

# LACTANTIUS, PORPHYRY, AND THE DEBATE OVER RELIGIOUS TOLERATION\*

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Did the events surrounding Diocletian's persecution of 303–311 launch a debate over religious toleration? The first suggestion that they did occurs in Porphyry's *Philosophy from Oracles*, a defence of traditional religion and theology in three books. Writing before the persecution, the celebrated Neoplatonist philosopher from Tyre, a man whom several Christian emperors and church councils would soon condemn, asked the question that stood at the heart of the persecution:

How can these people [i.e., Christians] be thought worthy of forbearance (συγγνώμη)? They have not only turned away from those who from earliest time are referred to as divine among all Greeks and barbarians . . . and by emperors, law-givers and philosophers—all of a common mind. But also, in choosing impieties and atheism, they have preferred their fellow creatures [i.e., to worshipping the divine]. And to what sort of penalties might they not justly be subjected who . . . are fugitives from the things of their fathers?<sup>1</sup>

The next hint that the persecution touched off such a debate appears in the *Divine Institutes*, a theological *summa* written during the persecution. In Book Five, Lactantius, a professor of rhetoric at the imperial court in Nicomedia (*Inst.* 5.2.2), developed an original and comprehensive argument for religious toleration. He urged both the Roman state and his fellow Christians to practise what he called the virtue of 'forbearance' (*patientia*) toward different religious beliefs (5.19–21).<sup>2</sup> Introducing this discussion, Lactantius says that he wrote in order to counter recent attacks from a judge and from an anonymous philosopher, who had 'vomited forth three books against the Christian religion and name' (5.4.2). He had heard these men read their works in Nicomedia (5.4.1), and, although he and others like him 'closed their eyes to it because of the times' (5.2.9: *temporis gratia coniverent*), he vowed to pay back his antagonists in kind (5.4.1). The judge is easily identified as Hierocles, the governor of Bithynia and one of the instigators of the edicts against the Christians.<sup>3</sup> But the philosopher has remained unidentified. Could Lactantius have developed his position on tolerance in response to Porphyry's argument in his three-volume *Philosophy from Oracles*? Although the conventional view is that Porphyry was not Lactantius' target, a close comparison of the *Philosophy from Oracles* and the *Divine Institutes* suggests that Porphyry and Lactantius did spar over the question of tolerance as a result of the Great Persecution.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Eus., *PE* 1.2.1ff. = Harnack 1: Ποίας δὲ καὶ ἀξιωθήσεσθαι συγγνώμης τοὺς ἐξ αἰῶνος μὲν παρὰ πάντων Ἕλλησιν καὶ βαρβάροις κατὰ τε πόλεις καὶ ἀγροὺς παντοίοις ἱεροῖς καὶ τελεταῖς καὶ μυστηρίοις πρὸς ἀπάντων ὁμοῦ βασιλέων τε καὶ νομοθετῶν καὶ φιλοσόφων θεολογουμένους ἀποστραφέντας, ἐλομένους δὲ τὰ ἀσεβῆ καὶ ἄθεα τῶν ἐν ἀνθρώποις; Ποίας δ' οὐκ ἂν ἐνδίκως ὑποβληθεῖεν τιμωρίας οἱ τῶν . . . πατριῶν φυγάδες . . .; see R. Wilken, 'Pagan criticism of Christianity: Greek religion and Christian faith', in W. Schoedel and R. Wilken (eds), *Early Christian Literature and the Classical Intellectual Tradition* (1979), 117–34; 127, for the inclusion of this fragment, once assigned to Porphyry's *Against the Christians*,

among those attributed to the *Philosophy from Oracles*. A. von Harnack, 'Porphyrius, "Gegen die Christen"', 15 Bücher: Zeugnisse, Fragmente und Referate', *AKPAW* (1916), 1–115.

<sup>2</sup> Latin text is from *Divinae institutiones*, in *L. Caeli Firmiani Lactanti Opera Omnia*, CSEL 19, ed. S. Brandt and G. Laubmann (1965 repr. of 1890 edn).

<sup>3</sup> The work was called Φιλαληθής (*Inst.* 5.3.22), a work which Eusebius identifies as that of Hierocles (*Contra Hieroclem* 1).

<sup>4</sup> Authors from Seston to Chadwick have suspected that Porphyry was Lactantius' philosopher. W. Seston, *Dioclétien et la Tétrarchie* (1946), 246; P. Benoit, 'Un adversaire du christianisme au III<sup>e</sup> siècle: Porphyre', *Revue Biblique* 54 (1947), 543–72; 552; H. Chadwick, *The Sentences of Sextus* (1959), 142; E. des Places in *Porphyre: Vie de Pythagore, Lettre à Marcella*, ed. and trans. E. des Places (1982), 89. But others, including J. Bidez and T. D. Barnes, have maintained that the philosopher from Tyre could not have been Lactantius' antagonist. J. Bidez, *Vie de Porphyre* (1964 repr. of 1913 edn), 112 n. 2; T. D. Barnes, 'Porphyry against the Christians: date and attribution of fragments', *JThS* n.s. 24 (1973), 424–42.

Establishing a firm connection between Lactantius' *Divine Institutes* and Porphyry's *Philosophy from Oracles* would not simply satisfy academic curiosity about Lactantius' sources. Identifying Porphyry with Lactantius' anonymous philosopher would connect him directly to the debates surrounding the Great Persecution. Situating Porphyry within this context would suggest that the theme of toleration in both works was not a fortuitous coincidence, but rather reflects a deliberate theoretical discussion of religious toleration as a result of the Great Persecution. Such an exchange between Porphyry and Lactantius would not only mark the first known debate between Greek philosophy and Christian theology on this issue,<sup>5</sup> it would also have broader implications. First, it would profoundly change the interpretation of the *Philosophy from Oracles*, once thought to be a product of Porphyry's youth. Second, it would add a new and significant chapter to the history of persecution and tolerance in the fourth century.

Although it seems natural to wonder whether Lactantius had developed his argument for toleration in order to counter this specific challenge from a formidable, influential foe,<sup>6</sup> this issue has never been addressed. In part, Latin rhetorical tradition and imperial vindictiveness are both responsible for obscuring any trace of philosophical debate over the Great Persecution: obeying convention, Lactantius refused to name his adversary, while Constantine and other emperors banned and burned Porphyry's works. His treatises survive thus only as quotations embedded in long, impassioned apologies by Christians, from Lactantius' contemporary, Eusebius of Caesarea to Augustine of Hippo, a hundred years later. Accidents of modern scholarship have further occluded this issue: because the *Divine Institutes* is a theological treatise, ancient historians have seldom read it as a source important for the history of the Great Persecution.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, ideas about the chronology, titles, and even the contents of Porphyry's books have varied widely throughout the twentieth century. Determining whether the Great Persecution motivated the first theoretical debate over religious toleration, then, first requires finding solid ground within the shifting and contradictory interpretations of Porphyry and his work.

Porphyry's references to himself, especially in his *Life of Plotinus*, provide the core for contemporary perspectives.<sup>8</sup> He was born in 234, in or near the city of Tyre in Roman Phoenicia.<sup>9</sup> As a young man, Porphyry appears to have been attracted to Christianity and to have studied with Origen of Alexandria, who had established a

<sup>5</sup> Although the traditional view has been that theoretical conceptions of toleration began in the sixteenth century (e.g., B. Crick, *Political Theory and Practice* (1973), 63), Peter Garnsey, Cary Nederman and others have successfully challenged this assumption. P. Garnsey, 'Religious toleration in classical antiquity', in W. J. Shiels (ed.), *Persecution and Toleration* (1984); Cary J. Nederman, 'Tolerance and community: a medieval functionalist argument for religious toleration', *JOP* 56 (1994), 901-18.

<sup>6</sup> L. Vaganay, *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* 12 (1935), col. 2562, in Barnes, op. cit. (n. 4), 438; Baronius, *Annal. Eccles.*, a.302.44ss in Bidez, op. cit. (n. 4), 112 n. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Studies that move in this direction are V. Buchheit, 'Goldene Zeit und Paradies auf Erden (Laktanz, *Inst.* 5,5-8)', *WJA* n.s. 4 (1978), 161-85; 5 (1979), 219-35; idem, 'Der Zeitbezug in der Weltalterlehre des Laktanz (*Inst.* 5,5-6)', *Historia* 28 (1979), 472-86; idem, 'Juppiter als Gewalttäter: Laktanz (*Inst.* 5.6.6) und Cicero', *RhM* 125 (1982), 338-42; F. Kolb, 'L'ideologia tetrarchica e la politica religiosa di Diocleziano', in G. Bonamente and A. Nestori (eds), *I cristiani e l'impero nel IV secolo* (1988), 17-44; O. Nicholson, 'Hercules at the Milvian Bridge: Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, 1.21.6-9', *Latomus* 43

(1984), 133-42; idem, 'The wild man of the Tetrarchy: a divine companion for the emperor Galerius', *Byzantion* 54 (1984), 253-75; and C. Ocker, '*Unius arbitrio mundum regi necesse est*: Lactantius' concern for the preservation of Roman society', *VChr* 40 (1986), 348-64.

<sup>8</sup> His fourth-century biographer, Eunapius, seems to have drawn his account in the *Vitae sophistarum* (*VS*) from Porphyry's own works, especially the *Life of Plotinus* (*VP*) (cf. Eunapius, s.v. 'Πορφύριος', *Vitae sophistarum*, ed. J. Giangrande (1956), 3-4, in *Porphyrii Philosophi Fragmenta*, ed. A. Smith (1993), 1-6). In 1913, Bidez attempted to augment the ancient sources by using Porphyry's writings to chart his intellectual development. Despite the profound influence of Bidez's work, however, the arguments and chronology of his *Vie de Porphyre* are no longer universally accepted. For criticism of Bidez, see Barnes, op. cit. (n. 4); J. O'Meara, *Porphyry's Philosophy from Oracles in Augustine* (1959); and Wilken, op. cit. (n. 1).

<sup>9</sup> The dates here follow those of R. Goulet, 'Le système chronologique', in *Porphyre: La vie de Plotin*, ed. R. Goulet (1982), 210-11. The calculations derive from Porphyry's remark in the *VP* (4.11) that he was thirty in the tenth year of Gallienus' reign.

school for Christian catechumens in Palestinian Caesarea near Tyre.<sup>10</sup> After leaving Origen, Porphyry studied in Athens with Longinus, and then, upon turning thirty, he travelled to Rome and became a student of Plotinus, the great Neoplatonist (*VP* 4–5). After six years in Rome, Porphyry went to Sicily to distract himself from an episode of depression. He was still there when Plotinus died in 270, two years later (*VP* 2, 11). Since Eusebius says that Porphyry wrote a ‘collection against us’ in Sicily (*HE* 6.19.2: ὁ καθ’ ἡμᾶς ἐν Σικελίᾳ καταστάς Πορφύριος συγγράμματα καθ’ ἡμῶν ἐνστησάμενος),<sup>11</sup> Porphyry’s criticisms of Christian worship seem to have begun in this period. Ultimately Porphyry returned to Rome where he continued to study philosophy and to present his ideas (Eun., *VS* s.v.). When he was sixty-eight, he published Plotinus’ writings as *The Enneads*, the preface of which is the *Life of Plotinus* (*VP* 23.13). Late in life, he married a rich widow, Marcella, who may have been Jewish.<sup>12</sup> Her husband had been Porphyry’s friend (Eun., *VS* s.v.), and he wanted to help educate her children and encourage her own interests in philosophy (Porph., *Ad Marc.* 3). But the marriage was controversial: Porphyry parried a charge that he married for money, while members of Marcella’s community opposed the nuptials and even threatened him with death (*Ad Marc.* 1).<sup>13</sup> Within ten months, ‘the needs of the Greeks and the gods’ (καλούσης δὲ τῆς τῶν Ἑλλήνων χρείας καὶ τῶν θεῶν συνεπειγόντων αὐτοῖς) called Porphyry away from his wife (*Ad Marc.* 4). Porphyry’s vague remark prompted Chadwick to suggest that, as a prominent philosopher critical of Christianity, Porphyry had attended Diocletian’s conference in Nicomedia called to discuss the impending persecution (Lact., *Mort.* 11.6).<sup>14</sup> This occasion might have offered Lactantius an opportunity to hear Porphyry speak. According to Eunapius (*VS* s.v.), Porphyry died in Rome after having lived to an advanced old age.<sup>15</sup>

The gravity of Porphyry’s criticism of Christianity is evident from the many books and edicts against him. Although he was not the first educated Greek to criticize Christianity, for Celsus and Galen preceded him, he was a distinguished philosopher, one well-versed in Christian literature and perhaps an apostate—so his work seemed particularly dangerous.<sup>16</sup> In the fourth century, Methodius of Olympus, Apollinaris of Laodicea, and Eusebius of Caesarea all argued against him at length; by the close of the Council of Nicaea (325), Constantine had ordered the destruction of Porphyry’s anti-Christian works (Socr., *HE* 1.9.30). Before the end of the fifth century, Augustine’s *City of God* had addressed him, Theodoret of Cyrrhus had targeted him as the leader of

<sup>10</sup> Eusebius’ *Church History* (*HE*) quotes a passage from Porphyry in which he says that he met Origen (6.19.5). Athanasius Syrius says that, as a disciple of Origen, Porphyry developed an interpretation of the Gospel opposed by Gregory Thaumaturgos, then a fellow student (*Bibl. Apost. Vat. Cod. III*, 305, in Smith, op. cit. (n. 8), 24). Echoes of this incident appear in Nicephorus and Socrates Scholasticus, who cite Eusebius as their source (Nicophorus Callistus Xanthopulus, *Historia ecclesiastica*, ed. Ducaeus (1630), 10.36, in Smith, op. cit. (n. 8), 14; Socrates Scholasticus, *Historia ecclesiastica*, ed. R. Hussey (1853), 3.23.37–9, in Smith). See also the Codex Tubingensis (*Fragmente griechischer Theosophien*, ed. H. Erbse (1941), 201, 1–5 in Smith, 15). Although Bidez doubted that the young Porphyry had any attachment to Christianity (op. cit. (n. 4), 13–14), the specificity of Athanasius’ remarks raises the possibility that these authors are referring, not to the vague reference in the *Church History*, but to Eusebius’ lost twenty-five-volume refutation of Porphyry (Hier., *Vir. ill.* 81). If this is so, the evidence in favour of Porphyry’s youthful interest in Christianity would be much stronger—a view that seems to be gaining ground (R. Beutler, ‘Porphyrios’, in *PWK* 22 (1953), col. 175–313; W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (1965), 357).

<sup>11</sup> Greek text is from Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica*, ed. E. Schwartz (1903/1908), in Smith, op. cit. (n. 8), 25.

<sup>12</sup> Codex Tubingensis 201, 1–5 in Smith, op. cit. (n. 8), 15.

<sup>13</sup> [Ἰ]οῦναντίον γὰρ ὅτ’ ἀβελτερίας τῶν πολιτῶν σοῦ καὶ τῷ πρὸς ἡμᾶς φθόνῳ βλασφημίαις τε πολλαῖς περιπέτωκα καὶ παρὰ πᾶσαν προσδοκίαν εἰς θανάτου κίνδυνον ὅτ’ αὐτῶν δι’ ἡμᾶς περιέστην. . . . Greek text is from Porphyry, *Ad Marcellam*, in *Porphyrii Opuscula*, ed. A. Nauck (1886), in Smith, op. cit. (n. 8), 25.

<sup>14</sup> Chadwick, op. cit. (n. 4), 142.

<sup>15</sup> Since the *Suda* says that he lived into the time of Diocletian (παρατείνας ἕως Διοκλητιανοῦ), R. Beutler and others assumed that Porphyry died before 1 May 305—the date the emperor abdicated (*Suda*, s.v., in *Lexicon*, ed. A. Adler (1935), in Smith, op. cit. (n. 8), 6; Barnes cites Beutler, op. cit. (n. 10), col. 278 and Vaganay, op. cit. (n. 6), col. 2562 as scholars who have accepted this date (Barnes, op. cit. (n. 4), 432 n. 1); cf. also A. Smith, ‘Porphyrian studies since 1913’, *ANRW* 2.26.2 (1987), 717–73; 721). But this date may simply result from Porphyry’s own statement that in his sixty-eighth year he published *The Enneads* (301), his last work with a firm date. ‘The *Suda* alone cannot provide proof that [Porphyry] was already deceased when Diocletian abdicated 1 May 305’ (Barnes, *ibid.*, 431).

<sup>16</sup> A. B. Hulén, *Porphyry’s Work Against the Christians: An Interpretation* (1933), 4; C. Evangeliou, ‘Porphyry’s criticism of Christianity and the problem of Augustine’s Platonism’, *Dionysius* 13 (1989), 51–70; 54.

the 'pagan resistance', and the emperors Theodosius II and Valentinian III had again consigned his books to the flames.<sup>17</sup>

Although the outrage that followed Porphyry's treatment of Christianity seems to suggest that Porphyry might be identified with Lactantius' anonymous philosopher,<sup>18</sup> several issues appeared to preclude any such association. First, Lactantius' description of the philosopher seemed ill-suited to the pious Porphyry. According to Lactantius, this 'high priest of philosophy' (*antistes philosophiae*) was

such a corrupt person that as a teacher of continence he burned no less with avarice than with inordinate desires; in sustenance he was so extravagant that in school he was a champion of virtue and a praiser of frugality and moderate circumstances, in the palace he ate worse than at home. Nevertheless, he used to cover his faults by his beard and the pallium and, which is the greatest veil, by his wealth: and so that he might increase his riches, he used to make his way into the friendship of judges by extremely unscrupulous lobbying, and he used to attach them to himself quickly by the influence of a sham reputation (*falsi nominis*), not only so that he might profit from their opinions (*ut eorum sententias venderet*), but indeed also so that by this influence he might impede those close to him (whom he was dislodging from their homes and lands) from reclaiming their property. . . . [I]n the very same period in which a just people was being impiously torn to pieces, [this man] vomited forth three books against *religio* and the Christian *nomen* . . . (*Inst.* 5.2.3-4)<sup>19</sup>

Lactantius then quotes the philosopher, who indicates his desire to spare people 'the tortures of their body', so that they might not 'suffer in vain the cruel mutilations of their limbs' (*Inst.* 5.2.6). He concludes by remarking that this 'veritable counsellor was ignorant, not only of what he attacked, but also of what he was saying'. Such a portrait, argued Barnes, could not belong to Porphyry because he never 'sold judicial verdicts' (Barnes's translation of *sententias venderet*). The philosopher's efforts against his neighbours also suggested to Barnes that he had property in Asia Minor (Pontica), while Porphyry's would have been in Rome, Sicily, or Phoenicia. Next he thought that the anonymous philosopher's moral character and life-style could not belong to the man who wrote *De abstinentia*, a treatise on the virtues of abstinence from food and sex. And finally, he reasoned that the poor intellectual quality of the philosopher's work, and his behaviour toward officials 'can hardly be reconciled with the known facts about Porphyry'.<sup>20</sup>

A second potential disparity between Porphyry and Lactantius' philosopher concerns the circumstances of the Neoplatonist's books on Christianity. The work that Eusebius calls the 'collection against us' (*HE* 6.19.2), has long been assumed to be *Against the Christians*. The title *Κατὰ Χριστιανῶν*, however, first appears in the Suda (s.v. Πορφύριος), along with the first indication that it was a work of fifteen books.<sup>21</sup> The very length of the work led Bidez and others to assume that *Against the Christians* was Porphyry's chief attack on Christianity, while the nature of Jerome's commentary on Porphyry's books twelve and fourteen suggested that *Against the Christians* was a compendium of detailed commentaries on Christian Scripture.<sup>22</sup> In 1916, following the

<sup>17</sup> A. Chaignet, 'La Philosophie des Oracles', *R.Hist.Rel.* 41 (1900), 337-53; 338; Frend, op. cit. (n. 10), 510, inc. n. 26; P. de Labriolle, 'Porphyre et le christianisme', *Revue d'Histoire de la Philosophie* 3 (1929), 385-440; 400; see Harnack, op. cit. (n. 1), 30 for mss. that link Eusebius to a twenty-five-book attack on Porphyry. Augustine, *De civitate dei*, ed. B. Dombart and A. Kalb (1928), in Smith, op. cit. (n. 8), 392-400. Theodoret, *Graecarum affectionum curatio*, ed. J. Raeder (1904), 12, in Smith, *ibid.*, 221; Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica*, ed. E. Schwartz (GCS 2, 1-2) (1903/1908), in Smith, *ibid.*, 30; Edictum Theodosii et Valentiniani (Collect. Vatic. 138) (17 Feb. 448) I, 1, 4 in *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*, ed. E. Schwartz (1927-), 66.3-4; 8-12, in Smith, *ibid.*, 32.

<sup>18</sup> cf. Vaganay, op. cit. (n. 6), in Barnes, op. cit. (n. 4), 439.

<sup>19</sup> 'Quorum alter antistitem se philosophiae profit-

ebatur, verum ita vitiosus, ut continentiae magister non minus avaritia quam libidinibus arderet, in victu tam sumptuosus, ut in schola virtutis adsertor, parsimoniae paupertatisque laudator, in palatio peius cenaret quam domi. Tamen vitia sua capillis et pallio et, quod maximum est velamentum, divitiis praetegebat: quas ut auget, ad amicitias iudicum miro ambitu penetrabat eosque sibi repente auctoritate falsi nominis obligabat, non modo ut eorum sententias venderet, verum etiam ut confines suos, quos sedibus agrisque pellebat, a suo repetendo hac potentia retardaret. . . . eodem ipso tempore quo iustus populus nefarie lacerabatur tres libros evomuit contra religionem nomenque Christianum. . . .'

<sup>20</sup> Barnes, op. cit. (n. 4), 438-9.

<sup>21</sup> Harnack, op. cit. (n. 1), 26.

<sup>22</sup> *De principio Marci* (*Anecd. Maredsol.* III, 2, p. 320, in Harnack, op. cit. (n. 1), 48; *Comm. in Daniel*, prol.); cf. Frend, op. cit. (n. 10), 357.

assumption that *Against the Christians* was Porphyry's most significant anti-Christian work, Harnack assembled under this title a variety of fragments hostile to Christianity quoted in sources that only sometimes attributed them to the philosopher (several other fragments were added later).<sup>23</sup> Since Eusebius suggests that the 'collection against us' was written in Sicily, and since Bidez thought that Porphyry left Sicily soon after Plotinus' death, *Against the Christians* was usually dated before 270.<sup>24</sup> But Lactantius says that he is not concerned with earlier critics (*Inst.* 5.2.2). So, since Porphyry's most hostile attack on Christianity was thought to have come before 270 with *Against the Christians*, Bidez and others thought that Porphyry wrote too soon to have been the object of Lactantius' *Divine Institutes*.<sup>25</sup>

Lactantius' statement that the philosopher presented three books (*Inst.* 5.2.4) reinforced the impression that the theologian ignored Porphyry, since the Suda attributes fifteen books to *Against the Christians*. Porphyry did write a three-volume work that addressed Christianity, the *Philosophy from Oracles* (Περὶ τῆς ἐκ λογίων φιλοσοφίας)—another work that survives only in fragments. But Bidez and his successors thought for several reasons that this was a work of Porphyry's youth: it discussed Hebrew, Egyptian, and Chaldaean wisdom, interests that Porphyry was thought to have relinquished after meeting Plotinus, and it showed no obvious Neoplatonist influence.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, Eunapius (*VS* s.v.) says that Porphyry, 'perhaps, as seems likely' as a youth, was granted a special oracle and wrote about it, encouraging others to heed divine utterances.<sup>27</sup> And finally, unlike *Against the Christians*, this book's depiction of Jesus as a wise and pious man seemed favourable to Christianity, and hence more appropriate to Porphyry's days with Origen.<sup>28</sup>

A number of relatively recent developments, however, have enabled a fresh approach to the problem of Porphyry's relationship to Lactantius. First, the significance of *Against the Christians* has diminished somewhat. Although Harnack had published fragments gathered from a variety of authors under the title, *Against the Christians*, most of them came from Macarius Magnes, who quoted an unnamed pagan. Harnack assumed, as did many who followed him, that these were genuine fragments from *Against the Christians*.<sup>29</sup> But Macarius is not only unaware that he is citing Porphyry, he also sees Porphyry as distinct from the authors whom he quotes.<sup>30</sup> Thus, while some of Macarius' fragments may ultimately trace back to Porphyry, he must have drawn them

<sup>23</sup> For later additions, cf. A. von Harnack, 'Neue Fragmente des Werks des Porphyrius gegen die Christen: Die Pseudo-Polycarpiana und die Schrift des Rhetors Pacatus gegen Porphyrius', *SAW-Berlin* (1921), 266–84; 834–5; P. Nautin, 'Trois autres fragments du livre de Porphyre *Contre les Chrétiens*', *Revue Biblique* 67 (1950), 409–16; al-Biruni, in Barnes, op. cit. (n. 4); D. Hagedorn and R. Merkelbach, 'Ein neues Fragment aus Porphyrios gegen die Christen', *Vig. Chr.* 20 (1966), 86–90. Barnes accepts the fragments from Pacatus as Porphyrian. But he cautions that the fragments in Didymus the Blind are probably not direct quotations and disqualifies those Nautin located in Eusebius' quotations of Philo of Byblos in Porphyry and those in al-Biruni (425–7).

<sup>24</sup> Bidez, op. cit. (n. 4), 67; O. Gigon, *Die antike Kultur und das Christentum: Kelsos, Porphyrios, Julian* (1966), 119; Harnack, op. cit. (n. 1), 1, 25, 31; Hulen, op. cit. (n. 16), 13; de Labriolle, op. cit. (n. 17), 387; W. Nestle, 'Die Hauptenwände des antiken Denkens gegen das Christentum', *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 37 (1941), 51–100; 54.

<sup>25</sup> Barnes, op. cit. (n. 4), 438–9; Bidez, op. cit. (n. 4), 112 n. 2; B. Croke, 'The era of Porphyry's anti-Christian polemic', *JRH* 13 (1984), 1–14; 7.

<sup>26</sup> cf. P. F. Beatrice, 'Towards a new edition of Porphyry's fragments against the Christians', in M.-O. Goulet-Cazé and D. O'Brien (eds), *Σοφίης μαίητορες: «Chercheurs de sagesse»: Hommage à Jean Pépin* (1992), 350, for a discussion of some of these authors; also Benoit, op. cit. (n. 4), 546; Beutler,

op. cit. (n. 10), and especially Bidez, op. cit. (n. 4), 15–16; R. M. Grant, 'Porphyry among the early Christians', in W. den Boer (ed.), *Romanitas et Christianitas* (1973), 181–7; 181; Hulen, op. cit. (n. 16), 16; de Labriolle, op. cit. (n. 17), 396–7; A. D. Nock, 'Oracles théologiques', *REA* 30 (1928), 280–90; 281; P. Sellew, 'Achilles or Christ? Porphyry and Didymus in debate over allegorical interpretation', *HThR* 82 (1989), 79–100; 90.

<sup>27</sup> νέος δὲ ὄν ἴσως τὰυτὰ ἐγράψεν, ὡς ἔοικεν: in Smith, op. cit. (n. 8), 4; cf. Chaignet, op. cit. (n. 17), 337.

<sup>28</sup> In addition, although Hans Lewy later disproved this assumption, Bidez argued that it showed no evidence of contact with the second-century collection called the *Chaldaean Oracles*. Cf. E. R. Dodds, 'New light on the Chaldaean Oracles', *HThR* 54 (1961), 263–73; 267. W. Lardner, *The Credibility of the Gospel History II: Testimonies of Ancient Heathens* (1788), in Beatrice, op. cit. (n. 26), T. D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (1981), 175, drawing on Bidez, op. cit. (n. 4), 15ff.; Grant, op. cit. (n. 26), 181; A. Meredith, 'Porphyry and Julian against the Christians', *ANRW* 2.23.2 (1980), 1119–49; Sellew, op. cit. (n. 26), 90.

<sup>29</sup> M. V. Anastos, 'Porphyry's attack on the Bible', in L. Wallach (ed.), *The Classical Tradition* (1966), 425; cf. Barnes, op. cit. (n. 4), 428 n. 1 for others.

<sup>30</sup> Barnes, op. cit. (n. 4), 428 n. 1 for scholars who also criticized the use of Macarius before Barnes's article; P. F. Beatrice, 'Le Traité de Porphyre contre les chrétiens: l'état de la question', *Kernos* 4 (1991), 119–38; 134–5.

from other sources.<sup>31</sup> This problem led Barnes to conclude that fragments attributed to *Against the Christians* should not include those of Macarius, but only those 'which later writers explicitly and unambiguously attribute to Porphyry by name', a practice now generally followed.<sup>32</sup> *Against the Christians* is sometimes still seen as a violent attack,<sup>33</sup> but on their own the undoubtedly genuine fragments do not seem particularly threatening. For the fragments tend to be both highly pedantic and derivative—sometimes drawn from the people (e.g., Origen) whom Porphyry wished to attack.<sup>34</sup>

A second development relevant to Porphyry's association with Lactantius concerns the dates for *Against the Christians* and the *Philosophy from Oracles*. It now seems likely that the first was written between 270 and 295, and the second could have been written at any time before Porphyry's death. Once Alan Cameron argued that Porphyry could have been in Sicily longer than Bidez had imagined or that he could have returned after the first visit, Plotinus' death in 270 was no longer the *terminus ante quem* for *Against the Christians*.<sup>35</sup> Indeed Porphyry wrote at least two other works in Sicily besides *Against the Christians*, his primer on Aristotle (*Isagoge*) and the *De abstinencia*—would two years have sufficed?<sup>36</sup> Moreover, Eusebius' *Church History*, written c. 295, says that Porphyry lived in Sicily in his own time (6.19.2: ὁ καθ' ἡμᾶς ἐν Σικελίᾳ), and Augustine calls him 'Porphyrius Siculus' (*Retract.* 2.57.10)—remarks that seem to discount a short stay.<sup>37</sup> Next, Cameron reasoned that Porphyry's use of Callinus Sutorius, who himself wrote in 270, necessitated a later date.<sup>38</sup> The new *terminus ante quem* is thus 295, the date of Eusebius' history of the church, so Porphyry could have written *Against the Christians* at any time between 270 and 295.<sup>39</sup> Thus, if Porphyry was a participant in the planning and debates that led up to the persecution of 303, he may have been invited because he had written this work some time before. The work itself, however, is probably too early to have been prepared for a conference occurring shortly before February 303.

Bidez's early date for the *Philosophy from Oracles* has also been challenged. Although the defence of sacrifices, appeal to oracular authority and absence of overt Neoplatonism in this work seemed unusual for a follower of Plotinus, Porphyry's letter to Marcella demonstrates that he respected traditional worship throughout his life and

<sup>31</sup> S. Pezzella, 'Il problema del Κατὰ Χριστιανῶν di Porfirio', *Eos* 52 (1962), 104.

<sup>32</sup> Meredith, op. cit. (n. 28), 1127. This finding has discredited the conclusions of some earlier scholars who accepted Macarius' fragments uncritically (e.g., Benoit, Beutler, Gigon, de Labriolle, Nestle, Evangelio). This study uses only those fragments that Barnes approved (2, 4–6, 8–12, 20, 21, 25 (part), 38–44, 49 (part), 55 (part), 70, 79–82, 86, 91, 92, 97); cf. Barnes, op. cit. (n. 4), 430–1, n. 9.

<sup>33</sup> Beatrice, op. cit. (n. 30), 119; Sellev, op. cit. (n. 26), 79–100.

<sup>34</sup> Meredith, op. cit. (n. 28), 1136.

<sup>35</sup> A. Cameron, 'The date of Porphyry's Κατὰ Χριστιανῶν', *CQ* 17 (1967), 382–4, 382; Barnes, op. cit. (n. 4), 433–4; cf. also Smith, op. cit. (n. 15), 717–73.

<sup>36</sup> Ammonius, *In Porphyrii Isagogen* 22, 12–22, ed. A. Busse (CAG IV.3) (1891), in Smith, op. cit. (n. 8), 22; Elias, *In Porphyrii Isagogen*, ed. A. Busse (CAG XVIII. 1) (1900), 39, 8–19, in Smith, *ibid.*, 23; Cameron, op. cit. (n. 35), 382.

<sup>37</sup> *HE* 6.19.2 in Harnack, op. cit. (n. 1), 64; P. Pirioni, 'Il soggiorno siciliano di Porfirio e la composizione del Κατὰ Χριστιανῶν', *RSCI* 39 (1985), 502–8; 503; see Croke, op. cit. (n. 25), 10, for the date of the *HE*.

<sup>38</sup> Cameron, op. cit. (n. 35), 382–3.

<sup>39</sup> Barnes has tried to date *Against the Christians* later still. His efforts seem to be motivated by his belief that *Against the Christians* was Porphyry's great contribution to the debates immediately preceding the Great Persecution. As evidence, Barnes cited a passage in Jerome where Porphyry seemed to describe

Britain as a 'fertile province for tyrants' (*Ep.* 133.9 = Harnack frag. 82), a remark that could have been written only after Carausius (286–93) (Barnes, op. cit. (n. 4), 436–7). He also noted the absence of references to Porphyry in Eusebius' *Against Hierocles* or his *General Elementary Introduction* (even though he discusses the Book of Daniel whose authenticity Porphyry had attacked) and Lactantius' *Divine Institutes* (Barnes, *ibid.*, 439–42; *idem*, 'Sossianus Hierocles and the antecedents of the Great Persecution', *HSCP* 80 (1976), 239–52; 240–1). Brian Croke, however, has rightly challenged Barnes's fourth-century date on several counts: (1) since Porphyry had made only a passing reference to Apollonius, Eusebius' *Against Hierocles* could still claim that Hierocles was the first formally to compare Jesus with the second-century miracle worker; (2) in his *Demonstratio evangelica*, a work aware of Porphyry's anti-Christian writing, Eusebius also discusses Daniel without reference to Porphyry's criticism (8.2.55f.); (3) the reference to Britain as a 'province of tyrants' is not clearly marked off as a quotation; indeed it could well refer to Britain in Jerome's day (407 had seen three usurpers, Marcus, Gratian, and Constantine); (4) finally, Eusebius refers to Porphyry in the part of his *Church History* written c. 295, so it is difficult to imagine that these would be later interpolations (Croke, op. cit. (n. 25), 6–7, 9–10, 13). In sum, the arguments of Cameron, Barnes, and Croke taken together suggest that Porphyry could have written *Against the Christians* any time after 270 but before 295 (W. H. C. Frend, 'Prelude to the Great Persecution: the propaganda war', *JEH* 38 (1987), 1–18; 10).

did not incorporate Neoplatonist ideas into all of his ethical or philosophical works.<sup>40</sup> Next, Eunapius' remark that Porphyry wrote about a special oracle, 'perhaps as seems likely in his youth', is unhelpful in dating the *Philosophy from Oracles*: since Porphyry discussed oracles in other books (e.g., Εἰς τὰ Ἰουλιάνου τοῦ Χαλδαίου and Φιλόσοφος ἱστορία), Eunapius may not be referring to the *Philosophy from Oracles*, and even if he were, he himself seems very uncertain of the date.<sup>41</sup> Finally, the heavy emphasis on oracles also supports a later date, in that it is compatible with the practices of Diocletian's court.<sup>42</sup> As Lactantius complains in the *De mortibus persecutorum*, the emperor frequently consulted oracles in deciding affairs of state (*Mort.* 10.1). Thus the *Philosophy from Oracles* could have been written at any time, not necessarily in Porphyry's youth.

After the diminished significance of *Against the Christians* and the possibility that the *Philosophy from Oracles* could have been a much later work, a third development is also relevant to Lactantius' relationship with Porphyry: although the *Philosophy from Oracles* appears to be favourably disposed toward the figure of Jesus, O'Meara showed that its attitude toward contemporary Christian belief and worship is far from complimentary.<sup>43</sup> Rather, its arguments are such that early Christians could well have seen it as a fierce attack on the very foundation of their faith. Noticing Eusebius' and Augustine's hostile attitude to this work, O'Meara observed that 'in both of their lengthy and important works, . . . having chosen Porphyry as an opponent worthy of their most serious attention', they gave no more than 'passing notice to his treatise *Against the Christians*, but concentrated deeply on his *Philosophy from Oracles*. Obviously [this] work seemed more important to them than it has . . . to us'.<sup>44</sup> Eusebius also suggests its critical tenor by linking it specifically with the 'compilation against us'.<sup>45</sup> References in the *Philosophy from Oracles* to Jesus as a pious sage, a reader, and disciple of Plato, once seemed consonant with Porphyry's early regard for or even attachment to Christianity. A more careful reading, however, shows that this presentation challenged a fundamental aspect of Christian teaching, for it denied the divinity of Christ.<sup>46</sup> That this was Porphyry's key criticism of contemporary Christianity, one that shows the *Philosophy from Oracles* to have been a work taken far more seriously than *Against the Christians*, is clear from the imperial edicts against him: for example, Constantine charges that the Arians, Christians who denied that Christ had equal divinity with God the Father, have imitated Porphyry (Socr., *HE* 1.9).<sup>47</sup> The conciliar canon of 435 also says that Constantine called the Arians 'Porphyrians . . . on account of the similarity of their impiety (διὰ τὸ ὅμοιον τῆς ἀσεβείας)'.<sup>48</sup> As the first Greek philosopher to have praised Christ at the same time that he criticized the Christians, Porphyry made a significant move toward Christianity. Nevertheless, Christians who proclaimed Christ's divinity must have seen his arguments—in their very proximity to the Christian position—as especially dangerous.<sup>49</sup>

The realization that the *Philosophy from Oracles* may have been a later work, one that challenged current Christian theology, has led to a more serious appreciation of its approach. Most of the fragments in Wolff's nineteenth-century edition (and in Smith's 1993 edition of Porphyry's collected fragments) come from Eusebius, who quoted them in a context relating to demons.<sup>50</sup> No doubt this circumstance contributed to Bidez's

<sup>40</sup> Wilken, op. cit. (n. 1), 131–2; O'Meara, op. cit. (n. 8), 33; idem, *Porphyry's Philosophy from Oracles in Eusebius' Praeparatio evangelica and Augustine's Dialogues of Cassiciacum* (1969), 7–8.

<sup>41</sup> See above p. 133. Suda, s.vv. Πορφύριος and Φερεκίδης Ἀθηναῖος, in Smith, op. cit. (n. 8), 7, 231; O'Meara, op. cit. (n. 8), 34; Smith, op. cit. (n. 15), 733; Beatrice, op. cit. (n. 26), 350; Wilken, op. cit. (n. 1), 132.

<sup>42</sup> G. Rinaldi, 'Giudei e pagani alla vigilia della persecuzione di Diocleziano: Porfirio e il popolo d'Israele', *VetChr* 29 (1992), 113–36; 122–3.

<sup>43</sup> O'Meara, op. cit. (n. 8), 51–7; Wilken, op. cit. (n. 1), 118; Rinaldi, op. cit. (n. 42), 121.

<sup>44</sup> O'Meara, op. cit. (n. 8), 64; idem, op. cit. (n. 40), 5.

<sup>45</sup> See Beatrice, op. cit. (n. 26), 347–8 for other authors who have adopted this point of view.

<sup>46</sup> P. Courcelle, 'Propos antichrétiens rapportés par saint Augustin', *Recherches Augustiniennes* 1 (1958), 149–86; 158, drawing on Augustine, *De doctrina chr.* 2.28.43.

<sup>47</sup> τοὺς πονηροὺς καὶ ἀσεβεῖς μμησάμενος Ἄρειος. Letter to the bishops after Nicaea, in Socrates Scholasticus 1.9.30, in Smith, op. cit. (n. 8), 30.

<sup>48</sup> *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* (Collect. Vatic. III) (3 Aug. 435?), II, 3, p. 68, 8–17 in Smith, op. cit. (n. 8), 31–2. Cf. also Augustine's discussion of the readers of Plato in *De doctrina chr.*: Courcelle, op. cit. (n. 46), 158; and de Labriolle, op. cit. (n. 17), 392, 395.

<sup>49</sup> de Labriolle, op. cit. (n. 17), 426–7; Hulen, op. cit. (n. 16), 25; cf. also Evangelou, op. cit. (n. 16), 55, n. 18; Rinaldi, op. cit. (n. 42), 121.

<sup>50</sup> O'Meara, op. cit. (n. 8), 29.

disparaging view of the *Philosophy from Oracles*. But Porphyry's preface (Eus., *PE* 4.6.2–7.2 = Smith 303) states that his principal aim was to discuss the salvation of the soul. In this work, Porphyry defines 'philosophy' to be the tenets that assure the soul's salvation as well as the practices that ensure a pure and holy life (Eus., *PE* 4.6.2–7.2 = Smith 303).<sup>51</sup> His evidence for this philosophy is the testimony of various oracles, making the *Philosophy from Oracles* a unique and significant project. As Lane Fox has demonstrated, not only were oracles widely held to be authoritative religious sources, after the late second century they were also increasingly influenced by contemporary philosophy. Thus they seem to have allowed Porphyry to attempt a novel undertaking, to communicate philosophical and religious concerns to a broader audience—people who did not engage in philosophy but worshipped the gods at home and in public rituals.<sup>52</sup> Given the book's references to Jesus as a wise and pious man, oracles may also have been useful in an apologetic sense since, as Lactantius' many citations of Sibylline oracles demonstrate, Christians also tended to take seriously oracular pronouncements.<sup>53</sup>

O'Meara and Wilken have also expanded the compass of the *Philosophy from Oracles* by finding more allusions to it in the works of Augustine and Eusebius. In 1959, O'Meara argued that Porphyry's *De regressu animae*—a title that occurs only in Augustine's *City of God*—was really another name for the *Philosophy from Oracles*.<sup>54</sup> In support of his argument, O'Meara rigorously and exhaustively compared the themes in the two works. It is a provocative, tempting, and—I think—compelling thesis, but it has not gained wide approval.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, even without accepting O'Meara's conclusion, it is still evident that, in his effort to find passages that linked the two works, he has been able to expand not only the number of fragments associated with the *Philosophy from Oracles*, but also the range of Porphyry's arguments.<sup>56</sup> It now seems that, in discussing various paths to salvation, the *Philosophy from Oracles* also addressed the appropriate sort of cult for the 'first hypostasis', God the Father. Porphyry argued that people should turn their minds to God and worship God everywhere. For Porphyry, God needed, not sacrificial offerings, but justice, chastity, and other virtues (Aug., *Civ. dei* 19.23.107–33 = Smith 346). As acceptable as these sentiments themselves might be to Christians, however, Porphyry strenuously objected to the way in which Christians worshipped God: where Christians like Augustine said that God was properly worshipped through Christ, Porphyry taught that this was wrong. Christians, in his view, had been deceived by demons into abandoning the proper worship, paying cult to demons, and making unworthy sacrifices all because they dedicated to a man the sort of cult appropriate only for God.<sup>57</sup> Since Augustine says that he withheld a number of oracles that 'blasphemed' Christians, Porphyry's work probably included a significant discussion of Christian error.<sup>58</sup> Expanding on O'Meara's approach, Wilken has concluded that Porphyry's book sought to praise Jesus as a type of Greek 'hero' or 'divine man', while criticizing Jesus' followers for misunderstanding his teaching and apostatizing from the worship of the gods. Thus, the *Philosophy from Oracles* defended the worship of the gods, especially the one supreme God as the proper object of worship and adoration; and it praised Jews for worshipping this one God. Porphyry's clear devotion to one supreme God clearly did not annul his belief in the importance of the traditional forms of worship, for he saw no contradiction in asserting the necessity of sacrifice: while *De abstinentia* does claim that the only offering worthy of a philosopher is a spiritual offering (1.28; 52–6; Eus., *PE* 4.10), it also defends sacrifices—not to the one supreme God, but to lesser gods (2.33–4).<sup>59</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Chaignet, op. cit. (n. 17), 339.

<sup>52</sup> R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (1986); Chaignet, op. cit. (n. 17), 343; Wilken, op. cit. (n. 1), 133; idem, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (1984), 150.

<sup>53</sup> Frend, op. cit. (n. 39), 10 citing R. P. C. Hanson, 'The Christian attitude to pagan religions', in *Studies in Christian Antiquity* (1985), 190–1; G. Rinaldi, 'Giudei e pagani alla vigilia della persecuzione di Diocleziano: Porfirio e il popolo d'Israele', *VetChr* 29 (1992), 113–36; 119.

<sup>54</sup> O'Meara, op. cit. (n. 8).

<sup>55</sup> P. Hadot, 'Citations de Porphyre chez Augustin', *REA* 6 (1960), 205–44; Dodds, op. cit. (n. 28), 263–73; cf. also Wilken, op. cit. (n. 1), 119, n. 3.

<sup>56</sup> Wilken, op. cit. (n. 1), 118–19, n. 3.

<sup>57</sup> O'Meara, op. cit. (n. 8), 58.

<sup>58</sup> O'Meara, op. cit. (n. 8), 50–1, 53.

<sup>59</sup> Wilken, op. cit. (n. 1), 126.



So, Wilken reasons, although the book was directed against aspects of Christianity, it was not an attack, but rather a defence of traditional Greek religion, modified by philosophical wisdom. Moreover, by praising Jesus' piety and wisdom while criticizing Christian worship, Porphyry appears to have been proposing a reformulation of Christianity that could be consonant with contemporary philosophy as well as the traditional cults. In presenting Jesus as a kind of Greek sage who taught people to worship the one supreme God, the *Philosophy from Oracles* thus represented a significant move of Greek philosophy toward Christianity. For even though Porphyry placed Jesus on the lowest rung of the divine hierarchy (God the Father was at the top, next the gods and celestial bodies, then daemones, and finally divine men (Eus., *PE* 4.5)), it was a 'lofty position, in with Heracles and Pythagoras'.<sup>60</sup> One fragment that illustrates Porphyry's approach occurs verbatim in Eusebius' *Demonstratio evangelica* (3.6.39–7.2 = Smith 345):

What is to be said by us next might perhaps seem paradoxical to some. For the gods declared that Christ was very pious and became immortal, and they remember him with words of good omen. . . . Having been asked about Christ, then—whether he is a god—[Hecate] says:

You know that the undying soul advances after the body, but [the soul] severed from wisdom always wanders; the former soul belongs to the man who is most outstanding in piety.

Therefore [she] said that he was a very pious man, and that his soul—just as that of other [pious human beings] was rendered immortal after death, the soul that ignorant Christians worship. And, having been asked why he was punished, [she] supplied:

The body is always exposed to intractable tortures, but the souls of pious ones take up a position in a heavenly region.

. . . He then, was pious and advanced into heaven, just as pious ones [do]. So you will not slander him, but show mercy upon the folly of human beings.<sup>61</sup>

The significance of this passage is readily apparent from the frequency with which other Christians alluded to it in arguing against people less generously disposed to Jesus. For instance, Eusebius used it against Hierocles (*DE* 3.6) and Augustine cites it in the *City of God* (19.23.43–73).<sup>62</sup> In addition, Arnobius' *Adversus nationes*, a work also composed during the Great Persecution, seems familiar with this passage (1.1; 1.36). Arnobius, however, links the passage to a further criticism, that the worship of Jesus is actually harmful to traditional piety because it leads people away from the civic cults. Eusebius' *Praeparatio evangelica* also connects this theme of Christian apostasy with the *Philosophy from Oracles*.<sup>63</sup> For example, in discussing ancient Greek, Phoenician, and Egyptian theology (wisdom praised in the *Philosophy from Oracles* (Eus., *PE* 9.10.3–5 = Smith 324)), Eusebius says that his purpose is to show that the Christians' revolt from this earlier theology is reasonable (2.praef.; 2.1.51; 2.4.3). Also, introducing Book Four, the source of nine fragments from the *Philosophy from Oracles*, Eusebius criticizes Greek theology in order to deflect the criticism that Christians are guilty of grave impiety because they deny the gods and break 'the laws, which require everyone to reverence ancestral customs'. These laws require all people to follow 'the religion of their forefathers', and to avoid innovation (4.1.2–3).<sup>64</sup> For Porphyry, then, the worship of Jesus violated traditional Greco-Roman theology which taught that the supreme God did not become human, but that humans could become in some sense divine. Thus Porphyry's reinterpretation of Jesus as a pious sage is inseparably connected with his

<sup>60</sup> Wilken, op. cit. (n. 1), 123, 126–7.

<sup>61</sup> Ferrar's translation, slightly altered (Eusebius, *The Proof of the Gospel*, trans. W. J. Ferrar (1920)). παράδοξον ἴσως δόξειεν <ἄν> τισιν εἶναι τὸ μέλλον λέγεσθαι ὑφ' ἡμῶν. τὸν γὰρ Χριστὸν οἱ θεοὶ εὐσεβέστατον ἀπεφάνησαντο καὶ ἀθάνατον γεγονότα, εὐφῆμως τε αὐτοῦ μνημονεύουσι. . . . περὶ γοῦν τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐρωτησάντων, εἰ ἔστι θεός, (sc. ἡ Ἐκάρτη) φησίν: <ὅτι μὲν ἀθανάτη ψυχὴ μετὰ σῶμα προβαίνει/ γινώσκεις, σοφίης <δὲ> τεμμημένη αἰὲν ἀλλάττει./ ἀνέρος εὐσεβίῃ προφερεστάτου ἔστιν ἐκείνη/ ψυχῆ.> εὐσεβέστατον ἄρα ἔφη αὐτόν, καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ, καθάπερ <καὶ> τῶν ἄλλων <εὐσεβῶν>, μετὰ θάνατον ἀπαθανατισθ-

ῆναι, ἦν σέβειν ἀγνοοῦντας τοὺς Χριστιανοὺς. ἐπερωτησάντων δὲ, διὰ τί ἐκολάσθη, ἔχρησεν: <σῶμα μὲν ἀδρανέσιν βασάνους αἰεὶ προβέβληται. ψυχὴ δ' εὐσεβέων εἰς οὐράνιον πέδον ἴζει.> . . . αὐτὸς οὖν εὐσεβῆς καὶ εἰς οὐρανοῦς, ὡσπερ οἱ εὐσεβεῖς, χωρήσας, ὥστε τοῦτον μὲν οὐ βλασφημήσεις, ἐλεήσεις δὲ τῶν ἀνθρώπων τὴν ἄνοιαν. Greek text is from Eusebius, *Demonstratio evangelica*, in *Eusebii Caesarensis Opera*, Vol. 3, ed. G. Dindorfius (1867), in Smith, op. cit. (n. 8), 395–8.

<sup>62</sup> Wilken, op. cit. (n. 1), 125–6.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Translation is that of E. H. Gifford (1903).

reaffirmation of the traditional system of worship.<sup>65</sup> The notion that Christian worship impedes traditional piety should not be seen as a commonplace, for by Porphyry's day the civic cults also included the imperial cult, and it was the Christians' unwillingness to participate in these rituals that made them the targets of Diocletian's persecution.

In light of this reassessment of the *Philosophy from Oracles* and the realization that Porphyry wrote more than one work on Christianity, it now appears that some fragments, once attributed to *Against the Christians* simply because of their anti-Christian tenor, may properly belong to the other work. Remember that none of the authors that Harnack drew from had attributed their quotations to a source entitled *Against the Christians*; rather these authors referred to Porphyry's work 'against us', a remark that could also refer to the *Philosophy from Oracles*.<sup>66</sup> One important example of such a misplaced fragment is Harnack 1 (Eus., *PE* 1.2.1ff.), the passage cited at the beginning of this article, the excerpt that asks why Christians should be tolerated rather than persecuted. This passage stresses the blind, irrational faith of the Christians, it criticizes their worship of a human being, it accuses them of hewing out their own abortive path to God—straying from the appropriate paths of the Greeks, barbarians and Jews, and it sees Christianity as seditious.<sup>67</sup> In short, as Eusebius remarked, it criticizes the Christians for their 'foreign' ways and their non-conformity.<sup>68</sup> As Wilken realized, although Eusebius here simply quoted 'some Greek I know' (τις Ἑλλήνων),<sup>69</sup> these ideas do find their source in Porphyry; they belong, however, not to the textual criticism of *Against the Christians*, but to the apologetics of the *Philosophy from Oracles*.<sup>70</sup> Further evidence that Harnack 1 belongs to the *Philosophy from Oracles* comes from Harnack 38 (Theodoret, *Graec. affect. cur.* 7.36): 'Porphyry, . . . in the writing against us, represented the foreignness of our piety, and he himself gave an account of sacrificing . . . Having stolen the divine oracles . . . , he put them into books for his kinsmen.'<sup>71</sup> Note that Theodoret's description of Porphyry not only echoes the characterization of Christians as 'foreign' in Harnack 1, it also connects Harnack 1 with a work that discussed sacrifices and oracles, two prominent themes of the *Philosophy from Oracles*.<sup>72</sup>

The *Philosophy from Oracles* now seems to be immediately relevant to Lactantius' *Divine Institutes*. It is an apologia of traditional religion and contemporary philosophy. It is a work in three volumes that confronts the issue of toleration and the differences between Christian and traditional worship, matters immediately relevant to the days just before the Great Persecution. It could have been written at any time in Porphyry's

<sup>65</sup> Wilken, op. cit. (n. 1), 124–5.

<sup>66</sup> cf. Jerome, *De principio Marci* = Harnack 9: 'qui adversum nos conscripsit'; Theodoret, *Graec. affect. cur.* vii 36 = Harnack 38: ὁ Πορφύριος . . . τὴν καθ' ἡμῶν τυρεῶν γραφὴν; Eusebius, *HE* 6.19.2ff. = Harnack 39: συγγράμματα καθ' ἡμῶν; also Harnack 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 80.

<sup>67</sup> W. Nestle, 'Zur altchristlichen Apologetik im neuen Testament', *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 4 (1952), 115–23; Barnes, op. cit. (n. 28), 21–2; Frend, op. cit. (n. 10), 358–9; cf. also de Labriolle, op. cit. (n. 17), 432.

<sup>68</sup> Τί οὖν ἄν γένοιτο τὸ καθ' ἡμᾶς ξένον καὶ τίς ὁ νεωτερισμὸς τοῦ βίου.

<sup>69</sup> Meredith has questioned any attribution to the Neoplatonist philosopher (op. cit. (n. 28), 1129). However, since the passage switches from referring to Christians as 'we' to 'they', it has long been recognized as a quotation from another source, and most likely from Porphyry (Gigon, op. cit. (n. 24), 120).

<sup>70</sup> Wilken, op. cit. (n. 1), 127.

<sup>71</sup> Τοῖς προφήταις ἀκριβῶς ἐντυχῶν ὁ Πορφύριος . . . τὴν καθ' ἡμῶν τυρεῶν γραφὴν ἀλλότριον εὐσεβείας καὶ αὐτὸς ἀποφαίνει τὸ θῆναι . . . τὰ θεῖα λόγια κεκλοφῶς καὶ ἐνίῳν τὴν διάνοιαν τοῖς συγγράμμασιν ἐντεθεικῶς τοῖς οἰκείοις. Greek text is from Harnack's collection, op. cit. (n. 1).

<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, the presence of fragments of the *Philosophy from Oracles* among those attributed to *Against the Christians* does not imply, as Beatrice has

suggested, that the two works are identical (Beatrice, op. cit. (n. 26), 348–9, drawing on A. von Harnack, *Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur bis Eusebius: Die Überlieferung und der Bestand* 1.2 (1893, repr. 1958), 873). Although the more ancient fragments that quote the *Philosophy from Oracles* by name refer to no book beyond the third, Beatrice cites two sixteenth-century manuscripts that cite an oracle from its 'tenth book'. (The first reference to an oracle from Book Ten occurs in a work of Steuchus, the second reference is to the same oracle in the *Codex Ambrosianus* 569 (Beatrice, *ibid.*, 350)). Beatrice took these references to mean, not only that the *Philosophy from Oracles* might be longer than originally thought, but also that it was an alternative title for *Against the Christians*. Nevertheless, since Wolff found the same oracle in a fourteenth-century manuscript that attributes it to the second book of the *Philosophy from Oracles* (H. Kellner, 'Der neuplatoniker Porphyrius und sein Verhältniss zum Christentum', *ThQ* 47 (1865), 86–7; Chaignet, op. cit. (n. 17), 337; G. Wolff, *Porphyrii de philosophia ex oraculis haurienda librorum reliquiae* (1962 repr. of 1856 edn), 39, 132–47), it seems more likely that the older manuscript is more accurate and that Beatrice's manuscripts follow a mistaken reading of δέκατος (tenth) for δεύτερος (second). Indeed, Beatrice's later work is more cautious, noting only that the relationship between the two works needs to be studied with great care (Beatrice, op. cit. (n. 30), 134).

career before 305, since that is the *terminus ante quem* for the earliest surviving work that addresses it, Arnobius' *Adversus nationes*.<sup>73</sup> Thus, it now seems possible that Lactantius was responding, not to Porphyry's earlier *Against the Christians*, but rather to the *Philosophy from Oracles*. Indeed, ever since Wolff's nineteenth-century edition of Porphyry's apology, it has been evident that Lactantius, who cites oracles frequently as evidence for the truth of Christianity, knew at least two of those that Porphyry cites.<sup>74</sup> Wilken has argued further that Lactantius was familiar with arguments that praised Jesus' piety yet criticized Christians for worshipping him, a position unique to Porphyry.<sup>75</sup> First, according to Lactantius, Apollo says that Jesus, 'convicted by Chaldaean judges . . . met his sharp-edged fate' (*Inst.* 4.13.11). This oracle may be the Greek source for Smith 343, a fragment of the *Philosophy from Oracles* in Augustine (*Civ. dei* 19.22.17–23.17).<sup>76</sup> Next, Lactantius observes that this oracle is partly true, but it also errs, 'for it seems to deny that [Jesus] was God . . . if he was wise, then, his teaching is wise . . . and those who follow it are wise' (*Inst.* 4.13.12–14). Having already asked why Christians were considered foolish for following 'a master who is wise even by the confession of the gods themselves' (4.13.14), Lactantius further adds that pagans 'hurl the Passion at us as an object of scorn because we "worship a human being"' (4.16.1).<sup>77</sup> These statements sum up the main arguments in the *Philosophy from Oracles* as found in Smith's fragments 343 and 345, namely, praise for Jesus as a wise man and criticism of Christians for their folly in worshipping him as God.<sup>78</sup>

Lactantius' familiarity with Porphyry's central claim is clearly important for the *Quellengeschichte* of the *Divine Institutes*. But because Lactantius' dependence upon Porphyry here rests solely on parallels between two oracles, it still leaves open the possibility that Lactantius was responding, not to the *Philosophy from Oracles* itself, but rather to a collection of Porphyry's oracles—such as the one assembled by Cornelius Labeo.<sup>79</sup> If, however, the *Divine Institutes* can be shown to respond to other themes in the *Philosophy from Oracles*, it would seem more likely that the two works were directly connected. Demonstrating that the *Divine Institutes* drew upon the *Philosophy from Oracles* and not merely from a collection of divine utterances requires more than identifying other themes that the two works share. Such a project must also be clear about what distinguished Porphyry from other critics of Christianity. Because Lactantius claims not to consider earlier attacks (5.2.2), Galen's criticisms can be dismissed. Celsus, however, cannot be ignored, since Porphyry seems to have incorporated a number of his criticisms into *Against the Christians*.<sup>80</sup> In addition, Hierocles drew on

<sup>73</sup> cf. M. B. Simmons, *Arnobius of Sicca* (1995), 93.

<sup>74</sup> cf. *Inst.* 4.13.11 and Aug., *Civ. dei* 19.22.17–23.17 = Smith 343; Lact., *De ira* 23.12 and Aug., *Civ. dei* 19.23.30–7 = Smith 344 (Chaignet, op. cit. (n. 17), 338; Friend, op. cit. (n. 39), 9, n. 57; Wilken, op. cit. (n. 1), 124; O'Meara, op. cit. (n. 8), 115–18; Wolff, op. cit. (n. 72), 177).

<sup>75</sup> Wilken, op. cit. (n. 1), 124. Wilken's argument has not been challenged by later authors (Croke, op. cit. (n. 25), 7; Lane Fox, op. cit. (n. 52), 196–7; Simmons op. cit. (n. 73), 24; see also Smith, op. cit. (n. 15), as the most recent assessment of Porphyrian scholarship).

<sup>76</sup> Lactantius' oracle in 4.13.11 is different from that in Augustine (where Augustine's text says that Jesus 'was condemned by right-thinking judges and killed in hideous fashion' ('quem iudicibus recta sententibus perditum pessima in speciosis ferro vincita mors interfecit'), Lactantius' Greek text has 'Chaldaean judges' (ὁπό Χαλδαίοισι δικασπολίαισιν ἄλώσας)), but it is possible that Lactantius himself changed the text to point toward Porphyry who was keenly interested in Chaldaean ideas (see e.g., Augustine, *Civ. dei* 10.27.8–25), or that Augustine's translator (19.23.1) may have altered it. Translation of the *City of God* is that of H. Bettenson (Augustine, *City of God* (1984)) with some modifications; Latin text is from Augustine, *De civitate dei*, ed. B. Dombart and A. Kalb (1928), in Smith, op. cit. (n. 8), 392–3.

<sup>77</sup> 4.13.12–14: 'Primo versu verum quidem dixit, sed argute consultorem fefellit . . . videtur enim negasse illum deum . . . si sapiens fuit, ergo doctrina eius sapientia est . . . et sapientes qui secuntur.' 4.13.14: '[Q]ui sectamur magistrum etiam ipsorum deorum confessione sapientem.' 4.16.1: 'Venio nunc ad ipsam passionem, quae velut obprobrium nobis obiectari solet, quod et hominem et ab hominibus insigni supplicio adfectum et cruciatum colamus.'

<sup>78</sup> Wilken, op. cit. (n. 52), 155. See above for the text of 345. 343: The following reply, in verse, was given by Apollo to one who asked what god he should propitiate in order to recall his wife from Christianity. . . . 'You might perhaps find it easier to write on water in printed characters, or fly like a bird through the air spreading light wings to the breeze, than recall to her senses an impious, polluted wife. Let her go as she pleases, persisting in her vain delusions, singing in lamentation for a god who died in delusions, who was condemned by right-thinking judges and killed in hideous fashion by the worst death, one bound with iron'. . . . Indeed in these verses Apollo made plain the incurability of their belief, saying that the Jews upheld God more than these.

<sup>79</sup> R. M. Ogilvie, *The Library of Lactantius* (1978), 23; Nock, op. cit. (n. 26), 281, n. 2.

<sup>80</sup> Nestle, op. cit. (n. 47), 115–23.

Celsus for his Φιλαληθής, which Lactantius heard in Nicomedia.<sup>81</sup> Thus, the more the *Divine Institutes* addresses aspects of the *Philosophy from Oracles* that do not appear among fragments of Hierocles and Celsus, the more likely it is that Lactantius drew on Porphyry's apologia.

By distinguishing Porphyry's ideas from those of Hierocles and Celsus it is indeed possible, at least in a few places, to demonstrate Lactantius' awareness of the *Philosophy from Oracles*. For example, both Porphyry and Lactantius, but not Hierocles, use the motif of the path as a way up to heaven or to truth. This metaphor also fails to appear in Celsus, but is scattered throughout the surviving fragments of the *Philosophy from Oracles*. The oracles Porphyry cites are replete with the sense that the paths of proper worship are many and that they lead up to heaven. 'For the way to the gods', he says, 'is bound with bronze, and is both precipitous and rough; the barbarians found many of its paths' (Eus., *PE* 9.10.3-5 = Smith 324).<sup>82</sup> At the same time, Porphyry depicts Christians as people entangled in error (*errore implicatos*: Aug., *Civ. dei* 19.23.43-73, 107-33 = Smith 345a, 346), who, eschewing the ways of their ancestors, have attempted to cut their own path, one that leads nowhere (Harnack 1: 'a path that is no path').<sup>83</sup> Lactantius simply flips the imagery around: his opponents, 'will be . . . called back from the error in which they have been entangled (*errore quo sunt implicati*) to the straight way (*ad rectiorem viam*)' (1.1.21). Ever since the *Didache*, Christians had used the metaphor of the 'two paths', one to heaven and one to hell (cf. *Did.* 1, 5, 6), but this early text does not also include the imagery of a climb upward. Like Porphyry, then, Lactantius claims that, 'The path of heaven has been set up to be difficult and precipitous, rough, with terrifying thorns, or blocked by jutting boulders' (6.4.6; cf. also 6.3.2, 6.4.9). Unlike Porphyry, however, Lactantius argues that only one path, not many, leads to salvation: 'This road, which is a path of truth and wisdom and virtue and justice is the one source, the one force, the one seat of all these things. It is a single road by which we follow . . . and worship God; it is a narrow path—since virtue is given to rather few; and it is a steep path—since one cannot reach the Good . . . without the greatest trouble and effort. It is this path that the philosophers search for' (6.7.9-8.1). But, he says, instead of recognizing that Christianity offers the only path to God, the 'false' road of the philosophers 'has many paths' and leads in the opposite direction (*ad occasum*) (6.7.1).<sup>84</sup>

Further, both Porphyry and Lactantius, but not Hierocles or Celsus depend heavily on oracles as evidence for the 'truth' of their position. They are clearly the hallmark of the *Philosophy from Oracles*. From the beginning of the work, Porphyry establishes oracles as the most reliable source for 'those struggling with truth' (τῆν ἀλήθειαν ὀδίναντες) (Eus., *PE* 4.6.2-7.2 = Smith 303). Lactantius' own use of oracles appears to take seriously Porphyry's reliance on oracular testimony. Introducing an oracle of Apollo, Lactantius asks, 'What better proof should we use against them than the testimonies of their own gods (*eos deorum suorum testimoniis revincamus*)?' (1.6.17). Lactantius also seems to be aware of Porphyry's special devotion to the oracles of Apollo. In citing his first oracle, one from Apollo, Lactantius observes that 'they consider [him] more divine than the others and especially prophetic' (1.7.1). Similarly, Eusebius calls Apollo, Porphyry's 'own god' (ὁ παρ' αὐτῷ Ἀπόλλων) (*PE* 9.10.1-2 =

<sup>81</sup> Although Bidez and Harnack assumed that Hierocles was a follower of Porphyry, probably because they read Macarius as a reliable source for Porphyry's *Against the Christians*, and several of these fragments seem to have come from Hierocles (Bidez, op. cit. (n. 4), 105; Harnack, op. cit. (n. 1), 27, 29; cf. also de Labriolle, op. cit. (n. 17), 436-7), Eusebius claimed that, even to the name of his treatise, Hierocles relied only on Celsus, not Porphyry (*Contra Hieroclem* = *CH* 1) (Barnes, op. cit. (n. 4), 440).

<sup>82</sup> [X]αλκόμετος γὰρ ἡ πρὸς θεοῦς ὁδὸς αἰπεινὴ τε καὶ τραχεῖα, ἥς πολλὰς ἀτραπούς βάρβαροι μὲν ἐξεύρον. . . Greek text is from Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica*, ed. K. Mras (1954), in Smith, op. cit. (n. 8), 371-2. Cf. also Smith, frag. 323.

<sup>83</sup> καινήν δὲ τινα καὶ ἐρήμην ἀνοδίαν ἑαυτοῖς συντεμεῖν, μήτε τὰ Ἑλλήνων μήτε τὰ Ἰουδαίων φυλάττουσαν.

<sup>84</sup> 6.4.6: 'Via vero illa caelestis difficilis et clivosa proposita est vel spinis horrentibus aspera vel saxis extantibus impedita.' 6.7.9-6.8.1: 'Haec autem via, quae est veritatis et sapientiae et virtutis et iustitiae, quorum omnium fons unus est, una vis, una sedes, et simplex est, quo paribus animis summaque concordia unum sequamur et colamus deum, et angusta, quoniam paucioribus virtus data est, et ardua, quoniam ad bonum quod est summum atque sublime nisi cum summa difficultate ac labore non potest perveniri. Haec est via quam philosophi quaerunt, sed ideo non inveniunt.' 6.7.1: '[V]ia illa mendax, quae fert ad occasum, multos tramites habet propter studiorum et disciplinarum varietatem, quae sunt in vita hominum dissimiles atque diversae.'

Smith 323) and emphasizes the reliance of the *Philosophy from Oracles* on the words of Apollo (Smith 303).

Finally, Lactantius also appears to respond more broadly to Porphyry's portrayal of Jesus as a divine, pious sage. Hierocles had quite a different view: Jesus was a robber (*Inst.* 5.3.4), a magician (*Inst.* 5.3.9), and a second-rate miracle-worker who set himself up as a god (*Inst.* 5.3.9–10). Apart from Hierocles' thoroughgoing comparison of Jesus with Apollonius—which Lactantius suggests is the main thrust of his work (*Inst.* 5.3.9) and Eusebius considers to be unique (*CH* 1)—the rest of his material seems to derive from Celsus who also treats Jesus as a wicked sorcerer and a liar (*ap. Or. Cels.* 1.28, 2.7, 2.32, 2.49). Porphyry, conversely, considers Jesus to be a wise and pious sage—and he emphasizes his uniqueness by introducing the oracle in praise of Christ with the words: 'What I am about to say may actually seem surprising: The gods have proclaimed that Christ was extremely devout and become immortal . . .' (Aug., *Civ. dei* 19.23.43–73; Eus., *DE* 3.6.39–7.2; Smith 345, 345a).<sup>85</sup> As Wilken has shown, Lactantius was clearly aware of Porphyry's arguments concerning the divinity of Christ. But Lactantius himself may have moved toward Porphyry on this issue, since his own Christology is, like Eusebius', almost Arian in nature: his Christ has a *substantia* between God and human beings (*Inst.* 4.13.4). Moreover, the *Divine Institutes* strongly emphasizes Jesus' role as a wise teacher (*doctor sapientiae*, e.g., *Inst.* 4.2.5).<sup>86</sup>

From the use of oracles and similar metaphors to the discussion of the nature of Jesus, Lactantius' *Divine Institutes* does appear to respond to the plan and arguments of Porphyry's *Philosophy from Oracles*. The strongest evidence that Lactantius wrote in response to Porphyry, however, comes from the treatment of religious toleration in the *Divine Institutes*. Both Lactantius and Porphyry address the issue of toleration, where Hierocles does not. Neither Lactantius nor Eusebius indicates that Hierocles considered whether Christians should be left to practice their religion or whether they should be punished for doing so. Given that Lactantius and Eusebius were both responding to the persecution, it seems reasonable to think that they would have alluded to any such argument that Hierocles might have made. Even so, if Hierocles followed Celsus here, the earlier author himself does not specifically deal with this question: Celsus criticizes Christianity as a secret society (*ap. Or. Cels.* 1.1, 8.20) and thus contrary to the law; he derides Jews for leaving their law to follow Christ (2.1, 5.25, 26); he asks why Christians abstain from feasts (8.21, 24); and he encourages them to sacrifice (8.24), to take oaths by the emperor (8.67), to help the emperor (8.73) and to accept office (8.75). Indeed Celsus' premise seems to be that if people are going to be Christians, they should at least participate in civic life. The fragments that survive in Origen's rebuttal show Celsus instead to be more concerned with Jesus' teachings, the nature of Jesus, and the folly of the people who have followed him. These issues take up most of the eight books that Origen wrote against Celsus.

Porphyry, however, explicitly addresses the question of toleration in Harnack 1. Here he asks why Christians should be treated with forbearance instead of being punished, since they not only desert the traditions of their ancestors, but also defy the teachings of philosophers, law-givers, and emperors. When this fragment is put together with the rest of the *Philosophy from Oracles*, it becomes clear that in this work Porphyry was trying both to point out how harmful Christianity was—as currently practised—for the Roman Empire, and also to suggest how Christianity might be integrated into Roman practice and belief. Such a project is not only appropriate for the period just before a persecution whose purpose was to restore traditional beliefs and practices,<sup>87</sup> it also shows the *Philosophy from Oracles* to be a work that directly confronted the issue of religious toleration. Porphyry did believe that many paths led to heaven, those of the philosophers, those of the traditional cults, and even the one that Jesus himself walked

<sup>85</sup> 'Praeter opinionem . . . profecto quibusdam videatur esse quod dicturi sumus. Christum enim dii piissimum pronuntiaverunt et immortalem factum et cum bona praedicatione eius meminerunt. . .'

<sup>86</sup> *Inst.* 4.13.4: 'mediam inter deum hominemque substantiam gerens.' Cf. Wilken, *op. cit.* (n. 1), 127,

on Eusebius' Arianism and V. Loi, 'Cristologia e soteriologia nella dottrina di Lattanzio', *RSLR* 4 (1968), 237–87, for the importance of Lactantius' emphasis on *Christus magister*.

<sup>87</sup> P. Davies, 'The origin and purpose of the persecution of A.D. 303', *JTS* 40 (1989), 66–94; 92.

(cf. Smith 323, 324). This sort of position is often associated with religious toleration: indeed, late in the fourth century, the senator Symmachus reiterated Porphyry's claim that many paths led to truth in his own quest for the toleration of traditional worship (*Relatio* 10).<sup>88</sup> But we should not let Symmachus' use of Porphyry blind us to an important corollary evident in the *Philosophy from Oracles*: there may well be many paths to heaven, but not all paths lead there. Porphyry raised the question of toleration in Harnack 1, but, in criticizing as mistaken and seditious the Christian insistence that Jesus was God, he shows himself unwilling to treat such beliefs with forbearance. Rather, people who deviated from traditional worship should be 'justly' (ἐνδίκως) punished. If true toleration requires refraining from the use of force and putting up with something one finds morally repugnant in order to gain some greater good,<sup>89</sup> then Porphyry denied that toleration was an appropriate response to Christianity. Instead he supported the use of force against those who worshipped a human being. At the same time, he also suggested a way in which Christianity, by forsaking its worship of Jesus, might be made compatible with traditional worship and philosophy. Porphyry's position is revolutionary, not only in its willingness to see common ground in the life of Jesus, but also in its readiness to consider the issue of tolerance. Nevertheless, while Porphyry may well have been the first Greek philosopher to consider the question of toleration, he did not ultimately endorse it as an appropriate solution: the Christians should conform to Roman practice, he thought; Rome should not forbear Christian worship in its present form.

Where Porphyry considered the question of tolerance and then rejected it, Lactantius—as might be expected from one facing persecution—pleads for the exercise of forbearance. Although Tertullian had already moved in this direction (*Apol.* 24.5; 28.1; *Scap.* 2.2), Lactantius' position is distinctive both for its dependence upon the Roman philosophical tradition and for its reciprocity: Lactantius argues that it is inappropriate to threaten the use of force or penalties to defend any sort of religious worship (5.19.21–3).<sup>90</sup> To support his claim, he draws upon Cicero's ideal constitution in *De legibus*. For Cicero, the gods should be approached chastely, 'by people offering *pietas* and laying aside wealth'. God would 'punish the one who does differently' (*Leg.* 2.8.19; cited in *Inst.* 5.20.3).<sup>91</sup> Lactantius interprets this passage to mean that a true deity would reject human coercion to obtain worship (*Inst.* 5.20.5). On the contrary, he argues, force opposes the spirit of religion; it pollutes and violates religion (5.19.7, 23). Moreover, those who strive to defend religion with force make a deity appear weak (5.20.4). Further, Lactantius precludes the use of force by either side: using force against Christians merely exhibits the bankruptcy of the traditional religions and the philosophers' arguments; the use of force by Christians opposes their deepest religious convictions, a fact that Lactantius addresses explicitly: 'We put up with practices that should be prohibited. We do not resist even verbally, but concede revenge to God' (5.20.9–10). Lactantius also develops Cicero's assertion (*Leg.* 2.10.25) that 'purity of mind' is more important than ritual. Here he takes Cicero to mean that a deity wants devotion, faith, and love (5.19.13, 26), sentiments that do not arise in response to force (5.20.7). 'Why should a god love a person who does not feel love in return?' (5.19.26) Lactantius asks. Consequently, 'nothing requires free will as much as religion' (*Nihil est enim tam voluntarium quam religio*) (5.19.23), because religion is absent where an observance is forced (5.19.23). This argument too is reciprocal: lack of feeling for a god violates both the quid pro quo of the traditional religions and the interior quality of philosophical piety. Nor can Christians retain people 'against their will' (*invitus*) because the person who lacks the requisite inner conviction is 'useless to God' (*inutilis est . . . deo*) (5.19.13). Unlike Porphyry's proposal of many paths, Lactantius' argument is a true theory of toleration: he understands that both Christians and the followers of the

<sup>88</sup> Meredith, *op. cit.* (n. 28), 1134.

<sup>89</sup> cf. Garnsey, *op. cit.* (n. 5) 1, and B. Crick, 'Toleration and tolerance in theory and practice', *Government and Opposition* 6 (1971), 144–71.

<sup>90</sup> See also Garnsey, *op. cit.* (n. 5), 14–16, for a summary of Tertullian's arguments and Lactantius'

position; also cf. M. Perrin, *L'Idée de révolution: Colloque ouvert organisé par Le Centre d'histoire des idées* (1991), 88.

<sup>91</sup> 'Ad divos aedeunto caste, pietatem adhibento, opes amovento. Qui secus faxit, deus ipse vindex erit.'

traditional religions strongly disapprove of and disagree with the other, but he also argues that neither group should use force against the other. And he advocates forbearance in order to achieve a greater good, nothing less than that of proper worship.

In developing his arguments for religious tolerance, Lactantius' *Divine Institutes* took the first step toward addressing Porphyry's challenge in the *Philosophy from Oracles*. Where Porphyry had asked why Christians should be thought 'worthy of forbearance', Lactantius had answered that to do otherwise would undermine the sanctity of any sort of worship. But Porphyry had pushed the issue further by linking proper worship with the traditions and fabric of the state.<sup>92</sup> Porphyry clearly thought that toleration turned a blind eye to sedition and deviance. A complete response to such a position could not simply endorse a position of toleration, no matter how well-grounded it might be in the Roman philosophical tradition. Someone who wanted to refute Porphyry would also have to demonstrate that tolerating Christianity was not to foster sedition but *Romanitas*, was not to promote deviance but a return to the core of Roman practice. It is no coincidence that these two themes have long been recognized as the hallmark of Lactantius' *Divine Institutes*.<sup>93</sup> Where Porphyry claimed that Christianity violated the claims of emperors, Lactantius showed how Christians could support—not the new fangled worship of Diocletian as *dominus et deus*—but the sort of honours conferred upon the first emperor, Augustus, the *princeps Senatus*.<sup>94</sup> Where Porphyry charged that Christians abandoned the claims of jurists, Lactantius argued that Christianity was identical to Roman law—not the illegitimate collections of contemporary lawyers rationalizing and justifying persecution, but the foundation of Roman jurisprudence, the natural law that since Cicero had lain at the heart of the Roman legal tradition.<sup>95</sup> And finally, where Porphyry accused the Christians of ignoring the teaching of philosophers, Lactantius argued that Christianity was the true philosophy—not the modern philosophy that said it believed in the one God but promoted the worship of idols, but the true, ancient, religious wisdom espoused also by Hermes Trismegistus, the source of Plato's religious inspiration.<sup>96</sup>

As these examples demonstrate, Lactantius was clearly familiar with Porphyry's *Philosophy from Oracles*. It would be a mistake to conclude that Porphyry was Lactantius' only concern: Lactantius not only addresses Hierocles' criticisms, but also responds directly to imperial propaganda, juridical arguments and a host of philosophical positions, while at the same time incorporating these arguments into a manual intended to be an introduction to the principles of Christianity. Still, it is clear that Lactantius used the challenges articulated in the *Philosophy from Oracles* to set out the structure and primary concerns of the *Divine Institutes*. Given the centrality of Porphyry's arguments to Lactantius' apologetic endeavour, is it not likely that Lactantius did indeed hear Porphyry read from the *Philosophy from Oracles* at the conference in Nicomedia shortly before the Great Persecution?

<sup>92</sup> See above p. 129.

<sup>93</sup> cf. e.g., H. Bolkestein, 'Humanitas bei Lactantius: Christlich oder orientalisches?' in T. Klauser and A. Rucker (eds), *Pisciculi: Studien zur Religion und Kultur des Altertums* (1939), 62–5; V. Loi, 'I valori etici e politici della romanità negli scritti di Lattanzio', *Salesianum* 27 (1965), 65–133; A. Alberte, 'Actitud de los cristianos ante el principio de la latinitas', *Eclás* 33 (1991), 55–62.

<sup>94</sup> See allusive references to Diocletian as Jupiter—a king who instituted worship of himself—in *Inst.* 1.3.11–12; 5.6.6, and allusive references to Augustus as Saturn in *Inst.* 1.11.51, 62; 1.13.13–15; 5.5.3; 5.5. E. Digeser, *Lactantius, Constantine and the Roman Res Publica*, unpubl. PhD dissertation, University of California at Santa Barbara (1996), chs 4, 6.

<sup>95</sup> See *Inst.* 5.11.18–19 for the criticism of third-century jurists and most of ch. 6 for the equation of Christian law with natural law. Digeser, op. cit. (n. 94), chs 4, 6.

<sup>96</sup> Iamblichus, *De myst.* 1.2: 'If also you should propose any philosophic inquiry, we shall discuss it for you according to the ancient pillars of Hermes, which Plato and Pythagoras knew before, and from thence constituted their philosophy'. See also Arnobius' association of the Neoplatonists, in particular, with Hermes (2.13: 'vos appello qui Mercurium, qui Platonem Pythagoremque sectamini'); Courcelle, op. cit. (n. 46), 154; E. L. Fortin, 'The *virii novi* of Arnobius and the conflict between faith and reason in the early Christian centuries', in D. Neiman and M. Schatkin (eds), *The Heritage of the Early Church* (1973), 197–226; 201–2, inc. n. 24. See *Inst.* 3 for wide-ranging criticisms of Greco-Roman philosophy and the careful discussion of Christ in Hermetic terms in *Inst.* 4. Digeser, op. cit. (n. 94), ch. 4. See also eadem, *Lactantius and Rome: Church, State and Tolerance in Late Antiquity* (forthcoming), ch. 3.

Assuming that Lactantius' account of the anonymous philosopher is a polemical description and that the book from which Porphyry read was the *Philosophy from Oracles*, not *Against the Christians*, it is indeed possible that Lactantius caricatures the famous Neoplatonist in Book Five, chapter two. For example, the term, 'antistes philosophiae' could well represent Porphyry as the head of the Neoplatonist school and the most celebrated philosopher of the day.<sup>97</sup> Next, although Lactantius' philosopher, a man 'ignorant of what he attacked, but also of what he was saying' (5.2.8), seems far removed from the erudite Porphyry, these are charges that could reasonably be levied against a person who was once a Christian: from Lactantius' point of view, it might well have been astounding that a student of Origen could urge thinking Christians to forsake their worship of Jesus and consider him simply a wise and pious teacher. Porphyry may also have opened himself up to a charge of hypocrisy by advocating continence without practising it (*Inst.* 5.2.3): he had urged his students to lead a life of sexual abstinence in *De abstinentia*, yet had then seemingly ignored his own teaching by marrying Marcella. His protestations in the *Ad Marcellam*, in fact, indicate that he had been accused of marrying her in order to have both children and comfort in his old age (*Ad Marc.* 1).<sup>98</sup>

Marcella's wealth is also relevant to several of Lactantius' criticisms.<sup>99</sup> One who praises frugality can easily be accused of avarice for marrying a wealthy woman. Marcella's money may also explain the snide observation that Lactantius' philosopher ate better at home than in the palace (5.2.3). Finally, Marcella's property may relate to the accusation that the philosopher lobbied judges unscrupulously. According to the *Divine Institutes*,

so that he might increase his riches, he used to make his way into the friendship of the judges by extremely unscrupulous lobbying, and he used to attach them to himself quickly by the influence of a sham reputation, not only so that he might profit from their opinions (*eorum sententias venderet*), but indeed also so that by this influence he might impede those close to him (*confines suos*) (whom he was dislodging from their homes and lands) from reclaiming their property (5.2.3).<sup>100</sup>

Although Barnes had argued that Porphyry, whose own holdings were in Italy or Phoenicia, would have had no reason to influence legal opinions in Nicomedia,<sup>101</sup> the passage does not say where the philosopher attempted to sway the courts. Barnes also claims, correctly, I think, that Porphyry never 'sold legal opinions'—his translation of '*eorum sententias venderet*'. But if the passage instead indicates that the philosopher sought to 'profit from legal opinions', this remark, together with the charge that he was dislodging his *confines* from their homes and lands, suggests that the philosopher was looking for judicial help in keeping property for which people close to him thought they had claim. Indeed, Porphyry and Marcella may have encountered opposition from men who sought to gain her property through marriage. Writing to his wife, Porphyry says that

far from being praised [for marrying you], because of the foolishness of your fellow-citizens (*πολιτῶν*) and in their jealousy of us, I have encountered many slanderous remarks, and, contrary to every expectation, I ran the risk of death at their hands because of you and your children (1). . . . I did not think it fitting, after you were bereft of your husband, who was a friend of mine, to leave you abandoned without a partner and protector wise and suited to your character. After driving away all those bent on mistreating you under false pretences, I endured their unreasonable outrages and I bore their acts of treachery with composure (3).<sup>102</sup>

<sup>97</sup> Pirioni, op. cit. (n. 37), 505.

<sup>98</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> Chadwick, op. cit. (n. 4), 142. Although de Labriolle interpreted Porphyry's comment in *Ad Marcellam* (1) ('even the basic necessities content those who are poor') as indicating Marcella's poverty, these remarks do not necessarily lead to such a conclusion (de Labriolle, op. cit. (n. 17), 385; cf. Bidez, op. cit. (n. 4), 111, n. 2 for the alternative view). Indeed the Codex Tubingensis specifically notes that Marcella was rich (*πλουσία*). Cf. also Barnes, op. cit. (n. 4), 439.

<sup>100</sup> For Latin text, see n. 19.

<sup>101</sup> Barnes, op. cit. (n. 4), 439.

<sup>102</sup> Translation is that of K. O'Brien Wicker (1987). *Ad Marc.* 3: [Ο]ὐκ ᾔφθην προσήκειν ἀνδρὸς φίλου μοι στερηθεῖσαν συλλήπτορος ἔρημόν σε καταλιπεῖν καὶ προστάτου σώφρονος καὶ τῷ σῶ τρόπῳ ἐπιτειδεῖου. ἀποσοβήσας δὲ πάντας τοὺς ἐπιπράξαι μὲλλοντας ἐν προσποιήσει, ἤνεγκα μὲν τὰς παραλόγους ὕβρεις, ἐβαστασα δὲ τὰς ἐπιβουλὰς εἰσχημόνας. For the first sentence, see n. 13.



We may never know the details of what happened, but it would not be the first time for a woman's marriage to a Platonist philosopher to be challenged by those close to her. The example of Apuleius is instructive: he married Pudentilla—a woman of some means—against the wishes of her father-in-law, a man unrelated to her, from her town, who would not have had legal control over her. She married Apuleius, in part, to avoid marrying one of her dead husband's relatives. In retaliation, the in-laws accused Apuleius of black magic—a treasonous offence that carried the death penalty.<sup>103</sup> In his defence, Apuleius wrote his *Apologia*, which documents his legal difficulties (1.1–7, 2.1–3, 68.2–72.1). Since Marcella was a recent widow, certain people in the community, who had designs on her wealth, may have similarly threatened Porphyry with legal action or with physical punishment. If Marcella really were Jewish (*Cod. Tub.*),<sup>104</sup> that circumstance may have also elicited opposition from her 'fellow-citizens'. Perhaps Porphyry's notorious interest in Chaldaean theurgy (Aug., *Civ. dei* 10) was enough to expose him, like Apuleius, to a similar accusation of black magic. If this interpretation is correct, Lactantius may provide a further piece of corroborating evidence: after a long litany of standard crimes committed by people who lack justice, Lactantius notes that some of these people 'seize upon inheritances, substitute wills, remove or exclude just heirs; they sell their bodies for sexual pleasures . . . and they try to reach the very sky with their magic' (5.9.16–17).<sup>105</sup> It may well be that the circumstances of Porphyry's marriage not only provided fertile ground for satire to an experienced orator such as Lactantius, but also was in retrospect a source of embarrassment to Porphyry himself. In this regard, Chadwick reads the *Ad Marcellam* as an 'apologia pro nuptiis suis', citing Apuleius as 'the obvious ancient parallel'.<sup>106</sup> Lactantius' description of the anonymous philosopher then can certainly be read as a satirical account of Porphyry's nuptial misfortunes.

Finally, the passage that Lactantius quotes from the anonymous philosopher also shares the themes of the *Philosophy from Oracles*. According to the *Divine Institutes*, the philosopher claimed that

Before all things the duty of a philosopher is to relieve the errors of human beings and to recall them to the true path, that is, to the *cultus* of the gods, by whose *numen* and *maiestas* the cosmos is guided, and not to allow ignorant people to be misled by certain deceivers, lest their simplicity be the plunder and fodder of cunning persons: and so I have taken upon myself this duty proper to philosophy, so that the light of wisdom might favour those not seeing it, not only so that with the cults of the gods having been taken up they might grow sound again, but also so that with their stubborn obstinacy having been put aside they might avoid the tortures of their body and not desire to suffer the cruel mutilations of their limbs to no purpose (5.2.5–6).<sup>107</sup>

Just like the *Philosophy from Oracles* (Harnack 1), this passage urges Christians to conform to traditional practice in order to avoid the penalties of persecution. Like Porphyry (Aug., *Civ. dei* 19.23.43–73, 107–33 = Smith 345a, 346), Lactantius' philosopher strives to recall people from error and set them on the proper path.

It thus seems reasonable to conclude that before 303 Porphyry went to Nicomedia to attend Diocletian's conference, called to lay the groundwork for the Great Persecution. When he was there he presented not *Against the Christians*, a long, scholarly work that would have been unsuitable for reading aloud in public, but his *Philosophy from Oracles*. In the presence of Lactantius and other courtiers, he not only offered a radical interpretation of Christianity that sought to incorporate it into the

<sup>103</sup> cf. Dio Cassius 56.25.5; Suet., *Tib.* 63; *Pauli sententiae* 5.21.1–4.

<sup>104</sup> See above, p. 131.

<sup>105</sup> '[U]t quae levia sunt atque usitata dicamus, qui hereditates captent, testamenta supponant, iustos heredes vel auferant vel excludant, qui corpora sua libidinibus prostituunt . . . qui caelum quoque ipsum beneficiis adpetant . . .'

<sup>106</sup> Chadwick, *op. cit.* (n. 4), 143, inc. n. 2.

<sup>107</sup> '[A]nte omnia philosophi officium esse erroribus hominum subvenire atque illos ad veram viam revo-

care id est ad cultus deorum, quorum numine ac maiestate mundus gubernetur, nec pati, homines inperitos quorundam fraudibus inlici, ne simplicitas eorum praedae ac pabulo sit hominibus astutis: itaque se suscepisse hoc munus philosophia dignum, ut praeferret non videntibus lumen sapientiae, non modo ut susceptis deorum cultibus resanescant, sed etiam ut pertinaci obstinatione deposita corporis cruciamenta devitent neu saevas membrorum lacerationes frustra perpeti velint.'

mainstream of Greco-Roman religious tradition. Porphyry also threw down the gauntlet to the Christian community by denying tolerance to those who would reject such an accommodation with traditional religion. Within a few years, Lactantius produced the *Divine Institutes*, a monumental work that he intended, in part, to address and refute Porphyry's challenge. Thus, the Great Persecution sparked the first-known debate between Greek philosophy and Christian theology over the question of religious tolerance.

This conclusion has implications that reach beyond the *Quellengeschichte* of the *Divine Institutes* and the textual criticism of the *Philosophy from Oracles*. First, it profoundly affects the interpretation and significance of the latter work. The *Philosophy from Oracles* was not the immature product of a young man enamoured of oracles and theurgy. Rather, Porphyry presented this text as a mature philosopher speaking in an official setting just before the Great Persecution. Moreover, the *Philosophy from Oracles* supplanted the technical criticisms of *Against the Christians* by explaining why Christianity as currently practised should be punished, and by suggesting how it might accommodate itself to traditional cult. Thus this work becomes important for the study of late antique apologetics, not only because it shows how authors from Celsus to Julian were increasingly familiar with Christian ideas and practice, but also because it is another example of the willingness of some fourth-century apologists—from Eusebius of Caesarea the Christian bishop to Themistius the pagan orator—to engage in a discourse that stressed areas of common ground.<sup>108</sup>

Next, the positions that Porphyry and Lactantius adopted in the debate over the question of religious tolerance may also provide insight into the religious policy of the emperors who were their patrons. On the one hand, the fact that this debate arose in the context of the Great Persecution and not the earlier empire-wide purges of Decius (250) and Valerian (257–8) indicates how much had changed by Diocletian's reign. Valerian's son Gallienus had decided to allow Christian worship in some form (Eus., *HE* 7.10.13), and Diocletian (284–305) himself had promoted Christians to important positions, including the chair in Latin rhetoric that Lactantius occupied (Hier., *Vir. ill.* 80). Diocletian's later decision to persecute certainly furthered his goal of uniting a long-divided empire around the new tetrarchic theology of rule. Nevertheless, to justify such a dramatic change of policy after a half-century of accommodation, the emperor may have needed to appeal to a respected authority on religion. Porphyry's *Philosophy from Oracles* thus may have given Diocletian a philosophical basis for persecuting Christians. On the other hand, Lactantius' response to Porphyry's position was useful to Constantine during the year in which he achieved sole rule (324). Faced by fellow Christians who thought his victory warranted the immediate repression of traditional cults,<sup>109</sup> the emperor urged forbearance (Eus., *VC* 2.56.1–2, 60.1–2). To do so, he appealed to the arguments of Lactantius, who had tutored his son (Hier., *Vir. ill.* 80).<sup>110</sup>

Finally, the exchange between Lactantius and Porphyry must now be seen as the first chapter in a controversy that would rage across the fourth century, a debate over religious tolerance in which Gregory of Nazianzen and Julian, Themistius and Jovian, Libanius and Theodosius, Symmachus and Ambrose all contended.<sup>111</sup> In Porphyry's day, Greek philosophy and traditional piety argued against tolerance. By the time Symmachus and Ambrose took up the issue, the debate remained, but the sides had changed.

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<sup>108</sup> cf. most recently Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse* (1991), esp. ch. 1; C. Ando, 'Pagan apologetics and Christian intolerance in the ages of Themistius and Augustine', *JECs* 4 (1996), 171–207.

<sup>109</sup> Lane Fox, op. cit. (n. 52), 671–2; Digeser, op. cit. (n. 94), ch. 7, eadem, op. cit. (n. 96), ch. 5.

<sup>110</sup> Digeser, op. cit. (n. 94), ch. 7.

<sup>111</sup> Ando, op. cit. (n. 108).