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Satire and Verisimilitude: Christianity in Lucian's "Peregrinus"

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SATIRE AND VERISIMILITUDE:  
CHRISTIANITY IN LUCIAN'S *PEREGRINUS*

“Whether Peregrinus was a Christian or not” wrote Bishop Lightfoot, “we have no means of ascertaining”<sup>1</sup>. Lucian is our sole source for the Christian career of Peregrinus, who earned for himself an expensive renown and a more than Olympic glory when he died on a pyre of his own construction in 165 A. D. Lucian’s narrative of his brief flirtation with Christianity lacks the circumstantial embellishments which compel us to believe the later episode (19–20) of his quarrel with the great sophist Herodes Atticus, a figure whose enmity to Peregrinus is in any case attested in other sources. The treatise *On the Death of Peregrinus* tells us merely how the Church received the charlatan when the better sort disowned him (11), how they ministered to his comforts in adversity (12) and how at last they expelled him for some slight but sufficient wrong (16). This, the stuff of all Christian martyrologies, neither strains nor compels belief; but we find also that the adventure is described in terms which must be incompatible with the discipline and faith of the early Church. It is surely mere absurdity in Lucian to inform us that the deceitful guest became their “thiasarch” or that they treated him with the honours due to a god (*Peregrinus* 11, discussed below).

Lucian was a satirist and a man under no obligation to be discerning; some measure of verisimilitude we are nonetheless entitled to expect. Modern critics, feeling the want of this, have exclaimed upon his “monumental ignorance”<sup>2</sup>, have alleged that he took Christianity for a mystery “of Oriental origin”<sup>3</sup> and have found him to be inferior to his educated contemporaries when it came to distinguishing Christians from Jews.<sup>4</sup>

If there is to be any defence of Lucian it must lie in an understanding of his methods and aims as a satirist. Satire seeks, not truth, but the characteristic and the probable: it depicts living characters, not as individuals, but as representative men. In the life of Peregrinus both the occasion and the materials for satire were ready to hand. For enemies like Tatian and admirers like Theagenes, the Cynic was the paragon of philosophy and Peregrinus was the consummate

<sup>1</sup> *Ignatius and Polycarp* (London 1889) pp. 334–5. That the Christians knew nothing of his Churchmanship appears from the *Scholia in Lucianum*, p. 216f. (Rabe).

<sup>2</sup> G. Bagnani, “Peregrinus Proteus and the Christians” in *Historia* 4 (1955), p. 111.

<sup>3</sup> S. Benko, “Pagan Criticism of Christianity in the First Two Christian Centuries” in *ANRW* 23.2 (1979) p. 1109.

<sup>4</sup> W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (Oxford 1965) p. 274, citing Jebb at n. 39.

Cynic; it is Lucian who must show that his career is a perversion of this philosophy, whose genuine exemplars were often unrecognised, and whose liveliest and most ludicrous aberrations were to be found in the Christian Church. To illustrate these remarks we may consider the following paradigms: (1) of the Christian as seen by his fellow-Christians; (2) of the Cynic as seen by one of his admirers, who is also suspicious of counterfeits; (3) of the Cynic, and in particular Peregrinus, as seen by Christians; (4) of Peregrinus as seen by the more credulous of the Cynics.

1. The earliest Christian apology was addressed to the Emperor Hadrian by a certain Aristides and preserved or imitated in many a later Christian work.<sup>5</sup> The fame of this treatise vastly exceeded its merits and even pagans were glad to quote some its memorable phrases in order to turn them back upon the new sect. Celsus, a contemporary of Lucian and perhaps even an acquaintance,<sup>6</sup> reciprocated the strictures of Aristides upon the helplessness of Asclepius and Heracles by remarking that even Christ had been unable to save himself,<sup>7</sup> and it may have been in the words of the apologist<sup>8</sup> that he found the source for some of his own loose statements about the Jews. Another phrase from the work was taken up by the Roman populace in the exclamation “Quo usque tertium genus?” which Tertullian professed not to understand.<sup>9</sup>

The virtues of the Christians are extolled in a single chapter, which Celsus may have plundered once again when he remarked that Christians traced their generation from Christ himself.<sup>10</sup>

XV. Οἱ δὲ Χριστιανοὶ γενεαλογοῦνται ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ· οὗτος δὲ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου ὁμολογεῖται ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ ἀπ’ οὐρανοῦ καταβὰς διὰ τὴν σωτηρίαν τῶν ἀνθρώπων· καὶ ἐκ παρθένου ἁγίας γεννηθεὶς ἀσπόρως τε καὶ ἀφθόρως σάρκα ἀνέλαβε, καὶ ἀνεφάνη ἀνθρώποις, ὅπως ἐκ τῆς πολυθέου πλάνης αὐτοὺς ἀνακαλέσῃται· καὶ τελήσας τὴν θαυμαστὴν αὐτοῦ οἰκονομίαν διὰ σταυροῦ θανάτου ἐγεύσατο ἔκουσῖα βουλῆ κατ’ οἰκονομίαν μεγάλην· μετὰ δὲ τρεῖς ἡμέρας ἀνεβίω καὶ εἰς

<sup>5</sup> See the edition by J. Rendell Harris in *Texts and Studies* 1 ed. J. A. Robinson (Cambridge 1891).

<sup>6</sup> See the opening of Lucian’s *Alexander*, but the difficulties in the identification are well known, since Celsus appears from Origen to be a Middle Platonist. See H. Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge 1965) pp. xxiv–xxvi.

<sup>7</sup> See Rendell Harris, “Celsus and Aristides” in *BJRL* 6 (1921) pp. 172f.

<sup>8</sup> Aristides, *Apology* 114. See Rendell Harris (1891) pp. 22–3.

<sup>9</sup> See Aristides, *Apology* 2 and Tertullian’s *Ad Nationes* 1.8 and 1.20; also *Scorpiace* 10. Harnack, *Mission and Expansion of Christianity* (trans. Moffatt, London 1908) pp. 266–78, seems to regard the phrase as a pagan monopoly.

<sup>10</sup> See Rendell Harris (1921) pp. 168f.

οὐρανοὺς ἀνήλθεν· οὗ τὸ κλέος τῆς παρουσίας ἐκ τῆς παρ' αὐτοῖς καλουμένης εὐαγγελικῆς ἀγίας γραφῆς ἔξεστὶ σοι γνῶναι, βασιλεῦ, ἐάν ἐντύχῃς. 2. Οὗτος δώδεκα ἔσχε μαθητάς, οἱ μετὰ τὴν ἐν οὐρανοῖς ἄνοδον αὐτοῦ ἐξῆλθον εἰς τὰς ἐπαρχίας τῆς οἰκουμένης καὶ ἐδίδαξαν τὴν ἐκείνου μεγαλωσύνην, καθάπερ εἷς ἐξ αὐτῶν τὰς καθ' ἡμᾶς περιήλθε χώρας τὸ δόγμα κηρύττων τῆς ἀληθείας· ὅθεν οἱ εἰσέτι διακονοῦντες τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ τοῦ κηρύγματος αὐτῶν καλοῦνται Χριστιανοί. 3. Καὶ οὗτοι οἱ ὑπὲρ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη τῆς γῆς εὐρόντες τὴν ἀλήθειαν· γινώσκουσι γὰρ τὸν θεὸν κτίστην καὶ δημιουργὸν τῶν ἀπάντων ἐν νιῶ μονογενεῖ καὶ πνεύματι ἀγίῳ καὶ ἄλλον θεὸν πλὴν τούτου οὐ σέβονται. Ἐχουσι τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις κεχαραγμένας καὶ ταύτας φυλάττουσι προσδοκῶντες ἀνάστασιν νεκρῶν καὶ ζωὴν τοῦ μέλλοντος αἰῶνος.

(*Apologia Aristidis* 15.1–3).

Children of Christ and knowing their own immortality, believers are prepared to give their lives on behalf of the gospel (15.8), and, knowing what the philosophies of the world can only boast of, they can claim to possess the secrets of divinity and truth.

2. For all their rough demeanour, their jejune diet and the filthiness of their attire, Lucian's Cynics share with all their rivals in philosophy the desire to be as gods (cf. Epictetus III.22). As an anonymous interlocutor tells Lycinus, they are as innocent of need as the Olympians (*Cynicus* 12 and 20) and show to advantage even against the heroes of mythology. Heracles (*Cynicus* 13) is their paradigm, and who could ask for more?

In another dialogue these claims are endorsed by Philosophy herself. The only beings worthy of comparison with the Cynics are the Brahmins (*Fugitivi* 6), who take the example of Heracles so far as to die upon pyres that they themselves have built and kindled. Lucian seems to exhort us to admire this fatal discipline, just as the spectacular combustion of an Indian sage in the forum had already excited general admiration and lasting praise.<sup>11</sup> Against such men, her followers and champions, Philosophy sets the pretenders, who cleave to the outward tokens of her virtues in the hope of avoiding labour and gaining wealth. They affect to be her μαθηταὶ καὶ ὁμιληταὶ καὶ θιασῶται (*Fugitivi* 4), but at their head is the charlatan Peregrinus, whose ostentatious death provides the starting-point of the dialogue. Like the Brahmins and the Christians Peregrinus flaunts his pretensions to philosophy and to divinity, but he is in fact the antitype of the true Cynic – false philosopher, false martyr and false god.

<sup>11</sup> See Strabo XV. i. 73.

3. Three Christian apologists, all nearly contemporary with Peregrinus, allude to him as a pagan without evincing any suspicion that he was known to be an apostate from the Church. Tertullian (*Ad Martyras* 4.5) is at least prepared to admire him and to bestow upon him his proper appellation when he exhorts his readers to emulate the fortitude of those pagans who suffered death without spiritual defences. The point is entirely lost if Peregrinus is supposed to have died for the new faith and not for the splendid errors of the old.

Peregrinus is thus a martyr after a fashion for Tertullian, keeping company with Empedocles, Socrates (*De Anima* 1.2) and Heraclitus. It is Tatian who calls him a Cynic,<sup>12</sup> and he adds the sobriquet Proteus, always fastened upon the sophist by his detractors, but not employed, or employed with a certain diffidence, by the partisans of his fame.<sup>13</sup>

Τί μέγα καὶ θαυμαστὸν οἱ παρ' ὑμῖν ἐργάζονται φιλόσοφοι; Θατέρου γὰρ τῶν ὤμων ἐξαμελοῦσι, κόμην ἐπιειμένοι πολλήν, πωγωνοτροφοῦσιν, ὄνυχας θηρίων περιφέροντες, καὶ λέγοντες μὲν δεῖσθαι μηδενός· κατὰ δὲ τὸν Πρωτέα σκυτοδέψου μὲν χρῆζοντες διὰ τὴν πήραν, ὑφάντου δὲ διὰ τὸ ἱμάτιον, καὶ διὰ τὸ ξύλον δρυοτόμον, διὰ δὲ τὴν γαστριμαργίαν τῶν πλουτούντων καὶ ὀψοποιοῦ. Ὡς ζηλῶν ἄνθρωπε τὸν κύνα, τὸν Θεὸν οὐκ οἶδας, καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν ἄλογον μίμησιν μεταβέβηκας. Ὁ δὲ κεκραγῶς δημοσίᾳ μετ' ἀξιοπιστίας, ἔκδικος γίνῃ σαυτοῦ, κἄν μὴ λάβῃς, λοιδορεῖς· καὶ γίνεται σοι τέχνη τοῦ πορίζειν τὸ φιλοσοφεῖν.

(*Oratio ad Graecos* 25.1).

The phrase κατὰ δὲ τὸν Πρωτέα is commonly taken to signify that “Proteus” is a member of that tribe who pretend to Olympian self-sufficiency, yet are equal or inferior to others in the multitude of their needs. Dudley took it to indicate that Tatian is alluding to some self-effacing apophthegm from the mouth of the sophist himself.<sup>14</sup> Whether he adduced him for his authority or his example it is obvious that the value of Peregrinus for this apologist is that he furnishes the most notorious evidence for the indictment of his own sect.

<sup>12</sup> Tatian may be the only attested example of an apostate from Christianity to Cynicism in the second century, but in fact the jibe of Hippolytus (*Refutation* VIII.20) that he and his followers are rather Cynics than Christians suggests that that is not how they styled themselves. However, the resemblance between the Christians and the Cynics was pointed out by Origen: see J. Bernays, *Lucian und die Kyniker* (Berlin 1879) pp. 93–4 and 98–9.

<sup>13</sup> For unfavourable references see Lucian, *Demonax* 21 and Philostratus, *Vitae Sophistarum* II. 1. 33. Ammianus at XXIX. 1. 39 uses the name Peregrinus, as does Eusebius in his *Chronicon* under Olympiad 236. For diffidence see Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* XII. xi. 1: “cui postea nomen Proteus factum est”.

<sup>14</sup> D. R. Dudley, *A History of Cynicism* (Cambridge 1937) p. 178. It is unlikely that Peregrinus entertained such a low estimate of himself.

Tatian testifies to a state of war between the Cynics and the Church. The enmity is most palpable in his denunciation of Crescens (*Oratio* 19.1), the Cynic who brought about the death of Justin in what would appear to have been a display of mutual animosity (Justin, *2 Apol* 3). Crescens, according to Tatian, is a mere hypocrite, surpassing other men in only three things, his covetousness, his passion for boys and his pusillanimity in the face of death. The Cynic is of all sages the most amenable to Christian principles of criticism, since his life is almost a parody of the discipline of Christ. Since early days the disciples had assumed the garb of poverty, forgetting human comforts and social intercourse, and the apologists took these patient exercises as a proof of their claim to the title of philosopher which few in the pagan world were disposed to allow them.

If the Christian has achieved the true goals of philosophy, then the Cynic, and in particular the arch-Cynic Peregrinus, must be the caricature of the genuine philosopher. Athenagoras (*Legatio* 26.2–4) sneers at his self-immolation and the honours that it attracted: can the statues of one who proved to be mortal be of advantage to the sick? We find no sign that Peregrinus presents a difficulty to the Christian, no expression of regret for his apostasy, no shade of admiration for his most illustrious deed. Athenagoras also elects to use the sobriquet Proteus (“you all know Proteus, the man who threw himself on the pyre at Olympia”), and where Tatian treated the sophist as a pretender to philosophy, this mockery of his death and of his effigies insinuates that he had no claim to be called either martyr or god.

4. In Lucian's *Peregrinus*, Theagenes fears that comparison with Socrates' death would belittle this modern Heracles (5), and is ready to flaunt the name of Zeus himself (5 and 6). Mistaking him for a public benefactor, the populace hails Peregrinus as “the one patriot, the one sage, the one partisan of Diogenes” (15), erroneously conferring philosophic honours upon him in a form of words appropriate to the acclamation of a saviour God.<sup>15</sup> We see that he enjoyed esteem in all three roles enumerated above, that is, as philosopher, as martyr and as present divinity, making it necessary for Lucian to disarm the trite comparisons with Heracles and the Brahmins and to put into the mouth of an anonymous philosopher a long parody of the encomium of Theagenes.

Thus the death of Peregrinus raised for the Cynics an army of admirers whom they could not afford to welcome and an army of detractors whom it was difficult to evade. Above all Peregrinus was a mark for the Church apologists, who made no doubt of his being a perfect Cynic and would not miss the opportunity of exploding the exaggerated claims of the rival sect.

<sup>15</sup> See Norden, *Agnostos Theos* pp. 244–5; E. Peterson, ΕΙΣ ΘΕΟΣ, (Göttingen 1926); R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (Harmondsworth 1986) pp. 34–5.

Lucian's task is to turn the game against the triumphant adversaries of the movement and to rescue it from its less discerning friends.

A certain familiarity with the apologists is indicated by Lucian's assertion that the Christians honoured the scoundrel as a "new Socrates" (*Peregrinus* 12). Justin (2 *Apol.* 10) and Athenagoras (*Legatio* 8.2) commemorate the Athenian sage as one who died, like a Christian, on a disingenuous charge of atheism and corruption; but the trope is not one that was likely to occur to a pagan author unless he already knew of such claims. Although there is little evidence that Lucian (or for that matter even Celsus) was acquainted with the *Apologies* of Justin, and the works of Athenagoras and Tatian may be later than his treatise on *Peregrinus*,<sup>16</sup> it seems that he has exploited Aristides in one paragraph where he mocks the θαυμαστή σοφία (11) of the Church:

βραχεῖ γάρ, ἀφειδοῦσι πάντων. καὶ δὴ καὶ τῷ Περειγρίνῳ πολλὰ τότε ἦκε χρήματα παρ' αὐτῶν ἐπὶ προφάσει τῶν δεσμῶν καὶ πρόσσωπον οὐ μικρὰν ταύτην ἐποιήσατο· πεπείκασι γὰρ αὐτοὺς οἱ κακοδαίμονες τὸ μὲν ὅλον ἀθάνατοι ἔσσεσθαι καὶ βιώσεσθαι τὸν αἰὲν χρόνον, παρ' ὃ καὶ καταφρονοῦσι τοῦ θανάτου καὶ ἐκόντες αὐτοὺς ἐπιδιδόασιν οἱ πολλοί· ἔπειτα δὲ ὁ νομοθέτης ὁ πρῶτος ἔπεισεν αὐτούς, ὡς ἀδελφοὶ πάντες εἶεν ἀλλήλων, ἐπειδὰν ἅπαξ παραβάντες θεοὺς μὲν τοὺς Ἑλληνικοὺς ἀπαρνήσωνται, τὸν δὲ ἀνεσκολοπισμένον ἐκείνον σοφιστὴν αὐτῶν προσκυνῶσι καὶ κατὰ τοὺς ἐκείνου νόμους βιώσι. καταφρονοῦσιν οὖν ἁπάντων ἕξισης καὶ κοινὰ ἡγοῦνται ἄνευ τινὸς ἀκριβοῦς πίστεως τὰ τοιαῦτα παραδεξάμενοι. ἦν τοίνυν παρέλθη τις εἰς αὐτοὺς γόης καὶ τεχνίτης ἄνθρωπος καὶ πράγμασι χρῆσθαι δυνάμενος, αὐτίκα μάλα πλούσιος ἐν βραχεῖ ἐγένετο ιδιώταις ἀνθρώποις ἐγχανών.

(*De Morte Peregrini* 13).

The crude θεοὺς . . . ἀπαρνήσωνται is an unsympathetic gloss upon the Christian ἄλλον . . . οὐ σέβονται; Lucian goes on, like Aristides, to derive the passion for martyrdom from the original crucifixion and to declare that it is supported by the hope of eternal life. In his effort to make the pretensions of the apologist recoil upon the Church, he applies to the martyrs the epithet κακοδαίμονες which he fixed upon *Peregrinus* at the beginning of his treatise.

In the chapter already quoted Aristides goes on to protest that the Christians "do not desire the belongings of others" (15.4); the satirist concludes that they

<sup>16</sup> Athenagoras' *Legatio* is dated to 177 A. D. in the *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, Vol I pp. 204–5, and in Pauly-Wissowa, *RE* II (1895–6) p. 2021. Tatian's *Oratio* ought to belong to the period before his apostasy, even if, as Harnack maintained, it is later than his departure from Rome. The latest possible date for his breach with the Church is 172 A.D. Lucian's *Peregrinus* must, of course, be later than 165. On these questions see Pauly-Wissowa, *RE* IV.A.2 (1932) pp. 2468–9 and *DCB* Vol IV p. 784.

despise all the goods of the world. We look after widows and orphans, says the apologist (15.7); Lucian does not forget them, for they are the dupes who attend Peregrinus in prison (*Peregrinus* 12). This strange race, who, as Aristides avers, do not fornicate, bear false witness, steal or dishonour their fathers and mothers (15.4), are almost created to be the butts of a charlatan who is guilty of all these crimes (*Peregrinus* 9 and 15). After all, it is Aristides who boasts (15.7) that they never turn away strangers, and the dangers of a too credulous hospitality were mentioned in Christian homilies.<sup>17</sup> The Syrian text of Aristides preserves a passage which might be said to tell the story of Peregrinus in miniature:<sup>18</sup>

If they know that any of their number is imprisoned or oppressed for the name of their Messiah, all of them provide for his needs, and if it is possible that he may be delivered, deliver him.

Thus Lucian has found the Christian Church to be vulnerable to the praise of its own apologist; he has turned the phrases of Aristides against his brethren in order to deny them both the glory of their martyrdom and their hopes of a belated share in the properties of God. He does not scruple (*Peregrinus* 13, above) to call the Christians *idiōtai*, a word which was then applied by the philosophers to those whom they regarded as incapable of elevated thought.<sup>19</sup>

It need hardly be said that anyone who was known to be a Christian was likely to suffer ridicule and hatred enough from the world. Drawing upon the prejudice of his contemporaries Lucian shows Peregrinus to be (1) a false god, (2) a false martyr, and (3) a false philosopher, waiving the distinctions on which a Christian would have insisted, not through ignorance, but in accordance with the insidious conventions of his art:

1. If Christians pay divine honours to Peregrinus, such credulity is to be expected from men who honour another human being as a god. Lucian (*Peregrinus* 11) juxtaposes two assertions: that the simple brethren honour Peregrinus as a Lawgiver,<sup>20</sup> and that Christ himself was no more than a

<sup>17</sup> See *Didache* XI. 1–6.

<sup>18</sup> See Rendell Harris (1949) p. 49. See also *Pap. Lon.* 2486 for ἀδελφούς καλοῦσιν αὐτούς (1.11) and θεοὺς ἄλλους οὐ προσκυνοῦσιν (1.12).

<sup>19</sup> See E. Schwartz in his commentary on the *Peregrinus* and *Philopseudes* (Paris 1951) p. 96. For the use of the word to designate those ignorant of philosophy see Lucian's *Fugitivi* 21.

<sup>20</sup> Schwartz (1951) p. 94 asserts without argument that the Nomothetes of *Peregrinus* 13 is Christ and not St Paul. Contempt for Greek gods was not, however, a tenet that Christ was required to inculcate in Palestine, and all the items in Lucian's indictment can be supported from Paul's letters (*Rom.* 1.23–7; *1 Cor* 10.21; *1 Cor* 2.2; *Philippians* 3.1 etc.). It is unlikely that Lucian knew Paul's writings at first hand, but it is possible that he knew something of the early history of the Church. It remains probable that the application of the word to Peregrinus is intended to raise him ironically to the rank of a Christian Father, if not to that of Christ himself.



“crucified sophist”. It is the practice of a good citizen to respect the gods of others; but Peregrinus belongs, like Christ, to a class of ignoble deities whom no-one will defend.

The statement also accords with Lucian’s principle of making Peregrinus the perfect master in every role that his dishonest ambition chooses to assume. We are constantly reminded that the sophist has taken the imitation of Heracles to an extremity (*Peregrinus* 21, 24, 25, 29 and 33), and when in prison he carries on a voluminous correspondence which, like the letters of Ignatius, is even added to the body of Christian Scripture (12);<sup>21</sup> naturally, therefore, when he elects to be a leader among the Christians, he is deemed worthy of the honours which are accorded so superstitiously to the Founder.

2. Lucian’s contemporaries were disposed to admire both Heracles and the Brahmins; but most, no doubt, agreed with Epictetus (*Discourses* IV.7.6) in regarding Christian martyrdom as a habit of desperate fortitude, arising, not from constancy of purpose, but from folly and weakness of mind. Lucian notes that they give themselves up too willingly, that their martyrdom is mere suicide, and his governor dismisses Peregrinus when he discerns that he is “one who longs to die” (*Peregrinus* 14). The courage of Peregrinus is therefore founded merely upon the custom and example of bad tutors, and Lucian can take note of the Brahmins (*Peregrinus* 25) only to insinuate the contrast (made much clearer in his *Fugitivi*) between their valiant parting from the world and the inglorious suicide of this modern showman.

So far is Peregrinus from being worthy even of the fanatical reverence of the Christians that he is excommunicated when they find him eating “one of the foods that they consider unclean” (16). The tasting of *eidolothuta* was a sin akin to apostasy, and one for which the heretics were repeatedly denounced by Christian leaders during times of persecution when it seemed unsafe to exercise the indulgence recommended by St Paul.<sup>22</sup> Lucian’s suggestion is avowedly a conjecture: his intention is merely to indicate that the sophist was as capable of corrupting the faith of the ignorant as he was of shaming philosophy by his masquerade of virtue.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Lightfoot used this as evidence for his theory that the Christian career of Peregrinus was an embroidered parody of the Acts of Ignatius (*Ignatius and Polycarp*, pp. 344ff.), but modern scholarship has inclined to the opinion of K. von Fritz that the details which impressed Renan and Lightfoot are the stuff of all martyrology, and ought not to be cited to prove the influence of any particular one: see Pauly-Wissowa (1937) pp. 662–3.

<sup>22</sup> See Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* I.26.1–2; Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* III.27; Frend, “The Gnostic Sects and the Roman Empire” in *JEH* 5 (1954) pp. 25–37.

<sup>23</sup> Bagnani (1955) p. 111 suggests that Peregrinus was an Ebionite who was expelled for practising dietary restrictions that the Church did not acknowledge. This assumes, however, that there were proselytising Ebionites of whom the Fathers knew nothing, and that Peregrinus voluntarily joined himself to one of the few communities which expelled men even for private

3. The charlatans in the *Fugitivi* are characterised as μαθηταὶ καὶ ὀμιληταὶ καὶ θιασῶται; Peregrinus rises among the Christians to the rank of προφήτης καὶ θιασάρχης καὶ συναγωγεὺς (*Peregrinus* 11). The vocabulary is deliberately promiscuous in both cases, since the aspiration is not to master any particular discipline but to win whatever name may chance to fall from the lips of the world. Lucian evinces no propensity to confuse the Church with other private cults: the joke is that one cult was like another to the ambition of Peregrinus, that he consummated his role as a false philosopher by achieving the highest dignities in a Church that was wholly ignorant of the true state of his soul.<sup>24</sup>

Philosophy is a blessing to society, while the charlatan is a mere parasite, whom the true devotee of wisdom will not care to entertain. The governor of Syria is represented as a man with a bent for philosophy (*Peregrinus* 14): the description does not serve to identify him, but assigns familiar roles to both the magistrate and his charge. Denuded of all pretensions, failing even to extort the crown of martyrdom from his accusers, Peregrinus stands before the appointed representative of educated Rome. The reader knew what would pass between this Christian and the governor, the rigmarole of extravagant hopes and squandered erudition which so many officials had been compelled to hear and some had been foolish enough to chastise. Peregrinus can only be an object of contempt to the true philosopher who will no more indulge his hopes of becoming a martyr than he will fall in with the cant that makes him a god.<sup>25</sup>

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The Christians mocked Peregrinus as a false god, berated him as a true Cynic and treated his martyrdom, now as a useless pantomime, now as an act of courage that was badly directed and easily excelled. Lucian treats the followers of Christ as counterfeit Cynics and Peregrinus as their most illustrious model.

proselytising. Meals of Hecate (see Schwartz (1951) p. 98) were considered abominable by other than Christian observers, and Lucian speaks of them openly elsewhere (e.g. *Dialogi Mortuorum* 1.1). However, *Cataplous* 7 indicates that he was prepared to treat the consumption of detestable food as a mark of the bad Cynic.

<sup>24</sup> For another instance of wilful failure to discriminate between Christians and Bacchanals see Pliny's Letter to Trajan, where the language of Livy justifies a severity not warranted by the governor's own findings: see further R. M. Grant, "Pliny and the Christians" in *HTR* 41 (1948) pp. 273–4.

<sup>25</sup> Bagnani (1955) p. 110 attempts to find suppressed truth behind this narrative, arguing that if the charge were Christianity alone, the proceedings were by delatio, not cognitio, and the governor had no right to dismiss the prisoner. But in fact the "usual penalties" were not mandatory, and in spite of Trajan's rescript trials were sometimes by cognitio: see G. De Ste Croix, "Why were the Early Christians Persecuted?" in *Past and Present* 26 (1963) p. 15. Bagnani's argument throughout his article forgets that Lucian is a satirist, and postulates ignorance even when there is nothing to explain.

It is curious to note that he makes his hero vulnerable to strictures which were passed both by himself and by Aristides on the gods of the pagan world. Zeus, exclaims the satirist (*De Sacrificiis* 5), was a veritable Proteus, assuming all manner of bestial forms in order to accomplish the most bestial forms of crime. Your gods, says Aristides, are all adulterers and profligates, and Zeus is among the worst: "How then can a god be an adulterer, a paederast or the murderer of his own father?" (6.9). These are the first three roles that Lucian assigns (*Peregrinus* 9), without either commentary of his own or any external testimony, to the man whom he is later to treat with ridicule as a self-appointed god. The satire is thus embellished with the invectives of a traditional controversy: Lucian exposes the pretensions of the charlatan by either inventing or giving unusual prominence to his escapades as a Christian, and prefaces his career with a Churchman's caricature of pagan immorality, the better to disparage both the deceiver and the credulous hospitality of the deceived.

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