

Chapter 1 : Minucius Felix - Encyclopedia Volume - Catholic Encyclopedia - Catholic Online

The Octavius by Minucius Felix is an apology for the Christian religion. Either Tertullian depended on this apology, making it perhaps the earliest piece of extant Christian Latin literature, or the author of this apology depended on Tertullian.

WHEN I consider and mentally review my remembrance of Octavius, my excellent and most faithful companion, the sweetness and charm of the man so clings to me, that I appear to myself in some sort as if I were returning to past times, and not merely recalling in my recollection things which have long since happened and gone by. Thus, in the degree in which the actual contemplation of him is withdrawn from my eyes, it is bound up in my heart and in my most intimate feelings. And it was not without reason that that remarkable and holy man, when he departed this life, left to me an unbounded regret for him, especially since he himself also glowed with such a love for me at all times, that, whether in matters of amusement or of business, he agreed with me in similarity of will, in either liking or disliking the same things. You would think that one mind had been shared between us two. Thus he alone was my confidant in my loves, my companion in my mistakes; and when, after the gloom had been dispersed, I emerged from the abyss of darkness into the light of wisdom and truth, he did not cast off his associate, but--what is more glorious still--he outstripped him. And thus, when my thoughts were traversing the entire period of our intimacy and friendship, the direction of my mind fixed itself chiefly on that discourse of his, wherein by very weighty arguments he converted Caecilius, who was still cleaving to superstitious vanities, to the true religion. For, for the sake of business and of visiting me, Octavius had hastened to Rome, having left his home, his wife, his children, and that which is most attractive in children, while yet their innocent years are attempting only half-uttered words,--a language all the sweeter for the very imperfection of the faltering tongue. And at this his arrival I cannot express in words with how great and with how impatient a joy I exulted, since the unexpected presence of a man so very dear to me greatly enhanced my gladness. Therefore, after one or two days, when the frequent enjoyment of our continual association had satisfied the craving of affection, and when we had ascertained by mutual narrative all that we were ignorant of about one another by reason of our separation, we agreed to go to that very pleasant city Ostia, that my body might have a soothing and appropriate remedy for drying its humours from the marine bathing, especially as the holidays of the courts at the vintage-time had released me from my cares. For at that time, after the summer days, the autumn season was tending to a milder temperature. And thus, when in the early morning we were going towards the sea along the shore of the Tiber, that both the breathing air might gently refresh our limbs, and that the yielding sand might sink down under our easy footsteps with excessive pleasure; Caecilius, observing an image of Serapis, raised his hand to his mouth, as is the custom of the superstitious common people, and pressed a kiss on it with his lips. Just then we were excessively delighted at its vagaries, as on the very threshold of the water we were wetting the soles of our feet, and it now by turns approaching broke upon our feet, and now the wave retiring and retracing its course, sucked itself back into itself. And thus, slowly and quietly going along, we tracked the coast of the gently bending shore, beguiling the way with stories. These stories were related by Octavius, who was discoursing on navigation. But when we had occupied a sufficiently reasonable time of our walk with discourse, retracing the same way again, we trod the path with reverted footsteps. And when we came to that place where the little ships, drawn up on an oaken framework, were lying at rest supported above the risk of ground-rot, we saw some boys eagerly gesticulating as they played at throwing shells into the sea. To choose a shell from the shore, rubbed and made smooth by the tossing of the waves; to take hold of the shell in a horizontal position with the fingers; to whiff it along sloping and as low down as possible upon the waves, that when thrown it may either skim the back of the wave, or may swim as it glides along with a smooth impulse, or may spring up as it cleaves the top of the waves, and rise as if lifted up with repeated springs. That boy claimed to be conqueror whose shell both went out furthest, and leaped up most frequently. And thus, while we were all engaged in the enjoyment of this spectacle, Caecilius was paying no attention, nor laughing at the contest; but silent, uneasy, standing apart, confessed by his countenance that he was grieving for I knew not

what. To whom I said: Wherefore do I not recognise, Caecilius, your usual liveliness? Therefore I shall proceed further: If he is willing that I, a man of that form of opinion, should argue with him, he will now at once perceive that it is easier to hold an argument among his comrades, than to engage in close conflict after the manner of the philosophers. Let us be seated on those rocky barriers that are cast there for the protection of the baths, and that run far out into the deep, that we may be able both to rest after our journey, and to argue with more attention." And at his word we sat down, so that, by covering me on either side, they sheltered me in the midst of the three. Nor was this a matter of observance, or of rank, or of honour, because friendship always either receives or makes equals; but that, as an arbitrator, and being near to both, I might give my attention, and being in the middle, I might separate the two. Then Caecilius began thus: Accordingly, if you sit in judgment on me, as a person who is new, and as one ignorant of either side, there is no difficulty in making plain that all things in human affairs are doubtful, uncertain, and unsettled, and that all things are rather probable than true. Wherefore it is the less wonderful that some, from the weariness of thoroughly investigating truth, should rashly succumb to any sort of opinion rather than persevere in exploring it with persistent diligence. And thus all men must be indignant, all men must feel pain, that certain persons--and these unskilled in learning, strangers to literature, without knowledge even of sordid arts--should dare to determine on any certainty concerning the nature at large, and the divine majesty, of which so many of the multitude of sects in all ages still doubt, and philosophy itself deliberates still. Nor without reason; since the mediocrity of human intelligence is so far from the capacity of divine investigation, that neither is it given us to know, nor is it permitted to search, nor is it religious to ravish, the things that are supported in suspense in the heaven above us, nor the things which are deeply submerged below the earth; and we may rightly seem sufficiently happy and sufficiently prudent, if, according to that ancient oracle of the sage, we should know ourselves intimately. But even if we indulge in a senseless and useless labour, and wander away beyond the limits proper to our humility, and though, inclined towards the earth, we transcend with daring ambition heaven itself, and the very stars, let us at least not entangle this error with vain and fearful opinions. Let the seeds of all things have been in the beginning condensed by a nature combining them in itself--what God is the author here? Let the members of the whole world be by fortuitous concurrences united digested, fashioned--what God is the contriver? Although fire may have lit up the stars; although the lightness of its own material may have suspended the heaven; although its own material may have established the earth by its weight; and although the sea may have flowed in from moisture, whence is this religion? What is this superstition? Man, and every animal which is born, inspired with life, and nourished, is as a voluntary concretion of the elements, into which again man and every animal is divided, resolved, and dissipated. So all things flow back again into their source, and are turned again into themselves, without any artificer, or judge, or creator. Thus the seeds of fires, being gathered together, cause other suns, and again others, always to shine forth. Thus the vapours of the earth, being exhaled, cause the mists always to grow, which being condensed and collected, cause the clouds to rise higher; and when they fall, cause the rains to flow, the winds to blow, the hail to rattle down; or when the clouds clash together, they cause the thunder to bellow, the lightnings to grow red, the thunderbolts to gleam forth. Therefore they fall everywhere, they rush on the mountains, they strike the trees; without any choice, they blast places sacred and profane; they smite mischievous men, and often, too, religious men. Why should I speak of tempests, various and uncertain, wherein the attack upon all things is tossed about without any order or discrimination? In peace also, not only is wickedness put on the same level with the lot of those who are better, but it is also regarded in such esteem, that, in the case of many people, you know not whether their depravity is most to be detested, or their felicity to be desired. But if the world were governed by divine providence and by the authority of any deity, Phalaris and Dionysius would never have deserved to reign, Rutilius and Camillus would never have merited banishment, Socrates would never have merited the poison. Behold the fruit-bearing trees, behold the harvest already white, the vintage, already dropping, is destroyed by the rain, is beaten down by the hail. Thus either an uncertain truth is hidden from us, and kept back; or, which is rather to be believed, in these various and wayward chances, fortune, unrestrained by laws, is ruling over us. Thence, therefore, we see through all empires, and provinces, and cities, that each people has its national rites of worship, and adores its local gods: Thus their power and

authority has occupied the circuit of the whole world: Thus, in that they acknowledge the sacred institutions of all nations, they have also deserved their dominion. Hence the perpetual course of their veneration has continued, which is not weakened by the long lapse of time, but increased, because antiquity has been accustomed to attribute to ceremonies and temples so much of sanctity as it has ascribed of age. Consider what is the record of books. You will at once discover that they have inaugurated the rites of all kinds of religions, either that the divine indulgence might be rewarded, or that the threatening anger might be averted, or that the wrath already swelling and raging might be appeased. Witness the Idaean mother, who at her arrival both approved the chastity of the matron, and delivered the city from the fear of the enemy. Witness the statues of the equestrian brothers, consecrated even as they had showed themselves on the lake, who, with horses breathless, foaming, and smoking, announced the victory over the Persian on the same day on which they had gained it. Witness the renewal of the games of the offended Jupiter, on account of the dream of a man of the people. And an acknowledged witness is the devotion of the Decii. Witness also Curtius, who filled up the opening of the profound chasm either with the mass, or with the glory of his knighthood. Moreover, more frequently than we wished have the auguries, when despised, borne witness to the presence of the gods: Thus, that Thrasymenus might be both swollen and discoloured with the blood of the Romans, Flaminius despised the auguries; and that we might again demand our standards from the Parthians, Crassus both deserved and scoffed at the imprecations of the terrible sisters. I omit the old stories, which are many, and I pass by the songs of the poets about the births, and the gifts, and the rewards of the gods. Moreover, I hasten over the fates predicted by the oracles, lest antiquity should appear to you excessively fabulous. Look at the temples and lanes of the gods by which the Roman city is both protected and armed: Thence therefore the prophets, filled with the god, and mingled with him, collect futurity beforehand, give caution for dangers, medicine for diseases, hope for the afflicted, help to the wretched, solace to calamities, alleviation to labours. Even in our repose we see, we hear, we acknowledge the gods, whom in the day-time we impiously deny, refuse, and abjure. When the men of Athens both expelled Protagoras of Abdera, and in public assembly burnt his writings, because he disputed deliberately rather than profanely concerning the divinity, why is it not a thing to be lamented, that men for you will bear with my making use pretty freely of the force of the plea that I have undertaken --that men, I say, of a reprobate, unlawful, and desperate faction, should rage against the gods? They despise the temples as dead-houses, they reject the gods, they laugh at sacred things; wretched, they pity, if they are allowed, the priests; half naked themselves, they despise honours and purple robes. Oh, wondrous folly and incredible audacity! Assuredly this confederacy ought to be rooted out and execrated. They know one another by secret marks and insignia, and they love one another almost before they know one another. Everywhere also there is mingled among them a certain religion of lust, and they call one another promiscuously brothers and sisters, that even a not unusual debauchery may by the intervention of that sacred name become incestuous: Nor, concerning these things, would intelligent report speak of things so great and various, and requiring to be prefaced by an apology, unless truth were at the bottom of it. I hear that they adore the head of an ass, that basest of creatures, consecrated by I know not what silly persuasion,--a worthy and appropriate religion for such manners. Some say that they worship the virilia of their pontiff and priest, and adore the nature, as it were, of their common parent. I know not whether these things are false; certainly suspicion is applicable to secret and nocturnal rites; and he who explains their ceremonies by reference to a man punished by extreme suffering for his wickedness, and to the deadly wood of the cross, appropriates fitting altars for reprobate and wicked men, that they may worship what they deserve. Now the story about the initiation of young novices is as much to be detested as it is well known. An infant covered over with meal, that it may deceive the unwary, is placed before him who is to be stained with their rites: By this victim they are pledged together; with this consciousness of wickedness they are covenanted to mutual silence. Such sacred rites as these are more foul than any sacrileges. And of their banqueting it is well known all men speak of it everywhere; even the speech of our Cirtensian testifies to it. On a solemn day they assemble at the feast, with all their children, sisters, mothers, people of every sex and of every age. There, after much feasting, when the fellowship has grown warm, and the fervour of incestuous lust has grown hot with drunkenness, a dog that has been tied to the chandelier is provoked, by throwing a small piece of offal beyond the length of a line by

which he is bound, to rush and spring; and thus the conscious light being overturned and extinguished in the shameless darkness, the connections of abominable lust involve them in the uncertainty of fate. Although not all in fact, yet in consciousness all are alike incestuous, since by the desire of all of them everything is sought for which can happen in the act of each individual. For why do they endeavour with such pains to conceal and to cloak whatever they worship, since honourable things always rejoice in publicity, while crimes are kept secret? Why have they no altars, no temples, no acknowledged images? Why do they never speak openly, never congregate freely, unless for the reason that what they adore and conceal is either worthy of punishment, or something to be ashamed of? Moreover, whence or who is he, or where is the one God, solitary, desolate, whom no free people, no kingdoms, and not even Roman superstition, have known? The lonely and miserable nationality of the Jews worshipped one God, and one peculiar to itself; but they worshipped him openly, with temples, with altars, with victims, and with ceremonies; and he has so little force or power, that he is enslaved, with his own special nation, to the Roman deities. But the Christians, moreover, what wonders, what monstrosities do they feign! It is a double evil and a twofold madness to denounce destruction to the heaven and the stars, which we leave just as we find them, and to promise eternity to ourselves, who are dead and extinct--who, as we are born, so also perish! It is for this cause, doubtless, also that they execrate our funeral piles, and condemn our burials by fire, as if every body, even although it be withdrawn from the flames, were not, nevertheless, resolved into the earth by lapse of years and ages, and as if it mattered not whether wild beasts tore the body to pieces, or seas consumed it, or the ground covered it, or the flames carried it away; since for the carcasses every mode of sepulture is a penalty if they feel it; if they feel it not, in the very quickness of their destruction there is relief. Deceived by this error, they promise to themselves, as being good, a blessed and perpetual life after their death; to others, as being unrighteous, eternal punishment. Many things occur to me to say in addition, if the limits of my discourse did not hasten me. I have already shown, and take no more pains to prove, that they themselves are unrighteous; although, even if I should allow them to be righteous, yet your agreement also concurs with the opinions of many, that guilt and innocence are attributed by fate. For whatever we do, as some ascribe it to fate, so you refer it to God: Therefore you feign an iniquitous judge, who punishes in men, not their will, but their destiny. Yet I should be glad to be informed whether or no you rise again with bodies; and if so, with what bodies--whether with the same or with renewed bodies? Then, as far as I know, there will neither be mind, nor soul, nor life. With the same body? But this has already been previously destroyed. Then it is a new man who is born, not the former one restored; and yet so long a time has passed away, innumerable ages have flowed by, and what single individual has returned from the dead either by the fate of Protesilaus, with permission to sojourn even for a few hours, or that we might believe it for an example?

Chapter 2 : Full text of "The Octavius of Minucius Felix"

Marcus Minucius Felix (died c. AD in Rome) was one of the earliest of the Latin apologists for Christianity. He was of Berber origin. Nothing is known of his personal history, and even the date at which he wrote can be only approximately ascertained as between AD and

Up to date as of January 23, From BibleWiki Christian apologist , flourished between and ; the exact date is not known. His "Octavius" has numerous points of agreement with the "Apologeticum" of Tertullian , similarities that have been explained by the theory of a common source -- an apology written in Latin, and which is supposed to have disappeared without leaving any trace, not even in the name of its author. This hypothesis is now generally abandoned. It seems improbable that such a work, from which Minucius and Tertullian might have drawn, would have so thoroughly disappeared. The most natural supposition is that one of the two writers, Minucius or Tertullian , is directly dependent on the other. Formerly, Minucius was regarded as posterior to Tertullian. The first doubts in this respect were expressed in France by Blondel in , by Dallaeus in , and in England by Dodwell. The theory of the priority of Minucius was defended by van Hoven in the second edition of Lindner in . In modern times it was most ably defended by Ebert. The priority of Tertullian has been chiefly defended by Ad. Harnack, who has been refuted by A. Waltzing, the scholar best acquainted with Minucius Felix and what has been written about him: The arguments in favour of one or the other of these theories are not decisive. However, it may be said that in the passages taken from the ancient authors, such as Seneca, Varro, and especially Cicero, Minucius seems to be more exact and closer to the original; consequently he seems to be intermediary between them and Tertullian. The ecclesiastical authors were probably not better informed than we are with regard to Minucius. Lactantius puts him before Tertullian Div. Jerome after; but, St. Jerome contradicts himself by putting him after St. Cyprian De Viris, lviii. If the treatise, "Quod idola non dii sint" is by St. It is true that the attribution of the aforesaid treatise to St. Cyprian has been contested, but without serious reason. If this be rejected there is no period ante quem before Lactantius. The birthplace of the author is believed to be Africa. At this period the principal writers were Africans, and it was natural that a Latin, of whatever province he might be, would read and imitate them. The allusions to the customs and belief of Africa are numerous, but this may be explained by the African origin of the champion of paganism. The "Octavius" is a dialogue of which Ostia is the scene. Caecilius Natalis upholds the cause of paganism, Octavius Januarius that of Christianity ; the author himself is the judge of the debate. Caecilius Natalis was a native of Cirta; he lived at Rome and attentively followed Minucius in his activity as an advocate. Octavius had just arrived from a foreign country where he had left his family. Minucius lived at Rome. All three were advocates. Caecilius Natalis of the inscriptions discharged important municipal duties and gave pagan festivals with memorable prodigality. He may have belonged to the same family as the interlocutor of the dialogue. Attempts have been made to make them identical or to establish family relationship between them. These are pure hypotheses subordinate to the opinion entertained regarding the date of the dialogue. The persons are real. The dialogue may likewise be so, despite the fact that Minucius has transformed into an almost judicial debate what must have been a mere conversation or series of conversations. Owing to the adjournment of the courts during the vintage time, the three friends went for rest to Ostia. Here they walked on the sea-shore, and when they passed before a statue of Serapis, Caecilius saluted it with the customary kiss. Octavius thereupon expressed his indignation that Minucius should allow his daily companion to fall into idolatry. They resume their walk while Octavius gives an account of his voyage; they go to and fro on the shore and the quay; they watch children jumping about in the sea. This beginning is charming; it is the most perfect portion of the work. During the walk Caecilius, silenced by the words of Octavius, has not spoken. He now explains himself and it is agreed to settle the debate. They seat themselves on a lonely pier; Minucius seated in the centre is to be the arbitrator. Thereupon Caecilius begins by attacking Christianity ; Minucius says a few words, and then Octavius replies. At the end Minucius and Caecilius express their admiration and the latter declares that he surrenders. Fuller explanations of the new religion are postponed until the next day. The dialogue therefore consists of two discourses, the attack of Caecilius and the

refutation of Octavius. The discussion bears on a small number of points: In this debate the conception of Christianity is very limited, and is reduced almost solely to the unity of God, Providence, the resurrection, and reward after death. The name of Christ does not appear; among the apologists of the second century Aristides, St. Justin, and Tertullian are the only ones who pronounced it. But Minucius omits the characteristic points of Christianity in dogma and worship; this is not because he is bound to silence by the discipline of the secret, for St. Justin and Tertullian do not fear to enter into these details. Moreover in the discussion itself Octavius ends abruptly. To the accusation of adoring a criminal he contents himself with replying that the Crucified One was neither a man nor guilty xxix, 2 and he is silent with regard to the mysteries of the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the Redemption which would have made clear his reply. He merely repels the accusation of incest and infanticide without describing the agape or the Eucharist xxx and xxxi. He does not quote Scripture, or at least very little; and he does not mention the fulfilment of the prophecies. On the other hand he makes only a brief allusion to the manner of proceeding against the Christians xxiii, 8. He does not speak of the loyalty of the Christians towards the state and the emperors. Political and judicial considerations, which are given so much space in Tertullian, are almost entirely absent here. These omissions are explained by a voluntary limitation of the subject. Minucius wished only to remove the prejudices of the pagans, to prepossess his readers by a pleasant discussion, and to show them the possibility of Christianity. He himself indicated this intention by putting off until the next day a more profound discussion xl, 2. He addressed himself chiefly to the learned, to sceptics, and to the cultured; and wished to prove to them that there was nothing in the new religion that was incompatible with the resources of dialectics and the ornaments of rhetoric. In a word his work is an introduction to Christianity, a Protrepticon. It is a mosaic of imitations, especially of Cicero, Seneca, and Virgil. The plan itself is that of the "De natura deorum" of Cicero, and Caecilius here plays the role of Cotta. However the personages have their peculiar characteristics: Caecilius is a young man, presumptuous, somewhat vain, sensitive, yielding to his first impression. Octavius is more sedate, but provincial life seems to have made him more intolerant; his pleading is hot and emotional. Minucius is more indulgent and calm. These learned men are charming friends. The dialogue itself is a monument of friendship. Minucius wrote it in memory of his dear Octavius, recently deceased. In reading it one thinks of Pliny the Younger and his friends. These minds exhibited the same delicacy and culture. The style is composite, being a harmonious combination of the Ciceronian period with the brilliant and short sentences of the new school. It sometimes assumes poetic tints, but the dominating colour is that of Cicero. By the choice of subjects treated, his ease in reconciling very different ideas and styles, the art of combinations in ideas as well as in language, Minucius Felix belongs to the first rank of Latin writers whose talent consisted in blending heterogeneous elements and in proving themselves individual and original in imitation. Portions of this entry are taken from The Catholic Encyclopedia,

Chapter 3 : Internet History Sourcebooks

Minucius Felix Octavius CHAP. I ARGUMENT: MINUCIUS RELATES HOW DELIGHTFUL TO HIM IS THE RECOLLECTION OF THE THINGS THAT HAD HAPPENED TO HIM WITH OCTAVIUS WHILE HE WAS ASSOCIATED WITH HIM AT ROME, AND ESPECIALLY OF THIS DISPUTATION.

References and Further Reading 1. Life and Circumstance Minucius lived in the late 2nd and early 3rd centuries C. Most of what we know about him comes from his only surviving work, the Octavius. His first name is revealed as Marcus III. He was once a pagan, and "after careful experience of either way of life," had "repudiated the one and approved of the other" V. Other sources for his life include Lactantius, the Professor of Latin Rhetoric at Nicomedia, who writes of Minucius, "among those who are known to me, Minucius Felix was not of mean repute among the case-pleaders of the place. His book, which has the title of Octavius, shows how suitable a defender of truth he could have been if he had devoted himself entirely to that pursuit" Div. Jerome mentions the Octavius briefly in the De Viris Illustribus and adds that Minucius also wrote a De fato the fate, although this text has never been found. Many historians assume that he was originally of African origin; his name is found on a dedication at Carthage, and on a column at Tebessa DeLabriolle However, other men shared his name, so it is unclear if these inscriptions actually refer to the author of the Octavius. In his dialogue, Minucius displays an antipathy towards the Roman policy of expansion: From the dialogue, we can gather that Minucius was a highly educated man, with an intimate understanding of ancient authors such as Virgil, Ovid, Nepos, Thallus and Diodorus. His comments on these ancient authors allow historians to consider him a doxographer, or one who enumerates and comments upon texts from earlier periods. His rhetorical Latin is "grand" gravis and refined, and his descriptions vivid and compelling. He is careful to avoid slipping into the swollen or drifting style argued against in the Rhetorica ad Herrenium see book IV. Aside from his religion, there is evidence from the dialogue that Minucius may have been a Stoic prior to his conversion. His passages on the "divine mind," or the intelligence behind all creation, attest to this XIX. The Octavius can be understood as an attack against the skepticism of the New Academy and of Pyrrhonism, and an attempt to reconcile nascent Christianity with Stoic philosophy and Roman civic life. But while Minucius rejects skepticism and embraces Stoicism, on first inspection he seems to adhere to the opinion of Tertullian; What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the Church? What between heretics and Christians? Our instruction comes from the "porch of Solomon" who had himself taught that "the Lord should be sought in simplicity of heart. We want no curious disputation after possessing Christ Jesus, no inquisition after enjoying the Gospel De praescriptione haereticorum 7. In defending the intellect, Minucius is careful not to assert the primacy of philosophy, for that would be to declare reason above revelation. In this way, he is a member of what Etienne Gilson calls the "Tertullian Family"; he stresses the limitations of the intellect, but not the negation of it History The Octavius may have been intended to persuade intellectual Romans to reject both paganism and skepticism, and to embrace the new religion. It has been said that Minucius Felix was the only Anti-Nicene father to present both the Christian and pagan side of the question History For centuries, scholars have attempted to assign a firm date of composition to the dialogue. The central question has always been, is the Octavius anterior to the Apologeticus of Tertullian? Aequae spectaculus vestris in tantum renuntiamus in quantum originibus eorum, quas scimus de superstitione conceptas, cum et ipsis rebus, de quibus transiguntur, praetersumus. Your public games, we renounce too, as heartily as we do their origins; we know these origins lie in superstition; we leave on one side matters with which they are concerned. Unlike the Apologeticus, which takes the form of a protest directed at the magistrates of the Roman Empire, the Octavius is a dialogue featuring individuals whom historians believe may have actually lived in the empire. This use of a dialogue is a Ciceronian technique although certainly not exclusive to Cicero, and can be seen in De Oratore. The Octavius is stylistically closer to the works of previous generations; it is markedly different than the texts written by Christian apologists in the 2nd and 3rd centuries. Nevertheless, the question of style is still debated among historians of Latin and scholars of early apologetics. Among the scholars that argue for the priority of the Octavius is O. When has joint monarchy

ever started in good faith, or ended without bloodshed? This is perhaps a subtle allusion to the quarrel between the Antonine emperors Caracalla and his brother Publius Septimius Geta, who ruled jointly before the Caracalla assassinated his brother in a fit of rage. The death of Geta was a shocking incident in the history of Rome, and it was surely on the mind of anyone writing during the period. Minucius could not risk referring to the event directly, he had to instead use the illustration of the perils of joint rule as a rhetorical commonplace. In , the Emperor Caracalla passed an edict known as the *Constitutio Antoniniana*, granting universal citizenship to all free Romans within the many provinces of the Empire. Prior to this, only men living within the Italian peninsula were considered citizens. The edict is important in that while Tertullian complains of Christians lacking citizenship at least those within the African provinces, Minucius ignores the issue altogether. Perhaps this is because the citizenship issue had already been settled by the time Minucius resolved to write his dialogue. So while the *Octavius* appears to be stylistically older than the *Apologeticus*, it is quite possible that it was composed no earlier than , following both the death of Geta, and the enactment of the *Constitutio Antoniniana*. A more telling approximation can be found in the passages of the *idola* in which Cyprian asserts that the gods of the Romans are merely deified men of antiquity, "Romulus was made a god when Proculus committed perjury" And in a passage from the *Octavius*, Minucius writes, It is a waste of time to go through all one by one, and to trace the whole family line; the mortality which we have proved in the case of their first parents has descended to the rest by order of succession. But perhaps you [Caecilius] imagine that men become gods after death; Romulus was made a god by the false oath of Proculus XXI. Since Lactantius mentions Minucius, and Cyprian used the *Octavius* as a source for the *idola*, the text must be no later than the middle of the 3rd century. Conversely, most scholars assume that the *Apologeticus* was composed in Another possibility is that both the *Octavius* and the *Apologeticus* draw from an earlier text that has been lost, but this hypothesis has never been proven. Some histories of rhetoric maintain that Minucius used the *Apologeticus* as a template, but the differences between the texts counterbalance the similarities. These works were not forensic exercises or speeches intended for large audiences; they were never intended to be performed. In the case of the *Apologeticus* we must consider that the advent of Christianity into the Roman Empire placed new obligations and prerogatives upon the rhetorician. As George Kennedy points out, "[e]xercises in declamation often lost touch with contemporary realities, a fact lamented by Quintilian, Tacitus, and others" Nevertheless, apologetics depends greatly upon rhetoric, and Christians were obligated to learn the art, even though Tertullian forbade them from ever teaching it *On Idolatry* So if we conclude that the texts are contra-distinct, the central question concerns the type or genre of oratory the *Octavius* represents. It is not an argument directed at a Roman official, or even a work intended to encourage persecuted Christians exhortation. It contains elements of apologetics, yet retains more of a classical rhetorical structure; it stands somewhere between Cicero and Tertullian in form. Within the dialogue is a forensic debate in which Octavius Januarius defends his faith against the prosecutor Caecilius, with Minucius acting as arbiter. Arbesmann and others suggest that this debate is in the form of a *controversia*, a rhetorical exercise popular in the first century. In this exercise described by Seneca the Elder, the instructor creates a special case for his students to build their arguments around. The teacher may posit a dilemma in which application of a particular law is difficult due to the circumstances involved; for instance, a woman who is raped has the choice of ordering the execution of her assailant or marrying him. But then it is discovered that the same man has raped two women in one night; one demands his death, the other asks him to marry her. For the *Octavius* to be a *controversia* it would have to be both fictional and hypothetical, however there is no evidence that it is either. All such dialectics have a deliberative character. Caecilius acts as the spokesman for the traditional Roman religion, and Octavius performs the same function for Christianity. The arguments follow and a conclusion is ultimately reached. So while the text has forensic judicial characteristics, its genre can be considered deliberative in the Ciceronian sense, as the issue of expediency is central; should the honorable Roman continue to follow "the thick darkness of vulgar ignorance," risking a wreck upon "stones, however carved and anointed and garlanded they may be," i. The *Octavius* is an argument intended for Roman ears, not Christian, and as Cicero remarks, in any deliberative endeavor, the orator must know "the character of the community" *De Oratore* II. As Gilson points out, Octavius avoids the "blunt dogmatism of Christian faith, something unpalatable to the

cultured pagan mind" This partially explains the curious absence of Christology within the text; the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus are not mentioned. Justin and Tertullian are the only ones who have uttered the name of Jesus Christ" Despite this, some have suggested that Minucius is somehow more orthodox than Tertullian, since the latter ultimately fell in with the Montanists Forster But his orthodoxy cannot be attested to, since he is intentionally vague on specific doctrinal matters. It would be counterproductive to swamp potential converts with the esoteric aspects of Christianity at the outset; Minucius instead presents and defends the exoteric image of the church. And while drawing heavily from ancient authors and historical events, Minucius never once uses scripture as an illustration of a point or concept. The dead man was the "sole confident" of his affections, and his "partner in wanderings from the truth" I. The language and circumstance is almost identical to that of Cicero in book 3 of *De Oratore*, as Cicero describes his "bitter recollection" that has "revived old feelings of distress and grief in [his] heart," III. In both instances, the occasion brings forth an opportunity to launch into a deliberative dialogue. The setting is Ostia, a pleasant resort town less than twenty miles from Rome, known for its baths. Minucius, Octavius Januarius, and Caecilius have come to the resort to obtain "relief from judicial duties" II. While walking along the shore, the men encounter an image of Serapis, a Graeco-Egyptian god. An interesting section follows, in which the men proceed down the beach and see a group of boys skipping rocks in the ocean. It is a contest in which the boy who wins is the one whose shard travels the farthest out into the sea, and it is perhaps a metaphor for the power of argument within the contest of rhetoric. It is a stylistic pattern that will be repeated throughout his speech. Caecilius declares that everyone "must feel indignant and annoyed that certain personsâ€”persons untrained in study, uninitiated in letters Caecilius follows this with the statement: Sufficient be it for our happiness, and sufficient for our wisdom if, according to the ancient oracle of the wise men, we learn closer acquaintance with our own selves. But seeing that with mad and fruitless toil we overstep the limits of our humble intelligence, and from our earth-bound level seek, with audacious eagerness, to scale heaven itself and the stars of heaven, let us at least not aggravate our error by vain and terrifying imaginations V. This passage is important on a number of levels: This also sounds very similar to the passage in *De Natura Deorum*, "[a]nd until this issue is decided, mankind must continue to labor under the profoundest uncertainty, and to be in ignorance about matters of the highest moment" I. Caecilius continues his speech with a particularly poetic and vivid illustration of the fortuitous and capricious nature of the physical world; natural disasters destroy the innocent as well as the guilty, and the harvest is obliterated by violent squalls and suffocating droughts. If divine intelligence and wisdom ruled the world, we would not see so much injustice in the human realm. Camillus would not have been sent into exile, Socrates would never have been forced to drink hemlock, and the tyrants Phalaris and Dionysius "would never have deserved a throne" V. The proposition or *partitio* is then introduced, "[C]um igitur aut fortuna caeca aut incerta natura sit", and the Latin here is a little unclear; it should probably read, "[S]eeing then that either blind fortune or uncertain nature" are the two possibilities open to us, we should "accept the teaching of our elders as the priest of truth" VI. The Romans can judge their efforts at piety simply by the results given to them: Rome has enjoyed hundreds of years of prosperity and expansion under the pagan gods, even as it has absorbed other religions and deities from people like the Gauls, Syrians, and Taurians. Military leaders have seen their successes and failures depend upon the favor of the gods; Brennus was defeated at the river Allia in B.

Chapter 4 : The Octavius of Minucius Felix

Minucius Felix was a Roman advocate, rhetorician, and Christian apologist. Like Lactantius, Minucius was a convert to Christianity. His only known work, the dialogue Octavius, is one of the earliest examples of Latin apologetics; it is an attack upon paganism and skepticism, and a defense of early Christianity as it was known in the Roman world.

Octavius And now, as wicked things advance more fruitfully, and abandoned manners creep on day by day, those abominable shrines of an impious assembly are maturing themselves throughout the whole world. Assuredly this confederacy ought to be rooted out and execrated. They know one another by secret marks and insignia, and they love one another almost before they know one another; everywhere also there is mingled among them a certain religion of lust, and they call one another promiscuously brothers and sisters, that even a not unusual debauchery may by the intervention of that sacred name become incestuous: Nor, concerning these things, would intelligent report speak of things so great and various, and requiring to be prefaced by an apology, unless truth were at the bottom of it. I hear that they adore the head of an ass, that basest of creatures, consecrated by I know not what silly persuasion, a worthy and appropriate religion for such manners. Some say that they worship the genitals of their pontiff and priest, and adore the nature, as it were, of their common parent. I know not whether these things are false; certainly suspicion is applicable to secret and nocturnal rites; and he who explains their ceremonies by reference to a man punished by extreme suffering for his wickedness, and to the deadly wood of the cross, appropriates fitting altars for reprobate and wicked men, that they may worship what they deserve. Now the story about the initiation of young novices is as much to be detested as it is well known. An infant covered over with meal, that it may deceive the unwary, is placed before him who is to be stained with their rites: Thirstily - O horror! By this victim they are pledged together; with this consciousness of wickedness they are covenanted to mutual silence. From Minucius Felix, Octavius, R. The Christian Literature Publishing Co. The charge of ritual cannibalism was probably based on confused accounts of the Christian eucharist. Hippolytus of Rome tells us what actually went on at a Christian service. This early eucharistic prayer still used in some churches dates from the beginning of the third century. Apostolic Tradition When one has been consecrated bishop all give him the kiss of peace. He is your inseparable Word, through whom you created all things and who was acceptable to you. Fulfilling your will and buying for you a holy people, he stretched forth his hands when he suffered, that by his Passion he might deliver those who believed in you. When he was delivered over to his Passion of his own will, to destroy death, to break the bonds of the devil, to trample upon Hell, to enlighten the just, and to manifest his resurrection, taking bread and giving thanks to you, he said: Take and eat, this is my body which shall be broken for you. And taking likewise the cup, he said: This is my blood which shall be shed for you; when you do this, do it in memory of me. And we beg you to send the Holy Spirit upon the offering of the holy church and gather into one all who have received it. Achelis, Die Canones Hippolyti Leipzig, , pp. This text is part of the Internet Ancient History Sourcebook. The Sourcebook is a collection of public domain and copy-permitted texts related to medieval and Byzantine history. Unless otherwise indicated the specific electronic form of the document is copyright. Permission is granted for electronic copying, distribution in print form for educational purposes and personal use. No representation is made about texts which are linked off-site, although in most cases these are also public domain. If you do reduplicate the document, indicate the source. No permission is granted for commercial use.

Chapter 5 : Minucius Felix - The Full Wiki

Marcus Minucius Felix, (born, Africa?â€”died c. , Rome), one of the earliest Christian Apologists to write in Latin. A Roman lawyer, he wrote the Octavius, a dialogue on Providence and Christianity in general, between the skeptic pagan Caecilius Natalis and the Christian Octavius Januarius, Minucius' friend.

The latter is securely dated to AD. The date of the former is quite uncertain, as will be seen. The question of which came first has long exercised scholars. This page does not pretend to weigh up the evidence, but to make available the information I have at hand. To discuss the subject of the date of the Octavius properly is outside the scope of this site. These notes should help the general reader. The Octavius is preserved in a single manuscript, Codex Parisinus Latinus 9th century. The current state of the question is that a later date is favoured, with the philological argument being solidly in that direction. However the question is really open. Here are a number of quotations from various works, discussing the subject. All material quoted is indented. A useful statement of the subject can be found in Chapter 3 pp. I reproduce it here verbatim. Minucius Felix serves as moderator and narrator of the dialogue. Nothing is known of Minucius Felix except that he was a jurist prior to his conversion to Christianity¹ and no other literature can be attributed to him. Octavius opens a debate with Caecilius who does homage to an image of Serapis. His main criticisms of Christians and Christianity are: The major points of his argument are: Therefore, Christians are capable of pondering the mysteries of God. Roman religion is a collection of superstitions which are not taken seriously even by Romans. Harnack went so far as to declare it a hopeless one. There is further dependence upon the Octavius by the pseudo-Cyprianic *Ad Novatianum*. Internal evidence indicates that it was composed sometime after the persecution of the Church by Gallus and Volusian C. To the Nations was written sometime before the *Apology* and material from the former work can be found in the latter. However, if dependence goes the other way, Tertullian made use of the Octavius for both his works. The priority of Minucius Felix was first asserted in modern times by de Muralto in They concluded that Minucius copied material from Tertullian who was the more vigorous and therefore more creative writer. Minucius Felix was the rhetorician who made use of the *Apology* which was the product of the more creative intellect. Heinze¹¹ made an exhaustive and exact study of the relevant passages and concluded that Minucius Felix abstracted material from the *Apology* and simplified it for effect. For Heinze, that the passages in the *Apology* are less pointed does not detract from the more logical order by Tertullian. Axelson¹² proposed that Minucius Felix edited his already complete manuscript after reading *To the Nations* and the *Apology*. It has also been proposed that both Tertullian and Minucius Felix made use of a common source. If Tertullian made use of the Octavius then we could establish a *terminus ad quem* of C. Both sides employ a priori considerations regarding what characterizes creativity. Therefore, the results are predetermined. Given the state of the debate it is not wise to go beyond dating the Octavius between c. Beaujeu noted possible allusions to the Old Testament: Genesis in chapters 19 and 32, Exodus in 33, Kings in 32, Job in 17 and 36, Psalms in 32, Isaiah in 32, and Jeremiah in He further isolated possible references to New Testament materials: These allusions reflect subject matter rather than any clear literary dependence. Pompei 10 , Pro Milone 32 and Ad Atticum 1. Dialogi chapter 36 , Consol. Also found are citations from Sallust 14 and 40 , Valerius Maximus 36 , Tacitus 8 , Suetonius 3 along with citations from poets such as Homer 19 , Ennius 12 and 19 , Lucretius 2 and 5 , Catalus 3 , Juvenal 4 , Statius 18 and especially Virgil 3 , , 12, 13, 19, 23, 25, 35, Citing Scripture to those who denied its validity would have been a futile effort. The use of Scripture would have made the Octavius a didactic work for Christians who required a response to pagan accusations rather than an apology for Christianity to those who misunderstood its teachings. In chapter 33 Minucius Felix responds to the Roman charge that the destruction of the Jewish nation proves the superiority of the Roman deities to the biblical God. Minucius Felix does not reject the logic and indeed supports it by disassociating the Jews from Christianity and from the protection of God. The fate of the Jewish people did not come from the inefficacy of God but from their abandonment of Him: Although his knowledge of Latin literature is extensive, Minucius Felix demonstrates little acquaintance with Greek writing. One wonders whether he read Josephus at all or is merely mentioning the name of a famous historian

who wrote about the Jews. Fronto lived from c. Octavius Paris, , lxxvii-lxxviii. Beaujeu provides a complete list of the parallels between Minucius Felix and Tertullian. For an extensive survey of the scholarship on the relationship between Tertullian and Minucius Felix, see H. For a more recent treatment see J. Minucius Felix Lund, Wilhelm, following a suggestion made by W. Here are a few snippets from the reviews. Each CTC entry is a review of a book or paper. Studies in honour of H. Nelson, Utrecht, Institut voor Klassieke Talen, , pp. The final pages reopen again the debate on the priority of the author of the Octavius which G. He responds to Tibiletti on the witness of the soul as to Waszink on the theologia tripertita. From a suggestion of Borleffs, which passed unnoticed, he takes a new line: But these two passages appear in very different contexts, and can very easily be explained independently of each other, by the different sources jewish apology for Minucius, oral tradition originating in Judaism for Tertullian. Il adopte la date de , pour la composition du traite, a la suite de W. Baehrens , mais sans engager une veritable discussion sur cette question si souvent debattue. He adopts the date of for the composition of the treatise, following W. Baehrens , but without engaging in a real discussion on this so often debated question. Analyse litteraire assez fine du dialogue, que P. Very detailed literary analysis of the dialogue, which P. On the subject of the relation between the Octavius and the Apologeticum, the author asks if the question of priority could one day be resolved, in the degree to which the two works reflect the very different situations of a Roman elite and a provincial milieu. Argument founded on the historicity of the events related in the dialogue and on the existence of an edict of persecution. Minucius, Octavius and Caecilius must have been Roman citizens ; they could not have embraced the Christian faith except before , year when Septimius Severus prohibited the conversion of Roman citizens to Christianity. If the facts reported are before , because of the premature death of Octavius, it is difficult to place the editing of the dialogue later than Pagans, Jews, and Christians, ed. Oxford University Press, p. The order in which the title of this chapter enumerates the three latin apologists no doubt a reference to Lactantius does not correspond to that which is generally but not always, cf. Patristic Monograph Series No. Christianity could seek accommodation with the pagan world. A synthesis would be formed in which the Christian message was clothed in pagan literary dress, thus reaching the members of the population at whom it was aimed. The Octavius of Minucius Felix adopted this approach. It forms the intellectual background for the milieu that led Cyprian to adopt Christianity as an alternative to what seemed a disintegrating and shattered pagan world view. Tertullian formed the most potent influence on his thought, outside of the Bible. The central difficulty in using the Octavius as representative of the intellectual milieu of the first quarter of the third century has been the question of its date. A heated and prolonged controversy has grown up about its relationship to the Apologeticum of Tertullian. The composition of the Apologeticum is firmly dated to the autumn of , or slightly later. The Octavius contains resemblances not only to the Apologeticum, but also to the earlier version of that work by Tertullian, the Ad Nationes. But careful analysis has revealed that the earlier work contains fewer resemblances to the Octavius than the finished version which became the Apologeticum. It could be argued that the Octavius appealed more to Tertullian as he revised, resulting in its greater utilization in the Apologeticum. Further detailed analysis led to the false view that Minucius Felix was simply a compiler and that his dialogue was a mosaic. The dialogue is more than a mere patchwork of classical commonplaces. A comparison reveals that the works of Tertullian are utilized in the same manner by Minucius Felix as the others. Thus the question of priority has been resolved in favour of Tertullian. The Octavius is badly represented in Christian literature. The earliest approximately datable reference is that of Lactantius in the Divinae Institutiones. For further discussion of this passage, see infra pp. For a summary of the earlier literature, see B. Later literature is summarized in J.

Chapter 6 : Octavius of Minucius Felix (Roberts-Donaldson)

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His "Octavius" has numerous points of agreement with the "Apologeticum" of Tertullian, similarities that have been explained by the theory of a common source -- an apology written in Latin, and which is supposed to have disappeared without leaving any trace, not even in the name of its author. This hypothesis is now generally abandoned. It seems improbable that such a work, from which Minucius and Tertullian might have drawn, would have so thoroughly disappeared. The most natural supposition is that one of the two writers, Minucius or Tertullian, is directly dependent on the other. Formerly, Minucius was regarded as posterior to Tertullian. The first doubts in this respect were expressed in France by Blondel in , by Dallaeus in , and in England by Dodwell. The theory of the priority of Minucius was defended by van Hoven in the second edition of Lindner in . In modern times it was most ably defended by Ebert. The priority of Tertullian has been chiefly defended by Ad. Harnack, who has been refuted by A. Waltzing, the scholar best acquainted with Minucius Felix and what has been written about him: The arguments in favour of one or the other of these theories are not decisive. However, it may be said that in the passages taken from the ancient authors, such as Seneca, Varro, and especially Cicero, Minucius seems to be more exact and closer to the original; consequently he seems to be intermediary between them and Tertullian. The ecclesiastical authors were probably not better informed than we are with regard to Minucius. Lactantius puts him before Tertullian Div. Jerome after; but, St. Jerome contradicts himself by putting him after St. Cyprian De Viris, lviii. If the treatise, "Quod idola non dii sint" is by St. It is true that the attribution of the aforesaid treatise to St. Cyprian has been contested, but without serious reason. If this be rejected there is no period ante quem before Lactantius. The birthplace of the author is believed to be Africa. At this period the principal writers were Africans, and it was natural that a Latin, of whatever province he might be, would read and imitate them. The allusions to the customs and belief of Africa are numerous, but this may be explained by the African origin of the champion of paganism. The "Octavius" is a dialogue of which Ostia is the scene. Caecilius Natalis upholds the cause of paganism, Octavius Januarius that of Christianity ; the author himself is the judge of the debate. Caecilius Natalis was a native of Circa ; he lived at Rome and attentively followed Minucius in his activity as an advocate. Octavius had just arrived from a foreign country where he had left his family. Minucius lived at Rome. All three were advocates. Caecilius Natalis of the inscriptions discharged important municipal duties and gave pagan festivals with memorable prodigality. He may have belonged to the same family as the interlocutor of the dialogue. Attempts have been made to make them identical or to establish family relationship between them. These are pure hypotheses subordinate to the opinion entertained regarding the date of the dialogue. The persons are real. The dialogue may likewise be so, despite the fact that Minucius has transformed into an almost judicial debate what must have been a mere conversation or series of conversations. Owing to the adjournment of the courts during the vintage time, the three friends went for rest to Ostia. Here they walked on the sea-shore, and when they passed before a statue of Serapis, Caecilius saluted it with the customary kiss. Octavius thereupon expressed his indignation that Minucius should allow his daily companion to fall into idolatry. They resume their walk while Octavius gives an account of his voyage; they go to and fro on the shore and the quay; they watch children jumping about in the sea. This beginning is charming; it is the most perfect portion of the work. During the walk Caecilius, silenced by the words of Octavius, has not spoken. He now explains himself and it is agreed to settle the debate. They seat themselves on a lonely pier; Minucius seated in the centre is to be the arbitrator. Thereupon Caecilius begins by attacking Christianity ; Minucius says a few words, and then Octavius replies. At the end Minucius and Caecilius express their admiration and the latter declares that he surrenders. Fuller explanations of the new religion are postponed until the next day. The dialogue therefore consists of two discourses, the attack of Caecilius and the refutation of Octavius. The discussion bears on a small number of points: In this debate the conception of Christianity is very limited, and is reduced almost solely to the unity of God, Providence, the resurrection, and reward after death. The name of Christ does not appear; among the apologists of the second century Aristides, St. Justin, and Tertullian are the only ones who

pronounced it. But Minucius omits the characteristic points of Christianity in dogma and worship; this is not because he is bound to silence by the discipline of the secret, for St. Justin and Tertullian do not fear to enter into these details. Moreover in the discussion itself Octavius ends abruptly. To the accusation of adoring a criminal he contents himself with replying that the Crucified One was neither a man nor guilty xxix, 2 and he is silent with regard to the mysteries of the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the Redemption which would have made clear his reply. He merely repels the accusation of incest and infanticide without describing the agape or the Eucharist xxx and xxxi. He does not quote Scripture, or at least very little; and he does not mention the fulfilment of the prophecies. On the other hand he makes only a brief allusion to the manner of proceeding against the Christians xxiii, 8. He does not speak of the loyalty of the Christians towards the state and the emperors. Political and judicial considerations, which are given so much space in Tertullian, are almost entirely absent here. These omissions are explained by a voluntary limitation of the subject. Minucius wished only to remove the prejudices of the pagans, to prepossess his readers by a pleasant discussion, and to show them the possibility of Christianity. He himself indicated this intention by putting off until the next day a more profound discussion xl, 2. He addressed himself chiefly to the learned, to sceptics, and to the cultured; and wished to prove to them that there was nothing in the new religion that was incompatible with the resources of dialectics and the ornaments of rhetoric. In a word his work is an introduction to Christianity, a Protrepticon. It is a mosaic of imitations, especially of Cicero, Seneca, and Virgil. The plan itself is that of the "De natura deorum" of Cicero, and Caecilius here plays the role of Cotta. However the personages have their peculiar characteristics: Caecilius is a young man, presumptuous, somewhat vain, sensitive, yielding to his first impression. Octavius is more sedate, but provincial life seems to have made him more intolerant; his pleading is hot and emotional. Minucius is more indulgent and calm. These learned men are charming friends. The dialogue itself is a monument of friendship. Minucius wrote it in memory of his dear Octavius, recently deceased. In reading it one thinks of Pliny the Younger and his friends. These minds exhibited the same delicacy and culture. The style is composite, being a harmonious combination of the Ciceronian period with the brilliant and short sentences of the new school. It sometimes assumes poetic tints, but the dominating colour is that of Cicero. By the choice of subjects treated, his ease in reconciling very different ideas and styles, the art of combinations in ideas as well as in language, Minucius Felix belongs to the first rank of Latin writers whose talent consisted in blending heterogeneous elements and in proving themselves individual and original in imitation.

Chapter 7 : The Octavius: An Early Christian Debate

Octavius is an early writing in defense of Christianity by Marcus Minucius Felix. It is written in the form of a dialogue between the pagan Caecilius Natalis and the Christian Octavius Januarius, a provincial lawyer, the friend and fellow-student of the author.

Christian apologist, flourished between and ; the exact date is not known. This hypothesis is now generally abandoned. It seems improbable that such a work, from which Minucius and Tertullian might have drawn, would have so thoroughly disappeared. The most natural supposition is that one of the two writers, Minucius or Tertullian, is directly dependent on the other. Formerly, Minucius was regarded as posterior to Tertullian. The first doubts in this respect were expressed in France by Blondel in , by Dallaeus in , and in England by Dodwell. The theory of the priority of Minucius was defended by van Hoven in the second edition of Lindner in . In modern times it was most ably defended by Ebert. The priority of Tertullian has been chiefly defended by Ad. Harnack, who has been refuted by A. Waltzing, the scholar best acquainted with Minucius Felix and what has been written about him, is inclined to think him anterior to Tertullian. The arguments in favour of one or the other of these theories are not decisive. However, it may be said that in the passages taken from the ancient authors, such as Seneca, Varro, and especially Cicero, Minucius seems to be more exact and closer to the original; consequently he seems to be intermediary between them and Tertullian. The ecclesiastical authors were probably not better informed than we are with regard to Minucius. Lactantius puts him before Tertullian Div. Jerome after; but, St. Jerome contradicts himself by putting him after St. Cyprian De Viris, lviii. If the treatise, "Quod idola non dii sint" is by St. It is true that the attribution of the aforesaid treatise to St. Cyprian has been contested, but without serious reason. If this be rejected there is no period ante quem before Lactantius. The birthplace of the author is believed to be Africa. At this period the principal writers were Africans, and it was natural that a Latin, of whatever province he might be, would read and imitate them. The allusions to the customs and belief of Africa are numerous, but this may be explained by the African origin of the champion of paganism. The "Octavius" is a dialogue of which Ostia is the scene. Caecilius Natalis upholds the cause of paganism, Octavius Januarius that of Christianity; the author himself is the judge of the debate. Caecilius Natalis was a native of Cirta; he lived at Rome and attentively followed Minucius in his activity as an advocate. Octavius had just arrived from a foreign country where he had left his family. Minucius lived at Rome. All three were advocates. Caecilius Natalis of the inscriptions discharged important municipal duties and gave pagan festivals with memorable prodigality. He may have belonged to the same family as the interlocutor of the dialogue. Attempts have been made to make them identical or to establish family relationship between them. These are pure hypotheses subordinate to the opinion entertained regarding the date of the dialogue. The persons are real. The dialogue may likewise be so, despite the fact that Minucius has transformed into an almost judicial debate what must have been a mere conversation or series of conversations. Owing to the adjournment of the courts during the vintage time, the three friends went for rest to Ostia. Here they walked on the sea-shore, and when they passed before a statue of Serapis, Caecilius saluted it with the customary kiss. Octavius thereupon expressed his indignation that Minucius should allow his daily companion to fall into idolatry. They resume their walk while Octavius gives an account of his voyage; they go to and fro on the shore and the quay; they watch children jumping about in the sea. This beginning is charming; it is the most perfect portion of the work. During the walk Caecilius, silenced by the words of Octavius, has not spoken. He now explains himself and it is agreed to settle the debate. They seat themselves on a lonely pier; Minucius seated in the centre is to be the arbitrator. Thereupon Caecilius begins by attacking Christianity; Minucius says a few words, and then Octavius replies. At the end Minucius and Caecilius express their admiration and the latter declares that he surrenders. Fuller explanations of the new religion are postponed until the next day. The dialogue therefore consists of two discourses, the attack of Caecilius and the refutation of Octavius. The discussion bears on a small number of points: In this debate the conception of Christianity is very limited, and is reduced almost solely to the unity of God, Providence, the resurrection, and reward after death. The name of Christ does not appear; among the apologists of the second century

Aristides, St. Justin, and Tertullian are the only ones who pronounced it. But Minucius omits the characteristic points of Christianity in dogma and worship; this is not because he is bound to silence by the discipline of the secret, for St. Justin and Tertullian do not fear to enter into these details. Moreover in the discussion itself Octavius ends abruptly. To the accusation of adoring a criminal he contents himself with replying that the Crucified One was neither a man nor guilty xxix, 2 and he is silent with regard to the mysteries of the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the Redemption which would have made clear his reply. He merely repels the accusation of incest and infanticide without describing the agape or the Eucharist xxx and xxxi. He does not quote Scripture, or at least very little; and he does not mention the fulfilment of the prophecies. On the other hand he makes only a brief allusion to the manner of proceeding against the Christians xxiii, 8. He does not speak of the loyalty of the Christians towards the state and the emperors. Political and judicial considerations, which are given so much space in Tertullian, are almost entirely absent here. These omissions are explained by a voluntary limitation of the subject. Minucius wished only to remove the prejudices of the pagans, to prepossess his readers by a pleasant discussion, and to show them the possibility of Christianity. He himself indicated this intention by putting off until the next day a more profound discussion xl, 2. He addressed himself chiefly to the learned, to sceptics, and to the cultured; and wished to prove to them that there was nothing in the new religion that was incompatible with the resources of dialectics and the ornaments of rhetoric. In a word his work is an introduction to Christianity, a Protrepticon. It is a mosaic of imitations, especially of Cicero, Seneca, and Virgil. The plan itself is that of the "De natura deorum" of Cicero, and Caecilius here plays the role of Cotta. However the personages have their peculiar characteristics: Caecilius is a young man, presumptuous, somewhat vain, sensitive, yielding to his first impression. Octavius is more sedate, but provincial life seems to have made him more intolerant; his pleading is hot and emotional. Minucius is more indulgent and calm. These learned men are charming friends. The dialogue itself is a monument of friendship. Minucius wrote it in memory of his dear Octavius, recently deceased. In reading it one thinks of Pliny the Younger and his friends. These minds exhibited the same delicacy and culture. The style is composite, being a harmonious combination of the Ciceronian period with the brilliant and short sentences of the new school. It sometimes assumes poetic tints, but the dominating colour is that of Cicero. By the choice of subjects treated, his ease in reconciling very different ideas and styles, the art of combinations in ideas as well as in language, Minucius Felix belongs to the first rank of Latin writers whose talent consisted in blending heterogeneous elements and in proving themselves individual and original in imitation. A complete bibliography will be found in the first three works, with analyses and discussion. About this page APA citation. In The Catholic Encyclopedia. Robert Appleton Company, This article was transcribed for New Advent by Kenneth M. Dedicated to the Rev. The editor of New Advent is Kevin Knight. My email address is webmaster at newadvent. Dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Chapter 8 : CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA: Minucius Felix

The Octavius of Minucius Felix. Chapter I.â€”Argument: Minucius Relates How Delightful to Him is the Recollection of the Things that Had Happened to Him with Octavius While He Was Associated with Him at Rome, and.

Either way, Minucius Felix, an otherwise unknown Christian from the 2nd or early 3rd century, ably defends Christianity against Roman arguments, superstition, and rumors. If you are a Christian, you should read Decoding Nicea. Listen, I know that internet readers usually skim. This is one of the best Christian writings in history, and the only debate in early Christian history that gives both sides. My introduction is long. You can skip it if you want, but read the debate!. Introduction First, you need to know that I have done two things to the original text. In The Octavius, Cecilius gives all his arguments at once. There are pages and pages of arguments. Octavius then gives all his answers, and the debate is over. I have divided the debate into eight arguments, the ones that apply best to our modern era, and I have let Cecilius and Octavius speak on only one subject at a time. In The Octavius, Minucius Felix is the moderator. His dear friend Octavius, visiting from afar, holds the debate with Cecilius, a pagan that may be Minucius servant or business partner. The Ostia Mediterranean seacoast. Public domain image The debate occurred as the three men were walking along the Tiber river toward the western seacoast of Italy. Along the way, Cecilius found a stone carved into the image of the god Serapis. He quickly picked it up and kissed it. Minucius, my brother, leaving a man in vulgar ignorance, especially one who lives by your side both at home and abroad, is not something a good man ought to do. It is not right that you should allow him to devote himself to a stone in broad daylight like this; it discredits you as much as it does him. The comment was awkward, of course, and the men continued in silence for a short while before Octavius and Minucius, old and dear friends, returned to conversing about their various travels and experiences. Cecilius, however, was angry, and eventually Minucius felt obligated to ask him about his silence. He directed that comment at you, accusing you of negligence, but really he wanted to condemn me for ignorance. His case stated, he had a proposition for resolving it. So, since the issue is really between myself and Octavius, I would like to propose a debate. Octavius readily agreed to this debate over Christianity, and the three of them found a stone wall at the mouth of the Tiber looking out at the Mediterranean seashore. For those of you who have as much difficulty as me in remembering names: Octavius and Minucius are the Christians. Cecilius is the pagan. Octavius, if you are going to sit in judgment against me as ignorant, I say that it is plain that all things in human affairs are doubtful, uncertain, and unsettled, so that most things are more probable than true. Instead, it is better to continue exploring with persistent diligence. It should be no surprise that everyone is indignant and vexed when people unskilled in learning, ignorant of literature, and without knowledge of the artsâ€”like you Christiansâ€”should dare to claim to know with any certainty the general nature of things or to understand divinity, which so many religious groups in so many ages still wonder about, and which even philosophy itself still debates. Since my brother used such expressions as that he was "vexed" and "indignant" that illiterate, poor, and unskilled people should dispute about heavenly things, let him know that all men are born alike, with a capacity and ability of reasoning and feeling, without bias to age, gender, or dignity. Nor do they obtain their wisdom by riches, but it is implanted by nature. Moreover, the philosophers themselves and others like them, before they made a name for themselves, were considered vulgar and untaught. The fact is, rich people are more accustomed to gaze upon their gold than upon heaven, while our sort of people, though poor, have both discovered wisdom and taught others. So it appears that intelligence is not given to the wealthy, nor obtained by study, but is begotten with the very formation of the mind. You should believe your forefathers rather than assert your opinion about the deities. They should not be enough to make us agree with the gods of our forefathers. You will find mournful deaths, misfortunes, funerals, and griefs and wailings of the miserable gods. What are the sacred rites of Jupiter? And why should I have to mention the discovered adultery of Mars and Venus? All these stories have been told with one aim: By these fictions and others like them the minds of boys are corrupted. They grow up with these fables clinging to them and, poor wretches, they grow old in the same beliefs, even though the truth is plain if they will only seek after it. Even dumb animals judge concerning your gods. Mice and swallows

know that they have no feeling. They gnaw them, trample them, and sit on them. Unless you drive them off, they build their nests in the very mouths of your gods. You wipe, cleanse, scrape, and you protect and fear that which you make, while not one of you thinks that he ought to know God before you worship him. Rumors About Christians Cecilius: What about all the accusations? Christians have gathered from the lowest dregs of society the more unskilled men and gullible women to establish an unholy conspiracy held together by nightly meetings, solemn fasts, and inhuman foods. Surely the obscurity of your religion proves that at least the greater part of the accusations must be true. Why do you never speak openly or congregate freely, unless what you adore and worship is worthy of punishment or something to be ashamed of? We do not hide in corners. We all judge one thing to be good, and we assemble with the same quietness with which we live our lives. The problem is that you either blush or are afraid to listen to us in public. It is not right to form a judgment based on things unknown and unexamined as you are doing. We were just like you. We thought Christians worshipped monsters, devoured infants, and engaged in incestuous banquets. We never noticed that in so long a time no one has come forth to betray their activities, trying to obtain pardon for their crime or credit for exposing it. The abominable shrines of this impious assembly are growing throughout the whole world. This confederacy ought to be rooted out and destroyed! They know one another by secret marks and signs, and they love one another almost before they know one another. We live an honorable way of life. Nor are we distinguished by some small bodily mark, as you suppose, but we are distinguished easily enough by the marks of innocence and modesty. Thus we love one another with a mutual love, to your regret, because we do not know how to hate. And you are angry with us, too, because we call each other brothers. But on this very account, perhaps, we are regarded as having less claim to be held true brothers, that tragedies do not cause problems in our brotherhood and the family possessions, which generally destroy brotherhood among you, create fraternal bonds among us. One in mind and soul, we do not hesitate to share our earthly goods with one another. All things are common among us but our wives. Christians think of themselves as good, and they promise to themselves a blessed and perpetual life after death, but to others, since they are unrighteous, eternal punishment. Only a profane man would hesitate to believe that those who do not know God are tormented deservedly, because it is no less wicked to be ignorant of the Parent of all than to offend him. And if you wish to compare Christians with yourselves, then even if in some things our discipline is inferior, yet we shall be found much better than you. You forbid, yet commit, adulteries; we are born men only for our own wives. You punish crimes when committed; with us, even to think of crimes is to sin. You are afraid of those who are aware of what you do; we are afraid even of our own consciences, without which we cannot exist. Finally, from your numbers the prisons boil over, but there is no Christian there unless he is accused on account of his religion or has deserted it. Can you at least learn from your current experience, how the fruitless expectations of your vain promise deceive you? Consider, wretched creatures, from your experience while you are alive, what is threatening you after death. As you yourself admit, most of you are needy, cold, and work in heavy labor even while you are hungry. And God allows it! He is either unable or unwilling to help his people, and thus he is either weak or unjust. Yes, many of us are called poor. This is not our disgrace, but our glory. The mind is lulled to sleep by luxury, but it is strengthened by frugality. Besides, who can be poor if he does not want? Can he be poor if he is rich towards God? No, the person who is poor is the one who desires more even though he has much. Who can be as poor as the day he is born? Birds live without any income. Every day the cattle are fed. Just as the person who travels on a road is happier the lighter he walks, so is he happier who carries himself along in poverty in this life and does not breathe heavily under the burden of riches. Let me be clear, though, that if we thought wealth was useful for us, we would ask God for it. We are confident that God would answer us in some measure, because he possesses everything. But we would rather despise riches than possess them. What we want is innocence, and what we pray for is patience. We prefer being good to being lavish. For you specifically there are threats, punishments, tortures, and crosses.

Chapter 9 : Marcus Minucius Felix | racedaydvl.com

In The Octavius, Minucius Felix is the moderator. His dear friend Octavius, visiting from afar, holds the debate with Cecilius, a pagan that may be Minucius servant or business partner. His dear friend Octavius, visiting from afar, holds the debate with Cecilius, a pagan that may be Minucius servant or business partner.

The question of his originality is earnestly debated among moderns, as it was in some degree with the ancients. It turns upon the doubt as to his place with respect to Tertullian, whose Apology he seems to quote, or rather to abridge. If the Testimony was quoted or employed by Minucius, therefore, he could not have written before [1] a. The modern discussion of the matter is an interesting literary controversy; not yet settled, perhaps, though the dip of the balance just now sustains my own impressions. Like Tertullian, our author appears to have been a jurisconsult, at Rome, at some period of his history. Beautiful glimpses of his life and character and surroundings are gained from his own pages, and nearly all we know about him is to be found therein. So far, he is his own biographer. He probably continued a layman, and may have lived, as some suppose, till the middle of the third century. We have entered upon the third Christian century, and as yet the venerable apostolic see of the West has made no movement whatever towards the creation of a Latin literature among Christians. This, although it is our fourth volume, contains nothing to modify this fact; and yet the whole literature of early Christianity is contained in our series. See also my prefatory remarks to Mathetes, and the reference to Bunsen which I have suffixed to the Notice of the Edinburgh editors. It will gratify the scholar to find it here where it belongs, and not less to note that it has an index of its own, while in the Edinburgh edition its contents are indexed with those of Cyprian. Consequently, the joint index is rendered nearly worthless, and the injury and confusion resulting to the Contents of Cyprian are not inconsiderable. Here follows the valuable Prefatory Notice of Dr. Minucius Felix is said by Jerome [5] to have been an advocate at Rome prior to his conversion to Christianity. The date of its composition is still a matter of keen dispute. The settlement of the point hinges upon the answer to the question—“Whether, in the numerous passages which are strikingly similar, occurring in the Apologeticus and the Octavius, Tertullian borrowed from Minucius, or Minucius borrowed from Tertullian? If Minucius borrowed from Tertullian, he must have flourished in the commencement of the third century, as the Apologeticus was written about the year a. If, on the other hand, Tertullian borrowed from Minucius, the Octavius was written probably about the year , and Minucius flourished in the reign of Marcus Aurelius. The later date was the one adopted by earlier critics, and the reasons for it are well given by Mr. Holden in his introduction. Of the literary character of the dialogue, it is sufficient to quote the testimony of the late Dean Milman: Only one manuscript of the work has come down to us; which is now in the Imperial Library in Paris. It is beautifully written. Some editors have spoken of two other mss. They supposed that the first edition was taken from a different ms. The Octavius appears in the ms. To Franciscus Balduinus is due the merit of having discovered the real author. There are very many editions of the Octavius. Among the earlier, those of Gronovius and Davies are valuable. Among the later, Lindner , Eduard de Muralto , and Oehler may be mentioned. There is a very good English edition by the Rev. Both Holden and Halm give new recensions of the Codex Regius. See also Bunsen, Hippol.