prosecutes the evil deeds of idolatry. Hear and entrust to
 your holy senses what God commanded about this evil deed.
 This very law is written in Deuteronomy, for it says:

1

If your brother asked you or your
 son or your wife who is of your bosom
 or your friend who is equal to your
 own soul, saying secretly: 'Let us
 go and serve other gods, the gods of
 the nations,' you shall neither ack-
 knowledge nor yield to him, neither
 shall your eye pity him nor conceal
 him. Proclaiming, you shall make him
 known. Your hand shall be first above
 him to kill him and at last, every hand
 of the people, and they shall stone
 him, and he shall die since he sought
 to turn you from your Lord.²⁸²

He commands not to pity either the son or the father,
 and through the loved members of a spouse, he thrusts the
 vindicating sword. He also persecutes the friend with lofty
 severity and all the people are armed for breaking up the
 bodies of the sacrilegious. Also, for whole cities, if they

2

²⁸²Deuteronomy 13:6-10.

shall have been detected in this evil deed, the deaths are determined, and so that your foresight might learn this more clearly, let me cite the judgment of the constituted law. In this same book, the Lord set up a punishment for the whole city with this voice. Indeed, he said:

However, if you shall have heard in one of your cities which the Lord your God gave to you to inhabit there, one saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods which you have not known,' killing, you shall murder everyone who is in the city with a destruction by the sword and you shall burn the city with fire and it shall be without habitation and nothing shall be built there forever, so that the Lord will be turned from his anger. And he will have sympathy for you and he shall pity you and he will multiply you if you listen to the voice of the Lord your God and if you shall have observed his commandments.²⁸³

The Greatest God promises rewards of his mercy to you, 3
Most Holy Emperors, and he decrees increase of the greatest enlargement. So, do that which he commands! Fulfill that which he prescribes! Your beginnings are filled with greater gifts. Placed at the beginning of faith, you noticed the increase of divine favor. At no time has the venerable hand of God deserted

²⁸³Ibid., 13:12-18.

you; at no time has he denied aid to you while laboring. The troops of the godless were laid low and always rebellious arms have fallen in your sight. Most powerful peoples were sent under the yoke and the Persian desires collapsed. Barbarity, decorated with its own evils, was not able to stand for a long time against you. You both realized the strength of God from diverse events. The heavenly crown of victory was brought to you, and our disasters were relieved by your fortune. The Greatest God, Most Holy Emperors, returned these rewards to you on account of your faith. He invites you, meanwhile, enriched with these insignia, to the secrets of his venerable law. With a pure mind, with a devoted conscience, with an uncorrupt spirit, may your clemency always look to heaven, may it always expect aid from God, may it always implore the venerable deity of Christ, and may it always offer spiritual sacrifices to the God of salvation on behalf of the salvation of the whole earth and also your salvation.

4

Thus everything will turn out well for you--victories; wealth, peace, plenty, well-being, and triumphs--so that having been advanced by divine majesty, you may rule the whole earth with successful rule.

The Error of Profane Religions by Julius Firmicus Maternus V.C.
ends.

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