

THE OCTAVIUS OF MINICIUS FELIX

Translation of Chapters 17 and 18

as a requirement for

CHURCH HISTORY 215

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Chapter XVII

1. Neither do I object to what Cassilius has striven with all his might to assert, that man ought to know himself and ought to consider carefully what he is, whence he is, and why he is: whether he has been collected from the elements or carefully fitted together from atoms or rather made, formed, and animated by God.

2. It is this very thing which we are not able to explore and search without an inquiry of the universe, since all things are joined and chained together by coherence in such a way that, unless you examine diligently the nature of divinity, you remain ignorant of humanity; nor are you able to discharge well your civic responsibilities unless you know the citizenship of the world common to all. Specially, since we differ from the wild animals in this, that while they, prone and tending towards the earth, are born to look at nothing but fodder, we, whose countenance is erect, whose looking is towards heaven, whose gift is speech and reason, are neither permitted nor granted to ignore the heavenly brightness pressing upon our eyes and senses. For it is as great as the greatest sacrilege to seek on earth what you ought to find on high.

3. On which account, those that think that the furniture of the whole world was not perfected by divine reason but pressed together by certain bits casually hanging together, seem to me rather not to have either mind, sense, nor even their very eyes.

4. For what can possibly be so opened, so acknowledged and so evident, when you lift up your eyes towards heaven and examine the things which are below and around, than that there is a certain Deity of most distinguished mind, by whom all nature is inspired, moved, nourished, and governed?

5. Look at heaven itself, how widely it is stretched, how quickly it is

turned around, either as it is decorated by the stars at night or as it is made bright by the sun in daytime. Immediately you will know how the wonderful and divine equilibrium of the supreme governor is present in it. Look also on the year, as the circuit of the sun makes it; and look on the month, as the moon drives it around in her waxing, waning, and falling down.

6. What shall I say of the recurring alternations of darkness and night, how an alternate renovation of work and rest exists for us? Truly a more abundant speech concerning the stars ought to be left to the astrologers, either how they rule the course of navigation or how they bring in the time of ploughing and reaping. Each one of these things needed a supreme artist and perfect intelligence not only as they were created, made, and set in order, but, moreover, they cannot be felt, perceived and understood without the highest ingenuity and reason.

7. What? When the order of the seasons and harvests is distinguished by stable variety, does it not attest its author and father? Equally, the spring with its flowers and the summer with its harvests, and the pleasant ripeness of autumn and the winter harvest of olives are necessary things. This order would be easily disturbed, except it were set in place by the highest reason.

8. Now how great is providence to insert the moderate temperature of autumn and spring, lest winter alone would burn with its ice and summer alone would blaze with its heat, so that the concealed and harmless transitions of the year by returning on its footsteps may glide by!

9. Direct your thoughts to the sea: it is bound by the law of its where. Wherever there is a tree, see how it is animated from the bowels of the earth! Look at the ocean: it flows and ebbs with alternate tides. See the fountains: they flow in perennial streams. Gaze at the rivers: they always go in regular courses.

10. Why should I speak of the aptly arranged elevated mountains, the sloping hills and the extended fields? Wherefore should I ^{> speak} ~~show~~ of the multiform protection of the animals against each other: some armed with horns, others protected with teeth, and strengthened with hoofs and spiked with stings, or free either by the swiftness of the feet or by the soaring of the wings?

11. The very beauty of our form confesses God as its artificer: the standing posture, the uplifted countenance, the eyes placed on high, as it were in a mirror, and the rest of the senses composed as it were in an arch.

Chapter XVIII

1. It would be tedious to go through particular cases one by one. There is nothing of the members in man which does not exist either by reason of necessity or of beauty, and what is more wonderful, the same form is present in all, but to each one there are certain reflected features; thus we seem to be alike in general and are found to be among ourselves dissimilar one from the other.

2. What is the reason of being born? Why, the desire of begetting, is it not given by God so that the breast might become full of milk while the offspring comes to maturity, and so that the tender progeny might grow up by the abundance of the milky moisture?

3. Neither does God have regard alone for the whole universe but also for its parts. Britain lacks in sunshine, but it is refreshed by the moderate warmth of the sea flowing around it. The Nile River is accustomed to temper the dryness of Egypt; the Euphrates compensates Mesopotamia in place of rain. The Indus River is said both to cultivate and to irrigate the East.

4. But if on entering a certain house you were to see all things polished, ordered, and adorned, certainly you would believe that a master presided over it ^{and} ~~it~~ that he was much better than all those good things. Thus, in this house of

the world, when you behold in the heaven and in the earth providence, order, law, believe that the Lord and Father of the whole universe is more excellent than the very stars and the parts of all the world.

5. Lest perchance, since there is no doubt concerning providence, you think that it ought to be inquired whether the celestial kingdom is ruled by the power of one or by the authority of many: this very thing is of no great difficulty to lay bare for the one thinking of earthly kingdoms, for which the examples are certainly from heaven.

6. When at any time was there an alliance of royal power which either began with faith or ended without bloodshed? I omit the Persians who took the auguries for their dominion from the neighing of horses and I equally pass over the dead fable of the Theban brothers. The tradition concerning the twins on account of a dominion of shepherds and a cottage is very well known. The wars of son-in-law and father-in-law have been scattered over the whole world, and the fortune of such great empire could not receive two.

7. Look at other things. There is one king for the bees, one leader for the flocks, one ruler for the herds. Would you believe that in heaven the highest power is divided and that the whole majesty of that true and divine empire is torn asunder, when it is evident that the Father and God of all Kings has neither beginning nor end--that He who is responsible for all things is to Himself perpetuity, that He who was before the world was Himself to Himself in place of the world, that He orders all things, whatever they are, by His work, arranges them by His reason, finished them by His power?

8. Here He can neither be seen: He is clearer than sight; nor can He be apprehended: He is purer than touch; nor appraised: He is greater than perceptions, infinite, immense and knows only to Himself how great He is. But our heart is narrow for understanding Him and therefore we thus appraise Him worthily when

we say that He is beyond estimation.

9. I shall speak out whatever I ^{feel} feel. He who thinks to himself that he knows the magnitude of God, is diminishing it; he who wishes not to diminish it, knows it not.

10. Neither should you seek a name for God: God is His name. We have need of names when a multitude is to be divided into individuals by the peculiar signs of names. With God, who is alone, the name of God is the whole. If I were to call Him Father you would suppose Him earthy; if a King, you would regard Him as carnal; if Lord, you would certainly understand Him as mortal. Take away the addition of names and you will perceive His glory.

11. Why, do not I have the consent of all men in this matter? Hear the common people: when they stretch their hands towards heaven, nothing else do they say but, "O God," and "God is great," and "God is true," and "If God shall permit." Is this the natural speech of the common people or is this the prayer of a confessing Christian? And those who desire Jupiter as the first one, are mistaken in His name, but they agree concerning one power.