

# AN EARLY CHRISTIAN “APOLOGY”

The Epistle to Diognetus 5:1 – 6:6

For the distinction between Christians and other men is neither in country nor language nor customs. For they do not dwell in cities in some place of their own, nor do they use any strange variety of dialect, nor practice an extraordinary kind of life . . . Yet while living in Greek and barbarian cities, each according to his lot, and following the local customs, both in clothing and food and in the rest of life, they show forth the wonderful and confessedly strange [*paradoxon*] character of their own citizenship. They dwell in their own fatherlands, but as if sojourners in them; they share all things as citizens and suffer all things as strangers. Every foreign country is their fatherland, and every fatherland is a foreign country. They marry as all men do, they bear children, but they do not expose their offspring.

They set a common table, but not a common bed. They happen to be in the flesh but do not live according to the flesh. They pass their time upon the earth, but they have their citizenship in heaven. They obey the appointed laws, and they surpass the laws in their own lives. They love all men and are persecuted by all men. They are unknown and they are condemned. They are put to death and they gain life. They are poor but make many rich; they lack all things and have all things in abundance. They are dishonoured, and are glorified in their dishonour, they are spoken evil of and are justified. “They are abused and give blessing,” they are insulted and render honour. When they do good they are maligned as evil-doers, when they are maligned they rejoice as men who receive life. They are warred upon by the Jews as foreigners and are persecuted by the Greeks, yet those who hate them cannot state the reason for their enmity.

To put it simply, what the soul is in the body, that the Christians are in the world. The soul is spread through all members of the body, and Christians throughout the cities of the world. The soul dwells in the body, but is not of the body, and Christians dwell in the world, but are not of the world. The soul is invisible, and is guarded in a visible body, and Christians are recognized when they are in the world, but their piety remains invisible. The flesh hates the soul, and wages war upon it, though it has suffered no evil, because it is prevented from gratifying its pleasures, and the world hates the Christians though it has suffered no evil, because they are opposed to its pleasures. The soul loves the flesh which hates it and the limbs, and Christians love those that hate them.