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LUCIUS ANNAEUS SENECA: TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

Michael Thomas

Lucius Annaeus Seneca was born in Spain in the year 4 B.C.E. At this time, Spain was a province of the Roman Empire. This fact coupled with his father's wealth and reputation as a powerful rhetorician, provided Seneca the necessary educational training which permitted him to excel in philosophy, rhetoric, and politics. Due to his own skill and reputation, Seneca was selected to be the private tutor and confidant of the young Nero, who would later become the infamous emperor of the Roman Empire. Seneca, in part because of his intimate involvement in the royal court, became a noted politician and rose to prominence as one of the greatest writers of the 1st century. Upon retiring from public office in 62 C.E., Seneca devoted himself wholly to his writings. During this time, he produced his *Epistulae Morales* (*Moral Letters*) from which the following two texts is extracted and translated. Although being a highly regarded and powerful figure, Seneca was accused of conspiring to overthrow the Emperor. In 65 C.E. Seneca was asked to commit suicide, the proper death for a Roman gentleman.

Seneca was known first and foremost as the greatest proponent of Stoicism during his day. Stoic philosophy posited that one supreme and all-encompassing God resided in the entire cosmos and in each individual soul. Stoicism further taught that this God who existed everywhere was known by differing names such as Virtue, Nature, Fate, Reason, and Word (Logos). In this way, Stoicism was more similar to the modern understanding of religion than philosophy. Seneca believed that the Stoic God created and resided within his soul and that by cultivating the proper way of life and death—following virtues, avoiding sin, treating others well, living each day as if it were one's last—he would live—and curiously die—the authentic human life. The similarities manifested by Stoicism vis-à-vis Christianity were not lost on ancient writers, pagans and Christians alike. In fact, due to the similarities of Stoic teachings with Christian doctrine, a story began to circulate that Seneca had met Paul the Apostle. The 4th century text entitled *Correspondence between Seneca and Paul* preserves a tradition that Seneca met Paul of Tarsus when Paul was under house arrest in Rome. Although apocryphal, these stories grew out of the philosophical and religion similarities between the ideas present by Seneca and those of Paul. The early Christian Church found much worth within the *Moral Letters* of Seneca. Thus, it is in this spirit that the following translations of Letter 41 and 61 are offered.