

## Le Témoignage véritable (NH IX,3)

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What is the testimony of the martyrs worth? Is the sacrifice of their blood enough to put their actions in accordance with their words? By questioning the prestige that these witnesses of the faith enjoyed in the Early Christian period, the author of the *Testimony of Truth* argues that the true God does not demand blood sacrifice. The only testimony that he requires is a life completely conformed to the Word of Truth.

This requirement, which is addressed to all and not to certain expiatory victims, is much more difficult than a sudden, violent death. It requires a perpetual renouncement, an absolute continence. It divides us to very depth of our being, just as Isaiah has been sawn in half by king Manasseh. Only practical deeds can effectively demonstrate the authenticity of the faith. No word or sacrament can exempt us from this asceticism. The baptism of water is as illusory as the baptism of blood.

Behind the incisive and spontaneous argumentation of a talented orator stands a conception of the Christian life supported by a Gnostic myth coming from a critical revision of Valentinism. The combat that leads the generation of the Son of Man against the seed of Adam is only the reflection of the final episode of the rectification of the fallen celestial beings, symbolized by the division and consolidation of the two limbs of the cross. Only the one who, in the image of Christ, “knows where he came from and where he is going” (Jn 8:14) is able to witness legitimately.

To the edition and translation of this late third century Gnostic homily, Annie and Jean-Pierre Mahé add an introduction and commentary that introduces the reader to many aspects of Early Christianity. A Christianity divided into a variety of currents that are mutually accused of heresy. Coexistence or division? In the primitive Church, it is still an open question.