

Lectio XVI

Pliny's Letter to the Emperor Trajan: "What Do I Do About the Christians?"

Meanwhile, in those (cases/ people) who were reported to me as Christians, I have followed/ proceeded this way. I have asked those (people themselves) whether they are Christians: confessing, I have asked again (i.e. a second time) and a third, threatening punishment: persevering I ordered (them) to be led (to death). For I did not doubt: whatever which was confessed, certainly stubbornness and inflexible obstinacy ought to be punished. Others were of similar folly, those people (they), because they were Roman citizens, I signed must be sent into the city (Rome).

Soon by its own management, as is accustomed to happen, while accusations were spreading themselves many sights (incidents) occurred. A pamphlet with no author was placed before/ published containing many names. They who denied that they themselves were or have been Christians, with me saying it first called upon the gods, and offered prayers with incense and wine to your image which I had ordered to be brought with statues of dieties because of this (for this purpose), moreover (if) they should curse Christ (of whom they say that nothing (none) are able to be forced (to do) who are true Christians, I have thought (that they) must be dropped/ discharged. Others, having been named by an informer, said that they themselves were Christians and soon denied (saying) certainly (they) have been but have stopped, some before a three year period, some before more years, some before twenty years. These also all both worshipped your image and the statues of the gods and cursed Christ.

Word-for-word translation

Meanwhile, in the case of those who were denounced to me as Christians, I have observed the following procedure: I interrogated these as to whether they were Christians; those who confessed I interrogated a second and a third time, threatening them with punishment; those who persisted I ordered executed. For I had no doubt that, whatever the nature of their creed, stubbornness and inflexible obstinacy surely deserve to be punished. There were others possessed of the same folly; but because they were Roman citizens, I signed an order for them to be transferred into the city (to Rome.)

Soon accusations spread, as usually happens, because of the proceedings going on, and several incidents occurred. An anonymous document was published containing the names of many persons. Those who denied that they were or had been Christians, when they invoked the gods in words dictated by me, offered prayer with incense and wine to your image, which I had ordered to be brought for this purpose together with statues of the gods, and moreover cursed Christ--none of which those who are really Christians, it is said, can be forced to do--these I thought should be discharged. Others named by the informer declared that they were Christians, but then denied it, asserting that they had been but had ceased to be, some three years before, others many years, some as much as twenty-five years. They all worshipped your image and the statues of the gods, and cursed Christ.

A more colloquial translation from Georgetown University

Lectio XVII

The Emperor Trajan's Reply to Pliny

You have followed the procedure which you ought to have, my dear Pliny, in examining the cases of those who had been brought/ denounced to you as Christians. For nothing is able to be ascertained for a universal rule, to have as a certain shape/ standard. They are not to be sought out/ They must not be sought out: if they are brought/ denounced and are proved (guilty), they are to be punished/ they must be punished - nevertheless in this way so that a person who has denied that he/she has been a Christian, and he made manifest doing it (it/ this thing is by offering prayers to our gods), although having been suspected in the past, he will be granted pardon from the past. The published pamphlets without an author ought to have a place in no accusations. For it is both of the worst example, and not of our age/ generation.

Word-for-word translation

You observed proper procedure, my dear Pliny, in sifting the cases of those who had been denounced to you as Christians. For it is not possible to lay down any general rule to serve as a kind of fixed standard. They are not to be sought out; if they are denounced and proved guilty, they are to be punished, with this reservation, that whoever denies that he is a Christian and really proves it--that is, by worshiping our gods--even though he was under suspicion in the past, shall obtain pardon through repentance. But anonymously posted accusations ought to have no place in any prosecution. For this is both a dangerous kind of precedent and out of keeping with the spirit of our age.

A more colloquial translation from Georgetown University