THE BEGINNINGS OF LATIN CHRISTIANITY--THE LATIN APOLOGISTS AND
THE FIRST LATIN THEOLOGIAN

Hymn: 351 "Beneath the Cross of Jesus"
Scripture: John 13:34,35
Prayer: Tertullian: Apology - XXX.1-XXXII.1

We have no real information about the beginnings of the church in
Africa. According to tradition Africa was evangelized from Rome.
The church in Africa seems to have had a comparatively late
beginning. The Christianity of Rome was Greek. Paul, Mark,
Clement, Hermas, and Justin Martyr all wrote in Greek. The first
surviving Latin document of importance of the Roman church may have
been the Muratorian Canon (c. 180-200 A.D.). Victor who was
bishop of Rome c. 189-198 A.D. seems to have been the first
of the Latin bishops and the first to send letters to his clergy
and churches in Latin. Our oldest dated Latin document from the
African church is The Acts of the Martyrs of Scili (these were
sentenced to death on July 17, 180 A.D.). The martyrs of Scili
are thought to have had the letters of Paul in Latin. Shortly
after A.D. 200 Tertullian had a whole Bible in Latin but it
seems to have been a private translation with no official
character. The earliest Latin Bibles in Rome may have been
imported from Africa.

Between 195 A.D. and 200 A.D. two important Latin apologies were
written—one in Carthage in Africa and one in Rome. Tertullian,
a lawyer in Carthage and a presbyter in the church (we cannot be
sure whether he was already a presbyter or whether he became
a presbyter a little later) wrote his great apology in A.D. 197.
We are not sure whether Minucius Felix, a lawyer in Rome, wrote
his apology called The Octavius in A.D. 195 or in A.D. 200.

MINUCIUS FELIX: THE OCTAVIUS

The apology of Minucius Felix is in the form of a dialogue
between three lawyers who are spending their vacation together
at Ostia, the famous resort of the Romans. Two of the lawyers
are Christians. Minucius Felix is a famous lawyer of Rome.
Octavius is a lawyer from Africa who is visiting in Rome. These
two had been partners in the search for the truth which they had
found in Christianity. Caecilius is a lawyer from Cirta in
Numidia. As the three walk along the beach they come to a statue
of Serapis and Caecilius throw a kiss to Serapis. This touches
off a debate in which Caecilius attacks Christianity and defends
paganism and Octavius defends Christianly, attacking paganism.
Minucius Felix presides as arbiter. He is to announce the winner.
The Speech of Caecilius:

1. Everything in human affairs is doubtful. Man's
intelligence is so limited that he can arrive
only at probabilities; he can never attain absolute
truth. Lawless chance, trickery, and haphazard rules
and the disorder in the natural and moral world
argue against a creator or divine providence.

2. The wisest course is to accept the teachings of
the elders, to maintain the beliefs and traditions
that have been handed down, and to adore the gods
we have been taught to adore from the cradle. These
3. The mass of the Christians lack the ability and the training necessary to pursue philosophy. The Christians religion is the product of an intolerable pride and conceit which would undermine and destroy the established order. Christians are atheists, conspirators, and anarchists who introduce a worship of lust, promiscuous brother and sisterhood; they hallow ordinary fornication and pervert it to incest. Vain superstition leads Christians to boast of crime. The Christians' doctrines of God, of the destruction of the world by fire, of immortality, of resurrection of the flesh, of eternal rewards and eternal punishment are absurdities.

The OCTAVIUS VIII.3-XIII.5 is one of the most powerful attacks on Christianity surviving in ancient literature.

The Answer of Octavius: Calmly he answered his friend, step by step. One goal of the debate was the search for the truth. Caecilius had given vent to feelings of indignation against poor, ignorant Christians discussing supernatural things.

1. All men are created with the capacity and power of reasoning and understanding. While the rich have been engrossed with the material the poor have sought wisdom. Christians are the true philosophers. Those who see no order in the universe have not opened their eyes and minds to the heavens that declare the deity if one will only look up. God is too great to be seen by the human eye. But poets and philosophers agree with the Christians that the universe requires an intelligent creator.

2. Men must not let themselves be misled by pet fables and ignorant tradition. Pagan religion is a disgusting mixture of immoral myths and mysteries. Superstition did not make the Roman empire great. The treasures of Rome are the spoils taken from ruined temples. Rome did not grow great by religion but by unpunished sacrilege.

3. The accusations against the Christians are the calumnies of the demons. The doctrines of the Christians are capable of proof from reason. The deportment of the Christians is their best apology. Chapters XXVIII-XXXVIII is a powerful presentation of the Christian religion, climaxing in XXXVIII.6, "Christians do not preach great things, they live them."

Conclusion: Before Minucius Felix had to announce his decision Caecilius declared himself convinced on the major points and ready to become a Christian. Minucius Felix could rejoice in the victory of Octavius and the new-found faith of Caecilius.

TERTULLIAN: APOLOGIST AND THEOLOGIAN

Tertullian had been born of well-to-do heathen parents in Carthage. He received a solid pagan education, mastering both Greek and Latin. He was well read in literature, history and philosophy. He studied and practised law in Rome. About 193 he became a Christian in Rome
and returned to Carthage where he devoted himself to studying the Scriptures and Christian literature. He served so zealously in the church that he was made a presbyter. He was probably between thirty-five and forty-five when he was converted. He had been a typical pagan. As a new Christian he had all the zeal of the new convert. He had the Roman sense of order and respect for authority. He had the mind of a lawyer—even a prosecuting attorney. His style was rugged, passionate and violent. He was not content to defeat, he wanted to completely blacken, to completely annihilate the evil. The great passion of his life was a passion for "Truth." He would react strongly to the growing worldliness in the church with a growing legalism and Puritanism. He was one of the brightest minds and greatest writers of his day. It has been said that he did more to shape the vocabulary of the church than anyone before Thomas Aquinas in the Middle Ages. He was not only one of the greatest of the apologists but also one of the first great theologians of the church.

TERTULLIAN: THE APOLOGY (A.D. 197)

CHALLENGE TO RULERS TO EXAMINE CHRISTIANITY: Christians are persecuted ignorantly and unjustly. The very numbers of the Christians should arouse curiosity. Men have been willing to remain ignorant concerning Christians because they have been afraid to read the Christian books. The pagan leaders pride themselves on their philosophy, their reason, their justice and the intellectual prowess of having read everything. They cannot let the public know they read Christian books but curiosity should lead the rulers to secretly and privately read the works of the Christians.

THE RULERS ARE UNJUST: They play fast and loose with the laws. They treat Christians differently form all other criminals. Criminals have hired advocates but Christians are not allowed to give any defense: Crimes are investigated but no inquiry is made concerning Christians. They are condemned for their name. Criminals are tortured to get a confession; Christians are tortured to get a denial.

CHRISTIANS ARE BLAMELESS: The pagans practise the things of which they accuse the Christians. Christianity causes evil men to change their lives for the good. Unjust and irrational laws should be changed.

Tertullian is at his best defending the Christians against the public crimes of contempt for the religion of the state and high treason. They do not worship pagan gods who are nothing more than deceased individuals or images made by men. These divinities are mocked by the pagans themselves in the theatre and despised in the temple. Christians worship the creator of the world, the only true God. The Romans by persecuting Christians assault the true religion and commit against the true God the crime of irreligion.

Tertullian demands freedom of religion. The Romans permit other conquered people to keep their own religion although it is only empty superstition. They allow the worship of any god except the true God.

THE TRUE GREATNESS OF ROME: Rome did not become great by venerating the idols. The True God entrusted them with dominion. The Christians pray for the welfare of the emperor.
ARE CHRISTIANS ENEMIES OF ROME? Christians are enemies of error. If Christians were enemies their very numbers should fill Rome with fear. Christians are forbidden to return evil for evil. XXXVII. Christians are everywhere—except in pagan temples. Christians are citizens of the universe. Christians do not participate in pagan amusements.

A PICTURE OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP: XXXIX. Christian worship is a feast of love (an Agape). XXXIX. 7 "Look how they love one another!"

CHRISTIANITY IS NOT JUST A NEW PHILOSOPHY—IT IS A DIVINE REVELATION. Christianity is the truth. The rulers cannot destroy it with cruelties.

Ch. L; The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church: L. 14 "The blood is the seed."

TERTULLIAN THE THEOLOGIAN

TO THE HEATHEN (Ad nationes) A.D. 197
The persecution of Christians contradicts all principles of justice.
It is the product of ignorance.
The pagan gods are human inventions.
The pagans practise the immoralities of which they accuse the Christians. The charges against the Christians are untrue.

THE TESTIMONY OF THE SOUL A.D. 198
The soul is by its very nature Christian. Pagan learning has deformed the soul. The soul proclaims the unity and the goodness of God. The soul witnesses to the truth.

THE PRESCRIPTION OF HERETICS, c. 200 A.D.
The lawyer becomes the Theologian: the "presecriptio" is a legal term in which the defendant wishes to ban a suit. The church has the legal title to the truth: God sent Christ to bring the truth. Christ revealed the truth to the Apostles who recorded it in the Scriptures. The Apostles gave the Scriptures to the Church. Heretics and pagans have no right to use or quote Scripture. Philosophy is the source of all heresy. Each heresy can be traced to a particular school of philosophy. Ch. VII "What is there in common between Athens and Jerusalem?"
The truth has been handed down in the churches: the guarantee of the truth is apostolic succession—communion with apostolic churches. The church at Rome is the great example since it received the truth from Peter and Paul. Tertullian's solution to the problem of the Trinity: The Corporation owning one piece of Property. Tertullian's solution to Christology: the person owning two pieces of property.