

# THE PASTOR'S CORNER

## "THESE CHRISTIANS"

*You may have seen lately, among all the column inches written in the newspapers, a few (or maybe more) articles about the waning influence of Christians in our country's recent elections. One piece noted that the Evangelical bloc wasn't what it used to be. Once a significant voice in every election, they seemed to have been absent from the national debate. Certainly, that could be said of Catholics too. The Catholic vote, I imagine, is as divided as the national electorate. It was likely that the last time Catholics exerted any influence on an election was in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when Archbishop Hughes used the threat of the Catholic vote to prevent Protestant indoctrination in New York City public schools. Would that the Catholic vote, the largest voting "bloc" in the United States, made a difference among both Democrats and Republicans in not only electing a candidate, but also in choosing one who conforms to Catholic social doctrine (including protection of the unborn).*

*Perhaps it might be helpful to be reminded of who we are? Below, **The Apology of Aristides, the Philosopher**, which was given to the Roman Emperor Hadrian when he visited Athens in the year 125 AD. The following text is a translation from the Syriac version discovered in the library of St. Catherine's Monastery in Sinai in 1889.*

**B**ut these Christians, O King, .... know and trust in God, the Creator of heaven and of earth, in whom and from whom are all things, to whom there is no other god as companion, from whom they received commandments which they engraved upon their minds and observe in hope and expectation of the world which is to come. Wherefore they do not commit adultery nor fornication, nor bear false witness, nor embezzle what is held in pledge, nor covet what is not theirs. They honor father and mother, and show kindness to those near to them; and whenever they are judges, they judge uprightly. They do not worship idols (made) in the image of man; and whatsoever they would not that others should do unto them, they do not to others.... And their oppressors they *comfort* and make them their friends; they do good to their enemies; and their women, O King, are pure as virgins, and their daughters are modest; and their men keep themselves from every unlawful union and from all uncleanness, in the hope of a recompense to come in the other world. Further, if one or other of them have slaves, through love towards them they persuade them to become Christians, and when they have done so, they call them brethren without distinction. They do not worship strange gods, and they go their way in all modesty and cheerfulness. Falsehood is not found among them; and they love one another, and from widows they do not turn away their esteem; and they deliver the orphan from him who treats him harshly. And he, who has, gives to him who has not, without boasting. And when they see a stranger, they take him in to their homes and rejoice over him as a very brother; for they do not call them brethren

after the flesh, but brethren after the spirit and in God. And whenever one of their poor passes from the world, each one of them according to his ability gives heed to him and carefully sees to his burial. And if they hear that one of their number is imprisoned or afflicted on account of the name of their Messiah, all of them anxiously minister to his necessity, and if it is possible to redeem him they set him free. And if there is among them any that is poor and needy, and if they have no spare food, they fast two or three days in order to supply to the needy their lack of food. They observe the precepts of their Messiah with much care, living justly and soberly as the Lord their God commanded them. Every morning and every hour they give thanks and praise to God for His loving-kindnesses toward them; and for their food and their drink they offer thanksgiving to Him. And if any righteous man among them passes from the world, they rejoice and offer thanks to God; and they escort his body as if he were setting out from one place to another near. And when a child has been born to one of them, they give thanks to God; and if moreover it happens to die in childhood, they give thanks to God the more, as for one who has passed through the world without sins. And further if they see that any one of them dies in his ungodliness or in his sins, for him they grieve bitterly, and sorrow as for one who goes to meet his doom.

Such, O King, is the commandment of the law of the Christians, and such is their manner of life. As men who know God, they ask from Him petitions which are fitting for Him to grant and for them to receive. And thus they employ their whole lifetime.... Verily, this is a new people, and there is something divine in the midst of them.