

**Carmen ad senatorem ex Christiana religione ad idolorum servitutum conversum
(Poem to a Senator converted from Christianity to the service of idols)**

When I saw you paying homage once again to a variety of empty sacred objects and clinging to your former error, I was dumb-founded. Because you always enjoyed poetry, I have hastened to write verses so that by replying in a poem I shall reproach you. For who may allow darkness to be preferred to light or that you should believe that the Great Mother could be said to be a goddess and think that she whose devotees are branded by scandalous infamy may be worshipped again? For indeed the priests in effeminate garb confess to their same private vice in public ritual, and think admissible that which is not. Whereupon they mince lightly through the city speaking in feminine voices and carry themselves with languishing hips and finger extended, and change their sex through a well publicized crime. And when they celebrate their rites they proclaim that on these days they are chaste.

Yet if only then are they, as they say, chaste, then what are they for the rest of the time? But because they are compelled to be pure at least once, they groan in spirit, disfigure their body and shed their blood. What holy rite indeed is it which goes by the name of blood? For I have now learnt that not age but your religion has made you bald, that your [Roman] boots are removed and your feet swathed in the soft papyrus of the Galli — an object quite astonishing and this could be thrown down from a great height. If any consul proceeds into the city from the rite of Isis he will be the laughing-stock of the world: who, however, will not mock that you who were consul are now a minister of Isis? What is shameful in the first instance you are not ashamed to be in the second: to abuse your mind through vile hymns with the rabble responding to you and the senate censuring you; and, once depicted in your home with the fasces, now to bear a dog-like countenance with your rattle.[1] Is this humility? It is but a semblance of humility. Those monuments will always remain part of your house. And the general rumour abroad had reached our ears that you have said: ‘Goddess, I was mistaken, forgive me, I have returned’. Tell me, if you please, since you often made these requests and sought forgiveness, what words does she say to you? You, who follow those who are mindless, are truly deprived of your wits. Once again you seek out these things and do not realize that you are doing wrong. See what you deserve. Perhaps you would have been less notorious if you had known only this and persisted in this error. Yet, since you have crossed the threshold of the true Law and come to know God for a few years, why do you cling to what should be abandoned or why do you give up what should be retained? When you worship everything, you worship nothing. Nor do you reconsider in your heart how different is truth from falsehood, light from darkness. You only pretend to be a philosopher since opinion changes your mind. For if popular anger prompted your displeasure you would be both a Jew and be held to be uncertain of everything. Indulge yourself with words, lofty wisdom does not satisfy. All that is carried to excess, fails: heat and cold have the same effect, the former burns and so does the latter. So darkness brings light and the sun the opposite; the icy cold and the boiling hot bath are equally harmful. Food sustains the body, the body is corrupted by food and decreases its own strength, if too much is consumed. Lastly, if you sit it is a great rest from work: but if you sit for long it becomes a strain. For the poet Virgil described as a punishment: ‘Unfortunate Theseus sits and will sit forever’.[2] Length always harms something useful: lengthy banquets are harmful, long fasts are trying. Likewise, knowing too much makes you stupid.

‘The wicked sect, so the goddess taught me, said moderation was good.’

But you care for neither principle nor the guidance of the mean. However, a stable mind is not thrown off course by any turmoil and simplicity itself never contemplates any evil. Wherefore, sincere faith shall enjoy an eternal abode and wrongdoing on the other hand will be tortured in lasting fire. Choose what you wish in order to avoid deserved punishments. I say nevertheless that the creditor deserves this concession. If you do not wish to know the truth, the offence will be light. It will not be light if you abandon the truth already known. But perhaps mature old age will recall you, when you are sated with these errors, to correction and the better path. For time changes evil, time sets everything in order. Therefore, then, when age and experience have restored you, learn to keep faith with God, lest you happen to lapse the same way a second time, because it is truly said that he who has once tripped over a stone and is not aware of how to avoid it and carelessly hurts himself a second time must ascribe blame to himself, and not to other causes. Correct your sin with faith, straighten out your mind. It was sufficient to sin once. Leave off fearing. He who repents of what he previously was will not be held to account.

[1] The ritual masks of the rites of the Great Mother. [2] Aeneid VI.617.