

PLINY
LETTERS, BOOKS VIII-X
PANEGYRICUS

WITH AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION BY
BETTY RADICE



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3 illi fortunae malignitas denegavit. Scio, domine, quantum beneficium petam, sed peto a te cuius in omnibus desideriis meis indulgentiam experior. Potes enim colligere quanto opere cupiam, quod non rogarem absens si mediocriter cuperem.

XCV

TRAIANUS PLINIO

QUAM parce haec beneficia tribuam, utique, mi Secunde carissime, haeret tibi, cum etiam in senatu adfirmare soleam non excessisse me numerum, quem apud amplissimum ordinem suffecturum mihi professus sum. Tuo tamen desiderio subscripsi et dedisse me ius trium liberorum Suetonio Tranquillo ea condicione, qua adsuevi, referri in commentarios meos iussi.

XCVI

C. PLINIUS TRAIANO IMPERATORI

1 SOLLEMNE est mihi, domine, omnia de quibus dubito ad te referre. Quis enim potest melius vel cunctationem meam regere vel ignorantiam instruere? Cognitionibus de Christianis interfui num-

¹ What exactly these were is not known. Perhaps the grant was revocable on re-marriage (S-W, p. 691).

² For this celebrated exchange of letters, see Tertullian, *Apology* II. 6-10, and Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* III. 33; for trials of Christians, see Eusebius, IV. 15, V. 1, etc. Note that P.

fortune has denied him. I know, Sir, what a great favour I am asking, but remember from experience your kindness hitherto in granting my wishes; and you may judge how much this means to me by the fact that I should not make such a request during my absence abroad did I not have it much at heart.

XCV

TRAJAN TO PLINY

You are certainly well aware, my dear Pliny, that I grant these favours sparingly, seeing that I have often stated in the Senate that I have not exceeded the number which I said would meet my wishes when I first addressed its distinguished members. I have, however, granted your request and issued instructions that it is to be officially recorded that I have conferred on Suetonius Tranquillus the privileges granted to parents of three children, on my usual terms.¹

XCVI

PLINY TO THE EMPEROR TRAJAN²

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

I have never been present at an examination³ of

first executes Christians for their *contumacia*, then has doubts and seeks advice; but the charge is never that of *maiestas*.

³ The term *cognitio* indicates that this was a formal trial presided over by the holder of *imperium*, assisted by a *consilium*; cf. the court at Centum Cellae, VI. 31.

quam: ideo nescio quid et quatenus aut puniri soleat
 2 aut quaeri. Nec mediocriter haesitavi, sitne aliquod
 discrimen aetatum, an quamlibet teneri nihil a robu-
 stioribus differant; detur paenitentiae venia, an ei,
 qui omnino Christianus fuit, desisse non prosit;
 nomen ipsum, si flagitiis careat, an flagitia cohaerentia
 nomini puniantur. Interim, <in>¹ iis qui ad me
 tamquam Christiani deferebantur, hunc sum secutus
 3 modum. Interrogavi ipsos an essent Christiani.
 Confitentes iterum ac tertio interrogavi supplicium
 minatus: perseverantes duci iussi. Neque enim
 dubitabam, quaecumque esset quod faterentur,
 pertinaciam certe et inflexibilem obstinationem
 4 debere puniri. Fuerunt alii similis amentiae, quos,
 quia cives Romani erant, adnotavi in urbem remit-
 tendos.

Mox ipso tractatu, ut fieri solet, diffundente se
 5 crimine plures species inciderunt. Propositus est
 libellus sine auctore multorum nomina continens.
 Qui negabant² esse se Christianos aut fuisse, cum

¹ in *add. Cat.*: *om. Aa.*

² negabant *Keil*: negant *Aa*: negarent *Casanbon*.

¹ Action taken by the Romans against foreign cults was usually directed against their associated *flagitia*; Pliny's concern is with what the Christian apologists called *accusatio nominis*, i.e. membership of the cult, approved by Trajan in his reply. See S-W, Appendix V, pp. 772 ff.

² It is not clear whether P. was obliged to do this, whether or no those charged had (like St. Paul) exercised their right to appeal (*provocatio*), but it was probably the custom to do so.

Christians. Consequently, I do not know the nature or the extent of the punishments usually meted out to them, nor the grounds for starting an investigation and how far it should be pressed. Nor am I at all sure whether any distinction should be made between them on the grounds of age, or if young people and adults should be treated alike; whether a pardon ought to be granted to anyone retracting his beliefs, or if he has once professed Christianity, he shall gain nothing by renouncing it; and whether it is the mere name of Christian which is punishable, even if innocent of crime, or rather the crimes associated with the name.¹

For the moment this is the line I have taken with all persons brought before me on the charge of being Christians. I have asked them in person if they are Christians, and if they admit it, I repeat the question a second and third time, with a warning of the punishment awaiting them. If they persist, I order them to be led away for execution; for, whatever the nature of their admission, I am convinced that their stubbornness and unshakeable obstinacy ought not to go unpunished. There have been others similarly fanatical who are Roman citizens. I have entered them on the list of persons to be sent to Rome for trial.²

Now that I have begun to deal with this problem, as so often happens, the charges are becoming more widespread and increasing in variety. An anonymous pamphlet has been circulated which contains the names of a number of accused persons. Among these I considered that I should dismiss any who denied that they were or ever had been Christians

praeunte me deos adpellarent et imagini tuae, quam propter hoc iusseram cum simulacris numinum adferri, ture ac vino supplicarent, praeterea male dicerent Christo, quorum nihil cogi posse dicuntur
 6 qui sunt re vera Christiani, dimittendos putavi. Alii ab indice nominati esse se Christianos dixerunt et mox negaverunt; fuisse quidem sed desisse, quidam ante triennium, quidam ante plures annos, non nemo etiam ante viginti. <Hi> quoque¹ omnes et imaginem tuam deorumque simulacra venerati sunt et
 7 Christo male dixerunt. Adfirmabant autem hanc fuisse summam vel culpae suae vel erroris, quod essent soliti stato die ante lucem convenire, carmenque Christo quasi deo dicere secum invicem sequi sacramento non in scelus aliquod obstringere, sed ne furta ne latrocinia ne adulteria committerent, ne fidem fallerent, ne depositum adpellati abnegarent. Quibus peractis morem sibi discedendi fuisse rursusque coeundi ad capiendum cibum, promiscuum tamen et innoxium; quod ipsum facere desisse post edictum meum, quo secundum mandata tua hetaerias
 8 esse vetueram. Quo magis necessarium credidi ex duabus ancillis, quae ministrae dicebantur, quid esset veri, et per tormenta quaerere. Nihil aliud inveni quam superstitionem pravam et² immodicam.

¹ viginti. Hi quoque *Keil*: viginti quoque *Aa*.

² et *a*: om. *A*.

¹ For a full discussion on this evidence for the services of the early Church, see S-W, pp. 702 ff. The morning service seems to be one of prayer and reading, the evening one the

when they had repeated after me a formula of invocation to the gods and had made offerings of wine and incense to your statue (which I had ordered to be brought into court for this purpose along with the images of the gods), and furthermore had reviled the name of Christ: none of which things, I understand, any genuine Christian can be induced to do.

Others, whose names were given to me by an informer, first admitted the charge and then denied it; they said that they had ceased to be Christians two or more years previously, and some of them even twenty years ago. They all did reverence to your statue and the images of the gods in the same way as the others, and reviled the name of Christ. They also declared that the sum total of their guilt or error amounted to no more than this:¹ they had met regularly before dawn on a fixed day to chant verses alternately among themselves in honour of Christ as if to a god, and also to bind themselves by oath, not for any criminal purpose, but to abstain from theft, robbery and adultery; to commit no breach of trust and not to deny a deposit when called upon to restore it. After this ceremony it had been their custom to disperse and reassemble later to take food of an ordinary, harmless kind; but they had in fact given up this practice since my edict, issued on your instructions, which banned all political societies. This made me decide it was all the more necessary to extract the truth by torture from two slave-women, whom they call deaconesses. I found nothing but a degenerate sort of cult carried to extravagant lengths,

combined Eucharist and *Agape*. It is the latter which comes under the ban on *collegia* (cf. X. 34).

- Ideo dilata cognitione ad consulendum te decucurri.
- 9 Visa est enim mihi res digna consultatione, maxime propter periclitantium numerum. Multi enim omnis aetatis, omnis ordinis, utriusque sexus etiam vocantur in periculum et vocabuntur. Neque civitates tantum, sed vicos etiam atque agros superstitionis istius contagio pervagata est; quae videtur sisti et
- 10 corrigi posse. Certe satis constat prope iam desolata templa coepisse celebrari, et sacra sollemnia diu intermissa repeti passimque¹ venire <carnem>² victimarum,³ cuius adhuc rarissimus emptor inveniebatur. Ex quo facile est opinari, quae turba hominum emendari possit, si sit paenitentiae locus.

XCVII

TRAIANUS PLINIO

- 1 ACrum quem debuisti, mi Secunde, in excutiendis causis eorum, qui Christiani ad te delati fuerant, secutus es. Neque enim in universum aliquid, quod quasi certam formam habeat, constitui potest.
- 2 Conquirendi non sunt; si deferantur et arguantur, puniendi sunt, ita tamen ut, qui negaverit se Chris-

¹ passimque *ai*: passumque *A*: pastumque *Beroaldus*.

² carnem *add. Körte post victimarum: ita Sherwin-White*.

³ victimarum cuius *A*: victimas quarum *a*.

¹ *i.e.* the charges must be properly made against individuals by *delatio* and a trial held before the governor. There are to be no mass prosecutions. Note that Trajan never answers Pliny's original question on the extent of punishments.

I have therefore postponed any further examination and hastened to consult you. The question seems to me to be worthy of your consideration, especially in view of the number of persons endangered; for a great many individuals of every age and class, both men and women, are being brought to trial, and this is likely to continue. It is not only the towns, but villages and rural districts too which are infected through contact with this wretched cult. I think though that it is still possible for it to be checked and directed to better ends, for there is no doubt that people have begun to throng the temples which had been almost entirely deserted for a long time; the sacred rites which had been allowed to lapse are being performed again, and flesh of sacrificial victims is on sale everywhere, though up till recently scarcely anyone could be found to buy it. It is easy to infer from this that a great many people could be reformed if they were given an opportunity to repent.

XCVII

TRAJAN TO PLINY

You have followed the right course of procedure, my dear Pliny, in your examination of the cases of persons charged with being Christians, for it is impossible to lay down a general rule to a fixed formula. These people must not be hunted out; if they are brought before you and the charge against them is proved, they must be punished,¹ but in the case of anyone who denies that he is a Christian, and makes

tianum esse idque re ipsa manifestum fecerit, id est supplicando dis nostris, quamvis suspectus in praeteritum, veniam ex paenitentia impetret. Sine auctore vero propositi libelli <in>¹ nullo crimine locum habere debent. Nam et pessimi exempli nec nostri saeculi est.

XCVIII

C. PLINIUS TRAIANO IMPERATORI

- 1 AMASTRIANORUM civitas, domine, et elegans et ornata habet inter praecipua opera pulcherrimam eandemque longissimam plateam; cuius a latere per spatium omne porrigitur nomine quidem flumen, re vera cloaca foedissima, ac sicut turpis immundissimo
2 adspectu, ita pestilens odore taeterrimo. Quibus ex causis non minus salubritatis quam decoris interest eam tegi; quod fiet si permiseris curantibus nobis, ne desit quoque pecunia operi tam magno quam necessario.

XCIX

TRAIANUS PLINIO

RATIONIS est, mi Secunde carissime, tegi aquam istam, quae per civitatem Amastrianorum fluit, si intacta salubritati obest. Pecunia ne huic operi desit, curaturum te secundum diligentiam tuam certum habeo.

¹ in *add. Gierig: om. Aa.*

it clear that he is not by offering prayers to our gods, he is to be pardoned as a result of his repentance however suspect his past conduct may be. But pamphlets circulated anonymously must play no part in any accusation. They create the worst sort of precedent and are quite out of keeping with the spirit of our age.

XCVIII

PLINY TO THE EMPEROR TRAJAN

AMONG the chief features of Amastris, Sir, (a city which is well built and laid out) is a long street of great beauty. Throughout the length of this, however, there runs what is called a stream, but is in fact a filthy sewer, a disgusting eyesore which gives off a noxious stench. The health and appearance alike of the city will benefit if it is covered in, and with your permission this shall be done. I will see that money is not lacking for a large-scale work of such importance.

XCIX

TRAJAN TO PLINY

THERE is every reason, my dear Pliny, to cover the water which you say flows through the city of Amastris, if it is a danger to health while it remains uncovered. I am sure you will be active as always to ensure that there is no lack of money for this work.