

**CHRISTIANITY'S CRIMINAL  
HISTORY**

**Vol. I**

**Karlheinz Deschner**

Front cover:  
1957 copy by César Tort Sr.  
of *Cain Slays Abel*, an 1866  
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*This free translation is dedicated  
to my German friend, Albus*



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## EDITOR'S PREFACE

Christianity is the greatest regression humanity has ever experienced: The Jew has thrown back humanity one and a half thousand years.

—*Hitler's Table Talk*

The present book is an abridged translation of some chapters of the first three volumes of Karlheinz Deschner's ten-volume *Kriminalgeschichte des Christentums* (criminal history of Christianity). The original ten volumes in German, and also in the Spanish translation that I have been using, contain thousands of endnotes, omitted here. This preliminary translation is only the first step for a more formal translation of Deschner's magnum opus.

I have modified and added some headings as well as several illustrations and brackets translating German or Latin terms; omitted ellipsis between unquoted paragraphs, and even dared to simplify a few phrases. I also replaced many instances of the author's use of the word 'pagan' with terms like 'Hellenes', 'advocates of Greco-Roman culture', 'classical culture' or simply added quotation marks on the word 'pagan'. Such editorial liberties moved me to use the initials of the author on the present book's cover instead of his full name (otherwise I would have fallen in the same Christian faults discussed in the first chapters of this translation!). The term 'Hellenes' requires further clarification. Those familiar with the masthead of my website *The West's Darkest Hour*, the long article 'Rome vs. Judea; Judea vs. Rome', know that the takeover of the Classical World by the

Christians was mainly a takeover by non-Aryans.<sup>1</sup> It cannot be more significant, as Deschner mentions, that before the introduction of the pejorative term ‘pagan’ the non-Christians of the Roman Empire were called *hélènes* and *éthne* by the treatise writers of the 4th century. The expression *hellénon éthne* can be translated into modern English as ‘the Greek races’, that is, the white peoples. Therefore, instead of the author’s textual ‘pagan’ I chose the pre-derogatory term in the vernacular of the 4th century, ‘Hellenes’, right before the status of the white peoples was demoted unless they started to worship a Semitic god.

White nationalists are pretty knowledgeable of the Jewish problem. But very few are aware that Jewish subversion is an epiphenomenon of a religion of Semitic origin: Christianity. Who among the white nationalists—or what more recently is known as the Alt-Right—knows the real history of Christianity? Who is aware that Christian fanatics literally destroyed the Greco-Roman world? As Catherine Nixey put it in *The Darkening Age: The Christian Destruction of the Classical World*, a book published in the United States this very year:

In a spasm of destruction never seen before—and one that appalled many non-Christians watching it—during the fourth and fifth centuries, the Christian Church demolished, vandalized and melted down a simply staggering quantity of art. Classical statues were knocked from their plinths, defaced, defiled and torn limb from limb. Temples were razed to their foundations and burned to the ground. A temple widely considered to be the most magnificent in the entire empire was levelled.

Many of the Parthenon sculptures were attacked, faces were mutilated, hands and limbs were hacked off and gods were decapitated. Some of the finest statues on the whole building were almost certainly smashed off then ground into rubble that was then used to build churches.

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to Evropa Soberana’s ‘Rome vs. Judea’ in my compilation *The Fair Race’s Darkest Hour* (printed by Lulu, Inc., 2018), see other essays by Soberana in the same book, especially those about the ethnic group of ancient Greeks and Romans.

Books—which were often stored in temples—suffered terribly. The remains of the greatest library in the ancient world, a library that had once held perhaps 700,000 volumes, were destroyed in this way by Christians. It was over a millennium before any other library would even come close to its holdings.

Virtually all westerners ignore the ISIS-like history of early Christianity right after Constantine handed over the Roman Empire to his bishops. They know only the martyr myths (see the chapter ‘The Persecution of the Christians’), the pious legends and the New Testament lies they told us as children: subjects also discussed in this book.



Karlheinz Deschner (1924-2014) was a liberal German. He spent the first sixty years of his life investigating the history of the Catholic Church before starting the ten volumes of his *Kriminalgeschichte* series, which only ended at ninety. It is a more encyclopaedic treatise about the real history of Christianity than Nixey’s book for the general public. I started reading Deschner eighteen years ago when I was also a liberal. I would not wake on the Jewish question until six years ago. But Deschner, like all Germans of our times who aspire to see their books in the bookstores, never woke up. He even criticised the most notorious ‘anti-Semites’ in early Church history. This said, the difference between Deschner and liberal theologians like Hans Küng (*The Church*) and conservative historians like Paul Johnson (*A History of Christianity*) is that Küng and Johnson concealed a great deal of Christianity’s criminal history. It is

remarkable how a scholar who abandoned the religion of our parents, like Deschner, was capable to see it in a way that Küng, Johnson, and the contemporary Christian authors would never dream of.

After awakening to the realities of the Judeo-Christian problem I realised that Deschner's information, despite his mistaken point of view, can be rescued. It only has to be processed through the filter of someone who is awakened. Had Germany won the war, Deschner, who appears in the previous page in Nazi uniform, could have written his history from the National Socialist point of view.

*César Tort Jr.*  
*September of 2018*

# CHRISTIANITY'S CRIMINAL HISTORY

## INTRODUCTION

To begin, I will say what the reader should not expect. As in all of my criticisms of Christianity, here there will be missing many of the things that also belong to history, but not to the criminal history of Christianity that the title indicates. That, which also belongs to history, may be found in millions of works that fill up the libraries, archives, bookstores, academies and the lofts of the parish houses. He who wants to read those materials can do so long as he has life, patience and faith.

This religion has thousands, hundreds of thousands of apologists and defenders; it has books in which many boast of 'the luminous march of the Church through the ages' (Andersen), and that the Church is 'one' and 'the living body of Christ' and 'holy' because 'its essence is holiness; sanctification its end' (the Benedictine von Rudloff). It is understood, on all this, that the unfortunate side details (religious wars, persecutions, fighting, famine) happened in the designs of God; often inscrutable, always just, full of wisdom and salvific power. Given the overwhelming predominance of the silly, misleading and deceitful glorifying, was it not necessary to show the opposite view insofar as it is much better proven? At any event, those who always want to see the bright side are shielded from the ugly side, which is often the truest.

The distinction between the Church and Christianity is relatively recent. As is known, there is a glaring contradiction between the lives of the Christians and the beliefs they profess: a contradiction which has always been downplayed by pointing to the eternal opposition between the ideal and the real. Nobody

dares to condemn Christianity because it has not fulfilled all its ideals, or has fulfilled half of them, or not at all. But such an interpretation 'equals to carry too far the notion of the human and even the all too human, so that when century after century and millennium after millennium someone does the opposite of what he preaches then becomes, per share and effect of all his history, epitome and absolute culmination of worldwide and historical criminality' as I said during a conference in 1969 which earned me a visit to the courthouse. Because that is really the question. Not that they have failed the ideals in part or by degrees, no: it is that those ideals have been literally trampled, without which the perpetrators lay down, for a moment, their claims of self-proclaimed champions of such ideals, nor stop their self-declaration of being the highest moral authorities in the world.

Western Christianity, in any case, 'was essentially created by the Catholic Church'; 'the Church, organised from the papal hierocracy down to the smallest detail, was the main institution of the medieval order' (Toynbee).

Part of our question are the wars started or commanded by the Church, the extermination of entire nations: the Vandals, the Goths, and the relentless slaughter of East Slav peoples—all of them, according to the chronicles of the Carolingian and the Ottos, criminals and confused peoples in the darkness of idolatry that was necessary to convert by any means not excepting betrayal, deceit and fury. Of the fourteen legislated capital crimes by Charlemagne after subduing the Saxons by blood and fire, ten offenses relate exclusively to the religious camp. Under the old Polish criminal law, those guilty of eating meat during the Easter fast were punished by pulling their teeth out.

We will also discuss ecclesiastical punishments for violations of civil rights. The ecclesiastical courts were increasingly hated. There are issues that we will discuss extensively: sacrificial practices (the stolen goods from the Church to be repaid fourfold, and according to Germanic law up to twenty times); ecclesiastical and monastic prisons, especially of the *ergastulum* type (the coffins were also called *ergastula*), where they were thrown both 'sinners' as the rebels and madmen, and usually installed in basements without windows or doors, but

well equipped with shackles of all kinds, racks, handcuffs and chains. We will document the exile punishment and the application of it to the whole family in case of the murder of a cardinal; which extended to the male descendants up to the third generation. Also very fashionable were torture and corporal punishment, especially in the East where it became furiously popular to mutilate limbs, pull out eyes and cut off noses and ears.

It is quite plausible that not all authorities indulged themselves in such excesses, and certainly not everyone would be as insane as the Abbot Transamund, who tore off the eyes of the monks of the Tremiti Convent, or cut their tongues (and, despite this, enjoyed the protection of Pope Gregory VII, who also enjoyed great notoriety). Without a doubt the churches, particularly the Roman Church, have created significant cultural values, especially buildings, which (representing power) usually obeyed no altruistic reasons; and also in the domain of painting, responding to ideological reasons (the eternal illustrations of biblical scenes and legends of saints). But aside from such opted love of culture that contrasts sharply with paleo-Christianity—that with eschatological indifference contemplated the ‘things of this world’, as they believed in the imminent end of all (a fundamental error in which Jesus himself fell)—, it should be noted that most of the cultural contributions of the Church were made possible by ruthlessly exploiting of the masses, the enslaved and the impoverished, century after century. And against this promotion of culture we find further cultural repression, cultural intoxication and destruction of cultural property.

The magnificent temples of worship of antiquity were destroyed almost everywhere: irreplaceable value buildings burned or demolished, especially in Rome itself, where the ruins of the temples served as quarries. In the 10th century they still engaged in breaking down statues, architraves, burning paintings, and the most beautiful sarcophagi served as bathtubs or feeders for pigs. But the most tremendous destruction, barely imaginable, was caused in the field of education. Gregory I, the Great, the only doctor Pope of the Church in addition to Leo I, according to

tradition burned a large library that existed on the Palatine. The flourishing book trade of antiquity disappeared; the activity of the monasteries was purely receptive. Three hundred years after the death of Alcuin and Rabanus Maurus, the disciples were still studying with manuals written by them. Even St. Thomas Aquinas, the Church's official philosopher, writes that 'the desire for knowledge is a sin when it does not serve the knowledge of God'.

In universities, the Aristotelian hypertrophy aborted any possibility of independent research. Philosophy and literature were subject to the dictation of theology. History, as a science, was completely unknown. The experimentation and inductive research were condemned; experimental sciences were drowned by the Bible and dogma; scientists were thrown into the dungeons, or sent to the stake. In 1163, Pope Alexander III (remember in passing that at that time there were four anti-popes) forbade all clerics studying physics. In 1380 a decision of the French parliament forbade the study of chemistry, referring to a decree of Pope John XXII. And while in the Arab world (obedient to Muhammad's slogan 'The ink of scholars is more sacred than the blood of martyrs') the sciences flourished, especially medicine, in the Catholic world the bases of scientific knowledge remained unchanged for more than a millennium, well into the 16th century. The sick were supposed to seek comfort in prayer instead of medical attention. The Church forbade the dissection of corpses, and sometimes even rejected the use of natural medicines for considering it unlawful intervention with the divine. In the Middle Ages, not even the abbeys had doctors, not even the largest. In 1564 the Inquisition condemned to death the physician Andreas Vesalius, the founder of modern anatomy, for opening a corpse and for saying that man is not short of a rib that was created for Eve.

Consistent with the guidance of teaching we find another institution, ecclesiastical censure, very often (at least since the time of St. Paul in Ephesus) dedicated to the burning of the books of the Hellenes, Jews or Saracens, and the destruction (or prohibition) of rival Christian literature, from the books of the Arians and Nestorians until those of Luther. But let us not forget



that Protestants sometimes also introduced censorship, even for funeral sermons and also for non-theological works, provided they touched on ecclesiastical matters or religious customs.

The above is a selection of the main issues that I refer to in my history of the crimes. And yet, it is only a tiny segment of the overall history.

History!

Like any other historian, I only contemplate a history of the countless possible histories, a particular one, worse or better defined, and even this biased aspect cannot be considered the whole 'complex of action': an absurd idea, given the volume of existing data; theoretically conceivable, but practically impossible and not even desirable. The author who intends to write a criminal history of Christianity is constrained to mention only the negative side of that religion which weight has exceeded ultimately that of the perceived or real positives. Those who prefer to read about the other aspects ought to read other books: *The Joyful Faith*, *The Gospel as Inspiration*, *Is it True that Catholics are No Better Than the Others?*, *Why I Love My Church?*, *The Mystical Body of Christ*, *Beauties of the Catholic Church*, *Under the Cloak of the Catholic Church*, *God Exists (I Have Known Him)*, *The Way of Joy Toward God*, *The Good Death of a Catholic*, *With the Rosary to Heaven*, *SOS from the Purgatory*, *The Heroism of Christian Marriage*. The pro-Christian literature! More numerous than the sands of the sea: against 10,000 titles just one of the style of this *Criminal History of Christianity*, not to mention the millions of issues if we add the countless religious periodicals.

It turns out that truly there are among Christians men of good will, as in all religions and in every game, which should not be taken as data in favour of those religions and parties, because if that were allowed how many crooks would testify against such belief? And good Christians are the most dangerous, because they tend to get confused with Christianity, or to borrow the words of Lichtenberg, 'unquestionably there are many righteous Christians, only that it is no less true that *in corpore* their works as such have never have helped much'.

What is the basis of my work? As with most historical studies, it is based on sources, tradition, contemporary historiography; especially texts. But when I expose my subjectivity bluntly, my ‘point of view’ and my ‘positioning’, I think I show my respect to the reader better than the mendacious scribes who want to link their belief in miracles and prophecies; in transubstantiations and resurrections from the dead; in heavens, hells and other wonders with the pretence of objectivity, accuracy and scientific rigor. Could it not be that, with my confessed bias, I am less biased than them? Could it be that my experience, my training, did not authorise me to form a more independent opinion about Christianity? At the end of the day I left Christianity, despite having been formed in a deeply religious household, as soon as it ceased to seem real.

Let us face it: we are all ‘partial’, and he who pretends denying it is lying. It is not our bias what matters, but confessing it, without the pretence of impossible ‘objectivities’. We are all biased. This is particularly true in the case of historians who are more bent on denying it, because they are the ones who lie the most—and then they throw to one another the dogs of Christianity. How ridiculous, when we read that Catholics accused the Protestants of ‘bias’; or the Protestants accusing the Catholics, when thousands of theologians of various confessions throw over each other so common reproach; for example, when the Jesuit Bacht wants to see in the Protestant Friedrich Loofs ‘an excess of zeal against monastic status as such’, for which ‘his views are too one-sided’. And how would not the Jesuit Bacht opine with partiality when he refers to a reformed; he, who belongs to an order whose members are required to believe that white is black and black white, if mandated by the Church? Like Bacht, unquestioning obedience is imposed upon all Catholic theologians in the habit through baptism, dogma, the chair, the ecclesiastical license to print and many other obligations and restrictions. And so they live year after year, enjoying a steady income in exchange for advocating a particular view, a particular doctrine, a particular interpretation of history strongly impregnated with theology—not so much to deceive themselves but to continue cultivating the deception of others. For example,

by accusing of bias the opponents of their confession and pretending to believe that Catholics are safe from such defect; as if it didn't exist, for two thousand years, another sneakier bias than the Catholic.

Historiography is no more than the projection into the past of the interests of the present. The conservative historian who compared his job to that of the priest (for heaven's sake!) and issued for himself reports of maximum impartiality and objectivity, claimed that he 'erased his subjectivity'! This unshakable faith for objectivism, called 'ocularism' by Count Paul York Wartenburg and lampooned as a proposal for a 'eunuch objectivity' by Droysen ('only the unconscious can be objective') is illusory. Because there is no objective truth in historiography, nor history as it happened. 'There can only be interpretations of history, and none is definitive' (Popper). All historiography is written against the background of our personal vision of the world. It is true that many scholars lack such a worldview and thus are often considered, if not markedly progressive, at least notably impartial, honest and truthful. Those are the champions of 'pure science', the representatives of an alleged stance of neutrality or indifference as to value statements. They reject any reference to a particular point of view, any subjectivity, as if they were unscientific sins or blasphemies against the postulate of the true objectivity they advocate; against that *sine ira et studio* [without anger and affection] which they have as sacrosanct and that, as Heinrich von Treitschke ironizes, 'nobody respects, let alone the speaker himself'.

The fiction of the concealment of the ideological premises of the historical presentation can serve to conceal many things: an ethical relativism and a cowardly escapism fleeing categorical decisions on principles—which still is a decision: irresponsibility on behalf of scientific responsibility! For a science that does not make assessments, whether they like it or not, is an ally of the *status quo*: it supports the dominating and hurts the dominated. Its objectivity is only apparent, and in practice it means nothing but love to one's own tranquillity, security and attachment to a career. Our life does not run value-free, but full of it; and scientists, insofar as they start from life, if they claim they are

value-free incur in hypocrisy. I have had in my hands works of historians who were dedicated to the wife who had died in the bombings, or perhaps dedicated to two or three fallen sons on the fronts; and yet, sometimes, these people want to keep their writing as ‘pure science’, as if nothing has happened.

That’s *their* problem. I think otherwise. Even if it existed, and I say it does not, a totally apolitical historical research, oblivious to all kinds of judgments would serve no purpose but to undermine ethics and make way for inhumanity. Moreover, it would not be true ‘research’ because it would not be dedicated to revealing the relationships between the factors; as much as it would be mere preparatory work, the mere accumulation of materials, as noted by Friedrich Meinecke.

Now, to what extent does the reality of history coincides with my statement?

I prefer life on principle to science, especially when it starts to become apparent as a threat to life in the broadest sense. It is often objected that ‘science’ is not to blame, but only some of the scientists (the problem is that there are many, at worst almost all): quite a similar argument that says that we should not take Christianity to task for the sins of Christendom. All this does not mean that I am a supporter of pure subjectivism, which does not exist. A limited capacity of conviction would have my thesis of the criminal character of Christianity if, to prove it, I confined myself to only some examples. But, being a multi-volume work no one will say that these are isolated or inconclusive examples. Because I write ‘out of hostility’ the story of those I describe has made me their enemy. *And I would not consider myself refuted by having omitted what was also true, but only when someone proves that something I have written is false.*

There are even those who believe that it is very wrong to criticise, especially when they are criticised, although the latter they would never confess. Quite the contrary, they always claim they have nothing against criticism: that all critiques are welcome but, yes, provided they are positive critiques, constructive; not negative or deleterious. With swollen anger they set those high standards, precisely against the ‘mania of judging’ (Aitmeyer), and display their scandal with ‘scientific’ trims when an author

dares to ‘value’; when ‘the historian, given his inability as a moralist, assumes the role of prosecutor’. Is it not grotesque that the sworn representatives of an ancient mystery cult, those who believe in trinities, angels, demons, hell, virgin births, celestial assumptions of a real body, conversion of water into wine and wine into blood, want to impress us with their ‘science’? And could it not be the height of grotesqueness that such people continue to receive the honours of the scientific world itself?

We are invited to take care on behalf of the ‘zeitgeist’ so that we understand and forgive. But precisely Goethe satirised it in his *Faust*: ‘What you call the spirit of the times, is ultimately the spirit of the masters’. If we are not worth the testimony of the poet for being notoriously anti-Christian and not less anticlerical, let us go to St. Augustine: ‘Times are hard, miserable times, people say. Let us live well, and times are good. Because we ourselves are the times that run; so that how we are, so will our time be’. In his other sermons Augustine reiterated this idea that there is no reason to accuse the times or the ‘zeitgeist’, but the very humans that (as the historians of today) blame everything on the times: those miserable, difficult and murky times. Because ‘time does not offend anyone. The offended are men, and other men are the ones who inflict the offenses. Oh, pain! It offends men who are robbed, oppressed, and by whom? Not by lions, snakes or scorpions but by men. And so men live the offenses on pain, but will not themselves do the same, if they can, and as much as they have censored it?’ Augustine knew what he meant, as he himself fits perfectly in the last sentence of the quotation (see the last chapter of this volume).

As this, ultimately, cannot be denied by the apologists, they object that sometimes—i.e., every time it was necessary, whatever the historical period under consideration—the agents ‘were not true Christians’.

But look, when there were true Christians? Were they the bloodthirsty Merovingians, the Franks so fond of plundering expeditions, the despotic women of the Lateran period? Was Christian the great offensive of the Crusades? Was it the burning of witches and heretics? The Thirty Years War? The First World War, the Second or the war of Vietnam? If all those were not

Christians, then who was it? In any case, the spirit of the times was not ever the same at each particular time. While Christians were spreading their gospels, beliefs and dogmas; while they were transmitting their infection to always larger territories, there were not a few men, such as the first great debunkers of Christianity in the 2nd century, Celsus and Porphyry in the third, who knew how to raise a comprehensive and overwhelming criticism, which we still feel justified. As Christianity was guilty of appalling outrages, Buddhism, which never had a Western-style organised church in India or central authority dedicated to homogenise the true faith, gave signs of a much higher tolerance. Non-priest believers contracted no exclusive commitment, nor were forced to recant other religions, or converting anyone by force. Their peaceful virtues can be seen, for example, in the history of Tibet, whose inhabitants, a warrior nation among the most feared of Asia, became one of the most peaceful under the influence of Buddhism. In every century there was a moral conscience, even among Christians, and not less among 'heretics'. Why should we not apply to Christianity its own scale of biblical standards, or even occasionally patristic standards? Do not they themselves say that 'by their fruits ye shall know them'?

For me, history (and what I said is but a drop in an ocean of injustices) cannot be cultivated *sine ira et studio* [without anger and affection]. It would be contrary to my sense of fairness, my compassion for men. He who has not as enemy many enemies, is the enemy of humanity. And is not anyone who pretends to contemplate history without anger or affection similar to the one who witness a large fire and sees how victims suffocate and does nothing to save them, limiting himself to take note of everything? The historian who clings to the criteria of 'pure' science is necessarily insincere. He wants either to deceive others or deceive himself. I would add: he is a criminal, because there can be no worse crime than indifference.

And if the sentence of St. John Chrysostom retains its validity today, 'he who praises the sin is guiltier than he who commits it', would then praising the crimes of history and glorifying the criminals be even worse than these crimes? Would not human affairs be better, and also the affairs of history, if

historians (and schools) illuminated and educated the public based on ethical criteria, condemning the crimes of the sovereigns rather than the praising? But most historians prefer to spread the faeces of the past as if they had to serve as fertiliser for the future havens.

An example, to cite only one, is the daily glorification of Charlemagne (or Charles the Great). The worst looting expeditions and genocides of history come to be called expansions, consolidation, extension of the catchment areas, changes in the correlation of forces, restructuring, incorporation domains, Christianization, pacification of neighbouring tribes. When Charlemagne oppresses, exploits, and liquidates what is around him that is 'centralism', 'pacification of a great empire'. When there are others who rob and kill those are 'raids and invasions of enemies across the borders' (Saracens, Normans, Slavs, Avars) according to Kampf. When Charlemagne, with bags full of holy relics, sets fire and kills on a large scale, thus becoming the noble smith of the great Frank empire, the Catholic Fleckenstein speaks of 'political integration'. Some specialists use even safer, more peaceful and hypocritical expressions as Camill Wampach, professor of our University of Bonn: 'The country invited immigration, and the neighbouring region of Franconia gave the inhabitants newly liberated lands'.

The law of the jungle in a word: the one which has been dominating the history of mankind to date, always where a State intended it (or another refused to submit), and not only in the Christian world, naturally. Because, of course, we will not say here that Christianity is the sole culprit of all these miseries. Perhaps someday, once Christianity disappears, the world remains equally miserable. We do not know that. What we do know is that, with it, everything will necessarily remain the same. That's why I have tried to highlight its culpability in all cases I have found it essential, trying to cover as many cases as possible but, yes: without exaggeration, without taking things out of proportion, as those could judge who either do not have an idea about the history of Christianity, or have lived completely deceived about it.

*Karlheinz Deschner*





# **Christianity's Criminal History**

The Early Period:  
from Old Testament origins  
to the death of Saint Augustine

Many people, perhaps most, are afraid to admit the grossest lie in the field to them 'more sacred'. It seems inconceivable to them that those who give ocular and auricular testimony of the Lord can be no more than vulgar falsifiers. But it has never been lied and cheated as often and as unscrupulously as in the field of religion. And it is entirely in Christianity where taking us for a ride is the order of the day, where an almost infinite jungle of deceit is created since Antiquity and in the Middle Ages in particular.

But fabrication continues in the 20th century, massively and officially. Thus, J.A. Farrer asks himself almost desperate: 'If we reflect on everything that has emerged from this systematic deception, all the struggles between popes and sovereigns, the dismissal of kings and emperors, excommunications, inquisitions, indulgences, acquittals, persecutions, and cremations, etc., and it is considered that all this sad history was the immediate result of a series of falsifications, of which the *Donatio Constantini* (Donation of Constantine) and the *False Decretals* were not the first, although the most important, one feels obliged to ask if it has been more the lie than the truth that has permanently influenced the history of humanity'.

Of course, the most successful lie, the one that causes the most havoc among most souls, is certainly not a Christian invention, but it bears a close relationship with the religious pseudepigraphy. (A *pseudepigrapha*, anglicized pseudepigraph, is a text under a false name: a text that does not come from who, according to the title, content or transmission, has written it.) Both methods, fabrication, and pseudepigraphy, were not Christian innovations. Literary falsification had already existed for a long time among the Greeks and the Romans; it has appeared in India, among the Egyptian priests, with the Persian kings and, also, in Judaism.

## FORGERIES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The boldest, daring and of greatest consequence of this type was to attribute to the spirit and dictation of God all the writings of the Old and New Testaments.

—Arnold Meyer

### *The bibles and some peculiarities of the Christian Bible*

The ‘book of books’ of Christians is the Bible. The German translation *Bibel* appears for the first time in the moral poem ‘The runner’ of Bamberg’s school teacher and verse builder, Hugo von Trimberg (born around 1230, he was also the author of a collection of homiletic fables and about two hundred hagiographic almanacs). The term coined by Hugo derives from the Latin *biblia*, which in turn has its origin in the neutral plural *ta biblia* (the books).

The Bible is a ‘sacred’ scripture and texts. Books and sacred writings form, in the history of religions, part of the trade, of the business on which it depends closely and not only the monetary but also the political and, ultimately, anyone sheltered by the human heart. The bibles of mankind are therefore numerous: the three *Vedas* of ancient India, for example, the five *Ching* canonical books of the Chinese imperial religion, the *Siddhanta* of Jainism, the *Typitakam* of Theravada Buddhism, the *Dharma* of Mahayana Buddhism in India, the *Tripitakam* of Tibetan Buddhism, the *Tao-tea-ching* of Taoist monks, the *Avesta* of Persian Mazdaism, the *Qur’an* in Islam, the *Granth* of the Sikhs, the *Gima* of Mandeism. There were many sacred writings in the Hellenistic mysteries, which were already referred to in the pre-Christian era simply with the word ‘writing’, or with the formula ‘is written’ or ‘as written’. In Egypt the sacred

writings go back to the most ancient times and a sacred text has already been cited in the 3rd millennium BC, *Words of God (mdw ntr)*.

Of course, we know that the Bible is not just a book among other books but the book of books. It is not, therefore, a book that can be equated with Plato's, the *Qur'an* or the old books of Indian wisdom. No, the Bible 'is above them; it is unique and unrepeatable' (Alois Stiefvater). In its exclusivity the monotheistic religions insist with emphasis—and *that* is precisely why they are, so to speak, exclusively intolerant! 'Just as the world cannot exist without wind, neither it can without Israel' says the Talmud. In the *Qur'an* it is said: 'You have chosen us from among all the peoples; you have raised us above all the nations'. And Luther also boasts: 'We Christians are bigger and more than all creatures'. In short, the Bible is something special. But Christianity did not have its own 'Sacred Scripture' in its first 150 years, and for that reason it assimilated the sacred book of the Jews, the Old Testament, which according to the Catholic faith precedes 'the Sun of Christ' as the 'morning star' (Nielen).

The name Old Testament (Greek *diathéke*, covenant) comes from Paul, who in 2 Cor. 3:14 talks about the Old Covenant. The synagogue, which naturally recognises no New Testament, does not speak of the Old but of *Tanakh*, an artificial word formed by the initials of Torah, *nevi'im* and *ketuvim*: law, prophets, and remaining writings. The Old Testament books, as they were transmitted by the Hebrews are, to date, the Holy Scriptures of the Jews. The Palestinian Jews did not establish the final received texts until the Council of Jamnia, between the 90s and 100 AD: twenty-four texts, the same number as the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. (The Jewish bibles of the 15th century were the first that proceeded to a different division and gave rise to thirty-nine canonical books.) In any case, God, to whom these Sacred Scriptures refer and from which they come, needed more than a millennium to compile and finalise the Bible.

The unique thing about the Christian Bible is that each of the different confessions also has different bibles, which do not coincide as a whole; and what some consider sacred, to others seem suspicious. The Catholic Church distinguishes between

Protocanonical writings, that is, never discussed, and Deuterocanonical writings whose ‘inspiration’ was for some time ‘put into doubt’ or was considered uncertain. This Church has a much wider Old Testament than that of the Jews, from which it proceeds. Besides the Hebrew canon, it collected within its Holy Scriptures other titles. In total, according to the Council of Trent in its session of April 8, 1546, confirmed by Vatican I in 1879: forty-eight books, that is, in addition to the so-called Deuterocanonics, Tobias, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch and letters of Jeremiah, Maccabees I and II, Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Holy Children (*Vulgate*, Daniel 3:24–90), Story of Susanna, Bel and the Dragon (*Vulgate* Daniel 14; *Septuagint* epilogue), Esther 10, 4-16, 24.

On the contrary, Protestantism, which gives authority exclusively to the books that appear in the Hebrew canon, does not consider as canonical or manifested by God, the Deuterocanonics added by Catholicism. It grants them little value and calls them ‘apocryphal’, that is, that what Catholics call books never had canonical validity. Luther, in defining what belonged to the canon, relies on the ‘inner spiritual testimony’ or the ‘internal sense’. He eliminates, for example, the second book of the Maccabees because Luther was disturbed by the passage on the purgatory, whose existence he denied. About that same book and also Esther, Luther opined that ‘they have too many Jewish and pagan remnants’. Nevertheless, he considered the Deuterocanonical writings to be ‘useful and good to read’ although were not inspired by God, in any case by the ‘internal sense’ of the reformer.

In the Synod of Jerusalem, the Greek Church included, in 1672, among the divine word four other works that did not appear in the Council of Jamnia: Wisdom, Ecclesiastical, Tobias, and Judith.

Much broader than the Old Testament was the canon of Hellenistic Judaism, the Septuagint (abbreviated: *LXX*, the translation of the seventy men). It was elaborated for the Jews of the Diaspora in Alexandria by various translators in the 3rd century BC: the book for the Greek-speaking Jews, the oldest and most important transcription of the Old Testament into Greek, the

language of the Hellenistic period, and the official Bible of Diaspora Judaism. It became part of the synagogue. The Septuagint, however, collected more writings than the Hebrew canon and more also from those later considered valid by Catholics. The quotations of the Old Testament that appear in the New (with 270 to 350 allusions) come mostly from the Septuagint and it constituted for the Fathers of the Church, who used it with insistence, the Old Testament or Holy Writ.

*The five books of Moses, which Moses did not write*

The Old Testament is a very random and very fragmentary selection of what was left of ancient transmission. The Bible itself quotes the titles of nineteen works that have been lost, among them *The Book of the Wars of the Lord*, *The Story of the Prophet Iddo*, and *The Book of the Good*. However, the researchers believe that there were many other biblical texts that have not left us even the title. Have they also been holy, inspired and divine?

In any case the remains are enough, more than enough; especially of the so-called five books of Moses, presumably the oldest and most venerable, that is, the Torah, the Pentateuch (Greek *pentáteuchos*, the book 'containing five' because it consists of five rolls): a qualifier applied around 200 AD by Gnostic writers and Christians. Until the 16th century, it was unanimously believed that these texts were the oldest of the Old Testament and that they would therefore be counted among the first in a chronologically ordered Bible. That is something that today cannot even be considered. The Genesis, the first book, is without good reason at the head of this collection. And although still in the 19th century renowned biblical scholars believed they could reconstruct an 'archetype' of the Bible, an authentic original text, that opinion has been abandoned. Or even worse, 'it is very likely that such an original text never existed' (Comfeld / Botterweck).

The Old Testament was transmitted mostly anonymously, but the Pentateuch is attributed to Moses, and the Christian churches have proclaimed his authorship until the 20th century. However, while the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the first

Israelite fathers, must have lived between the 21st and the 15th centuries BC, or between 2000 and 1700 if they actually lived, Moses—‘a marshal, but at the bottom of his being with a rich emotional life’ (Cardinal Faulhaber)—must have lived in the 14th or 12th century BC, if he also lived.

In any case, nowhere outside the Bible the existence of these venerable figures, and others more recent, is ‘documented’. There is no proof of their existence. Nowhere have they left historical traces; neither in stone, bronze, rolls of papyrus, nor in tablets or cylinders of clay, even though they are more recent than, for example, many of the Egyptian sovereigns historically documented in the form of famous tombs, hieroglyphs or cuneiform texts: authentic certificates of life. Therefore, writes Ernest Garden, ‘either one is tempted to deny the existence of the great figures of the Bible or, in case of wishing to admit their historicity even with the lack of demonstrative material, it is supposed that their life and time they passed in the way described by the Bible... had circulated for many generations’.

For Judaism, Moses is the most important figure in the Old Testament. It is mentioned 750 times as a legislator; the New Testament does it 80 times. It is claimed that all the Laws were being handled as if Moses had received them at Sinai. In this way he acquired for Israel a ‘transcendental importance’ (Brockington). Each time he was increasingly glorified. He was considered the inspired author of the Pentateuch. It was attributed to him, the murderer (of an Egyptian because he had beaten a Hebrew), even a pre-existence. He became the forerunner of the Messiah, and the Messiah was considered a second Moses. Many legends about him emerged in the 1st century BC; a novel about Moses, and also a multitude of artistic representations. But the tomb of Moses is not known. In fact, the prophets of the Old Testament quote him five times.

Ezekiel never mentions him! And yet, these prophets evoke the time of Moses, but not him. In their ethical-religious proclamations they never rely on Moses. Neither the papyrus *Salt 124* ‘has a testimony of any Moses’ (Cornelius). Nor does archaeology give any sign of Moses. The Syrian-Palestinian inscriptions barely quote him in as little measure as cuneiform

texts or hieroglyphic and hieratic texts. Herodotus (5th century BC) knows nothing of Moses. In short, there is no non-Israelite proof of Moses, our only source of his existence is—as in the case of Jesus—the Bible.

There were already some who in Antiquity and in the Middle Ages doubted the unity and authorship of Moses in the Pentateuch. It was hardly believed that Moses himself could have reported on his own death, ‘an extraordinary question’ Shelley mocks. However, a deep criticism only came from the pen of Christian ‘heretics’, as the primitive Church saw no contradiction in the Old or New Testaments.

In the modern age Andreas Karlstadt was one of the first scholars in which some doubts were aroused when reading the Bible (1520). More doubts were raised by the Dutchman Andreas Masius, a Catholic jurist (1574). But if this pair, and shortly afterwards the Jesuits B. Pereira and J. Bonfrère, only declared some citations as post-Mosaic and continued to consider Moses the author of the whole text, the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes declared that some paragraphs of the Pentateuch were Mosaics but post-Mosaic most of the text (*Leviathan*, 1651). In 1655 the reformed French writer I. de Peyrère went even further; and in 1670, in his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* Spinoza denied Mosaic authorship for the whole thing.

In the 20th century some scholars of religion, among them Eduard Meyer (‘it is not the mission of historical research to invent novels’), and Danek of the school of the Prague, have questioned the historical existence of Moses himself; but their adversaries have rejected such hypothesis. It is curious that even the most illustrious minds, the greatest sceptics and scientists under whose daring intervention the sources of material are shelled so that there is little space left for the figure of Moses, present us again, as if by sleight of hand, Moses in all his greatness as the dominant figure of all Israelite history. Although everything around this character is too colourful or too obscure, the hero himself cannot be fictional they say. As much as the criticism of sources has reduced the historical value of these books, almost annulled it, ‘there remains a broad field of the



possible' (Jaspers). It is not surprising, then, that among some conservatives Moses is of greater importance than the Bible!

In short: after Auschwitz, Christian theology returns to win over the Jews. 'Today again a more positive idea of ancient Israel and its religion is possible'. However, Moses is still 'a problem' for the researchers, 'there is no light to illuminate his figure' and the corresponding traditions remain 'outside the capacity of historical control' according to the *Bibl. Hist. Handwörterbuch* (*Hist. Bibl. handwritten book*). Although these scholars strongly refuse to 'reduce Moses to a nebulous figure, known only to legends', they admit at the same time that 'Moses himself is faded'. They claim that 'the uniqueness of the Sinai event cannot be denied' but they add immediately 'although the historical demonstration is difficult'. They find in the 'stories about Moses a considerable historical background' and some paragraphs later claim that this 'cannot be proved by facts', that 'it cannot be witnessed by historical facts' (Cornfeld / Botterweck).

This is the method followed by those who do not deny the evidence itself, but neither do they want everything to collapse with a crash (No way!). For M.A. Beek, for example, there is no doubt that the patriarchs are 'historical figures'. Although he only sees them 'on a semi-dark background' he considers them 'human beings of great importance'. He himself admits: 'To date we have not been able to find documentary evidence of the figure of Joshua in Egyptian literature'. He adds that, apart from the Bible, he does not know 'a single document containing a clear and historically reliable reference to Moses'. And he continues that, if we do without the Bible, 'no source is known about the expulsion from Egypt'. 'The abundant literature of the Egyptian historiographers silences, with a worrying obstinacy, events that should have deeply impressed the Egyptians, if the account of the Exodus is based on facts'. Beek is also surprised that the Old Testament rejects

curiously enough, any data that would make possible a chronological fixation of the departure from Egypt. We do not see the name of the Pharaoh that Joshua knew, nor the one who oppressed Israel. This is all the more amazing because the Bible retains many other Egyptian names of

people, places and offices. Even more suspicious than the lack of chronological reference points in the Old Testament is the fact that none of the known Egyptian texts cites a catastrophe that affected a Pharaoh and his army while chasing the fleeing Semites. Since historical documents have an abundance of material on the epoch in question, at least some allusion would be expected. The silence of the Egyptian documents cannot be dismissed with the observation that court historiographers do not usually talk about defeats, since the events described in the Bible are too decisive for Egyptian historians to have overlooked them.

‘It is really curious’, this scholar continues, ‘that no tomb of Moses is known’. Thus, ‘the only proof of the historical truth of Moses’ is for him ‘the mention of a great-grandson in a later epoch’.

‘And Moses was 120 years old when he died’ says the Bible, although his eyes ‘had not weakened and his strength had not diminished’ and God himself buried him and ‘no one knows to this day where his tomb is’. A pretty weird end. According to Goethe, Moses committed suicide and according to Freud his own people killed him. The disputes were not rare, as with Aaron and Miriam. But as always, the closing of the fifth and last book of the Pentateuch significantly recalls ‘the acts of horror that Moses committed before the eyes of all Israel’. Every character always enters the history thanks to his terrifying feats, and this is so regardless if he lived or not really. But whatever the case may be with Moses, the investigation is divided.

The only thing that is clear today, as Spinoza saw it, is that the five books of Moses, which directly attribute to him the infallible word of God, do not come from him. This is the coincidental conclusion of the researchers. Naturally, there are still enough people like Alois Stiefvater and enough little treatises such as *Schlag-Wörter-Buch für katholische Christen* types (*Schlag Words Book for Catholic Christians*) who continue to deceive the mass of believers by making them believe in the five books of Moses, that ‘although not all have been directly written by him, they are due to him’. How many, and which ones Moses wrote directly, Stiefvater and his accomplices do not dare to say. What remains true is that the Laws that were considered

as written by the hand of Moses or even attributed to the ‘finger of God’ are also forgeries. (On the other hand, although God himself writes the Law on two tablets of stone, Moses had so little respect for them that in his anger against the golden calf he destroyed them.)

It is also clear that the writing of these five books was preceded by an oral transmission of many centuries, with constant changes. And then there were the editors, the authors, the biblical compilers who participated throughout many generations in the writing of the books by ‘Moses’, which is reflected in the different styles. It looks like a collection of different materials, such as the entire fourth book. Thus arose a very diffuse collection lacking any systematic organisation, overflowing with motifs of widely spread legends, etiological and folkloristic myths, contradictions and duplications (which by themselves alone exclude the writing by a single author). Added to all this is a multitude of heterogeneous opinions that have been developed in a gradual way, even in the most important issues. Thus the idea of the resurrection arises very little by little in the Old Testament, and in the books Ecclesiasticus, Ecclesiastes and Proverbs any testimony of beliefs in the resurrection is missing. In addition, the scribes and compilers have constantly modified, corrected and forged the texts, which acquired new secondary extensions every time. And these processes went on for entire epochs.

The Decalogue or Ten Commandments, which Luther considered the supreme incarnation of the Old Testament, proceeds in its earliest form perhaps from the beginning of the age of kings. Many parts of the Pentateuch that must have been written by the man who lived, if he lived, in the 14th or 13th centuries BC—no less than sixty chapters of the second, third and fourth books—were not produced or collected by Jewish priests until the 5th century BC. Thus, the final redaction of the books awarded to Moses—I quote the Jesuit Norbert Lohfink—‘took place some seven hundred years later’. And the composition of all the books of the Old Testament—I quote the Catholic Otto Stegmüller—was prolonged ‘for a period of approximately 1,200 years’.

Research on the Old Testament has reached enormous dimensions and we cannot contemplate it here—saving the reader from the labyrinthic methodology: the ancient documentary hypotheses of the 18th century, the assumptions of fragments, complements, crystallisation and the important differentiation of a first Elohist, a second Elohist, a Jahwist or Yahwist (H. Hupfeld, 1835), the formal historical method (H. Gunkel, 1901), the various theories about the sources, the theory of two, three, four sources, the written sources of the ‘Jahwist’ (J), of the ‘Elohist’ (E), of the ‘writing of the priests’ (P), of ‘Deuteronomy’ (D), of the combined writing... We cannot get lost in all the threads of the story, the traditions, the plethora of additions, complements, inclusions, annexes, proliferations, textual modifications, the problem of the variants, the parallel versions, the duplications—in short, the enormous ‘secondary’ enlargement, and the history and the scrutiny of the texts. We cannot discuss either the reasons for the extension of the Pentateuch into a Hexateuch, Heptateuch or even Octateuch, or its limitation to a Tetrateuch however interesting these hypotheses may be within the context of our subject.

A simple overview of the critical comments, such as Martin Noth’s explanations of the Mosaic books, will show the reader its editors, redactors, compilers; of additions, extensions, later contributions, combinations of different states of incorporation, modifications, etcetera: an old piece, an older one, a fairly recent one that is often called secondary, perhaps secondary, probably secondary, surely secondary. The word ‘secondary’ appears here in all conceivable associations. It seems to be a keyword, and even I would like to affirm without having made an exact analysis of its frequency: there is no other word that appears with greater assiduity in all these investigations of Noth and his work.

Recently Hans-Joachim Kraus has written *Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Erforschung des Alten Testaments* (*The story of the historical-critical exploration of the Old Testament*). Innovative and advanced for the 19th century was W.M.L. de Wette (died 1849) who perceived the many stories and traditions

of these books and considered ‘David’, ‘Moses’ and ‘Solomon’ not as authors but as nominal symbols, such as collective names.

Due to the immense work of scholars in the course of the 19th century and the eventual debunking of biblical sacred history, Pope Leo XIII attempted to obstruct the freedom of research through his 1893 encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* (*The most provident God*). A counteroffensive was opened also under his successor, Pius X, in a decree. From *De Mosaica authentia Pentateuchi* (*Authentic Mosaic Pentateuch*), June 27, 1906, Moses was considered an inspired author. Although on January 16, 1948 the secretary of the papal biblical commission declared in an official reply to Cardinal Suhard that the decisions of the commission ‘do not contradict with a later scientific analysis of these questions’, in Roman Catholicism ‘true’ *always* means: in the sense of *Roman Catholicism*. The final exhortation should be understood along the same lines: ‘That is why we invite Catholic scholars to study these problems from an impartial point of view, in the light of sound criticism’. But ‘from an impartial point of view’ means: from a partial point of view for the interests *of the papacy*. And with ‘sound criticism’ it is not meant to say anything other than a critique *in favour of Rome*.

The historical-scientific analysis of the writings of the Old Testament certainly did not provide a sure verdict about when the texts arose, although in some parts, as for example in the prophetic literature, the certainly about their antiquity is greater than, say, the religious lyrics. When it comes to the age of the Laws, there is less certainty. But historical-religious research with respect to the Tetrateuch (Moses 1-4) and the Deuteronomic historical work (Moses 5, Joshua, Judges, books of Samuel and the Kings) speaks of ‘epic works’, ‘mythological tales’, ‘legends’ and ‘myths’ (Nielsen). The confusion that reigns in scholarship is manifest in the abundance of the repetitions: a double account of Creation, a double genealogy of Adam, a universal double flood (in one version the flood subsides after 150 days; according to other it lasts one year and ten days; and according to another, after raining forty days there are added another three weeks), in which Noah—then 600-years-old according to Genesis 7:6—took in the Ark seven pairs of pure animals and one of impure ones

and, according to Genesis 6, 19 and 7, 16, there were a pair of pure and impure animals. But we would be very busy telling all the contradictions, inaccuracies, deviations with respect to a book inspired by God, in which there are a total of 250,000 textual variants.

In addition, the five books of Moses know a double Decalogue; a repeating legislation on slaves, the Passah, a loan, a double on the Sabbath, twice the entry of Noah into the Ark, twice the expulsion of Hagar by Abraham, twice the miracle of the manna and the quails, the election of Moses; three times the sins against the body and life, five times the catalogue of festivals, at least five legislations about the tenths, etc.

### *David and Solomon*

Something analogous to the Pentateuch can be said about what the Holy Scriptures endorse regarding David and his son Solomon. Both had to live, reign and write around the year 1,000, but their alleged works are usually several more recent centuries.

The Jewish and Christian tradition of the Bible attributes to King David the entire Psalter and the book of Psalms, in total 150 psalms. In all likelihood, not a single one comes from him. However, according to the Bible, David has written them.

Under the slogan of ‘David as a singer’, the treatise *Sachkunde zur Biblischen Geschichte (Expertise on Biblical History)* describes in a relatively neat way the ‘harp player’ of that time. This implies real authorship in equal measure to M.A. Beek’s claim that tradition, which introduces David into history as a poet of psalms, has ‘surely a historical background’. But Beek said a few lines before that ‘outside of the Bible we do not know any text that sheds light on the reign of David or that merely cites his name’. This reminds us of Beek’s historical Moses! Of David, he says: ‘David played a stringed instrument that could be called more a lyre than a harp. The illustration of such a lyre appears in a container manufactured around 1000 BC’. If around the year 1000 there was a lyre that could be represented, why could not David have it, play it and also—among his raids, slaughters and actions related to the cutting of foreskins and roasting in ovens—have written the biblical book?

The conclusion seems almost obligatory, especially since David really appears in the Old Testament as a poet and musician, specifically in the two books of his contemporary, the prophet and judge Samuel, an eyewitness and at the same time an auricular witness.

Anyway, as the research points out, the books 'of Samuel' appeared from a hundred to four hundred years after the death of Samuel, just as many of the 'David' psalms did not appear until the time of the second temple (after 516 BC): more than half a millennium after the death of David! The collected psalms had been constantly edited and elaborated. The selection of compilations may have lasted until the 2nd century BC. It is not excluded that incorporations were still made in the 1st century after Christ. Curiously, a radically different interpretation of the celestial chords of the royal court around the year 1000 BC is considered three thousand years later, and not without a solid base in the biblical text, by German poets such as Rilke and company who said that it is nothing but sexualisation. One of these poets unabashedly states that it was David's 'butt', rather than his music, that 'relieved' King Saul.

Just as the 'bloodthirsty dog' David became the 'kind psalmist', his son (begotten by Bathsheba, whose husband David had killed), the 'wise king Solomon' has become famous as the creator of religious songs. But it is totally unprovable if Solomon ever developed literary activity. What is certain, on the contrary, is that by means of a *coup d'état*, allied with his mother, the priest Zadok, the prophet Nathan and the general Benaiah, Solomon seized the throne; that he executed part of his adversaries, banished others; that he demanded from his subjects very high taxes and forced provision of work, which led to a growing dissatisfaction and a general decline while, according to the Bible, it was to satisfy 700 principal wives and 300 concubines. This scenario does not allow us to deduce precisely a great literary production. But the Sacred Scriptures award him three books: *Book of Proverbs*, the *Ecclesiastes* and the *Song of Songs*. 'I believe that for the most part, this is a premeditated deception and that it was also in its day' (S.B. Frost).

The author of Solomon's *Ecclesiastes* (in Hebrew *Kohelet*) expressly claims that the book is 'the words of the preacher, the son of David, the king of Jerusalem'. It used to be generally considered that Solomon was its author and for that reason alone the work became part of the Bible. But the real author is not known, nor his name, nor when he lived. The truth is only that, as H. Grotius first put it clearly in 1644, Solomon did not write it, to whom the first verse intends to attribute. By language, spirit, and reticence it seems more like a work that emerged in the 3rd century BC, from the Stoic and epicurean philosophy: the influences of the environment and the Hellenistic period. There is no other book of the Bible that is so non-conformist, so fatalistic; that invokes so insistently the vanity of the earth: 'vanity of vanities and all is vanity'; wealth, wisdom, everything 'under the Sun', a book that never ceases to lament the brevity of life and disappointments, in which God himself stands hazy on his throne in the distance. It is therefore not strange that several times it has been modified, or that its canonicity was not definitively established until 96 AD.

An impressive Jewish forgery, in any case, is the *Song of Songs*, which knows no resurrection and in whose last verses I always feel (uselessly) alluded: 'And above all, my son, beware then, in the make books there is no end and much study exhaust the body'. Ergo: 'Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, because with the dead towards whom you go there is neither thought nor knowledge'. Let no one say that there is nothing worth reading in the Bible!

After the writing of the books of the kings, 'Solomon' also wrote three thousand sentences and one thousand five—according to other sources five thousand—songs: of the trees, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows from the wall. He also wrote of the animals of the earth, of the birds, of the worms and of the fish. The book of *Proverbs* was attributed to Solomon for a long time. Chapters 1 to 9 are now included in the Bible. But in reality, the structure of the book betrays various authors who wrote it in different times: chapters 1 to 9, for example, were written after the 5th century. In total, the appearance of sentences extends throughout the entire Old



Testament era, and the final compilation may have been produced around 200 BC.

Also, the *Wisdom of Solomon*, admired by the early Christians, was considered his work, especially because the author is expressly named Solomon and chosen as king of the people of God. It was considered a prophetic and inspired book. Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Tertullian and St. Hippolytus attest to its canonicity, as does St. Cyprian who cites him repeatedly as Holy Scripture. Most old exegetes believe it. And although a man like Jerome was more critical he continued to admit it as official reading. At any event, the book continues in the Bible of the Papal Church. But in reality the *Wisdom of Solomon* is almost a millennium more recent than Solomon, the original language of the forgery was classical Greek; the author—many critics admit two—lived in Egypt, probably in the Hellenistic city of the wise, Alexandria, and wrote his work, which puts on the lips of the (presumably) wisest of the Israelites, in the 1st century before or after Christ. The influence of this forgery has been enormous.

### *Joshua and Isaiah*

In addition to the Old Testament books unjustly attributed to Moses, David, and Solomon, other earlier parts—Judges, Kings, Chronicles, etc.—are also the anonymous products of a much later period. And they were compiled in a definitive way long after the events they relate.

Many Bible scholars deny that the book of Joshua, which the Talmud, many Church Fathers, and most recent authors ascribe to Joshua himself, has any historical credibility. But even for those who view it with benevolence, as a historical source, ‘it must be used only with prudence’ (Hentschke). It is composed of a multitude of legends, myths and local transmissions that were completed at different times and arbitrarily linked and related to Joshua. Calvin already deduced that Joshua could not have written the book. The definitive edition comes from the 6th century BC, from the time of the exile in Babylon (which according to a Bible passage lasted 67 years, another passage says 73 years, and still another 49 years).

Much of the prophetic literature appears, consciously or by chance, under a pseudonym, although other parts come from the prophets under whose names the authors have visions and auditions, subjectively true, that could be ‘authentic’ disregarding the subsequent literary elaboration. This cannot be proven or discussed with certainty. But many things, even the prophetic books that rightly carry the name of their author, are difficult to delimit and have been altered in later periods; that is, passages have been added and the text modified, taken out of context; much of it has been forged without generally knowing when and who did it.

This is especially true for the book of Isaiah, one of the longest and best-known books of the Bible. Luther already pointed out that Isaiah ben Amos did not write it. The so-called great apocalypse of Isaiah (chapters 24-27), a collection of prophecies, songs, hymns, was added relatively later (its last form was received in the 3rd century BC or the beginning of 2nd BC), evidently trying to imitate the Isaiah style. And precisely chapter 53, the best known and most influential, does not proceed, like the rest of the 40-55 chapters, from Isaiah who had been considered the author (until Eichhorn, 1783). It is more likely that an unknown author wrote it two centuries later, in the time of the Babylonian exile: a man who probably appeared at the celebrations of the lamentations of the exiled Jews, between 546 and 538. This author is generally called Deutero-Isaiah (second Isaiah) and, in many ways, is more important than Isaiah himself.

But precisely this added text—in which the questioners of the historicity of Jesus (together with the figure of the ‘Just’ of the equally forged *Wisdom of Solomon*) already see embryonically the figure of Jesus—was a broad and univocal example for the passion of Jesus. Chapter 53 tells how the servant of God, the *Ebed-Yahweh*, was despised and martyred and that for the forgiveness of sins he poured out his blood. The New Testament contains more than 150 allusions of it, and many early Christian writers quote the entire chapter 53 or in extracts. Luther also interpreted this ‘prophecy’ as referring to Jesus as it had really been fulfilled. Naturally, the papal biblical commission also confirmed this traditional point of view on June 29, 1908.

However, almost all Catholic exegetes admit the Babylonian dating. And the last chapters of Isaiah (56 to 66) are from a much more recent period. Since the times of Duhm in 1892 Scholars speak in a somewhat confused way about a *Tritojesaja* (Third Isaiah, chapters 56-66), which the research greets with an ironic *vivat sequens* (long live the pursuing). It is probable that these chapters come from several authors after the exile. In any case, Is. 56, 2-8, and 66, 16-24 are not from a Third Isaiah either; they were added later! Up to 180 BC, the book of Isaiah did not appear 'essentially in its current form' according to the *Biblich-Historisches Handwörterbuch* (*Biblical-Historical Hand Dictionary*).

### *Ezekiel and Daniel*

The same as the work of Isaiah, the book of Ezekiel, written almost all in the first person, unites prophecies of misfortunes and beatitudes, reprimands and threats with tempting hymns and omens. For a long time it was considered the undisputed writing of the most symbolic Jewish prophet, the man who in the year 597 BC left Jerusalem with King Jehoiakim to exile in Babylon. Until the beginning of the 20th century Ezekiel's book was almost universally seen as a work of the prophet himself and of true authenticity. From the investigations of literary criticism by R. Kraetzschmars (1900) and even more by J. Herrmann (1908, 1924), the opinion prevailed that this presumably unitary book emerged in stages and that a subsequent hand reworked it. Some researchers even attribute to Ezekiel only the poetic parts, assigning to the compiler the texts in prose.

In this scenario the compiler would have designed at least the bulk of the work: no less than five-sixths. According to W.A. Irwin, of the total of 1,273 verses only 251 come from Ezekiel and according to G. Hölscher, 170. Although other authors accept the authenticity of the text, they admit several redactions and editors, who interspersed forged passages among those considered authentic and also manipulated the rest at their discretion. It is very significant that the Jewish tradition does not attribute the work to Ezekiel, but to the 'men of the great synagogue'.

The book of Daniel was clearly and completely fabricated: something that, surprisingly, already affirms Porphyry, the great adversary of the Christians, in the 3rd century. Although his fifteen books *Against the Christians* were targeted for destruction by the first Christian emperor, something has been preserved in excerpts and quotations, among them the following phrases of Jerome in the prologue of his comments on Daniel:

Porphyry has destined, against the prophet Daniel, the book XII of his work. He does not want to admit that the book was written by Daniel, whose name appears on the title, but by someone who lived in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes (that is, some 400 years later) in Judea, and maintains that Daniel did not predict anything of the future but simply told something of the past.

The book of Daniel would come from the prophet Daniel, who apparently lived in the 6th century BC in the royal court of Babylon and whose authorship has also been questioned in modern times by Thomas Hobbes. Critical research has long since stopped considering it an authentic book. But in 1931 the Catholic *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche (Encyclopaedia for Theology and the Church)* says: ‘The nucleus of the different episodes can reach very ancient times, even that of Daniel... Most of the Catholic exegetes essentially consider Daniel as the author of the book’. The first-person form of the visions of chapters 7-12 and, of course, their place in the Holy Scriptures made the Christian tradition believe for a long time in the authorship of the book by Daniel: about whose life and acts they know only for his own work. It is probable that it was the last to reach the canon of the Old Testament and, from the traditionalist point of view, must be defended accordingly as authentic.

However, it comes from the *Revelations* of the time of the Syrian king Antiochus IV Epiphanes, probably from the year of the revolt of the Maccabees, 164 BC. Ergo the author lived long after the events described in the historical part of his book written in the third person (chapters 1-6). In this way, the ‘prophet Daniel’, who four centuries before is the servant of King Nebuchadnezzar in ‘Babel’ and who understands ‘stories and dreams of all kinds’, can easily prophesy. This is what Porphyry

had discovered. Consequently, in the historical epoch of the book in which Daniel presumably lived and described, the ‘prophet’ mixes everything. Thus, Balthazar, the organiser of the famous banquet, although was a regent he was not ‘king’. Balthazar was not the son of Nebuchadnezzar but of Nabonidus, the last Babylonian king (555-539). Artaxerxes did not come before Xerxes but after him and ‘Darius the Mede’ is not a historical figure at all. In short, ‘Daniel’ knew more about visions than about the time he lived.

Special forgeries of the Septuagint are also some well-known pieces, which Catholics call Deuterocanonicals and Protestants apocryphal: the story of the *Three Boys in the Fiery Furnace*, the story of *Susanna* and *Bel and the Dragon*. All these special forgeries appear today in the Catholic Bible. The book of Daniel is the oldest apocalypse and, among all the apocalyptic literature the only one that reaches the Old Testament and consequently becomes canonical. In the Catholic Bible there is another forgery, Baruch’s ‘Deuterocanonical’ book, with which we turn our attention to a special literary genre, made up of obvious falsifications, which later goes on in an organic and integral way into Christianity.

### *The Jewish apocalyptic*

The apocalyptic genre (from the Greek *apokalypsis*) plays an important role, a kind of transitional role from the Old to the New Testament, especially in the epoch that goes from the 3rd century BC to the 2nd century AD.

In the apocalyptic genre one can see a kind of Jewish eschatology, so to speak, an unofficial eschatology which extends to the cosmic: beyond the official national eschatology of the rabbis. Unlike the latter, the apocalyptic literature was universalistic. It encompassed Earth, heaven and hell. However, their followers carried rather an existence of secret meetings, similar to what happens today in many sects and their relations with the churches.

As stated above, the research sees in these writings a ‘link’ between the Old and New Testaments and assigns the apocalyptic genre an intermediate period between the two. This is

all the more logical because the apocalyptic authors—Jews whose exact origin (Essenes, Pharisees) is difficult to establish—are falsifiers: people who did not write under their own names but with pseudonyms; who attribute their revelations of a primordial time, from the last hour, from the beyond, its mysterious manifestations of the future, of dreams, states of ecstasy (sometimes to heaven as, among others, Enoch and also the Christian apocalyptic writer John of Patmos) to ‘visions’ while the prophets are generally based on ‘auditions’. Often, the enlightened ones who have to illuminate us are accompanied by a revealing intermediary, an *angelus interpres* (exegete angel) who explains to the author what happened and, of course, to us.

Typical of this sort of prayer-ridden fabrication is their dualistic concept of the world, deeply influenced by Iranian ideas, and their theory of the two eons, one temporary and the other eternal. Typical is that the seen events are about the end of times and the ‘pains of the Messiah’ are described as imminent. All this goes from horrible human and cosmic catastrophes (women stop giving birth, the earth becomes sterile, stars collide) to the Last Judgment and a messianic splendour painted full of fantasy. Of course, the sufferings of the wicked are included, which provided a strong consolation to the righteous, together with imperious warnings of penance and conversion.

The expectation of the proximity of the end is just as typical as the hope in the hereafter and there is determinism, since ‘God has everything planned’ (4 Ezra 6): the beginning and the end. ‘This world has been created by the Highest for many, but the future only for a few’ (4 Ezra 8, 1): a novel manifestation of his *Summa Misericordiae* (sum of His mercy). It is also characteristic of these intermediate testamentaries that they introduce many mysterious figures (animals, clouds, mountains) and a complicated numerical symbolism: a religious coryphaeus of earlier times in the form of Adam, Enoch, Abraham, Ezra, Moses, Isaiah, Elijah, Daniel. Theirs is an occult writing known only by a group of the elect, but now God wants to spread it. The imposters often represent their visions of history as prophecies, in future form. Naturally, writing generally many centuries after the

events and having placed their omens on their lips, they predict everything with great precision.

Their readers are amazed. So predisposed, they believe everything that they prophesied for a distant future about the horrors of the end and its magnificence. This *pia fraus* (loving fraud), this ‘representation of history as a *vaticinium ex eventu*’ (Vielhauer), has distant Old Testament parallelisms in the Pentateuch itself (Gen 49, Num 23 et seq., Deut 33) but its authentic model is, perhaps, in the oracle sibylline literature of the Hellenistic-Roman era.

In addition to the biblical falsification of the book of Daniel that we have already seen, there is also the book of Baruch, presumably written by Baruch ben Neriah: the scribe, companion and friend of the prophet Jeremiah. ‘Baruch’, who appears as a messenger of God and experiences a multitude of visions, claims to have written his own book in Babylon, after the destruction of Jerusalem. He also says he knows and means much more than the prophets; and still in 1931 the *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* did not ‘see any reason to doubt the authorship of Baruch’.

Today there are very few who claim the authenticity for this work of the Old Testament (as well as the book of ‘Daniel’) insofar as it was written half a millennium after Baruch: the first part perhaps in the 1st century BC (the farthest moment), the second part probably in the middle of the 1st century AD. The forgeries almost always emerged as an internal necessity of the apocalyptic genre. They were widely used by the Christians and became typical of them. The easy way was simply to believe in the ‘works’ of ancient authorities—those of the twelve patriarchs; Daniel and Enoch, whose authenticity already Origen doubted, as well as the ‘works’ of Abraham, Moses, Isaiah and Ezra; in total a list of twenty names—, as their ‘prophecies’ and ‘revelations’ were being ‘fulfilled’.

### *Portrayals of the biblical female world*

Among the singularities of the Old Testament lies the more or less strong opposition, that it always found a place in Christianity, about this section of the ‘Word of the Lord’: the

most extensive. It not only was full of enormous warlike cruelty, but also consecrated deceit, hypocrisy and treacherous murder. For example, the heroic deeds of Phinehas, who sneaks into the tent and pierces a couple of lovers with a sword; the bloodthirsty actions of Judith, who enters the camp of the Assyrians and treacherously murders General Holofernes; the fatal blow of Jael, who amicably attracts Sisera, the fugitive captain of the king of Hazor, who is exhausted, and murders him from the back.

These and other similar acts have more than two thousand years and not only do they appear in the Bible: they have been justified and exalted through the ages. Even in the 20th century the cardinal archbishop of Munich and expert in the Old Testament, Michael Faulhaber, military prior of the emperor, follower of Hitler and *post festum* of resistance, pompously praises 'the act of Judith': the action of a woman that, according to Faulhaber, has 'lied' first, then 'woven a network of conscious lies' and finally 'killed a sleeper in a treacherous way'. However, 'as a warrior of the Most High, Judith felt she was the depository of a divine mission. The struggle for the walls of Betulia was ultimately a war of religion'. If something 'sacred' is at stake, the Church hierarchs always consider any diabolical action valid provided that it is in the interest of the Church; that is, of their own. Consequently Christian Friedrich Hebbel, a vehement detractor of Christianity ('the root of all discord', 'the smallpox virus of mankind') with his *Judith* (1840), which made him famous, is disqualified for presenting only one 'sad caricature of the Biblical Judith'.

Another poet deserved a much more favourable opinion from the same ecclesiastical prince. After Faulhaber reminded us the feat of Jael with the words of the Bible ('Her right hand to the workman's hammer, And she smote Sisera; She crushed his head, She crashed through and transfixed his temples'), he says nonetheless that this is 'unworthy, perfidious, hypocritical and murder'. But the Bible glorifies this woman as a 'national heroine' through the hymn of the prophetess and Judge Deborah. And so the entire Catholic world celebrates her for two millennia and also her most famous author, Calderón de la Barca.



In one of his sacramental plays he provided Judge Deborah with the allegorical figures of prudence and justice; and Jael the other two cardinal virtues, temperance and strength. Jael, who destroys the head of the enemies of the revelation, becomes a projection of the Immaculate, who, according to the words of the Latin Bible, crushes the head of the old serpent. Hence Calderón's words while destroying the head of Sisera: 'Die, tyrant, to arms'. Under the pen of Calderón the whole story of Deborah becomes a little Marian doctrine.

Nice expression that of the 'little Marian doctrine'!

At least for those who know—because the great mass of Catholics are ignorant—, Mary is not only the Immaculate, the caste, the queen, the triumphant dominator of the impulses: but the successor in the head of Janus of her ancient predecessor, Ishtar, the virgin Athena, the virgin Artemis, also the great Christian goddess of blood and war; not only 'our beloved Lady of the Linden', 'of the green forest' but also of murder and massacres, from the beginning of the Middle Ages until the First World War.

Faulhaber published on August 1, 1916, 'the day of commemoration of the mother of the Maccabees', in 'war edition', the 3rd revised edition of his *Charakterbilder der biblischen Frauenwelt (Portrayals of the Biblical Female World)* to 'bring to the German feminine world in bloody and seriousness the days and the examples still alive of biblical wisdom: the sources that still emanate spiritual strength and altars still flaming above-earthly consolations'. Women could 'learn much war wisdom' from these biblical women; 'much sense of courage', 'much spirit of sacrifice'. 'Even in the days of the war the Word of the Lord is still a light in our path'. And in the 6th edition, Cardinal Faulhaber presents his *Portrayals* in 1935, the Hitler era, and praises Deborah as 'a heroine of ardent patriotism', 'which makes in her people a rebirth of freedom and a new national life'.

### *Opposition to the Old Testament*

In the 2nd century, when Christians were still not exercising war as they would do permanently a little later, among

them there were perhaps more opponents of the Old Testament than defenders. And none of them saw more clearly their incompatibility with the biblical Jesus doctrine than the 'heretic' Marcion, at least none of them derived consequences of such premise and with such success. In his *Antitheses* (lost) Marcion showed the contradictions and elaborated the first canon of Christian writings, based on the Gospel of Luke, the one with the least Hebrew influence, and the letters of Paul. Seventeen, eighteen centuries later, theologians weave wreaths of praise towards the outlaw, from Harnack to Nigg; the theologian Overbeck, friend of Nietzsche ('the God of Christianity is the God of the Old Testament'!) states that he has correctly understood this Testament; for the Catholic theologian Buonaiuti 'it is the most dense and insightful enemy' of 'ecclesiastical orthodoxy'.

It is precisely the 'heretical' circles that have fought the Old Testament. Many Christian Gnostics condemned it globally. Two hundred years later, the Visigothic apostle Ulfilas, an Arian of pacifist sentiments, was shocked by the contrast between Yahweh and Jesus. In his version of the Bible to the Gothic he made around the year 370, which is the oldest German literary monument, the bishop did not translate any of the Old Testament history books.

After the century of the Enlightenment, criticism intensified again. The perceptive Lessing, who also considers the historical foundations of Christianity precarious, exclaims at the sight of the old book of the Jews: 'On this clay, on this clay, great God! If you had mixed a couple of gold nuggets...!' With greater passion Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) scourges the 'unprecedented blasphemy': to claim that the Almighty God had expressly ordered Moses to attack a defenceless people and because of their different beliefs to completely annihilate all living beings; to assassinate in cold blood all the children and the unarmed men, to slaughter the prisoners, to tear apart the married women and to respect only the young girls for carnal commerce and rape. Mark Twain (1835-1910) could not help but comment caustically that the Old Testament is essentially concerned with blood and sensuality; the New with salvation and redemption

through fire. Theologians have also rejected the Old Testament as the foundation of life and doctrine, among them some as renowned as Schleiermacher and Harnack, who strongly opposed that this book

be preserved as a canonical document in Protestantism. We must make a clean slate and honour the truth in worship and teaching. This is the act of courage demanded today—almost too late—to Protestantism.

But what good would it do? The masses would continue to be deceived by the New Testament and its dogmas. But the Catholic *Wörterbuch christlicher Ethik* (*Dictionary of Christian ethics*) still finds, in 1975, ‘the roots of the ethos of the Old Testament’ in ‘the decisive personal attention’ of Yahweh ‘to the world and to man’.

### *Forgeries in diaspora Judaism*

Not a few of the literary falsifications of the Jews are due to the effort to reincorporate a considerable part of the Greek philosophy to the Pentateuch, which supposedly the Greeks had stolen. To ‘demonstrate’ this daring accusation the Jews forged, for example, the Orphic hymns. They also inserted texts from the Old Testament into the works of Hesiod and other pagan epics. They even made Homer a strict defender of the Sabbath precepts! Abraham appeared as the father of astronomy. Moses was ahead of Plato, and according to Clement of Alexandria even Miltiades won at the Battle of Marathon (490 BC) thanks Christian strategy: the military art of Moses.

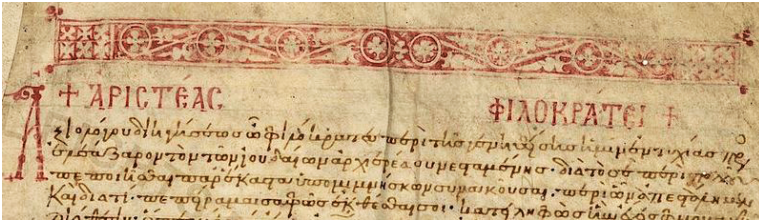
What did the Jews have to offer culturally to the Greeks? What great philosophers and literati? The Old Testament? The Greco-Roman world also respected sacred texts but did not value the biblical books. For them the essentials came from other religions. The omens of the prophets on the other hand were *ex eventu*; stories of crazy miracles, and ridiculous ceremonies. They hated Jewish nationalism. It is true that the schools of rabbis forced the strict accuracy in the transmission. ‘Imputing to any doctor of the law a word he had not said would be simply a crime’ (Torm). But in Jewish literature of the same period the phenomenon of pseudonyms proliferated considerably. The

increasingly expansive Jewish mission in Jesus' times used a huge propaganda literature, with unscrupulous falsifications, appearing a 'flowering of Jewish pseudo-iconography' (Syme).

Precisely during the diaspora the Jews must have felt inferior to the Greeks. Thus they tried to correct this complex: they wanted to value their Judaism, their faith, the superiority of their religion by demonstrating their superiority through seemingly ancient writings, making the Jewish prophets much older than the Greco-Roman philosophers, as if the former were their teachers. Through Aristotle, the Jews suggested sympathies towards monotheism, as well as through Sophocles and Euripides who attacked polytheism. They also attributed to Hecataeus of Abdera, a contemporary of Alexander the Great, a glorifying work on Abraham, and assigned to the poet Phocylides of Miletus, who lived in the 6th century, a didactic poem written in 230 hexameters: a popular moral philosophy that unites what is Greek to the Jewish, the resurrection of the flesh, and the continuation and deification of souls. This was an effort toward a self-esteem in a superior environment, or subtle propaganda campaigns for Hellenistic Judaism under a pagan mask. And precisely among the Christians these forgeries were much more successful than the pseudo-epigraphic apocalypses and the books of the patriarchs.

Within this context we can mention the famous Judeo-Alexandrian *Letter of Aristeas*, written for recognition and exaltation of the Pentateuch of the Septuagint, Jewish law and of Judaism: apparently written in the 3rd century BC, although probably authored in the 2nd if not in the 1st century. The official of the court Aristeas informs in it of the translation of the Jewish Pentateuch into Greek by seventy-two Jewish men (six of each tribe) on the island of Faros, for the royal library of Alexandria. The number of translators, rounded from seventy-two to seventy, gave name to the oldest and most important translation of the Old Testament into Greek, the Septuagint Version. According to the pious legend, each of the translators worked separately but each one produced, word for word, the same text: something that all the Fathers of the Church believed, including Augustine. Within this context we may include the fact that the Jews used the Greek

sibyls in their writings: exactly the practice that later the Christians would do with the predictions and prophecies under non-Jewish names and, naturally, cases of *vaticinium ex eventu* (postdiction): pure lies.



Beginning of Aristeas' letter (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana).

The *Sibylline Oracles*, fourteen books of prophecies of divine inspiration, whose origin extends from the 2nd century BC (third book) to the 3rd and 4th centuries AD (book fourteen), also referred to those divine prophetesses of Antiquity. Books one to five were forged by Hellenistic Jews, although it is true that the Christians forged them even more with their numerous introductions. The books six, seven and eight are pure Christian forgeries of the second half of the 2nd century, including a very celebrated cantata to Christ and the crucifixion. In books eleven to fourteen it is really difficult to know who forged more, Jews or Christians. Many spiritual guides have considered these lies as authoritative texts, such as the freedman Hermas, Justin, Athenagoras, Theophilus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius, but especially Lactantius (who quotes the eighth book thirty times). But even a Church Father like Augustine fostered respect for such false documents.

The influence of this Judeo-Christian Sibylline texts was great and its influence reaches from Antiquity to Dante, Calderón, Giotto and Michelangelo. From the 2nd century Christian apologists adopted these Jewish texts to fight a Rome hostile to Christians.

## FORGERIES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

‘The forgeries begin in the New Testament era and have never ceased’.

—Carl Schneider, theologian

### *The error of Jesus*

At the beginning of Christianity there are hardly any falsifications, assuming that Jesus of Nazareth is historical and not the myth of a god transported to the human being. However, historicity is merely presupposed here; it is, independently from some exceptions, the *communis opinio* (common opinion) of the 20th century. But there is no actual demonstration. The hundreds of apologetic nonsense in circulation, such as that of the Jesuit F.X. Brors (with imprimatur), are as gratuitous as brazen: ‘But where is a personality somewhere whose existence is historically guaranteed as the person of Christ? We can also mythologize a Cicero, a Caesar, even Frederick the Great and a Napoleon: but more guaranteed that the existence of Christ is not theirs’.

On the contrary, what is clear is that there is no demonstrative testimony of the historical existence of Jesus in the so-called profane literature. All extra-Christian sources do not say anything about Jesus: Suetonius and Pliny the Younger on the Roman side, Philo and, especially important, Justus of Tiberias on the Jewish side. Or they do not take into consideration, as the *Testimonia* (Testimony) of Tacitus and Josephus, what even many Catholic theologians admit today. Even a well-known Catholic like Romano Guardini knew why he wrote: ‘The New Testament is the only source that reports on Jesus’.

Insofar as the judgment that the New Testament and its reliability deserves, critical historical theology has shown, in a way as broad as precise, a largely negative result. According to critical Christian theologians the biblical books ‘are not interested in history’ (M. Dibelius), ‘they are only a collection of anecdotes’

(M. Werner), ‘should be used only with extreme caution’ (M. Goguel), are full of ‘religious legends’ (Von Soden), ‘stories of devotions and entertainment’ (C. Schneider), full of propaganda, apologetics, polemics and tendentious ideas. In short: here everything is faith, history is nothing.

This is also true, precisely, about the sources that speak almost exclusively of the life and doctrine of the Nazarene, the Gospels. All the stories of Jesus’ life are, as its best scholar, Albert Schweitzer, wrote, ‘hypothetical constructions’. And consequently, even modern Christian theology, all of which is critical and does not cling to dogmatism, puts into question the historical credibility of the Gospels; arriving unanimously at the conclusion that, regarding the life of Jesus, we can find practically nothing. The Gospels do not reflect, in any way, history but faith: the common theology, the common fantasy of the end of the 1st century.

Therefore, in the beginnings of Christianity there is neither history nor literary forgeries but, as the central issue, its true motive: error. And this error goes back to none other than Jesus.

We know that the Jesus of the Bible, especially the Synoptic, is fully within the Jewish tradition. He is much more Jewish than Christian. As to the others, the members of the primitive community were called ‘Hebrews’. Only the most recent research calls them ‘Judeo-Christian’ but their lives were hardly different from that of the other Jews. They also considered the sacred Jewish Scriptures as mandatory and remained members of the synagogue for many generations.

Jesus propagated a mission only among Jews. He was strongly influenced by the Jewish apocalyptic—and this influenced Christianity mightily. Not in vain does Bultmann has one of his studies with the title *Ist die Apokalyptik die Mutter der christlichen Theologie?* (Is the apocalyptic the mother of Christian theology?). In any case, the New Testament is full of apocalyptic ideas and such influence has its mark in all its steps. ‘There can be no doubt that it was an apocalyptic Judaism in which the Christian faith acquired its first and basic form’ (Cornfeld / Botterweck).

But the germ of this faith is Jesus' error about the imminent end of the world. Those beliefs were frequent. It did not always mean that the world would end, but perhaps it was the beginning of a new period. Similar ideas were known in Iran, in Babylon, Assyria and Egypt. The Jews took them from paganism and incorporated them into the Old Testament as the idea of the Messiah. Jesus was one of the many prophets—like those of the Jewish apocalypses, the Essenes, John the Baptist—who announced that his generation was the last one. He preached that the present time was over and that some of his disciples 'would not taste death until they see the kingdom of God coming'; that they would not end the mission in Israel 'until the Son of Man arrives'; that the final judgment of God would take place 'in this same generation' which would not cease 'until all this has happened'.

Although all this was in the Bible for a millennium and a half, Hermann Samuel Reimarus, the Hamburg Orientalist who died in 1768 (whose extensive work, which occupied more than 1,400 pages, was later published in parts by Lessing), was the first to recognise the error of Jesus. But until the beginning of the 20th century the theologian Johannes Weiss did not show the discovery of Reimarus. It was developed by the theologian Albert Schweitzer.

The recognition of Jesus' fundamental error is considered the Copernican moment of modern theology and is generally defended by the critical representatives of history and the anti-dogmatics. According to the theologian Heiler 'a serious researcher discusses the firm conviction of Jesus in the early arrival of the final judgment and the end'.

But not only Jesus was wrong but also *all Christendom* since, as the archbishop of Freiburg, Conrad Gröber (a member promoter of the SS) admits, 'it was contemplated the return of the Lord as imminent, as is testified not only in different passages in the epistles of St. Paul, St. Peter, James and in the Book of Revelation, but also by the literature of the Apostolic Fathers and the Proto-Christian life'.

*Marana tha* ('Come, Lord') was the prayer of the first Christians. But as time passed without the Lord coming; when



doubts, resignation, ridicule and discord were increasing, the radicalism of Jesus' affirmations had to be gradually softened. And after decades and centuries, when the Lord finally did not arrive, the Church converted what in Jesus was a distant hope, his idea of the Kingdom of God, into the idea of 'the Church'. The oldest Christian belief was thus replaced by the Kingdom of Heaven: a gigantic falsification; within Christian dogma, the most serious one.

The belief in the proximity of the end decisively conditioned the later appearance of the Proto-Christian writings in the second half of the 1st century and in the course of the 2nd century. Jesus and his disciples—who expected no hereafter and no state of transcendental bliss but the immediate intervention of God from heaven and a total change of all things on Earth—naturally had no interest in taking notes, writings, or books; for whose writing they were not even trained.



*Note of the Ed.:* The face that Richard Neave constructed from skulls of typical first-century Palestinian Jews suggests that Jesus must have differed significantly from the traditional depictions in Western art, which invariably 'Nordicize' the Semites.

And when the New Testament authors began to write, they softened the prophecies of Jesus of a very imminent end of the world. The Christians did not live that end and this is why questions arise in all ancient literature. Scepticism and indignation spread: 'Where, then, is his announced second

coming?’ says the second Epistle of Peter. ‘Since the parents died, everything is as it has been since the beginning of creation’. And also in Clement’s first epistle the complaint arises: ‘We have already heard this in the days of our fathers, and look, we have aged and none of that has happened to us’.

Voices of that style arise shortly after the death of Jesus. And they are multiplied in the course of the centuries. And here there is how the oldest Christian author, the apostle of the peoples, Paul, reacts. If he first explained to the Corinthians that the term ‘had been set short’ and the ‘world is heading to the sunset’, ‘we will not all die, but we will all be transformed’—later he spiritualised the faith about the final times that, from year to year, became increasingly suspicious. Paul thus made the faithful internally assume the great renewal of the world, the longing for a change of eons, was fulfilled through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Instead of the preaching of the kingdom of God, instead of the promise that this kingdom would soon emerge on Earth, Paul thus introduced individualistic ideas of the afterlife, the *vita aeterna* (eternal life). Christ no longer comes to the world but the believing Christian goes to him in heaven! Similarly, the gospel authors who write later soften Jesus’ prophecies about the end of the world and make the convenient corrections in the sense of a postponement. The one that goes further is Luke, who substitutes the hopeful belief for a history of divine salvation with the notion of previous stages or intermediate steps.

### *The ‘Holy Scriptures’ are piled up*

No evangelist intended to write a kind of revelation document, a canonical book. No one felt inspired, neither did Paul, and in fact none of the authors of the New Testament. Only the Book of Revelation: the one that, with difficulty, became part of the Bible pretends that God dictated the text to the author. But in 140 Bishop Papias did not consider the Gospels as ‘Holy Scriptures’ and gave preference to oral tradition. Even St. Justin, the greatest apologist of the 2nd century, sees in the Gospels—which he hardly quotes while he never ceases to mention the Old Testament—only ‘curiosities’.

The first to speak about an inspiration of the New Testament, which designates the Gospels and the epistles of Paul as ‘holy word of God’, was the bishop Theophilus of Antioch at the end of the 2nd century: a special luminary of the Church. On the other hand, in spite of the sanctity and divinity that he presupposes about the Gospels, he wrote a piece of apologetics about the ‘harmony of the Gospels’, as they were evidently a little too inharmonious.

Until the second half of the 2nd century the authority of the Gospels was not gradually accepted yet. Still, by the end of that same century the Gospel of Luke was accepted with reluctance; and that of John was accepted with a remarkable resistance. Is it not odd that proto-Christianity did not speak of the gospels in the plural but in singular, the *Gospel*? In any case, throughout the 2nd century a fixed canon ‘of the Gospels did not yet exist and most of them were really considered a problem’ (Schneemelcher). This is clearly demonstrated by two famous initiatives of that time which tried to solve the problem of the plurality of Gospels with a reduction.

In the first place, there is the widespread Marcion Bible. This ‘heretic’, an important figure in the history of the Church, compiled the first New Testament and was the founder of the criticism of its texts, written shortly after the year 140. With it Marcion completely distanced himself from the bloodthirsty Old Testament, and only accepted the Gospel of Luke (without the totally legendary story of childhood) and the epistles of Paul; although, significantly, the latter without the forged pastoral letters and the epistle to the Hebrews, also manipulated. Moreover, Marcion deprived the remaining epistles of the ‘Judaistic’ additions, and his action was the decisive motive for the Catholic Church to initiate a compilation of the canon; thus beginning to constitute itself as a Church.

The second initiative, to a certain extent comparable, was the *Diatessaron* of Tatian. This disciple of St. Justin in Rome solved the problem of the plurality of the Gospels in a different way, although also reducing them. He wrote (as Theophilus) a ‘harmony of the Gospels’, adding freely in the chronological framework of the fourth Gospel the three synoptic accounts, as

well as all kinds of ‘apocryphal’ stories. It had great success and the Syrian Church used it as Sacred Scripture until the 5th century. The Christians of the 1st century and to a large extent also those of the next century did not, therefore, possess any New Testament. As normative texts they used, until the beginning of the 2nd century, the epistles of Paul; but the Gospels were still not cited as ‘Scripture’ in religious services until the middle of that century.

The true Scripture of those early Christians was the sacred book of the Jews. Still in the year 160, St. Justin, in the broadest Christian treatise up to that date, almost exclusively referred to the Old Testament. The name of the New Testament (in Greek *he kaine diatheke*, ‘the new covenant’, translated for the first time by Tertullian as *Novum Testamentum*) appears in the year 192. However, at this time the limits of this New Testament were not yet well established and the Christians were discussing this throughout the 3rd and part of the 4th century, rejecting the compilations that others recognised as genuine. ‘Everywhere there are contrasts and contradictions’, writes the theologian Carl Schneider. ‘Some say: “what is read in all the churches” is valid. Others maintain: “what comes from the apostles” and third parties distinguish between sympathetic and non-sympathetic doctrinal content’.

Although around 200 there is in the Church, as Sacred Scripture, a New Testament next to the Old—being the central core the previous New Testament of the ‘heretic’ Marcion, the Gospels and the epistles of Paul—, there were still under discussion the Acts of the Apostles, the Book of Revelation and the ‘General Epistles’. In the New Testament of St. Irenaeus, the most important theologian of the 2nd century, the book *Shepherd of Hermas* also appears which today does not belong to the New Testament; but the Epistle to the Hebrews, which does belong in today’s collection, is missing. The religious writer Clemente of Alexandria (died about 215), included in several martyrologies among the saints of December 4, barely knows a collection of books of the New Testament moderately delimited. But even the Roman Church itself does not include around the year 200, in the New Testament, the epistle to the Hebrews; nor the first and

second epistles of Peter, nor the epistle of James and the third of John. And the oscillations in the evaluation of the different writings are, as shown by the papyri found with the texts of the New Testament, still very large during the 3rd century.

Even in the 4th century, Bishop Eusebius, historian of the Church, includes among the writings that are the subject of discussion the epistles of James, of Judas, the second epistle of Peter and the so-called second and third epistles of John. Among the apocryphal writings, Eusebius accepts, 'if you will', the Revelation of John. (And almost towards the end of the 7th century, in 692, the Quinisext Council approved in the Greek Church canons compilations with and without John's Book of Revelation.) For the North African Church, around the year 360, the epistle to the Hebrews, the epistles of James and Judas do not belong to the Sacred Scriptures; and according to other traditions, neither belonged in Scripture the second of Peter and the second and third of John.

On the other hand, prominent Fathers of the Church included in their New Testament a whole series of Gospels, Acts of the Apostles and Epistles that the Church would later condemn as apocryphal but in the East, until the 4th century, they enjoyed great appreciation and were even considered as Sacred Scripture, among others, *Shepherd of Hermas*, the *Apocalypse of Peter*, the *Didache* and others. And even in the 5th century it is possible to find in a codex some 'apocryphal' texts, that is, 'false' together with the 'genuine' ones.

The so-called General Epistles needed the most time to enter the New Testament as the group of the seven epistles. The Father of the Church St. Athanasius, the 'father of scientific theology' was the first one to determine its extension (whom the investigators also blame for the falsification of documents, collecting the 27 known writings, among them the 21 epistles). St. Athanasius lied without the slightest hesitation when affirming that the apostles and teachers of the apostolic era had already established the canon. Under the influence of Augustine, the West followed the resolution of Athanasius and consequently delimited, almost about the beginnings of the 5th century, the Catholic canon of the New Testament in the synods of Rome in

382, Hippo Regius in 393 and Carthage in 397 and 419. The canon of the New Testament, used in Latin as a synonym for 'Bible', was created by imitating the sacred book of the Jews. The word canon, which in the New Testament appears only in four places, received in the Church the meaning of 'norm, the scale of valuation'. It was considered canonical what was recognised as part of this norm, and after the definitive closure of the whole New Testament work, the word 'canonical' meant as much as divine, infallible. The opposite meaning was called 'apocryphal'.

The canon of the Catholic Church had general validity until the Reformation. Luther then discussed the canonicity of the second epistle of Peter ('which sometimes detracts a little from the apostolic spirit'), the letter of James ('a little straw epistle', 'directed against St. Paul'), the epistle to the Hebrews ('perhaps a mixture of wood, straw and hay') as well as the Book of Revelation (neither 'apostolic nor prophetic'; 'my spirit cannot be satisfied with the book') and he admitted only what 'Christ impelled'.

On the contrary, the Council of Trent, through the decree of April 8, 1546, clung to all the writings of the Catholic canon, since God was its *auctor* (author). In fact, the real *auctor* was the development and the election through the centuries of these writings along with the false affirmation of their apostolic origin.

### *God as the author?*

The New Testament is the most printed and (perhaps) most read book of modern times. It has been translated into more languages than any other book. It has been interpreted, says the Catholic Schelkle, with an intensity 'that surpasses everything. Would not any other book have been exhausted long ago with such exhaustive exegesis?' Is it possible, apart from its Jewish ancestors, that it offers with some good things so many contradictions, legends, myths; so much secondary transformation and writing work; so many parallels, as shown by the *History of the Synoptic Tradition* by Bultmann with the tales of universal literature—starting with the old Chinese fictions, through the stories of Indians and gypsies, the tales of the seas of

the south to the Germanic legends, with so many inappropriate remarks and nonsense—that many men have taken it so seriously, and many still take seriously?

The New Testament is, not only formally but also in terms of its content, so diverse and contradictory that the concept of a ‘New Testament theology’ became, a long time ago, something more than problematic. In any case, there is no unitary doctrine of the New Testament but great deviations, inconsistencies, notable discrepancies, even in regard to the ‘testimony of Christ’ itself. Only the fact that the Lord is attested gives the whole a highly heterogeneous unity. In view of this, speaking of inspiration or inerrancy leaves speechless even those of us who take it for laughter!

At the Council of Florence (February 4, 1442), the Council of Trent (4th session of April 8, 1546) and Vatican Council I (3rd session on April 24, 1870), the Roman Catholic Church has made the doctrine of the inspiration of the Bible, which carries inerrancy, a dogma of faith. In this last conclave they decreed that ‘the Sacred Scriptures, written by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, have God as author’. Therefore, the ecclesiastical theologians flatly deny the contradictions or even the simple possibility of falsifications in the Bible.

Contradictions and inerrancy, forgery and sanctity, illegitimacy and canonicity, hardly harmonise among themselves. Also, the high moral and religious dignity attributed to the biblical authors, their presumed conscience of the strict truth, is wrongly combined with all that. The ‘authority’ of their books is based and has been based precisely on ‘faithfully reproducing the prophecies about Christ by the prophets and the testimony of Christ by the apostles’ (Von Campenhausen). This is how the apologists have defended and still defend themselves, usually with eloquent words, against accusations of falsification. Even a scholar not exempt of criticism such as Arnold Meyer, at the end of his article on religious pseudoepigraphy, not precisely in favour of the Churches, avoids the word ‘forgeries’—which I always prefer to the decent babblings of ‘serious’ science—and ‘prefers to speak of an ancient form of the creative literary force, which strives to give again the word to old figures, in a way as

real and effective as possible, so that the truth finds today the same as yesterday a dignified voice and a successful defence’.

In fact, the forgeries of Christians—and of Jews—must be judged in a much more rigorous way than those of the pagans. Although the latter possessed sacred books, for example in Orphism or Hermeticism, these books did not have the meaning of a revealed religion. On the other hand, the Jewish and Christian revelations, the doctrines of the prophets and of Jesus, were obligatory; inviolable. But the Christians modified the writings of the New Testament and also of the Fathers of the Church, the texts of the ecclesiastical conclaves. In fact, they fabricated totally new treaties in the name of Jesus, of his disciples, of the Fathers of the Church; they forged full written statements of the councils.

It is significant that Norbert Brox (a Catholic theologian!) still calls in 1973 and 1977 ‘uncertain’ the scientific investigation of proto-Christian pseudo-epigraphy. He wrote: ‘All these efforts try to save themselves from the calamity of having to attribute to authors, with proven ethical and religious pretensions, a dubious behaviour in which they do not believe; and they want to delimit, from the whole mass of falsifications, an integral area: religiously motivated and beyond all suspicion’.

### *Christians forged more consciously than Jews*

We have to bear in mind in the first place a relevant fact: of no Gospel, of any writing of the New Testament, and of course of any biblical text, we have an original, even though until the century of the historical Enlightenment it was affirmed that they had the original of the Gospel of Mark, even in duplicate, one in Venice and the other in Prague and both originals in a language in which none of the evangelists wrote: Latin.

Even the first *copies* are missing. We only have copies of copies of copies, and new ones constantly appear. In 1967 there were more than 1,500 manuscripts of the Greek Old Testament and 5,236 of the New Testament. Although with some frequency, an item has been mistakenly recorded several times, very few of them contain the complete New Testament and most of them are relatively recent. Only the papyri date back to earlier times, some



of them to the 2nd and 3rd centuries, but they are very fragmentary: of the oldest only a few words are left (John 18, 31-33, and 37- 38).

Since in antiquity books were only reproduced by hand, falsifications were simpler and, while copying, at any time changes in the text could be done: enter new paragraphs, make suppressions or even complete them. In the manuscripts of the New Testament, errors, mistakes for lack of attention or ignorance as well as conscious falsifications arose in this way, sometimes unintentionally and other times intentionally; the latter especially in the 1st and 2nd centuries, when the New Testament did not yet have canonical validity and there was not the slightest qualm, as many other falsifications show us, in modifying the text. The copyists, the editors and the glossators intervened constantly. Some passages were suppressed at will, others were enlarged; the text was reordered or shortened. It became uniform, polished, harmonised and paraphrased; confusion and degeneration increased and the field became a jungle of conflicting versions (Lietzmann); a chaos that today makes it impossible for us to establish, in many places with certainty or at least probability, what was the original text (Knopf).

If many Christians are hardly satisfied with these undeniable facts, so much so it is irritating that the books of their 'inerrant' Bible are forgeries. That imputation, either by the author or in the course of its transmission, is called pseudoepigraphy.

Some forged Christian works, especially those of the most ancient times, may have been done in good faith, with good intentions, and strictly speaking they are not forgeries or crimes from the psychological or subjective viewpoint. But objectively they are still falsifications. However, nobody could or would want to call a spade a spade as it would disfigure the face of supposedly inerrant writings inspired by God.

In any case, the Old Testament is better off in comparison with the New and the early Christian literature as the Jews, especially those of earlier times, were much less versed in falsification and all that this implies. The pseudepigraphs of the ancient Jews did not yet emerge in an aura marked by the

constant struggle against the heretics; of mutual suspicion, and corrosive distrust. For that reason they were not attacked but rather received with enthusiasm. Those peoples were barely prepared for fabrication. The reproaches of forgery were not generalized for a long time among the Jews as they would later be among the Christians, when each of the many sects resorted to forgery to impose their theories of faith on the great Church, and this, by means of counter-falsifications—sometimes even by the simple method of destroying the contrary writings. However, as hearing about falsifications became a constant, it is difficult for someone to have forged in good faith. The redaction of a ‘true’ religious pseudoepigraphy is ‘quite improbable’ and it is evident that ‘in the Christian sphere it occupies an essentially smaller space than in the Jew or the pagan’ (Speyer). That is to say: the Christians forged more. They were the ones who did it the most.

Why were falsifications done?

Well, there are many reasons. An important one was the increase in authority, although often it was only a concomitant circumstance. Attempts were made to achieve respect and the spreading of a text by passing it off as that of a renowned author or altering its age, that is, dating it to earlier times so that it formed part of the evangelical past. This is how both the ‘orthodox’ and the ‘heretics’ proceeded. The forger confused his readers about the author, the place and the copy. For as the Christian communities grew and time passed, new problems, situations and interests naturally arose, to which the old literary tradition—the so-called classical period, the early apostolic times—could not respond. But since their approval was needed or at least reflect the legitimate continuity with the origins, several writings and ‘revelations’ were produced: false works that were dated to earlier times.

Catholics forged to be able to resolve ‘apostolically’, in the sense of Jesus and his apostles (that is, with authority), the new problems that arose from ecclesiastical discipline, the Church’s law, the liturgy, morality and theology. The ‘orthodox’ also forged in order to fight, with falsifications of their own, the falsifications of the ‘heretics’: often widely read such as those of the Gnostics, the Manichaeans, the Priscillianists, etc., as is the

case of the *Kerygmata Petrou*, the Acts of Paul, and the *Epistula Apostolorum*. The forgers warn against ‘heretical’ falsifications as in the third Epistle to the Corinthians. They insult and curse the forgers by practicing exactly the same method, often in a more refined and less manifest way. And the ‘heretics’ forged above all to impose and to defend their divergent beliefs before the dogma of the Church. Finally, it was also forged to guarantee the ‘authenticity’ of another text by means of a forgery; and also to harm personal enemies, to discredit the rivals. Although more rarely, it was done to defend friends, as shown in the claimed letters of Boniface. But only very rarely has the name of a forger come to us, such as that of the Catholic John Malalas, a rhetorician about whom we know nothing else.

What methods did forgers use?

The simplest and most frequent method of falsification was the use of a false but illustrious name of an author of the past. This happened in the pagan world in a similar way as in the Jewish world, but in the Christian era it was systematic. Towards the end of Antiquity and later, an authority from the past generally was more notable, especially when the forger felt he did not have a ‘name’. Resorting to a known contemporary was too risky as he could discover the falsification at any time by making a statement, reducing its effects. Although a work with the name of another author does not have to be a forgery in itself, the falsifier is usually also the author of the work. A great amount of ‘apocryphal’ books, even New Testament texts that emerged with the purpose of deceiving, are conscious falsifications of a literary genre during antiquity: shoddy pieces of work that pretend to come from the pen of a totally different author whose ancient personality is considered venerable and holy.

In particular, the forgers of many of the lives of saints use the first person and turn to eyewitnesses to strengthen their lies. And no less effective were, above all, the forgers of the Christian books of revelation, promising the readers and propagators the blue of the sky and at the same time threatening their detractors. The comen presented sworn witnesses as guarantors of their lies, and to reinforce confidence they even said some truths on

the sidelines. After all, in Christianity, by the will of God everything is allowed.

In antiquity most of the forgeries were made to support the faith. In the Middle Ages, it is forged in particular to secure or expand possessions and power. Already in the 9th century, papal documents were forged throughout the West, naturally by ecclesiastics. The fact is that the percentage of pseudepigraphs is very high in proto-Christianity. The practice of unscrupulous falsification has always existed, even in the beginnings of Christianity. ‘Unfortunately,’ confesses the theologian Von Campenhausen, ‘truthfulness in this sense is not one of the cardinal virtues of the ancient Church’.

*Neither the Gospel of Matthew, nor the Gospel of John, nor John’s Book of Revelation come from the apostles to whom the Church attributes them*

Due to the great importance of the ‘apostolic tradition’, the Catholic Church published all the Gospels as books of the apostles or their disciples, which justified their prestige. But there is no proof that Mark and Luke, whose names appear in the New Testament, are disciples of the apostles; that Mark is identical to the companion of Peter, or that Luke was Paul’s companion. The four Gospels were transmitted anonymously.

The first ecclesiastical testimony in favour of ‘Mark’, the oldest of the evangelists, comes from Bishop Papias of Hierapolis, in the middle of the 2nd century. But today there are many researchers who criticise the testimony of Papias; call him ‘historically worthless’ (Marxsen), and even admit that Mark ‘has never heard and accompanied the Lord’.

The apostle Matthew, a disciple of Jesus, is not the author of the Gospel of Saint Matthew which appeared between the 70s and 90s, as is generally assumed. We ignore how he earned the reputation of being an evangelist. It is evident that the first testimony comes from the historian of the Church, Eusebius, who in turn accepted the claim of Bishop Papias: about whom he writes that ‘intellectually, he should have been quite limited’. The title ‘Gospel of Matthew’ comes from a later period: we find it for the first time with Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian. Both

died at the beginning of the 3rd century. If the apostle Matthew, contemporary of Jesus and witness of his works, had written the Gospel that is attributed to him, would he have had to borrow so heavily from Mark? Was he so forgetful? Did he have so little inspiration? All critical biblical research considers that there is no reason why the name of the apostle Matthew should appear on the Gospel, since it was not written in Hebrew, as the tradition of the ancient Church affirms, but in Greek. No one is known to have seen the Aramaic original, nor is anyone known to have translated it into Greek; nor in the manuscripts or citations is the slightest remnant of an original Aramaic text preserved. Wolfgang Speyer rightly includes the Gospel of Matthew among 'forgeries under the mask of religious revelations'. K. Stendhal ventures that it is not even the work of a single person but of a 'school'. According to an almost unanimous opinion of all the non-Catholic researchers of the Bible, that gospel is not based on eyewitnesses.

The most recent Catholic theologians often painfully turn on these facts. 'In case our Greek version of the Gospel of Matthew had been preceded by an original version in Aramaic...' writes K. H. Sohelkle. Of course, 'in case', says Hebbel with irony, is the most Germanic of the expressions'. 'An original Aramaic Matthew must have been written several decades before the Greek Matthew'. Not even they themselves believe this. Lichtenberg was not the first to know but was the first to say it accurately: 'It is clear that the Christian religion is supported more by those people who earn their bread with it than by those who are convinced of its truth'.

It is interesting that the first three Gospels were not published as apostolic, the same as the Acts of the Apostles, whose author we also ignore. The only thing we know is that he who wrote these Acts of the Apostles simply puts on the lips of his 'heroes' the most appropriate phrases: something common in old historiography. But these inventions not only constitute a third part of the Acts of the Apostles but are also their most important theological content and, what is particularly remarkable, the writing of this author represents more than a quarter of the entire New Testament. It is generally supposed that

the author of the Gospel of Luke is identical to the travelling companion and 'beloved physician' of the apostle Paul. But neither the Gospel of Luke nor the Acts of the Apostles are very Pauline. Researchers do not believe today that either of these two works was written by a disciple of Paul.

The Acts of the Apostles and the three Gospels were not signed with the true name or even with pseudonyms: they were anonymous works like many other proto-Christian works, such as the Epistle to the Hebrews of the New Testament. No author of the canonical Gospels cites his name, not once does he mention a guarantor, as the later Christian treatises so often do. It was the Church the first to attribute all these anonymous writings to certain apostles and their disciples. However, such attributions are 'hoaxes', they are a 'literary deception' (Heinrici). Arnold Meyer notes that 'with certainty only the letters of the apostle Paul are authentic, who was not an immediate disciple of Jesus'. But it is well known that not all those epistles that appear under his name come from Paul.

Since the end of the 2nd century, from Irenaeus, although at first not without controversy, the Church attributes without reason the fourth Gospel to the apostle John: something that all critical researchers have questioned for more than two hundred years. There are many weighty reasons for raising questions. Although the author of this fourth Gospel, who curiously does not mention any author, affirms having leaned on the chest of Jesus and being a reliable witness, he assures and repeats emphatically that his 'testimony is true', that 'he has seen' and that he 'knows' he is telling the truth so that we 'may believe'. But this Gospel did not appear until about the year 100, while the Apostle John had been killed long ago. The Father of the Church, Irenaeus, who was the first to affirm the authorship of the apostle John, has intentionally confused him with a priest, John of Ephesus. And the author of the second and third epistles of John, which are also attributed to the apostle John, calls himself at the beginning, 'the presbyter' (a similar confusion also occurred between the apostle Philip and the 'deacon' Philip). Even Pope Damasus I, in his canonical index (382), does not attribute two of John's epistles to the apostle John, but to 'another John, the

presbyter'. Also, even the Father of the Church Jerome denied that these second and third epistles belonged to the apostle. The arguments against the authorship of the apostle John as 'the Evangelist' are so numerous and convincing that even Catholic theologians are starting to manifest, little by little, their doubts.

The same could be said about the Book of Revelation of John, whose author is repeatedly called John both at the beginning and at the end of the book, who also appears as a servant of God and brother of Christians, but not as an apostle. The book was written, according to the doctrine of the ancient Church, by the son of Zebedee, the apostle John, since an 'apostolic' tradition was needed to guarantee the canonical prestige of the book. But such attribution did not last long given that the Book of Revelation, which appeared in the last place of the New Testament, was rejected by the end of the 2nd century by the critics of the Bible who otherwise did not deny any dogma. Pope Dionysius of Alexandria (died 264-265), a disciple of Origen and nicknamed 'the Great', categorically denied that John was the author of the Apocalypse. Pope Dionysius points out that primitive Christians have already 'denied and completely rejected' the 'Revelation of John':

They challenged each and every one of the chapters and declared that the work lacked meaning and uniqueness and that the title was false. They affirmed, in particular, that it did not come from John and that they were not revelations since they were surrounded by a multitude of incomprehensible things. The author of this work was not one of the apostles, no saint and no member of the Church, but Cerinthus, who wanted to give a credible name for his forgery and also for the sect of his own name.

The theologian and Protestant bishop Eduard Lohse comments: 'Dionysius of Alexandria has very accurately observed that the Revelation of John and the Fourth Gospel are so far apart in form and content that they cannot be attributed to the same author'. The question remains whether the author of the Book of Revelation wanted to suggest, by his name John, to be considered a disciple and apostle of Jesus. He does not say that explicitly: it was done by the Church to confer apostolic authority

and canonical prestige on his text. And so falsifications started: the falsifications of the Church.

### *Forged 'epistles of Paul'*

None of the Gospels was written by any of the 'first apostles'. Neither the Gospel of Matthew comes from the apostle Matthew nor that of John from the apostle John, nor is the Revelation of John of Patmos due to the apostle. But if in the Old Testament there were men who spoke as if God were speaking, why should there not be others, in the New Testament, capable of putting everything imaginable on the lips of Jesus and his disciples? In this way, several writings of the New Testament pass as works of the apostles. Although in some of them the intention to cheat may be doubted, in others it is evident and in others, plainly obvious. Nevertheless, and against all evidence, their authenticity is expressly attested. The main idea is to describe as 'apostolic' everything that has already been accepted and to make it binding as a norm. Several epistles were thus forged in the New Testament under the name of the oldest Christian author: Paul, who openly confesses he is only for proclaiming Christ 'with or without second intentions'.

Totally false in the *Corpus Paulinum* are the two epistles 'To Timothy' and 'To Titus', the so-called Pastoral Epistles. They were known in Christianity from the middle of the 2nd century and ended up in the New Testament among the other epistles without any qualms... until the beginning of the 19th century. In 1804-1805, J.E.C. Schmidt questioned the authenticity of the First Epistle to Timothy; in 1807 Schleiermacher rejected it completely, and in 1812 the scholar of Göttingen, Eichhorn, verified the falsity of the three epistles. Since then, this idea has been imposed among Protestant researchers and lately more and more among Catholic exegetes, although there are still a few known authors who continue to defend their authenticity, or at least a partial authenticity (i.e., the 'hypothesis of fragments'). In the three epistles, which were probably written in Asia Minor at the beginning of the 2nd century, the forger calls himself, from the beginning, 'Paul, an



apostle of Jesus Christ'. He writes in the first person and boasts of having been named

preacher and apostle—I am telling the truth, I am not lying—: master of the pagans in faith and truth.

He lashes out harshly against the 'heretics', of whom more than one 'surrenders to Satan'. He whips 'the stories of old irreligious women', 'the hypocrisy of the liars', 'the useless and charming charlatans, in particular the Jews to whom it would be necessary to close their mouth'. But he also silences women: 'I do not allow a woman to indoctrinate, nor to raise her above a man, but to remain silent'. And the slaves must submit and 'respect their lords'.

These three falsifications, which are significantly lacking in the oldest collections of Paul's epistles, were already considered apocryphal by Marcion when referring to Paul. It is very likely that they were written precisely to rebut Marcion through Paul, as happened in the 2nd and 3rd centuries with other ecclesiastical falsifications. And it speaks for itself the fact that these false 'epistles of Paul', much later than Paul and therefore from the theological and canonical point of view much more evolved, soon enjoyed great popularity in Catholicism; that the most important writers of the Church quoted them with predilection and used them against the true Pauline epistles; and that precisely these falsifications made the almost heretic Paul a man of the Catholic Church. With them, countless times the popes have condemned their 'heretics' and fought to have their dogmas recognised.

Against the authenticity of these pastoral epistles there are historical reasons, but even more theological and linguistic reasons that have not only increased over time but become more precise. 'For evangelical researchers' writes Wolfgang Speyer, one of the foremost connoisseurs of the falsifications of antiquity, 'the pseudoepigraphy of the Epistle to Timothy and the Epistle to Titus is considered proven'. The theologian Von Campenhausen speaks of a 'falsification of extraordinary moral height' and attributes them to St. Polycarp, the 'ancient prince of Asia' (Eusebius). The Catholic theologian Brox, also an expert in this field so little appreciated by researchers, writes about 'the literary

manipulation that is perfect' although 'it is recognisable as fiction', a 'methodically executed deception, a presumption of conscious authority done in an artistically, refined way', and of course 'the crowning work' of forgery within the New Testament.

More conservative scholars, in view of the discrepancy with the authentic Pauline epistles, resort to the 'secretary's hypothesis': according to which the author would have been Paul's secretary who had to accompany him for a long time. 'It is true that tradition knows nothing of such a man' says the *Bibel-Lexikon (Bible Dictionary)*. In the 'hypothesis of the fragments' the assumption appears that among the false texts of Paul there are also authentic pieces. Even for Schelkle the Pastoral Epistles 'not only seem to be different from Paul's epistles but subsequent to them'.

### *The Second Epistle to the Thessalonians*

As is often supposed, it is very probable that the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians was 'conceived premeditatedly as a falsification' (Lindemann) attributing it to Paul. The authenticity of Two Thessalonians was put into question for the first time in 1801 by J.E.C. Schmidt, imposing definitively the thesis of falsehood, especially thanks to W. Wrede in 1903. In the early 1930s, researchers like A. Jülicher and E. Fascher were of the opinion that, by establishing a non-Pauline authorship of the epistle, 'we have not lost much'.

Not us! But this has implications to the faithful of the Bible. What would they think if, for two millennia, falsification has existed in their 'Holy Scriptures'? The forger, who above all tries to dispel the doubts about the Parousia (that the Lord's return does not occur) testifies at the end of the epistle its authenticity by emphasizing the signature of Paul's own hand:

I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters.

In order to avoid the doubts about authenticity in his case, the forger does not hesitate to warn his readers about the falsifications with these words: 'Do not let anyone confuse you, in any way...' He is fully aware of his deception. With a forged

epistle of Paul the author wants to disavow an authentic one. This is why there are 'very few' who today defend the authenticity of Two Thessalonians (W. Marxsen).

### *Colossians, Ephesians and Hebrews*

Most researchers consider the Epistle of Paul to the Colossians as 'deutero-Pauline', and also as 'non-Pauline'. And very probably the Epistle to the Ephesians was also 'consciously' forged, closely related to the previous one: an epistle which, from the beginning, was considered authored by Paul. It is significant that reminiscences of all the important Pauline epistles are found here, especially the one destined for the Colossians, from which almost its complete formulations are derived. The style is very rhetorical and, actually, more than an epistle it is a kind of 'meditation on the great Christian themes', a 'discourse on mysteries or wisdom' (Schlier). And in no other epistle of Paul is the word 'Church' used so exclusively in the Catholic sense.

The Epistle to the Hebrews, written perhaps in the 1st century by an unknown author, was originally transmitted anonymously and no old writing related it to Paul. It does not even contain the author's name, but in the end it shows 'intentionally the final formula of a Pauline epistle' (Lietzmann). In spite of the fact that until the middle of the 4th century it was not considered apostolic, Pauline or canonical, it appeared nonetheless in the New Testament as a letter from 'Paul', and as such was taken until Luther. The reformer put it in doubt, finding in it straw and wood, 'an epistle formed by numerous pieces'. At present, even on the Catholic side, the epistle to the Hebrews is rarely attributed to 'Paul'. However, since the 2nd century it was accepted by the tradition. It appears in the liturgical and official books of the Catholic Church as 'Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Hebrews'. It also appears in the Latin translation of the New Testament, but not in the Greek text. We do not even know who wrote it, and all the names that have been quoted or can be cited about the author are only speculations.

Although critical theology considers authentic other epistles of Paul, the fact is that the books of the New Testament contain various forgeries. No less than six epistles attributed to

Paul by his own name are actually deutero-Pauline, that is, not authored by Paul; but they appear anyway as such in the Bible. If the Epistle to the Hebrews is added, it would be seven.

### *Forged epistles of Peter*

Among the so-called General Epistles are the first and second of Peter; the first, second and third of John, that of James and that of Judas. Still in the 4th century, at the time of the Father of the Church Eusebius, although they were read in most of the churches, only two were unanimously considered authentic: the first of John and the first of Peter.

It is not until the end of the 4th century that all the General Epistles were considered canonical in the West. The situation is now different and all of them are designated as 'anonymous or pseudo-epigraphic writings', no matter how much the ancient Church introduced them with the name of several authors (Balz).

Under the name of Peter, a Christian forged two epistles. This is certainly true for the later writings of the New Testament such as the Second Epistle of Peter, something that even Catholic scholars no longer doubt. This letter, which, suspiciously, is almost a literal copy in many passages of that of Judas, enjoyed little confidence in the old Church. Throughout the 2nd century it is not quoted. The first to affirm its indisputability was Origen, but still in the 4th century Bishop Eusebius, the historian of the Church, states that it is not authentic, and Didymus the Blind, a famous Alexandrian scholar whose disciples included Rufinus and St. Jerome, says it is forged.

'Simon Peter, servant and apostle of Jesus Christ', thus begins the forger to legitimise himself as a witness, has 'seen himself' the magnificence of Jesus and also heard the call of God 'from heaven' in his christening. He not only warns the faithful that God finds them 'without spot or worthy of punishment', but attacks the 'false prophets', the 'false teachers' and advises to capture and kill them 'as irrational animals'. The Second Epistle of Peter, which is intended to be taken as the testament of the apostle, was written long after his death, perhaps three generations later; and was attributed to St. Peter in order to

counteract the doubts about the Parousia. The letter is full of controversy against the 'heretics', especially the blasphemers 'who go through life freely and say: where is your promised return? Since the parents died, everything remains as it was at the beginning of creation'. The daring forger, who claims the same apostolic authority as Paul, simulates from the beginning to the end of the epistle the fiction of a Petrine origin. He supports it with his own testimonies seen and heard, and appeals to 'the deep feelings of his beloved ones'. He also claims for himself the First Epistle of Peter, even though the great differences between both letters exclude the possibility that they come from the same author.

But it is notorious that the First Epistle of Peter is also forged notwithstanding the fact that, for Luther, it is 'one of the noblest books of the New Testament and the authentic Gospel'. It is precisely the evident kinship with the Pauline epistles, confirmed by modern exegesis (for what Luther was so enthusiastic) that makes Peter's authorship unlikely. Moreover, the place where it is written is apparently Rome, because by the end the author expressly greets 'from Babylon': a frequent secret name in the apocalyptic literature for the capital of the Empire. However, the name of Babylon to designate Rome appears in all likelihood because of the impression caused by the destruction of Jerusalem, and this happened in AD 70, that is, several years after the death of Peter. It is also extremely strange that the famous canonical index of the Roman Church, the Muratorian Canon (around 200), does not mention this epistle of Peter: a letter of its presumed founder. We will not review other criteria, also formal, that make less and less likely a Petrine origin of this document.

About the First Epistle of Peter, whose word 'Peter' carries the tagline of 'an apostle of Jesus Christ', recently Norbert Brox has stated in *Fälsche Verfasserangaben* (book author information) that, by its content, character and historical circumstances, it shows 'no connection with the figure of the historical Peter; nothing in this epistle makes this name credible'. Today it is considered 'completely a pseudepigraphic' (Marxsen), 'without any doubt a pseudonym writing' (Kümmel). In short, another falsification of the New Testament, conceived between

the years 90 and 95, in which the deceiver indiscreetly invokes Christ, and demands to be ‘holy in all your life’s journey’, ‘to reject all evil and falsehood’, not to say ‘lies’ and ‘always demand pure spiritual milk’.

### *Forged John and others*

According to the ecclesiastical doctrine, three biblical letters come from the apostle John. However, in none of them the one who writes cites his name.

The First Epistle of John started to be quoted as early as the middle of the 2nd century; and in those times it was already the subject of criticism. The Muratorian Canon reviews, around the year 200, only two epistles of John, the first and one of the so-called small epistles. It is not until the beginning of the 3rd century when Clement of Alexandria notarises the three epistles. However, in the 2nd and 3rd centuries they were not considered canonical everywhere. This only happened well into the 4th century. ‘They are not recognised unanimously’, Bishop Eusebius writes, ‘they are ascribed to the evangelist or to another John’. The First Epistle of John is so similar in its style, vocabulary and ideology to the Gospel of John that most Bible researchers attribute both writings to the same author, as tradition has always done. But since the latter does not come from the apostle John, neither can the First Epistle of John be his. And since the second epistle is, so to speak, an abbreviated edition (thirteen verses) of the first one, which is almost unanimously attributed to the same author, nor can it have been penned by the apostle John. And that he even wrote a third one is something that the ancient Church already questioned. Even conservative bibliologists admit today that the author of the three epistles of John is not the apostle, as the Church has been teaching for two millennia; but that he was one of his disciples and that the ‘Johannine tradition’ had transmitted it. About the main epistle, the first, which from the beginning was not the subject of discussions, Horst Balz says: ‘Just as the apostle John, son of Zebedee and brother of James, cannot be considered author of the homonymous Gospel, so much less he may be behind the First Epistle of John’.

The alleged epistle of James was also forged. Like most of the 'General Epistles' it only imitates the epistolary form. This text, which is especially difficult to fix temporarily, contains proportionately few Christian features. It borrows numerous elements from the Cynic and Stoic philosophies and even more from the wisdom of the Jewish Old Testament, for which many authors consider it a slightly retouched Jewish writing. Although the epistle claims to have been written by James, brother of the Lord, many important reasons exclude this possibility. For example, he only quotes the name of Jesus Christ, his divine brother, twice. He does not miss a syllable while writing about the laws of Jewish ritual and ceremonial, but, unlike most authors of biblical letters, he uses the formalities of Greek epistolary. He writes in good Greek, something unusual for a New Testament author. It is a surprising text with rich vocabulary and many literary forms such as *paronomasia*, *homoioteleuron*, etc. This and many other features show that this epistle, which constantly preaches those who apostrophise as 'dear brothers', the 'faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord in Glory', is a 'more elaborate version of literary falsification' (Brox) than the First Epistle of Peter. It is curious that the epistle of James, later canonised in the West, is absent in the Muratorian Canon, Tertullian and Origen. Bishop Eusebius reports on the little recognition it enjoyed and the questioning of its canonicity. Luther also dismissed it. He even comes to threaten to 'throw the rubbish into the fire' and 'expel it from the Bible'.

Finally, the brief Epistle of Judas, which in the first verse claims to have been written by 'Judas, slave of Jesus Christ, the brother of James', is also included in the numerous falsifications of the 'Sacred Scriptures'. This epistle also betrays 'clearly later epochs' (Marxsen).

It is a matter of fact 'that in the early times falsifications were made under the name of the apostles' (Speyer); that authenticity is claimed about them, that the 'apostles' give their names and that the texts were written in the first person. It is also a fact about 'all the writings of the New Testament', as the theologian Marxsen emphasizes, that 'we can only provide the exact names of two authors: Paul and John (the author of the

Book of Revelation)'. And, finally, it is also a fact, and one of the most worthy of attention, that *more than half of all New Testament books are unauthentic, that is, they have been forged or appear under a false name*. In the next section we will show *pars pro toto* (part of the whole) that, in addition, in the 'Book of books' there is a whole series of forgeries in the form of interpolations.

### *Interpolations in the New Testament*

Christians were very fond of interpolations. They have constantly modified, reduced and expanded the New Testament writings and, for that, they had the most diverse motives. They used interpolations, for example, to reinforce the historicity of Jesus or to promote and strengthen certain ideas of faith. Not everyone was able to modify a complete work, but he could easily distort the text of an opponent by introducing or deleting something for his own profit. Falsifications were also done to impose unpopular opinions that the author was not in a position to impose but that, under the name of someone famous, there was a chance to achieve it.

Important authors also fell into this practice. Tatian reviewed Paul's epistles for aesthetic reasons and Marcion did so for content reasons. Dionysius of Corinth in the 3rd century and Jerome in 4th century complain about the numerous interpolations in the Gospels. But St. Jerome, patron of Catholic faculties and who made 'the most shameful forgeries and deceptions' (C. Schneider), accepted the commission of the murderous Pope Damascius to revise the Latin Bibles, of which there was not even two that coincided in somewhat long passages. Scholars have modified the text in some 3,500 places to legitimise the Gospels. And in the 16th century the Council of Trent declared as authentic this *Vulgate* destined for general diffusion, although the Church had rejected it for several centuries.

Well, in this case it was, so to speak, an intervention of the 'official' type. But usually it was produced clandestinely. And one of the most famous interpolations of the New Testament



is linked to the dogma of the Trinity that, apart from later additions, the Bible does not proclaim, and for very good reasons.

The classical world knew hundreds of trinities since the 4th century BC. There was a divine Trinity at the top of the world. All the Hellenistic religions had their Trinitarian divinity: there were the dogmas of Trinity of Apis, of Serapis, of Dionysus, there was the Capitoline trinity: Jupiter, Juno and Minerva; there was a thrice-greatest Hermes, the god of the universe three times unique, who was ‘only and three times one’, etc. But in the first centuries there was no Christian trinity because well into the 3rd century Jesus himself was not even considered as God, and ‘there was hardly anyone’ who thought of the personality of the Holy Spirit, as discreetly ironizes the theologian Harnack. (Except, let’s be fair, the Valentinian Theodotus: a ‘heretic’! He was the first Christian who, by the end of the 2nd century, called the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit a Trinity, something that the Christian tradition still did not dream of.) According to the theologian Weinel, ‘there was rather a revolted mass of ideas about the celestial figures’.

Everything that in Christianity was not pagan comes from the Jews. Another trinity characterised the ‘Holy Scriptures’ in the Revelations of John: God the Father, the seven spirits and Jesus Christ. Soon St. Justin finds a tetralogy: God the Father, the Son, the army of angels and the Holy Spirit. As has been said, ‘a revolted mass’. But little by little, the ancient doctrine—which until the 4th century was widespread even in ecclesiastical circles—, the Christology of the angels fell into disrepute and was considered heretical. In its place a true dogma was imposed, in addition to all the Christian Churches: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. At last they had the right people all together, but unfortunately not yet in the Bible. Therefore it was fabricated. Forgery was necessary because in the New Testament there were—and they are—‘false’ opinions, even of Jesus. For example, in the Logion of Matthew 10, 5: ‘Do not go to the nations of the pagans and do not set your foot in the cities of the Samaritans either. Go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel’. From what fate the Greco-Romans would have been spared, and also the Jews, if the Christians had followed these

words of Jesus! But for a long time they had done the opposite. In evident contradiction with Matthew 10, 5, the 'risen' says right there 'Go and teach all peoples and baptise them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit...'

This passage, the mandate of the mission of Christ, is considered true precisely because the Christians soon went on the mission to the pagans: the opposite of the first mandate of Jesus, preach only to the Jews. And to justify this in practice, at the end of the Gospel the mandate to do mission in the wider world is interpolated. And, incidentally, this contained the biblical foundation, the *locus classicus*, for the Trinity. However, considering that the preaching of Jesus himself lacks the slightest sign of a Trinitarian conception and that none of the apostles was commissioned to baptise, how Jesus, who exhorts to go 'only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel' expressly forbids 'the path toward the pagan peoples'. How could this Jesus ask to do the mission for the world? The latter mandate, which is increasingly questioned by rationalism, is considered by critical theologians to be a forgery. The ecclesiastical circles introduced it to justify *a posteriori* both the practice of the mission among the 'pagans' and the custom of baptism, and to have an important biblical testimony for the dogma of the Trinity.

Precisely for that reason in the first epistle of John there was another falsification, minimal in appearance but of special bad reputation, the Johannine Comma. What was modified was the passage (First Epistle of John 5:7-8): 'There are three who bear witness: *the Spirit, the Water and the Blood*, and the three are one', leaving it as 'There are three who testify *in heaven, the Father and the Word and the Holy Spirit*, and the three are one'. The addition is missing in almost all Greek manuscripts and almost all of the old translations. Before the 4th century, none of the Greek Fathers of the Church used it, nor did they cite it, as a careful verification has pointed out in the writings of Tertullian, Cyprian, Jerome, and Augustine. The forgery comes from North Africa or Spain, where it appears for the first time about 380. The first to question it was R. Simon in 1689. Today, the exegetes reject it almost with total unanimity. However, on January 13, 1897, a decree of the Roman Office proclaims its authenticity.

## THE INVENTION OF POPES

*Neither Jesus instituted the papacy nor Peter was bishop of Rome*

The Catholic Church bases the foundation of the papacy, and of itself, in the Matthew passage: 'You are Peter, and on this rock [*petrus*] I will build my Church' (Mt 16:18). In huge golden mosaic letters these words appear, the most discussed of the Bible, in the dome of St. Peter built by Michelangelo. But they are missing in three of the four Gospels, especially in Mark, the oldest of the evangelists. In fact, Jesus never uttered them. Today, this is 'the certain outcome of biblical exegesis' (Brox).

In spite of this, the Catholic Church continues to maintain its 'divine foundation'. It has no choice: the Church has affirmed it for two thousand years. However, not a few of its theologians capitulate now. Many of them, following with delay the steps of quite conservative Protestants, have developed a language that 'scientifically' makes them preserve half the face and allows them not to lose everything before their superiors. They paraphrase the lack of authenticity of the 'foundational words of the Church' in the following way: Matthew does not refer to it historically but he composes it theologically. Or they claim the 'rock' is a commandment uttered after the 'resurrection'. The Catholics with fewer detours explain the 'promise of Peter' as a later interpolation, simply as an invention of the evangelists.

However, perhaps Peter had a kind of primacy, a certain leading role. But perhaps only temporarily and in certain areas; not, of course, after the 'council of the apostles'. Paul, who opposes Peter 'in his face' in Antioch, insults him by calling him a hypocrite and, in an open manner, questions his demands. Elsewhere in the 'Holy Scriptures' there are also 'anti-Petrine' tendencies. And that Peter retained his primacy, if he had one, even if it was only an invention of the 'Petrist party', does not appear anywhere in the New Testament. Nothing is said.

However, even in the case—which must be excluded for many reasons—that the ‘primacy words’ came from Jesus, the Church could not explain how they were transmitted from Peter to the ‘popes’, since they not only apply to the apostle but also to his ‘successors in office’. Neither the Bible nor any other historical source indicates that Peter appointed his successor.

More than one Catholic ‘sees himself in trouble when trying to explain from a historical and critical point of view the strength of the biblical foundations for the papacy’ (Stockmeier). The most courageous theologians admit that ‘there is nothing’ of a succession of Peter (De Vries), which ‘in the New Testament cannot be seen anywhere’ (Schnackenburg). In effect, the theologian Josef Blank asks himself how primitive Christianity understood this sentence. Did it mean Rome or the primacy of the Roman bishop as successor to the Apostle Peter? ‘The answer is, plain and simple: No!’ Apologetics is based on indications from Jesus to Peter: that he should catch men, that he takes the keys to the kingdom of heaven; that all that he unites or desires on earth will be united or disunited in heaven and finally: ‘Strengthen your brothers’, ‘Feed my flock’. However, many other Gospel or New Testament parallels show that the five dispositions of Jesus were not linked in principle to Peter. And above all, of a successor, even of a superior of the Roman community as director of a global Church, it is not spoken at all in any early Christian text.

*There is no evidence of Peter’s stay and death in Rome*

Nor was he ever the bishop of Rome. It is an absurd idea, but it is the basis of a whole doctrine that the popes and their theologians literally put on the roof. There is no definitive proof, even that he was ever in Rome.

The Christian community of Rome was founded neither by Peter nor by Paul or the ‘blessed founding apostles’ (in the 6th century, Archbishop Dorotheus of Thessalonica attributed a double bishopric to them), but by unknown Judeo-Christians. Already then, between these and the Jews there were so serious disturbances that Emperor Claudius, in the middle of the 1st century, ordered the expulsion of Jews and Christians, among

whom no differences were made: *Judaeos, impulsore Chresto, assidue tumultuantes [Claudius] Roma expulit* ('Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, [Claudius] expelled them from Rome' — Suetonius).

Peter's stay in Rome has never been demonstrated, although today, in the era of ecumenism and the approximation of Christian churches, even many Protestant scholars assume it. But assumptions are no demonstration. Even when according to legends full of fantasy, Peter suffered martyrdom in Rome and was crucified as his Lord and Saviour, although, out of a desire for humility, with his head down... In reality, there is not a single solid proof about that. Not even Paul, who would be the one who founded the Roman community with Peter, and who writes his last epistles from Rome (although he never cites his adversary, Peter, in them) knows anything about it. Nor is there any data about it in the history of the apostles, the synoptic Gospels. Likewise, Clement's important first Epistle, from the end of the 1st century, knows nothing of the history of 'You are Peter' or of another appointment by Jesus, nor of any decisive role of this apostle. Clement limits himself to reporting with imprecise words about his martyrdom. In short, throughout the 1st century there is silence in this regard, as well as in the 2nd century. The oldest 'witness' of Peter's stay in Rome, Dionysius of Corinth, is suspect. First, because his testimony comes from the year 170 approximately. Secondly, because this bishop is very far from Rome. And thirdly, because he affirms that Peter and Paul not only found together the Church of Rome but also that of Corinth: an aspect that contradicts Paul's own testimony. Does a guarantor of this type deserve more confidence about the Roman tradition?

But those who doubt this, or even deny it, 'only raise an infamous monument to their ignorance and fanaticism' (Gröner, Catholic). But is not precisely the other way around? Is not fanaticism more frequent among the faithful than among the sceptics? And also ignorance? Don't religions, Catholicism and the papacy live on it? Don't their dogmas overflow in the irrational and supernatural, in logical absurdities? Do they fear nothing more than authentic criticism? Haven't they instituted a

strict censorship, the index, the ecclesiastical authorisation to be able to print, the anti-modernist oath and the bonfire?

Catholics need Peter's visit, they need the corresponding activity of this man in Rome, who will head as 'founder apostle' the list of Roman bishops, the chain of his 'successors'. In this theory the 'apostolic' tradition and the primacy of the pope are largely based. They affirm therefore, especially in popular writings, that the presence of Peter in Rome 'has been demonstrated by historical research beyond all doubt' (F.J. Koch); 'it is a result of the investigation confirmed in a general way' (Kösters, Jesuit); it is 'totally incontestable' (Franzen); it is attested in 'all the ancient Christian world' (Schuck); there is 'no' news of antiquity 'as sure as this' (Kuhn), which does not make any more certain the image that Peter has 'set up his episcopal chair, his seat, in Rome' (Specht / Bauer). In 1982, for the Catholic Pesch 'there is no longer any doubt' that Peter died martyred in Rome under Nero. (However, the martyred bishop Ignatius does not say anything about it in the 2nd century.) Pesch considers it unquestionable. But neither he nor anyone else provides any proof. For him it is only 'an attractive idea to assume that Peter left for Rome'.

### *The story of the discovery of Peter's tomb*

According to an ancient tradition, the tomb of the 'prince of the apostles' is on the Appian Way, and according to another version, under the church of St. Peter. It seems that in the middle of the 2nd century this tomb was already sought. Around the year 200 the Roman presbyter Gaius believed he knew where Peter's tomb was, 'in the Vatican', and Paul's tomb, 'on the way to Ostia'. And since Constantine it has been venerated—and visited—the presumed tomb of Peter in St. Peter's church. However, its historical authenticity has not been proven; simply, in the Constantinian era there was a belief that they had found Peter's tomb. But this belief did not prove anything more in those times than today. What was found under the church of St. Peter (in whose vicinity was the Phrygianum, the sanctuary of the goddess Cybele) was a large number of pagan tombs: in the last

excavations no less than twenty-two mausoleums and two open crypts.

Between 1940 and 1949 the archaeologist Enrico Josi, the architect Bruno Apolloni-Ghetti, the Jesuit Antonio Ferrua and another Jesuit, Engelbert Kirschbaum, excavated under the dome of St. Peter. The management was given to the prelate Kaas, who was then director of the centre. The results of various critical researchers—Adriano Prandi, Armin von Gerkan, Theodor Klauser, A. M. Schneider, and others—ended up extracting from the Jesuits the confession that the (Catholic) report of the excavations was not ‘free of errors’. There were ‘defects in the description’. They spoke of ‘greater or lesser contradictions’ and mention that *errare humanum est* (to err is human) ‘which, unfortunately, continues to be fulfilled’. But the decisive thing is that they wanted to ‘believe’. In no way has criticism ‘caused them to falter’. Finally, Engelbert Kirschbaum records the following:

Has Peter’s tomb been found? We reply: the *tropaion* of the middle of the 2nd century has been found. However, the corresponding tomb of the apostle has not been ‘found’ in the same sense, but it has been demonstrated: that is, by means of a whole series of clues, its existence has been deduced, although there are no longer ‘material parts’ of this original tomb.

Ergo, the grave has been there, but it’s gone! ‘Fantasy would like to imagine how the corpse of the first pope rested on earth’, Kirschbaum writes, and assumes that Peter’s bones were removed from its tomb in the year 258—naturally, without the slightest demonstration.

When Venerando Correnti, a well-known anthropologist, studied the legs of the *vecchio robusto* (old robust), the presumed bones of Peter, he identified them as the remains of three individuals, among them with ‘almost total certainty’ (*quasi ciertamente*) those of an elderly woman of about seventy years old. However, on June 26, 1968, Pope Paul VI announced in his address on the occasion of a general audience: ‘The relics of St. Peter have been identified in a way that we can consider as convincing’. In fact, any identification among the pile of buried remains was, both at the beginning and after two thousand years,

impossible even if Peter was there. Erich Caspar has rightly pointed out, with a good dose of prudence, ‘that the existing doubts will never be eliminated’.

Within this same context, Johannes Haller has recalled, also rightly, the scepticism regarding the authenticity of the Schiller and Bach skulls, although the distance in time is much smaller and the conditions much better. Likewise, Armin von Gerkan writes that, even if Peter’s tomb were discovered with inscriptions that would attest to it—which is not the case—that would prove nothing ‘since that inhumation would come from the Constantinian era, and it is very possible it was a fiction’. Norbert Brox, who in 1983 knows ‘with all certainty’ that Peter has been in Rome, confesses that the role that Peter played in the community of that city is unknown. ‘It is ruled out that he was its bishop’. The author of the First Epistle of Peter (the ‘apostle of Jesus Christ’ in ‘Babylon’, that is, Rome) did not present himself as bishop but, according to the Protestant theologian Felix Christ, ‘as a preacher and above all as an ‘elder’. Also for the Catholic Blank, Peter was not, ‘in all probability the first bishop of Rome’, and naturally not the founder of the Roman community. Even for Rudolf Pesch, so faithful to the opposite line, there was no ‘such beginnings’, no episcopate in Rome. Neither Peter nor Paul—‘neither of the two apostles has had a direct’ successor ‘in a Roman bishopric’. However, at the end of his study, this Catholic declares that the papal primacy is ‘the Catholic primacy of Peter united to the succession of the apostles in the office of bishop, at the service of the faith of the Church, One and Holy’. This is the *factum theologicum*.

In plain English: hiding a fact to obtain what would not otherwise be achieved.

As the historical-critical exegesis of the Bible teaches us, Jesus—the apocalyptic man who, totally within the tradition of the Jewish prophets, waits for the immediate end: the irruption of the ‘God’s imperial rule’, and thereby makes a complete mistake (one of the most solid results of exegetical investigation)—certainly did not want to found any Church or institute priests, bishops, patriarchs and popes. As late as the middle of the 2nd century, the Roman Christian community had about thirty



thousand members and 155 clerics. None knew anything about the appointment of Peter, nor about his stay and martyrdom in Rome.

*The list of fabricated Roman bishops*

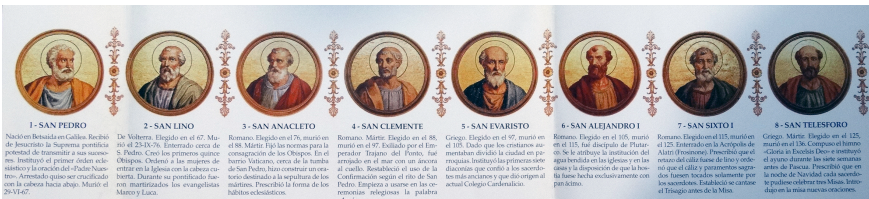
The oldest list of Roman bishops was provided by the father of the Church, Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyon, in his work *Adversus Haereses*, roughly between the years 180 and 185. The original Greek text is not preserved; only a complete Latin copy of the 3rd century or 4th, if not the 5th. Literature about it is hardly noticeable, the text is ‘spoiled’ in a manifest way. What remains a mystery is the origin of the list. Irenaeus wrote down a little more than the names.

And nowhere is there talk of a primacy of Peter! By the end of the 2nd century Peter was not yet counted in Rome among the bishops. And in the 4th century it is affirmed that he was pope for twenty-five years! Bishop Eusebius, a historian of little confidence, even guilty of falsification of documents, transmitted in his time the succession of Roman bishops. Eusebius also ‘perfected’ the list of Alexandrian bishops, very similar to that of the Romans. The same with the Antioquian list, associating an Olympiad with each one of the bishops Cornelius, Eros and Theophilus. In the list of bishops of Jerusalem he also worked with artificial computations, not having ‘practically any written news’ of the years in which they were in office. Later, Bishop Epiphanius made an exact dating comparing it with that of the emperors.

Around the year 354, the *Catalogus Liberianus (Liberian Catalogue)*, a relation of popes that goes from Peter to Liberius, indicating dates in days and months, was continued and ‘completed’, as indicated by the Catholic Gelmi, who immediately added: ‘All these data have no historical value’. The *Liber Pontificalis (Book of the Popes)*, the official book of the popes, the oldest list of the Roman bishops, contains ‘a great abundance of forged or legendary material’, which the author ‘completes by new findings’ (Caspar). In short, it carries so many forgeries that until the 6th century it has hardly any historical

value, not naming Peter, but a certain Linus, as the first bishop of the city. Thereafter Linus is in second place and Peter in the first.

In the end a ‘position of Peter’ is constructed (Karrer) and becomes ‘papacy’. ‘Like a seed’, writes the Jesuit Hans Grotz in a poetic way, ‘Peter fell on the Roman earth’. And then many others fell, as is still happening today. Little by little all the ‘successors’ of Peter could be counted, as has been said, with the year in which they acceded to the papacy and the date of their death, apparently in an uninterrupted succession. However, over time the list of Roman bishops was modified, perfected, completed in such a way that, in a table compiled by five Byzantine chroniclers, of the first twenty-eight bishops of Rome only in four places do the figures agree in all columns. Indeed, the final editor of the text, perhaps Pope Gregory I, seems to have expanded the list of names to include twelve saints, in parallel with the twelve apostles. In any case, the list of Roman bishops of the first two centuries is as unreliable as that of the list of the Alexandrians or Antiochenes, and ‘in the first decades it is pure arbitrariness’ (Heussi).



**Editor’s Note:** Part of a poster of the bishops of Rome from St. Peter to Pope Francis published under the heading *I Sommi Pontefici Romani*. The poster is so large that, unfolded, I had to hang it on a wall to photograph it. It is a fabricated list of popes that starts at the left with St. Peter. Note the noblest faces the artist used for these non-existent popes to make the faithful believe that the first popes were not only saints, but also holy men of the white race.

The invention of a series of traditional names and tables, partly constructed, artificially filling the gaps, existed long before the appearance of Christianity and its lists of bishops forged from the beginning. It is comparable to the Old Testament genealogies, which through a succession of names without empty gaps,

guaranteed participation in the divine promises; especially the list of high priests after the exile, as a list of rulers of Israel. Furthermore, the ancient pastors of Rome were not considered in any way 'popes'. For a long time they had 'no other title than that of the other bishops' (Bihimeyer, Catholic). Whereas in the East, patriarchs, bishops and abbots were long known as 'popes' (*pappas*, *papa*, father), this designation appears in Rome for the first time on a tombstone from the time of Liberius (papacy 352-366).

At the end of the 5th century, the notion acquired a naturalisation certificate in the West, where the Roman bishops used the word 'pope' to call themselves, along with other bishops, although they did not do so regularly until the end of the 8th century. And until the second millennium the word 'pope' does not become an exclusive privilege for the bishops of Rome.

The first to refer to Mt, 16, 18, is, of course, the despotic Stephen I (papacy 354-357). With his hierarchical-monarchical conception of the Church, rather than episcopal and collegial, it is to a certain extent the first pope. Not even Augustine, so fond of Rome but sometimes oscillating delicately among the pope and his African brothers, defends papal primacy. That is why Vatican I, of 1870, even reproached his 'erroneous opinions' (*pravae sententiae*) to the famous father of the Church. *Sumus christiani, non petriani*, 'We are Christians, not Petrians', Augustine had affirmed.

Similarly, like the bishops and fathers of the Church, the ancient councils did not recognise the primacy of law of Rome.

## BACKGROUND IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The country in which Christianity arose, a narrow coastal strip east of the Mediterranean in the western reaches of Asia, is a bridge between Asia Minor and North Africa, particularly Egypt. In this ‘corner of storms’ between the two continents rivalled the greatest powers of antiquity.

The Israelites, a nomadic people, livestock herders according to some researchers, occupied part of the land of Canaan perhaps in the 14th century BC, and certainly in the 13th. They worshiped several deities and spirits like El of Semitic origin, a deity endowed with a particularly large member, who then finished mingling with Yahweh. It was precisely the enmity against the Philistines, who, coming probably from the Aegean islands dominated five coastal cities (Gaza, Astod, Ekron, Ashkelon and Gath), what served to shape the Jewish nationalist delirium and forge the union of the tribes.<sup>2</sup> The Israelites warred against the Tiskal, the Midianites, the Syrians and, of course, also against themselves, to the point that Bethel (the house of God) was destroyed four times between 1200 and 1000 BC. This was the golden rule for dealing with an enemy city: ‘When thanks to Yahweh, your God, they have fallen into your hands, you will pass by the sword all the men who dwell therein, and shall be yours women and children as well as beasts and all that there be in it’. Obviously, so merciful treatment is only reserved for distant enemies; of the closest neighbours: ‘Not one should be left alive’.

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<sup>2</sup> *Note of the translator:* There is some evidence in favour that the Philistines were of Indo-European origin. In 2016 a large Philistine cemetery was discovered. If the Aryan origin is corroborated by DNA testing of the skeletons, the Philistines, not the Hebrews, should be considered the ‘good guys’ of the story (again, cf. *The Fair Race’s Darkest Hour*).

But this God, obsessed by his absolutism like no other in the history of religions, and also of an unparalleled cruelty, is the same God in the history of Christianity. Even today this deity claims that humanity must believe in him; that they should pray and give their life for him. It is a God so singularly bloodthirsty that he ‘absorbed the demonic’ because ‘being himself the most powerful demon Israel did not need demons of any other kind’ (Volz). It is a God who hives of jealousy and vindictiveness, that admits no tolerance; strictly prohibits other beliefs and even dealing with the infidels, the goyim, qualified quintessentially as *rasha*: people without god. Against these he claims ‘very sharp swords’ to perform the ‘extermination’.

When the Lord thy God brought thee into the land which you go to possess, and destroyed from your view many nations... you must destroy them without leaving a living soul. You cannot get friendly with them nor have pity: no marriages giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons... You shall exterminate all peoples that the Lord your God will put in your hands.

Nothing pleases more God than both revenge and ruin. He gets drunk with blood. From the ‘settlement’ the historical books of the Old Testament ‘are but a long chronicle of ever renewed carnage, without reason and without mercy’ (Brock).

### *Moses and the Book of Judges*

But not even this was enough for Moses, a character that a tract of 1598, *On the Three Great Liars*, blamed for ‘the largest and most egregious crimes’ (*summa et gravissime Mosis crimina*). Moses was ‘angry with the commanders of the army’; he asked how they had spared the women and children. ‘Therefore kill all those men, even the children, and cut the throat of the women that have known a man; keep only girls and all the maids... And it was found that the booty was taken by the army of six hundred and seventy-five thousand sheep, seventy-two thousand oxen, donkeys, seventy-one thousand, and thirty-two thousand female virgins’.

In a word, they perpetrated the most horrible atrocities and praised themselves for it, and they burned entire towns and

villages to leave no stone unturned. Today, when excavating the ancient Canaanites doublings, it is common to find a thick layer of ash that confirms the destruction by fire. One of the most important Palestinian cities in late Chalcolithic, Tell-Isdud or Ashdod, located in the international route of the sea (*via maris*) and that would become the capital of the Philistine Pentapolis, disappeared; destroyed by fire in the 13th century BC, like its neighbour Tell-Mor. Sometimes exterminating whole tribes spread because it was common to throw at the enemy the most severe form of war decreed by the Lord, the accursed (Hebrew *herám*, which was the negation of life itself, and which root derives from a word meaning ‘sacred’ to the Western Semites): something offered to Yahweh as a kind of vast hecatomb or ritual sacrifice. Not by chance the biblical descriptions of ‘settlement’ have been compared with the later campaigns of Islam, when it is said that the conquerors should truly feel ‘custodians of the word of God’ and protagonists of a holy war. ‘Only these, not the profane wars, end the anathema which means the extermination of all the living in the name of Yahweh’ (Gamm). The ‘destruction at the roots can only be explained by the religious fanaticism of the Israelites’. Those are the cases where the Lord expresses his commands: ‘For in the towns that you shall not leave a living soul, but without differentiation you shall kill by the sword, namely: the Hittites and the Amorites, and the Canaanites and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, as the Lord your God has commanded you, lest they teach you to make all the abominations that they have used with their gods, and offend your Lord’.

Such excesses of faith had their origin, in the first place, in the nationalism of that ancient people, undoubtedly one of the most extremist ever known, combined with the rigor of a monotheism unknown in those regions. Both elements mutually potentiated the claim to be the chosen people. The Israelites of the pre-Davidic time committed the most terrible crimes, and celebrated the genocide as a pleasing action to the Lord’s eyes, almost as a symbol of faith. And that ‘holy war’, then and later, was carried out with particular vehemence; without admitting negotiations or agreements. Only the extermination of the enemy,

the uncircumcised or unbaptized, the ‘heretic’, the ‘infidel’ is ‘a typically Israelite trait’ (Ringgren).

In most respects, the description of the Old Testament book of Judges, dated between 1200 and 1050 BC, i.e., a century and a half after the ‘settlement’, is a source of information, if not entirely reliable, quite valid. It barely mentions anything but ‘holy wars’. These always began with blessings, after a period of sexual continence, and usually ended with the total liquidation of the enemy: men, women and children. ‘The ruins of many villages and towns, repeatedly destroyed during the 12th and 11th centuries, provided the most graphic of archaeological commentaries’ (Cornfeld / Botterweck). The Ark of the Covenant, assurance of God’s presence, accompanied the massacres.

### *The ravages of David and the modern translators of the Bible*

Samuel, the last judge and first prophet of Israel, fought against the Philistines and defeated them but then, feeling old, anointed Saul as army commander and ordered him in God’s name:

Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.

The Catholic encyclopaedia of many volumes, *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* (*Lexicon of Theology and the Church*) annotates that the prophet in question was a character ‘without blemish’ and goes even further in praise of his successor: ‘A great effort in defending the theocracy, the law and the right, was the major garment of character in Saul’. And this king, the first of Israel (1020-1000 BC) anointed by Samuel, figures typically as a ‘charismatic’ who acted through ‘the spirit of the Lord’ and yet, ‘was obviously a psychotic depressive, tormented by persecution’ (Beck) who energetically continued the tradition of ‘holy wars’. As the Bible tells, Saul fought ‘many enemies around him’: Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, the kings of the Philistines and Amalekites. Of course, when according to superior orders they killed all the Amalekites including the infants, but kept the best

cattle, he incurred in the wrath of both the Lord and the prophet Samuel, after which he suffered a tremendous defeat at the hands of the Philistines and committed suicide (incidentally, this is the first act of this kind mentioned in the Bible).

His successor, David, name that means the chosen one (of God), who bought as wife Saul's daughter, Michal, for the price of a hundred Philistine foreskins, towards the end of the millennium heralded the beginning of the national state, thus achieving the maximum period of splendour for Israel, whose possessions came then from the middle Syria to the borders of Egypt and was the strongest nation among the great empires of Mesopotamia, Hamath and Egypt. As had happened with Saul, David (1000-961 BC) was also possessed by 'the spirit of the Lord' and made a campaign after another, as many were 'oppressors' from the north. And so David said in his hymn of thanksgiving: 'I shall persecute my enemies, exterminate them; will not turn my back until they are wiped out. I will consume and shatter them all, so they can no longer recover'. 'But he never started a war' St. Ambrose hastens to add, the doctor of the Church, without first asking advice to the Lord.

David is admired not only in Jewish theology, but also in Christianity and Islam as a person of outstanding religious significance. 'Whenever he went on campaign, David did not leave a man or woman alive... so did David when he dwelt in the land of Philistines'. Other customs of the Lord's chosen included to cut off the horses' tendons of the enemy. Once he also cut the hands and feet of the enemies themselves. Another hobby of 'the divine David, great and softest prophet' according to bishop Theodoret, a Church historian, was to grind prisoners with saws and iron tongs and burn them in brick kilns, as he did to the people of all cities of the Ammonites. It is relevant to remember that, in 1956, the Council of the German Evangelical Church and the Union of Evangelical Bible Society agreed to publish a Bible 'according to the version of Martin Luther in German', an authorised edition in 1964 that appeared in 1971. It reproduces the passage just quoted thus: 'to the people he brought them out, and put them into slave labour with saws and axes of iron, and brick kilns'. However, Martin Luther had translated it thus:



To the people he took away and commanded them to be sawn, passing iron drays, and butcher them with knives, and toss them in the brick kilns.

This passage corresponds to the First Book of Chronicles (20,3), where the above Bible, authorised by the Council of the German Evangelical Church ‘according to the version of Martin Luther’ says, ‘whose inhabitants he took away, and put them down in labour servitude in the trails, saws and harrows’. But the words Luther chose were:

Whose inhabitants he took out, and made that drag harrows and chariots armed with cutting scythes ran over them, so that they were made pieces and shattered.

The approved Bible is a forgery, and responds to a certain method. In the course of the last hundred years, the Evangelical Church has proposed no less than three reviews of the Lutheran Bible. Luther did not suspect that his spiritual heirs would amend his words so widely—he, whose motto as a translator was that ‘words must serve the cause, not the cause serve the words’. When the Evangelical Church announces a Bible ‘according to the version of Martin Luther in the German language’ it is selling a gross forgery.

At any event, if the ancients, being idolaters, had been made slaves surely they would not have run a more enviable fate, even the non-combatants as reported by the archaeologist Glueck, who excavated the ruins of Eilat. His report on the slaves who worked in brick kilns was that ‘the rate of mortality must have been terrific’.

In the Bible, a man named Shimei curses David calling him ‘bloodthirsty’ and throws stones upon him. Erich Brock and a few others have opined that the words were uttered ‘for good reason’. Even the Lord himself confirms it: ‘You have shed much blood, and done many wars’. But yes, it is always ‘with the Lord’, always moved ‘by the will of the Lord’. Hence ‘pleased, the Lord watched David’ for example after passing on the knife ‘twenty-two thousand Syrians’ or after a massacre of ‘eighteen thousand’ Edomites. But if God praised the ‘bloodthirsty’ David for keeping his commandments and walk always in the shadow of the Lord, doing only what would please him, and if David praised

himself, he is also praised forever and tirelessly, by the Christian clergy: a clergy that, as I will try to argue, at all ages has been in favour of the great criminals of history if they are useful to the Church. The same bloodthirsty king has set an example for millennia: for being faithful to the Lord, for making war in the name of the Lord, and for sanctifying the loot destined to the construction of the Temple. He who tried to hide the contribution was exposed to the extermination of his entire family, livestock included.

### *The sacred warmongering of the Maccabees*

The energetic Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV, who was trying to consolidate his shaky kingdom by introducing a syncretic religion that unified the peoples, desecrated the Temple in Jerusalem. In 168 BC Antiochus reformed the great altar of burnt offering and laid right there an altar to Olympian Zeus; he banned the Jewish religion and burned the city, but not before looting the treasury of the Temple and taking 1,800 talents from it. (Centuries later, the painter Raphael was commissioned by Pope Leo X to solemnize such a significant episode in one of the walls of the Vatican.)

According to Elias Bickermann, if the stringent measures against the Jews by Antiochus IV had taken effect, it would not only have meant the end of Judaism, but also ‘would have prevented the rise of Christianity and Islam’. Our imagination almost fails to conceive a world so different...

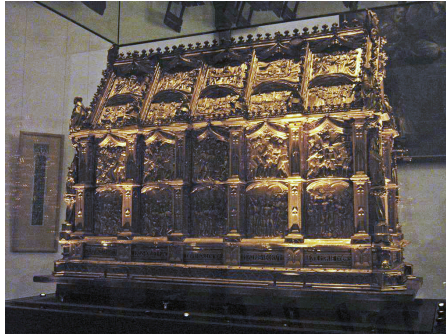
Mattathias, the first rebellious leader of the Maccabees, was a priest and assassin whose name means ‘gift of Yahweh’, of the family of Asmon. Possessed by the ‘religious zeal’ in the traditional biblical way, he killed an Israelite who by order of the royal commissioner intended to celebrate a sacrifice to idols. Judas Maccabeus organised the guerrilla struggle and purified the Temple, where he had found ‘the abomination of desolation’ (Daniel 12, 11) imposed by Antiochus; he also nailed the head of the enemy general Nicanor on the gate of the citadel: an event that is still being celebrated today by the Jews by means of a fixed holiday of the calendar.

Yohanan Hyrcanus (reigned 135-103) undertook great military campaigns, as they had not been known since the time of Solomon. He Judaised by the force of arms the provinces of Idumaea and Galilee. We are told not to believe that these were vulgar campaigns of expansion; they were ‘particularly religious wars called holy wars’ (R. Meyer). Hyrcanus also ravaged Samaria, a region that disappears completely from political history in the Christian era. Samaria, which had been the capital of the kingdom of Israel, enlarged with great splendour by King Amri, always rivalled Jerusalem. The Samaritans, a hybrid people in the middle of Palestine between Jew and idolater, were hated by the Jews more than any other. Few of the Maccabees died of natural death: Judas Maccabeus, in the field; his brother Jonathan, killed; Simon, murdered; Hyrcanus II, grandson of John Hyrcanus I, executed by Herod, the ally of the Romans; Aristobulus II, poisoned; his son, executed, as well as his brother and the last Asmonean prince. Also the daughter of Alexander, Mariamne, married in the year 37 with Herod, died a victim of a palatial intrigue, like the mother Alexandra and their children. ‘The reign of Herod was, to a great extent, a time of peace for Palestine’ (Grundmann).

At the head of these conflicts, imperialist wars, civil wars and various atrocities it shines the star—historical or not—of the seven Maccabean brothers: seven heroes of the ‘holy war’. It is thus that these Maccabees deserve not only to be ‘revered by all’, according to Gregory of Nazianzus, a doctor of the Church, but ‘Those who praise them, and those who hear their praise, should better imitate their virtues and, spurred by this example, rise to the same feats’. His opinion is typical. The most famous doctors of the Church compete among each other in their praise of the (supposed) proto-martyrs of the insurrection, those ‘Maccabean brothers’ who, according to St. Augustine, ‘before the Incarnation of Christ already fought for the Law of God to the point of giving their own lives’, or who ‘erected the magnificent banner of victory’ according to John Chrysostom. They became symbols of the *ecclesia militans* (militant Church) and remembered in the three oldest martyrology lists. Once transferred the precious ‘relics’ of the Maccabees to

Constantinople; then to the Roman church of San Pietro in Vincola, and later to the church of Maccabees in Cologne, Germany, they have been venerated, especially in the Rhine and Rhone valleys.

The existence of Christian saints before Jesus Christ can only seem absurd to anyone who does not know the Catholic mentality.



Maccabees Shrine, venerated in St. Andrew's Church, Cologne.

### *The Jewish War (66-70)*

The Zealots, a Jewish nationalist group originally constituted, undoubtedly, by a section of the Jerusalem clergy by the year 6, instigated a Jewish war as a reaction to the power of the Roman occupier. Despite the existence of notable differences between Zealots and Christians, many points of contact have been observed. It is no coincidence that one of the apostles of Jesus, a certain Simon, is called in the Gospel of Luke 'the Zealot' and in Matthew 'the Canaanite', which represents a simple transcription of the Aramaic *qannai*, 'the exalted'. Among the zealots, to whom current research attributes an important influence in the trajectory of Jesus, abounded apocalyptic rumours, as the oracle which said that, at that time, 'one of his own would be king of the world'. Four lustrums before the outbreak of the Jewish war they were already fighting against the Romans, but even more against antipatriotic Jews. Their enemies called them 'Sicarius' that means 'those of the knife' as they were armed with the *sica* with which they stabbed on the back those who they did not like, especially some rich Jews who for

reasons of interest agreed with the Romans. It is said (by Eusebius, Church historian) that one of their first victims had been 'the high priest Jonathas'.

They committed their murders in full day and in the middle of the city; they took advantage of the festive days to be confused in the agglomerations, and stabbed their enemies with small daggers hidden under the tunics. When the victim fell, the murderers added to the commotion and exclamations of consternation. Due to this cold blood they were almost never discovered.

Josephus, who in the middle of the war changed sides and favoured the Romans, calls the zealots assassins and bandits, but he does not forget to mention that 'they had many supporters, especially among the youth'. In extremist circles the insurrection against Rome was publicly incited. They used to read the books of the Maccabees (whose definitive inclusion in the Sacred Scriptures, let us recall in passing, dates from the Council of Trent; that is, from the 16th century). They hoped to be able to re-enact before the Romans, with the Lord's help, their triumphs against the Greeks. In this way, the *Bellum Iudaicum* (the Jewish war) finally occurred in 66-70. The revolt, so pleasing to the eyes of the Lord, was first led by Eleazar ben Simon, the son of a priest as well as by Zechariah ben Phalec; then by John of Giscala, who began at a well-chosen time on a Sabbath with the slaughter of the few Roman guards on the Antonia tower in Jerusalem and the powerful fortifications of the royal palace. Before surrendering to the garrison, they promised that they would not kill anyone; then they only pardoned an officer who agreed to be circumcised. (Later Christians would also forgive the Jews who accepted conversion.)

In the Greek cities of the region, Damascus, Caesarea, Ashkelon, Scythopolis, Hippos and Gadara, the Hellenes organised, in turn, a slaughter of Jews: 10,500 or 18,000 only in Damascus, according to one account. At the same time the insurgent Jews, stimulated by the ardour of their faith and by the great memories of the exploits of the Maccabees, ethnically cleansed all minorities in Judea. The Romans began to march, first under the orders of the governor of Syria, Cestius Gallus.

Nero then sent one of his best generals, the former mule dealer Titus Flavius Vespasianus, whose first operations were extremely cautious. He found himself in a politically sensitive situation due to the death of Nero and the fall of Galba. By the summer of the year 68 the Romans controlled almost all of Palestine. Vespasianus ordered the burning of the hermitage of Qumran, on the shores of the Dead Sea, whose important library, which the monks had hidden shortly before in the mountain caves, was not discovered until the middle of the 20th century. Vespasianus also decimated the Samaritans, who had taken part in the Jewish insurrection. Cerealis made with 11,600 of them a hecatomb in Mount Gerizim. Meanwhile, in Jerusalem, a city of 'sad fame' according to Tacitus, to which Vespasian already had in a siege, the children of God divided into two parties fought each other; they even came to form a third faction that fought against the other two in the Temple. With its surroundings, the Temple was a true fortress turned into a redoubt of zealots. They continued celebrating the rites even under the siege! While the masses, deprived of provisions, were starving the Jews stabbed each other in street fights, or killed the prisoners in the dungeons, while continuing to make common cause against the Romans. The latter, for their part, also passed the prisoners by the knife or crucified them.

Vespasian had to leave for Rome since his troops had proclaimed him emperor. But two years later, in early September 70, his son Titus ended the insurrection with a bloodbath. He ordered to throw thousands of imprisoned Jews to the circus of the beasts, or forced them to kill each other in duels, or burned them alive. The few survivors of Jerusalem, reduced to a single heap of ruins, were stabbed or sold as slaves. The Temple burned to the foundations, with all its possessions treasured for six centuries on the anniversary of the destruction of the first one. The struggle continued for several years in isolated fortresses such as Herodion Hill, Machaerus, and Masada, until the defenders committed suicide along with their wives and children. In the year 71 the victor entered triumphantly in Rome, where still can be seen the Arch of Titus in memory of the feat.

*Bar Kokhba and the 'Last War of God' (131-136)*

The massacre cost hundreds of thousands of lives. Jerusalem was devastated as once were Carthage and Corinth, and the country incorporated into the dominions of the emperor. Overwhelming taxes were imposed on the vanquished. Religious life, on the other hand—and how could it be otherwise—, flourished. Neither in Palestine nor anywhere the Jew was forbidden to practice his religion: 'For prudence, they abstained from declaring war on the Jewish faith as such' (Mommsen). But there was still ahead a major defeat, a few decades later, as a result of the second attempt of a 'last war of God'.

In 115 several uprisings occurred among the Jews of the diaspora, which were very numerous in the Mediterranean area according to Philo. Only in Alexandria there were more than a million Jews, still not disillusioned with the Messianic dream. During the war of Trajan against the Parthians (114-117), the rumour of a disastrous defeat of the empire spread, and there was also a great earthquake that destroyed Antioch and other cities of Asia Minor. In the face of these disasters, the Zealots believed their time had come. In the province of Crete and Cyrene, where 200,000 non-Jews were reported to have died, the 'messiah' Lukuas destroyed the capital, Cyrenaica. In Cyprus, the insurgents devastated Salamis and, according to the chronicles, killed 240,000 non-Jews: an obviously exaggerated figure. From then on, however, the Jews were barred from access to the island and even the castaways. In Egypt, where the Romans, in reprisals, liquidated all the Jews of Alexandria, the fighting lasted for years. In all places the Jewish diaspora was severely punished.

In Palestine, the successor of Trajan, Emperor Hadrian (reign 117-138), a great devotee of the gods, built a new city over the ruins of Jerusalem, Aelia Capitolina, and on the site of the Temple he built an altar to Jupiter and a temple of Venus. And here it is that in the year 131, Simon ben Kosevah (Bar Kokhba) begins a war of guerrillas so generalized and deadly that forces the very emperor to take command of the Roman troops. Bar Kokhba (in Aramaic means 'son of the star') takes over Jerusalem. His principal counsellor, Rabbi Aqiba, greets him

with a typical messianic appointment calling him 'star of Jacob', the saviour of Israel. He is also supported by the high priest Eleazar, later killed by Bar Kokhba himself because he advised surrender.

During two years the morale was high in Jerusalem. The Jews resumed worship in the Temple and proclaimed a new era of freedom. Emperor Hadrian sent four legions under the command of his best general, Julius Severus, with large numbers of auxiliary troops and a large fleet. The Romans start regaining ground little by little. According to Dion Casio, whose exaggerations are notorious, 580,000 Jewish fighters were killed and fifty fortresses and 985 villages destroyed; tens of thousands of prisoners were sent to captivity. Mommsen believes that these figures 'are not improbable' since the fighting was fierce and surely led to the extermination of the entire male population. Women and children flooded the slave markets, a practice that led to lower slave prices. The last population to fall was Beth-Ter (the present Battir), west of Jerusalem, where Bar Kokhba himself died in circumstances not well explained.

The site of the Temple and its surroundings were ploughed with oxen. As for the Zealots, the Romans utterly exterminated them, for at last, they understood that the religious fanaticism of the Jews was the true cause of the revolt. 'For the next fifty years we did not see the flight of a bird in Palestine', says the Talmud. The Israelites were forbidden under penalty of death to enter Jerusalem, and the garrison doubled. Until the 4th century, the Jews could not return to weep once a year for the loss of the 'holy city'. And before the 20th century; or more precisely, before May 14, 1948, they had failed to found a Jewish state, Eretz Yisrael.

### *The Jewish religion, tolerated by the Roman state*

Excepting Palestine, in pre-Christian times the Jews did not have a bad time. It is true that anti-Semitism has ancient roots. The first documentary testimony is found in the Aramaic papyri of Elephantine. In 410 BC a shrine offered to Yahweh was destroyed in Elephantine, possibly because the Jews were against the Egyptian independence and the supporters of the occupying



power, then Persia. Towards the year 300 BC anti-Judaism was already widespread. For example, there was already a rumour that the Jews were descendants of lepers. Such enmities were largely religious, and also political, rarely economic or racial.

With their insurrections under Nero, Trajan, and Hadrian, the Jews (they accounted for seven or eight percent of the empire's total population) gained the status of being dangerous to the state. They were distrusted. Their contemptuous attitude towards other cultures, religions, and nationalities, as well as their social isolation upset non-Jews. Tacitus, always moderate, censures the Jews' contemptuous stance before the gods, the country, and mentions their strange character and exclusivism of their customs (*diversitas morum*). In Tacitus, as in other classical writers (whose anti-Jewish manifestations undoubtedly did not cease exerting some influence) such as Pliny the Elder, Juvenal (a 'must read' author in medieval schools), Quintilianus (another 'must read' classical author at the beginning of the modern era), the impressions of the Jewish war are undoubtedly reflected. But even since Seneca, who committed suicide in 65 AD, a year before the beginning of that war, had written: 'The customs of this most abhorrent people have gained such force that they are introduced everywhere: they, the defeated, have given laws to their winners'.

But even the masters of Rome were tolerant of the Jews, in whom they found peasants, artisans, workers (at that time they were not yet characterised as merchants), and in some cases showed some sympathy for them. They enjoyed some special privileges, especially in the East, such as Sabbath observance. They had their own jurisdiction and were not obliged to submit to Roman jurisdiction. Caesar supported them in many ways. Augustus generously endowed the Temple of Jerusalem. According to the terms of the imperial donation, a bull and two lambs were sacrificed there every day 'to the highest God'. Agrippa, an intimate friend of Augustus, also favoured the Jews.

On the other hand, Emperor Caligula (37-41) expelled the Jews from the main cities of Parthia, where they were especially numerous. But even the Emperor Claudius, before persecuting the Jews of Rome, had issued a decree in their favour, in the year

42, granting them a special jurisdiction, valid throughout the empire; but at the same time he warned them not to abuse imperial magnanimity and that they did not despise the customs of other peoples. Nero's wife, Poppaea Sabina, was a great protector of Judaism. In general terms, the Roman administration was always ready 'to accommodate as much as possible, and even more, with all the demands of the Jews, justified or not' (Mommsen).

Not even after the conquest of Jerusalem did the emperors harass the Jewish faith, which for them was *religio licita* (legitimate religion). Vespasian and his successors ratified the privileges already granted by Caesar and Augustus. Jews could marry, sign contracts, acquire property, hold public office, possess slaves, and many other things like any Roman citizen. Jewish communities could manage their own goods and had their own limited jurisdiction. Even after Bar Kokhba's insurrection Emperor Hadrian and his successors consented the public celebration of Jewish cults and granted the dispensation of common obligations which were incompatible with their religion. Even in the provinces there were almost no restrictions against them; they built synagogues, appointed their trustees, and were exempt from military service in accordance to their beliefs.

Just as today the primitive peoples do not know, in their beliefs, the claim of exclusiveness of a 'superior being', the Romans were characteristically tolerant. In polytheism, no deity can claim the exclusive. The native cults amalgamated without problems with the imported ones. In the ancient pantheon of gods prevailed a kind of collegiality or friendly companionship; the faithful could pray to the god they preferred; recognised their own gods under the appearances of others, and certainly did not bother trying to 'convert' anyone. Schopenhauer says that intolerance is an essential characteristic of monotheism, that only the one God is

by its nature, a jealous god, that does not want to consent the subsistence of any other. On the other hand, the gods of polytheism are by nature tolerant; live and let live, and in principle tolerate their colleagues, the gods of the same religion. Later on, that tolerance extends equally to foreign deities.

To the Greco-Romans, the belief in a unique God looked like conceptual poverty; uniformity, un-sacralisation of the universe, atheism. Nothing more foreign to their way of thinking than the idea that the foreigners' gods are idols. Nothing sounds to them as incomprehensible as the 'thou shalt have no other God but Me' of the Jews; 'I am the Lord' or 'I am the Lord your God': an expression that is repeated up to sixteen times in the 19th chapter of Leviticus, to give but one example and not the longest. The Greco-Roman world knows nothing comparable to the covenant of blood between Yahweh and his 'chosen people'. And nothing excited more the antipathy against the Jews than their behaviour on account of their beliefs.

#### EARLY CHRISTIANITY

'No heretic is a Christian. But if he is not a Christian, every heretic is a devil'. 'Cattle for the slaughter of hell'.

—St. Jerome, Doctor of the Church

The Christians, in whom the Jews naturally saw nothing but doctors of error, turned the idea of 'Israel, the chosen people' into the claim of absolute truth of Christianity and Jewish messianism in the message of the second coming of Jesus Christ. This was the first important step in the evolution of the early Church, by which Christianity differed from its mother religion, the Jewish one.

#### *Interpretatio Christiana*

Not the Jews, but the Christians now became the 'people of Israel', from which the Jews had apostatised. In this way, they snatched from the Jews the Old Testament and used it as a weapon against them, an extraordinary process of forgery that is called *Interpretatio Christiana*: a unique phenomenon that has no history in the history of religions, and which is practically the only original feature of Christianity.

‘Your Scriptures, or rather, not yours, but ours!’ wrote Justin in the 2nd century. Justin is sure that ‘although they read them, they don’t understand them’. To the literal sense of the Scriptures they opposed, in an exegetical operation that rises the hair, a supposed symbolic or spiritual sense. Only thus they could affirm that ‘the Jews did not understand’ their own sacred texts. The Christians snatched from the Jews whatever might be useful for the anti-Jewish polemic. As Gabriel Laub jokes, Christianity would not have been possible ‘if there had existed in the Old Testament times something like the international convention of copyright’.

In the 1st century Christians were already speaking of ‘our father Abraham’ and asserted that ‘Moses, in whom you have your hopes, is, in fact, your accuser’. All of this hair-raising interpretations were systematised in Christian theology. For theologians and Christians, if there exists an Old Testament it is only to announce things that are going to have their fulfilment in the New Testament; and the passages of the Old one that just do not square, are eliminated. And since the Jews were the least squares, they were repressed for ‘apostasy’. As I have said: *Interpretatio Christiana*. One religion expropriates another and then insults, fights and persecutes the expropriated religion. This was necessary, because in Christianity what does not go back to paganism belongs, without exception, to the Jewish faith: its God, its monotheism, the days of fasting, festivities like Easter, Pentecost... Even the word Christ (from the Greek *christos*) is nothing more than a translation of the Hebrew *maschiah* or ‘messiah’. The increasing hostility against the Jews in times of primitive Christianity is observed in the writings of the *iospatres aevi apostolici*, that is, of the apostolic fathers: a designation created by the patristics of the 17th century to refer to the authors who lived shortly after the apostles: ‘When the earth was still warm from the blood of Christ’, according to the expression of St. Jerome.

### ‘Orthodoxy’ and ‘heresy’

The Church teaches that the original situation of Christianity was that of ‘orthodoxy’, that is, of ‘true faith’; later,

the 'heresy' would appear (*de a'tresis*, the chosen opinion). In classical literature, 'heresy' was any opinion, whether scientific, political or from a religious party. Little by little, however, the term took on the connotation of the sectarian and discredited.

The scheme 'original orthodoxy against overcoming heresy', essential to maintaining the ecclesiastical fiction of an allegedly uninterrupted and faithfully preserved apostolic tradition, is nothing more than an *a posteriori* invention, as false as that very doctrine of the apostolic tradition. The historical model according to which Christian doctrine, in its beginnings, was pure and true, then contaminated by heretics and schismatics of all epochs, 'the theory of deviationism', as the Catholic theologian Stockmeier has written, 'does not conform to any historical reality'. Such a model could not be true in any way, because Christianity in its beginnings was far from being homogeneous; there existed only a set of beliefs and principles not very well established. It still 'had no definite symbol of faith (a recognised Christian belief) nor canonical Scriptures' (E.R. Dodds). We could not even refer to what Jesus himself said, because the oldest Christian texts are not the Gospels, but the Epistles of Paul, which certainly contradict the Gospels in many essential points, not to mention many other problems of transcendence that arise here. The early Christians incorporated not one, but many and very different traditions and forms. In the primitive community there was at least one division, as far as we know, between the 'Hellenizing' and the 'Hebrew'. There were also violent discussions between Paul and the first original apostles. Ever since, every tendency, church or sect, tends to be considered as the 'true', the 'unique', authentic Christianity. That is, in the origins of the new faith there was neither a 'pure doctrine' in the current Protestant sense, nor a Catholic Church. It was a Jewish sect separated from its mother religion.

At the end of the 2nd century, when the Catholic Church was constituted, that is, when the Christians had become a multitude as the Roman philosopher Celsus joked, divisions and parties began to emerge, each of which called for their own legitimacy 'which was what they intended from the outset'.

And as a result of becoming a multitude they are distant from each other and condemn each other, to the point that we do not see that they have anything in common except the name since otherwise each party believes its own belief and has nothing from the beliefs of others.

At the beginning of the 3rd century Bishop Hippolytus of Rome cites thirty-two competing Christian sects which, by the end of the 4th century, according to Bishop Philastrius of Brescia, numbered 128 (plus twenty-eight so-called 'pre-Christian heresies'). Lacking political power, the pre-Constantinian Church could only complain verbally against the 'heretics' as well as against the Jews. To the ever-increasing enmity with the synagogue were added the increasingly odious clashes between the Christians themselves, owing to their doctrinal differences. Moreover, for the doctors of the Church such deviations constituted the most serious sin because divisions, after all, involved the loss of members; the loss of power. In these polemics the objective was not to understand the point of view of the opponent, which perhaps would have been dangerous. It would be more accurate to say that they obeyed the purpose 'of crushing the opponent by all means' (Gigon). 'Ancient society had never known this kind of quarrel because it had a different and non-dogmatic concept of religious questions' (Brox).

### *First 'heretics' in the New Testament*

Paul the fanatic, the paradigm of intolerance, provided the example of the treatment that would be given by Rome to those who did not think like him, or rather, 'his figure is fundamental to understand the origin of this kind of controversy' (Paulsen). This was demonstrated in his relations with the first apostles, including Peter. Before the godly legend made the ideal pair of the apostles, Peter and Paul (still in 1647, Pope Innocent X condemned the equation of both as heretical, while today Rome celebrates their festivities on June 29) were angry with fury, even the book of the Acts of the Apostles admits that there was 'great commotion'.

Paul, despite having received from Christ 'the ministry of preaching forgiveness' contradicts Peter 'face to face', accuses

him of 'hypocrisy' and asserts that with him, 'the circumcised' were equally hypocrites. He makes a mockery of the leaders of the Jerusalem community, calling them 'proto-apostles', whose prestige he says nothing matters to them since they are only 'mutilated', 'dogs', 'apostles of deceit'. He regrets the penetration of 'false brethren', the divisions, the parties, even if they were declared in his favour, to Peter or to others. Conversely, the primitive community reproached him those same defects, and even more, including greed, accusations of fraud and calling Paul a coward; an abnormal, and a madman while at the same time seeking the defection of the followers. Agitators sent from Jerusalem break into Paul's dominions. Peter called him 'hypocrite' and that, in Corinth, they face the 'erroneous doctrines of Paul'. The dispute did not stop to fester until the death of both and continued with their followers. Paul, very different from the Jesus of the Synoptics, only loves his own gang. Overbeck, the theologian and friend of Nietzsche who came to confess that 'Christianity cost my life because I have needed my whole life to get rid of it', knew very well what was said when he wrote: 'All beautiful things of Christianity are linked to Jesus and the most unpleasant to Paul. He was the least likely person to understand Jesus'. To the condemned, this fanatic wants to see them surrendered 'to the power of Satan', that is to say, prisoners of death. And the penalty imposed on the incestuous Corinth, which was pronounced, by the way, according to a typically pagan formula, was to bring about its physical annihilation: something similar to the lethal effects of the curse of Peter against Ananias and Sapphira.

Peter, Paul and Christian love! Whoever preaches another doctrine, even if he were 'an angel from heaven', is forever cursed. And Paul repeats, tirelessly, 'Cursed be...!', 'God would want to annihilate those who scandalize you!', 'Cursed be everyone who does not love the Lord', *anatema sit* (a curse) that became a model of future Catholic bulls of excommunication. But the apostle was to give another example of his ardour, to which the Church would also set an example. In Ephesus, where the 'tongues' were spoken, and where even the garments used by the apostles healed diseases and casted out devils, many

Christians, perhaps disillusioned with the old magic in view of the new wonders, 'collected their books and burned them up in the presence of everyone. When the value of the books was added up, it was found to total fifty thousand silver coins. In this way, the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power'. The New Testament already identifies heresy with 'blasphemy against God', the Christian of another hue with the 'enemy of God'; and Christians begin to call other Christians 'slaves of perdition', 'adulterous and corrupted souls', 'children of the curse', 'children of the devil', 'animals without reason and by nature created only to be hunted and exterminated', in which the saying that 'the dog always returns to his own vomit' and 'the pig wallows in his own filth' is confirmed.

For centuries the crying against the heretics spread; not an objective polemic, but a demagogic of denigration. 'In these circles, to vilify was considered more important than a refutation' (Walter Bauer). We can verify it in paleo-Christian literature. In the first Clementine Epistle, written about the year 96 AD (and attributed to the supposed third successor of Peter), the oldest document in patristics, Clement attacks the leaders of the Corinthian opposition who wanted to turn to the East, abandoning the West, and calls them 'heated and reckless individuals', 'leaders of contention and disagreement', who 'tear apart the members of Christ as they eat and drink, and become fat, shameless, vain and braggart, hypocrites and fools', 'a great dishonour'...

### *Thirteen good Christians*

*St. Ignatius.* Ignatius of Antioch says that 'heretics' live 'in the manner of the Jews' who propagate 'false doctrines', 'old fables that serve no purpose'. 'He who has been tainted by it is guilty of eternal fire', 'he shall die without delay'. And also those who teach the error 'will perish, victims of their disputes'. 'I warn you against these beasts with a human figure'. This holy bishop, who calls himself 'wheat of God' with 'seductive benevolence' (Hümmeler) and his 'language is full of the ancient dignity' (Cardinal Willebrands) was the first to use the word



‘Catholic’ to designate what today is the confession of seven hundred million Christians.

*St. Irenaeus.* Towards the year 180 Irenaeus, the bishop of Lyon, intervened in the chorus of those who thundered ‘against the heresies’. He was the first ‘father of the Church’ because he was the first to take for granted the notion of a Catholic Church and knew how to comment theologically; but he was also the first one to identify the masters of errors with the figure of the devil and ‘declared the beliefs of others as deliberately malicious’ (Kühner).

Irenaeus also advanced, like the great polemicists of the Church, the attacks on Gnosticism: one of the rival religions of Christianity and perhaps the most dangerous for the latter. Of undoubtedly earlier origin, although little is known of its origins and many points remain controversial, it represented an even more extreme and pessimistic dualism; its diffusion occurred with incredible speed but in a multitude of variants that confuses the scholars. As it borrowed many Christian traditions, the Church believed that the *gnosis* was a Christian heresy and as such fought it, though of course without achieving the ‘conversion’ of any head of school or sect of the Gnostics. Many Gnostics, because of their personal qualities as has been granted by the Catholic Erhard, ‘fascinated many community faithful’. From about the year 400 Catholicism was dedicated to systematically destroy the written documents of this religion which had a rich collection of books. Even in the middle of the 20th century, when in a place in Upper Egypt a complete Gnostic library was found in Nag Hamadi, there were ecclesiastics to resume defamation of the *gnosis* as ‘a poison of infiltration to eradicate’ (Baus).

Irenaeus thus harasses the ‘mental lucubration’ of the Gnostics, ‘the malice of their deceptions and the perversity of their mistakes’. He calls them names, ‘vain histrionics and sophists’ who ‘give vent to their madness’. This saint, whose importance for theology and for the Church ‘can hardly be overestimated’ (Camelot), in his main work exclaims: ‘Oh, and oh pain’ as to the epidemic of ‘heresies’, to correct himself immediately: ‘It is much more serious: it is something beyond the

woes and exclamations of pain'. The father of the Church particularly censures the hedonism of his adversaries. According to the account, the Marcosians, whose sect reached as far as the Rhône valley (where Irenaeus learned of their existence), were prone to seducing rich ladies, although the Catholics always preferred the poor. It is true that some Gnostics were in favour of debauchery, but there were also rigorous ascetics. Irenaeus puts a lot of emphasis on incontinence. 'The most perfect among them', he affirms, 'do all that is forbidden without any embarrassment; they surrender themselves without measure to the pleasures of the flesh, secretly dishonour the women whom they seek to indoctrinate'.

The Gnostic Marcus, who taught in Asia, where it was claimed he became acquainted with the wife of a deacon, had 'as an assistant a little devil', a 'forerunner of the Antichrist' who 'had seduced many men and not a few women'. 'His itinerant preachers also seduced many simple women'. The priests of Simon and Menander were also servants of 'sensual pleasure'; 'they use magical spells and formulas, and make love filters'. And so were the supporters of Carpocrates; even Marcion, despite his acknowledged asceticism. Marcion is branded as 'shameless and blasphemous' by Irenaeus. 'Not only must the beast be raised; it must be wounded on all sides'.

*Clement of Alexandria.* At the threshold of the 3rd century, Clement of Alexandria considers that 'heretics' are 'deceitful' individuals, 'bad people', unable to distinguish between 'true and false', who had no knowledge of the 'true God' and of course, were tremendously lustful. They 'twist', 'force' and 'violate' the interpretation of the Scriptures. Clement, praised even today for his 'breadth of sight and his spiritual benignity', defines Christians of other tendencies as those who 'do not know the designs of God' or the 'Christian traditions'; 'are not afraid of the Lord but only in appearance, as they commit sin by resembling pigs'. 'As human beings converted into animals, they are the ones who despise and trample on the traditions of the Church'.

*Tertullian.* Toward the beginning of the 3rd century, Tertullian, the son of a non-commissioned officer and lawyer

who occasionally exercised in Rome, writes his 'requisitions against heretics'. But not much later and during the final two decades of his life, he himself would become a 'heretic', a Montanist and an eloquent leader of a party of his own, that of the Tertullianists. In his *Praescriptio* (*Prescription*) that clever and mocking Tunisian, who dominated all the facets of rhetoric, 'proves' that Catholic doctrine is the original one and therefore the true doctrine in the face of the innovations of heresy, and that the 'heretic', therefore, is not a Christian and his beliefs are errors that cannot aspire to any dignity, authority, or ethical validity. Later on, this natural-born polemicist would whip up Catholics with his wit and sharp tongue, despite having been the creator of the institutionalised notion of the Church, as well as the whole doctrinal apparatus of sin and forgiveness; baptism and penitence, Christology, and the dogma of the Trinity. That is to say: the very notion of the Trinity was his invention.

When Tertullian still belonged to the Church (to the point he would be later called the founder of Catholicism) he was in favour of avoiding any controversy with 'heretics' saying that 'nothing is taken from it but stomach or head upset'. He even denies them the writing, since he says that they 'throw holy things to the dogs; and pearls, even if false, to the pigs'. He calls them 'mistaken spirits', 'falsifiers of truth' and 'insatiable wolves'. For Tertullian 'only the fight is worth; it is necessary to crush the enemy' (Kötting).

*St. Hippolytus.* Around the same time Hippolytus, the first anti-bishop of Rome, related in his *Refutatio* up to thirty-two heresies, twenty of them Gnostic. It is, among all the heresiologists of the pre-Constantine period, the one who left us most information about the Gnostics, and he knew very little about them! Moreover, these 'heretics' served only as a screen to attack his true enemy, Callixtus, the bishop of Rome, and the 'heresy' of the Callixtusians.

According to Hippolytus, who, speaking of himself, claims he wants to avoid even the appearances of 'slander', many of the heretics are nothing more than 'liars full of chimeras', 'daring ignorant', 'specialists in spells, incantations and formulas of seduction'. Noecians are 'the focus of all misfortunes', the

Encratites ‘incorrigible conceited’, the Montanists ‘let themselves be deceived by women’, and their ‘many foolish books’ are ‘indigestible and worthless’. The Docetists propose a ‘confused and ignorant heresy’, and even Marcion, so selfless and personally unblemished, is nothing more than ‘a plagiarist’, a ‘debater’, ‘madder’ than the others and ‘more shameless’. As far as his school is concerned, it is ‘full of incongruities and dog life’, a ‘heretical impiety’. ‘Marcion or one of his dogs...’ wrote the holy anti-bishop (and patron saint of the cavalry). Finally Hippolytus states that he had broken ‘the labyrinth of heresy, and not with violence’ but ‘with the force of truth’.

*St. Cyprian.* By the middle of the third century, among those who fought relentlessly against the defenders of other beliefs, there also flourished the holy bishop Cyprian, the author of the saying: ‘The father of the Jews is the devil’, which would have so much fortune among the Nazis. He was an arrogant, typical representative of his guild, who pretended that ‘before the bishop, one must stand as of yore before the figures of the pagan gods’. Like the Jews and the pagans, the Christian opponents of Cyprian are for him creatures of the devil, who ‘testify every day with an angry voice their mad frenzy’. And just as any Catholic writer ‘breathes holy innocence’, in the manifestations of ‘traitors to the faith and adversaries of the Catholic Church’, of ‘the shameless supporters of heretical degeneration’, there is nothing but the ‘bark of slander and false testimony’. Cyprian insists and repeats himself, for example in his 69th epistle, that every ‘heretic’ is ‘enemy of the peace of our Lord’; that ‘heretics and renegades do not enjoy the presence of the Holy Spirit’ but are ‘prisoners of the punishments to which they are credited for joining in the insurrection against their superiors and bishops’ and that ‘all without remission shall be punished’. He also says that ‘there is no hope for them’; that ‘all of them will be thrown into perdition’ and that ‘all those demons will perish’. He addresses the ‘heretics’ with abundant evidence from the Old Testament: ‘Neither food nor drink is owed to the earth’, nor, what to say, ‘the salvific water of baptism and divine grace’. From the New Testament he deduces that ‘one must depart from the heretic as the contumacious sinner, who condemns himself’.

Bishop Cyprian does not tolerate contact of any kind with the separated Christians. 'Separation encompasses all spheres of life' (Girardet). For Cyprian, who occasionally dedicates himself to establishing 'true lists of heretics' (Kirchner), the Catholic Church is everything and the rest, in the end, nothing. For him, they are only: *alieni, profani, schismatici, adversarii, blasphemantes, inimici, hostes, rebelles* (strange and profane men, schismatics, the opponents, blasphemers, the enemy, rebels), all of which is summed up in one word: *antichristi* (antichrists). This tone ends up being the one usually used in interfaith relations. While the Church itself is praised as 'heavenly paradise', the doctrines of adversaries are always 'absurd, confusion', 'infamous lie', 'magic', 'disease', 'madness', 'mud' 'plague', 'bleating', 'bestial howls' and 'barking'; 'delusions and scams of old women' and 'the greatest impiety'. As for separated Christians, they are always 'conceited', 'blind, persuaded to be worth more than others', 'atheists', 'crazy', 'false prophets', 'Satan's firstborn', 'demon spokesmen', 'beasts with human form', 'poisonous dragons' against which we must proceed, sometimes even with exorcisms. Against the heretics the charge of corruption of customs is also repeated; they are like the males chasing many goats, or like stallions whinnying when they sniff the mare, or like grunting pigs. According to the Catholic Irenaeus, the Gnostic Marcus seduced his parishioners with 'filters and magic potions' to 'tarnish their bodies'. Tertullian, after becoming a Montanist, proves that Catholics indulged in drunkenness and sexual orgies during the celebration of the holy supper; Cyril says Montanists climbers were child-eating ogres.

From Christians to Christians!

And yet Augustine said: 'Do not think that heresies are the work of the fainthearted; only strong spirits originate heterodox schools'. St Augustine devoted his whole life to persecute them, and then with the help of the secular arm.

*St. Pachomius*. During the 4th century, as divisions and sects grew, the schisms and the heresies developed with increasing boldness. The anti-heretic shouting became more strident and aggressive. At the same time, the struggle against

non-Catholics sought judicial support. It was the time of agitation and almost pathological actions, a true 'spiritual disease' (Kaphan).

Saint Pachomius, the founder of Christian monasteries (from 320 onwards) and author of the first monastic rule (of Coptic rite), hated the 'heretics' like the plague. This 'abbot-general' who wrote in code part of his epistles, considers himself capable of discovering heretics by smell and affirms that 'those who read Origen will go to the lowest circle of hell'. The complete works of this great pre-Constantinian theologian, one who was defended and appreciated even by great fanatics like Athanasius, were thrown by Pachomius to the Nile.

*Epiphanius*. In the 4th century Epiphanius of Salamis, a Jewish apostate and anti-Semitic fanatic, writes his *Panarion* (*Apothecary's Drawer*), where he warns his contemporaries of no less than eighty 'heresies', among which he even considers twenty pre-Christian sects! This does not prevent a coreligionist such as St. Jerome from praising him as *patrem paene omnium episcoporum et antiquae reliquias sanctitatis* (father of almost all the bishops of the holiness and remnant of the ancient Church), nor that the second Council of Nicaea (787) honoured Epiphanius with the title of 'patriarch of orthodoxy'. In his confusing as long-winded *Apothecary's Drawer*, the fanatical bishop exhausts the reader's patience with the pretence of supplying massive doses of 'antidotes' for those who have been bitten by these snakes of different species: the 'heretics', for which the 'patriarch of orthodoxy' not only 'asserts as true the most extravagant and unbelievable hoaxes, even pledging his word as a personal witness' (Kraft), but also invents the names of some 'heretics' and pulls out of thin air new and nonexistent 'heresies'.

Christian historiography!

*St. Basil*. In the 4th century Basil the Great, doctor of the Church, considers that the so-called heretics are full of 'malice', 'slander' and of 'naked and brazen defamation'. 'Heretics' like to 'take all things on the evil side', provoke 'diabolical wars' and have 'heavy heads for wine'. They are 'clouded by drunkenness' and 'frenetic', 'abysses of hypocrisy' and 'of impiety'. The saint is convinced that 'a person educated in the life of error cannot

abandon the vices of heresy, just as a Negro cannot change the colour of his skin or a panther its spots', so heresy must be 'branded by fire' and 'eradicated'.

*Eusebius.* Eusebius of Caesarea, the 'father of ecclesiastical history', born between 260 and 264 and the future favourite of Emperor Constantine, offers us a complete list of horrible 'heresies'. The celebrated bishop, now little esteemed by the theologians who judge him 'scarce of ideas' (Ricken S.J.), 'of diminished theological capacity' (Larrimore), castigates a large number of false and deceitful men: Simon the Magician, Satorrinus of Alexandria, Basilides of Alexandria and Carpocrates as schools of 'heretics who are enemies of God' and who operate with 'deceit' and incur in 'the most abhorrent abominations'.

*St. John Chrysostom.* Nor does John Chrysostom, the great enemy of the Jews, see in heretics anything other than 'children of the devil' and 'dogs that bark'. Incidentally, the comparisons with animals are a very used argument in the controversies against the heretics. In his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Chrysostom stands beside Paul, 'that spiritual trumpet' to fight against all non-Catholic Christians, and quotes him with satisfaction when he says: 'The God of peace [!] shall crush Satan under his feet'. Note that he does not say to 'subdue' them but 'crush' them; more concretely, 'under your feet'. In a sermon to the Christians, Chrysostom invites the public blasphemers (who in those days already included Jews, idolaters, and 'heretics', often called 'antichrists') to be questioned in the streets and, if necessary, receive the proper beating.

*St. Ephrem.* For Ephrem, a doctor of the Church and a person who professed a deep hatred for the Jews, his Christian enemies were 'abominable renegades', 'bloodthirsty wolves' and 'unclean pigs'. Of Marcion, the first founder of Christian churches (and also the creator of the first New Testament, and more radical than anyone in the condemnation of the Old Testament), Ephrem says he is devoid of reason and that Marcion's only weapon is 'slander'. He is a 'blind', 'a frenetic', 'a shameless harlot of conduct'; his 'apostles' are nothing but 'wolves'...

It is evident that whoever wants to learn to hate, to insult, to slander without deceit, must seek as an example the holy fathers of the Church, the great founders of Christianity. They followed this path against all those who did not think like them: Christians, Jews, and so-called pagans. 'Have no contemplations with idolatrous filthiness' (Ephrem). For them, the Greco-Roman world was nothing more than 'foolishness and deceit in all respects' and the Hellenes 'people who have lied', 'devour corpses' and are 'like pigs'.

*St. Hilary.* Hilary was a doctor of the Church who, besides his special displeasure of the Jews, he also had as his main enemies the 'heretics'. Born in Gaul at the beginning of the 4th century, he attacked the Arians and fought, as the Catholic Hümmeler testifies despite that 1,500 years have passed, 'the last breath of that plague'. Admired by Jerome to the extent that he took pains to copy a work of Hilary; praised by Augustine as a formidable apologist, and proclaimed by Pius IX, in 1851 'Doctor of the Church' after long debates about baptism, the Trinity and the eternal combat of Satan against Jesus Christ, Hilary charges against 'perfidy and folly', 'the viscous and twisted path of the serpent', 'the poison of falsehood', 'the hidden venom', 'the insanity of the doctors of error', their 'feverish deliriums', the 'epidemic', 'illness', 'deadly inventions', 'traps for the unwary', 'tricks', 'endless madness', the 'pile of lies of their words', etcetera.

With such litanies Hilary fills twelve books of his *De Trinitate (The Trinity)*, 'the best treatise against the Arians' (Anwander). The monotonous flow of hatred is interrupted only to elucidate, or perhaps better to say to obscure, the question of the Trinity.

### *Saint Jerome and Origen*

To the master Jerome, rich in wealth inherited from a noble Catholic household, we can admit without any doubt his words, 'I have never respected the doctors of error, and I have



always felt as a necessity of the heart that the enemies of the Church were also my enemies'.<sup>3</sup>

And Jerome, in fact, so ardently took up the fight against the heretics that, unintentionally, supplied more than enough ammunition to the so-called pagans, even in a treatise on virginity which he considered very precious. Still immature as in the days of his most ardent youth, the saint dedicated the text to Eustachia, a very young (seventeen-year-old) Roman girl of nobility, a 'disciple' and, in time, also saint: her celebration is commemorated on September 28. Jerome made known to her 'the dirt and vices of all kinds', as his modern biographer admits, the theologian Georg Grützmacher, calling it 'disgusting'.

At the same time that he becomes incensed against the 'heretics' and receives, occasionally, the same qualification, Jerome plagiarises to right and left, wanting to be admired for his imposing erudition. He copied Tertullian almost verbatim without naming him. From the great Hellene sage Porphyry he took everything he knew of medicine, without recognising the merit. The 'repellent mendacity of Jerome' (Grützmacher) is often manifested. Coming from such a holy mouth, it seems an exercise in moderation to just call Origen 'blasphemous', from whom he also 'boldly' copied 'entire pages' (Schneider). Jerome says of Basilides that he was 'an ancient master of errors, only notable by his ignorance', and of Palladium 'a man of low intentions'. Already in his habitual tone he calls the heretics 'donkeys in two feet, eaters of thistles' (of the prayers of the Jews—who according to him is a race unworthy to appear in the human race—he also said that they were heehaws). He compares Christians of other beliefs with 'pigs' and asserts that they are 'cattle for the slaughter of hell', in addition to denying them the name of Christians, since they are 'of the devil', '*Omnes haeretici christiani non sunt. Si Christi non sunt, diaboli sunt*' (All heretics are not Christians. If they are not of Christ, they are of the devil). This holiest doctor of the Church made many

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<sup>3</sup> *Note of the translator:* Unlike the main theologians of the ancient Church, Jerome, best known for his translation of the Bible into Latin (the Vulgate), was probably a white of Illyrian ancestry.

enemies even with people of his own party; for example the patriarch John of Jerusalem, whom Jerome persecuted for many years and also his hermits. And even more violent was his enmity with Rufinus of Aquileia; in all these cases the discussion dealt with the works of Origen, at least apparently.

This disciple of Clement of Alexandria personified in his time all Eastern Christian theology. Even long after his death he would be praised by many bishops, or rather by most of the East; among them Basil, Doctor of the Church, and Gregory of Nazianzus, who collaborated in an anthology of the writings of Origen under the title *Philokalia*. The text was even appreciated by Athanasius, who protected it and quoted it many times. Today Origen is again praised by many Catholic theologians and it is possible that the Church has repented from its condemnation for heresy, too little nuanced, that pronounced against him at the time.

In antiquity the disputes around Origen were almost constant. As is often the case, faith was hardly more than a pretext in all of these disputes. This was especially evident around the year 300, and in the year 400, and again in the middle of the 6th century, when nine theses of Origen were condemned in 553 by an edict of Justinian, adding to this sentence all the bishops of the empire, among whom the Patriarch Menas of Constantinople and Pope Vigilius stand out. The emperor's decision had political (ecclesial) motives: the attempt to end the theological division between Greeks and Syrians, by uniting them against a common enemy, none other than Origen. But there were also dogmatic reasons, which, after all, are political reasons too: some 'errors' of Origen such as his 'subordination' Christology, according to which the Son is less than the Father, and the Spirit less than the Son, which certainly reflects better the beliefs of the early Christians than the later dogma. His doctrine of *Apocatastasis* is also worth mentioning: the universal reconciliation which denied that hell was eternal: a horrible idea that, for Origen, cannot be reconciled with divine mercy and that finds its origin, as well as the opposite doctrine, in the New Testament.

The measure of a saint who could so rudely argue against the other fathers was demonstrated by Jerome in a short treatise, *Contra Vigilantius*, written, according to his own confession, in a single night.

Vigilantius was a Gallic priest from the beginning of the 5th century, who had undertaken a frank and passionate campaign against the repellent cult of relics and saints; against asceticism in all its forms, and against anchorites and celibacy. He received the support of a few bishops. 'The mantle of the Earth has produced many monsters', Jerome begins his outburst, 'and Gaul was the only country that still lacked a monster of its own... Hence, Vigilantius appeared, or it would be better to call him Dormitantius, to fight with his impure spirit the spirit of Christ'. Jerome proceed to call him 'descendant of highway robbers and people of bad life', 'degenerate spirit', 'upset dimwit, worthy of the Hippocratic straitjacket', 'sleeper', 'tavern owner', 'serpent's tongue' and he found in him 'devilish malice', 'the poison of falsehood', 'blasphemies', 'slandorous defamation', 'thirst for money', 'drunkenness comparable to that of Father Bacchus' and accused Vigilantius of 'wallowing in the mud' and 'bearing the banner of the devil, not that of the Cross'. Jerome also wrote: 'Vigilantius, living dog', 'O monster, who ought to be deported to the ends of the world!', 'O shame!, they say that he has bishops, even as accomplices of his crimes' and so on, always in the same tone.

Equally harsh was the polemical tone used by Jerome against Jovinian, a monk established in Rome. Jovinian had moved away from the radical asceticism of bread and water and at that time advocated a more tolerable lifestyle; he had many followers who thought that fasting and virginity were not special merits, nor virgins better than married women. Jerome only dared to launch his two treaties against Jovinian after the latter had been condemned by two synods in the mid-nineties of the 4th century: one in Rome under the direction of Bishop Siricius, and another in Milan presided over by Ambrose, who judged Jovinian's quite reasonable opinions as 'howls of wild beasts' and 'barking dogs'. On his behalf, Augustine, sniffing 'heresy', appealed to the intervention of the State and to better emphasise

his theses he managed the monk to be whipped with whips of lead tips, and exiled him with his acolytes to a dalmatic island. 'It is not cruelty to do things before God with pious intent', Jerome wrote.

Jerome's 'main skill' consisted of 'making all his opponents appear as rogues and soulless, without exception' (Grützmacher). This was the typical polemical style of a saint. Jerome also insulted Lupicinus, the canon judge of general jurisdiction in his hometown of Stridon with whom he had become antagonistic, concluding the diatribe with this mockery: 'For the ass's mouth thistles are the best salad'. Or as when he charged against Pelagius, a man of truly ascetic customs, of great moral stature and highly educated. In spite of having once been a friend of Jerome, he describes him as a simpleton, fattened with porridge, a demon, a corpulent dog, 'a well-primed big animal' which does more harm with the nails than with the teeth.

That dog belongs to the famous Irish race, not far from Brittany as everyone knows, and must be terminated with a single stroke with the sword of the spirit, as with that Cerberus can of legend, to make him shut up once and for all the same as his master, Pluto.

While dispensing this treatment to a man as universally respected as Pelagius, Jerome advocates asceticism and the anchorite life: the themes of most of his works, with so many lies and exaggerations that even Luther, in his table talk, protests: 'I know of no doctor who is as unbearable as Jerome'.

Jerome, who sometimes slandered without contemplation and praised others with little respect for the truth, who was for sometime advisor and secretary of Pope Damasus and then abbot in Bethlehem; a panegyrist of asceticism that enjoyed great popularity in the Middle Ages, has been raised with infallible instinct to the university patronage; in particular, in the theological faculties. It seems to us that he was short of becoming pope. At the very least, he himself testifies that according to the common opinion, he was deserving of the highest ecclesiastical dignity: 'I have been called holy, humble, eloquent'. His intimate relations with various ladies of the high Roman aristocracy excited the envy of the clergy. In addition, the death of a young

woman, attributed by the indignant people (perhaps for some reason) to a *detestabile genus monachorum* (detestable kind of monks), made him unrepresentable in Rome. That is why he fled, followed shortly by his female friends, from the city of his dreams and ambition.

In the 20th century, however, Jerome 'still shines' in the great *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* edited by Buchberger, bishop of Regensburg, 'despite certain negative aspects, for his manliness of good and the elevation of his views, for the seriousness of his penances and the severity towards himself, for his sincere piety and his ardent love for the Church'.

#### THE PERSECUTION OF THE CHRISTIANS

And you, too, Holy Emperor, have the duty of holding and punishing, and it is your duty, by virtue of the first commandment of the Highest, to pursue with your severity and in all possible ways the abomination of idolatry.

—Firmicus Maternus, Father of the Church

Two measures interested Firmicus: the destruction of the temples, and the persecution to death of those who did not think like him.

—Karl Hoheisel

If from the first moment the Christians fought with 'holy wrath' the Jews and the 'heretics', they showed some moderation before the heathen, called *hellenes* and *éthne* by the treatise writers of the 4th century. The concept of 'paganism', which was very complex and referred to both religious and intellectual life, excluded only Christians and Jews, and later Muslims. It is not, of course, a scientific notion, but rather theological, coming from the late New Testament period, with obvious negative connotations. Translated into Latin it gives *gentes* (people), and then, as the adherents of the old religion were being reduced to rural zones, *pagani*, pagan. In the meaning that designated non-Christians, this word appears for the first time in two Latin epigraphs at the beginning of the 4th century. In the ordinary

sense, it meant 'peasants' and can also be understood as antonym of 'military'. For example, the 'heathen', that is, those who were not soldiers of Christ, were called in ancient Gothic *thiudos*, *haithns*, that in old high German gives *heidan*, *haidano* (modern German: *Heiden*), with the probable meaning of 'wild'.

We said, then, that the initial treatment given by Christianity to these 'savages' was rather mild, a notable behaviour. It precludes the tactics used by the Church during the next long millennium and a half: against the majority, prudence; make oneself be tolerated to survive. Then destroy that tactic as soon as possible. If we have the majority, no tolerance! Otherwise, we are in favour of it. This is classic Catholicism, to this day.

At first, the pagans only saw in Christianity a dissident sect of Judaism. This was in line with the negative opinion that the Jews generally deserved, all the more so because, in addition to having inherited the intolerance and religious exclusiveness of them, they did not even represent, like Jewry, a coherent nation. They were despised and made responsible for epidemics and famines, so it was not surprising from time to time the cry of 'Christians to lions!' Hence the fathers of the pre-Constantinian period wrote 'Tolerance' with capital letters, making it a virtue. They were untiring in their demand for freedom of worship and respect for their beliefs, while making protests of detachment and virtue as if they lived on earth but were already walking in heaven; loving all and not hating anyone, not returning evil for evil, preferring to suffer injustices than to inflict them, nor sue anyone, nor steal, nor kill. If almost all the pagan things seemed to them 'infamous', Christians considered themselves 'righteous and holy'. By 177 Athenagoras explained to the pagan emperors that 'everyone should be allowed to have the gods he chooses'.

Towards the year 200 Tertullian is in favour of freedom of religion; that some pray to heaven and the others to altars; that these worship God and others Jupiter. 'It is a human right and a natural liberty for all to worship what seems best to them since with such cults no one harms or benefits others'. Origen still cited a long series of common points among the religion of the Hellenes and the Christian, to better emphasise the prestige of the

latter, and does not want to allow blasphemy against the gods of any kind, even in situations of flagrant injustice. It is possible that some Fathers of the Church expressed themselves by conviction; in others, this attitude would be nothing but calculation and opportunism. But as much as they postulated religious freedom, they attacked the ‘pagans’ in the same way they attacked the Jews and the ‘heretics’. That controversy, sporadic at first or we could almost say casually, gained ground since the end of the 2nd century, that is, when Christians began to feel strong. From the time of Marcus Aurelius (161-180), we know the names of six Christian apologists and the texts of three pieces of apologetics (authored by Athenagoras, Tatian, and Theophilus).

Arnobius of Sicca, who was Lactantius teacher, authored seven pathetically boring mammoths of polemics, *Against the Pagans*, whose gods had sex ‘like dogs and pigs’, ‘shameful members that an honest mouth cannot even name’. Arnobius criticises their passions ‘in the manner of unclean animals’, ‘with a frantic desire to exchange the filth of coitus’. Like many other writers, Arnobius recounts the Olympic loves of Jupiter with Ceres, or with humans such as Leda, Danae, Alcmena, Electra and thousands of maidens and women, not forgetting the Catamite ephebe. ‘Nothing displeases Jupiter, until finally it would be said that the unfortunate was only born to be a seed of crimes, target of insults and commonplace with all excrement of the sewers of the theatre’—the theatres that, according to Arnobius, deserve to be closed, as well as burned most of the writings and books.

An adulterous god is a thousand times worse than another who exterminates humanity by a flood! Christians judged as ridiculous legends the stories of the gods that Homer and Hesiod tell. On the other hand, that the Holy Spirit could make a maiden pregnant without altering her virginity was a very serious thing, as one of the most famous Catholics of those times, Ambrose, demonstrated. That some ‘pagans’ buried the figure of a god and dispensed it funeral honours, and then celebrated their resurrection with feasts, also seemed highly laughable to Christians, even taking as holy their own liturgy of holy week and Easter Resurrection. Just as the superstitious ‘pagans’ were

tainted with magical practices, from the first moment the Christians believed that idolatrous cults were of direct diabolical inspiration; some of them, like Tertullian, also include in that categorisation the circus, the theatre, the amphitheatre and the stadium.

It is significant, however, that all these criticisms, censures, and ridicule were not manifested until later. In the beginning, when Christians were still a minority, they had no choice but putting on a brave face to the bad weather. The ancient world was almost entirely 'pagan' and, in front of this supremacy, the Christians acted with prudence and even made compromises if necessary, in order to be able to end it when the time came. Such attitude is also evident in the oldest Christian authors.

#### *Anti-Hellene hatred in the New Testament*

Paul's preaching against the Hellenes was far more moderate than against 'heretics' and Jews. He often tries to counter them, and passages of clear preference in favour of 'idolaters' are not uncommon. Just as Paul wanted to be an 'apostle of the Gentiles', and says that they will participate in the 'inheritance' and promise them 'salvation', he also adhered to so-called pagan authority, which he says 'comes from God' and represents 'the order of God' and 'not from one who girds the sword'. A sword that, incidentally, finally fell on him; in addition, he had been flogged on three occasions despite his citizenship, and imprisoned seven times.

Paul did not see anything good in the so-called pagans, but he thinks that they 'proceed in their conduct according to the vanity of their thoughts', 'their understanding is darkened and filled with shadows', have 'foolish' heart, are 'full of envy' with 'homicides, quarrelsome, fraudulent and evil men, gossipers', and 'they did not fail to see that those who do such things are worthy of death'. All this, according to Paul (and in this, he completely agreed with the Jewish tradition so hated by him), was a consequence of the worship of 'idols', which could only result in greed and immorality; to these 'servants of the idols' he often names with the highwaymen. Moreover, he calls them



infamous, enemies of God, arrogant, haughty, inventors of vices, and warns about their festivities; prohibits participation in their worship, their sacramental banquets, ‘diabolical communion’, ‘diabolical table’, ‘cup of the devil’. These are strong words. And their philosophers? ‘Those who thought themselves wiser have ended up as fools’.

We can go back even further, however, because the New Testament already burns in flames of hatred against the Gentiles. In his first letter, Peter does not hesitate to consider as the same the heathen lifestyle and ‘the lusts, greed, drunkenness and abominable idolatries’. In the Book of Revelation of John, Babylon—a symbolic name of Rome and the Roman Empire—is ‘dwelling with demons’, ‘the den of all unclean spirits’, the ‘servants of the idols’. It is placed next to the murderers, together with ‘the wicked and evildoers and assassins’, the ‘dishonest and sorcerers... and deceivers, their lot will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone’ because Hellenism, ‘the beast’, must be ‘Satan’s dwellings’, where ‘Satan has his seat’. That is why the Christian must rule over the Hellenes ‘with a rod of iron, and they will be shredded like vessels of potter’. All the authors of the first epoch, even the most liberal as emphasized by E.C. Dewik, assume ‘such enmity without palliatives’.

### *The defamation of the Greco-Roman religion*

By the middle of the 2nd century, Aristides, one of the first apologists, criticised harshly (in a text of apologetics that was not discovered until 1889 in the monastery of St Catherine of Sinai) the divinisation of water, fire, winds, sun and, of course, the cult of the land: this being the place ‘where the filth of humans and animals, both wild and domestic, and the decomposition of the dead...’ Nothing remains of the animal or the vegetable kingdoms. Nothing of pleasure. And the polytheistic worlds are ‘madness’, ‘blasphemous, ridiculous and foolish talk’, which are the source of ‘all evil, hideous and repugnant’, ‘great vices’, of ‘endless wars, great famines, bitter captivity and absolute misery’, all of which falls upon humanity ‘because of paganism’ as the sole cause.

On the other hand, at the end of the 2nd century the Athenian Athenagoras wants to see God, the father of reason, even in creatures devoid of it, and demands that the image of God is honoured not only in the human figure but also in birds and terrestrial animals. Prudently, this Christian declares that 'it is necessary that each one choose the gods of his preference'. Athenagoras does not harbour the intention to attack the images and does not even deny that they are capable of working miracles (Augustine takes a very similar stance). How humble, or could almost be said, pious, Athenagoras seems in his *A Plea for the Christians* when he asks for the 'indulgence' of the Romans Marcus Aurelius and Commodus, and praises their 'prudent government', their 'kindness and clemency', their 'peace of mind and love of humans', their 'eagerness to know', their 'love of truth' and their 'beneficent actions'. He even assigns them honorary titles that did not correspond to them. However, at the same time, that is, towards 172, the Eastern Tatian writes a tremendous philippic against 'paganism'. For this disciple of St. Justin, Christianised in Rome and future leader of the Encratites 'heresy', for the 'barbarian philosopher Tatian' as he called himself, the Hellenes are pretentious and ignorant, quarrelsome and flatterers. They are full of 'pride' and 'bell-like phrases', but also of lust and lies. Their institutions, their customs, their religion and their sciences are nothing more than 'follies', 'stupidity under multiple disguises', 'aberrations'. In his *Oratio ad Graecos (Address to the Greeks)* Tatian criticises 'the talk of the Romans', 'the frivolity of the Athenians', 'the innumerable mob of your useless poets, your concubines and other parasites'. The ex-pupil of the sophists finds 'lack of measure' in Diogenes, 'gluttony' in Plato, 'ignorance' in Aristotle, 'gossip of old women' in Pherecydes and Pythagoras, 'vanity' in Empedocles. Sappho is no more than a 'dishonest female, a prey to the wrath of the uterus'; Aristippus, a 'lustful hypocrite' and Heraclitus a 'vain self-taught'. In a word: 'They are charlatans, not doctors', ironizes this Christian, 'great in words but lacking in knowledge' who 'walk on hooves like wild animals'.

Tatian makes a *tabula rasa* of the classical rhetoric, of the schools, of the theatre, 'those hemicycles where the public greets

listening to filth'. Even the plastic arts (by theme and chosen models), and even what the whole world has admired and still admires, the poetry and philosophy of the Greeks, Tatian continually opposes the 'frivolity', 'folly', the 'sickness' of Hellenism compared to Christian 'prudence'. Faced with 'the rival and deceitful doctrines of those whom the devil makes blind' he opposes the 'teachings of our wisdom'. With this discourse—'unique and forceful requisition against all the achievements of the Hellenic spirit in all disciplines' according to Krause—it begins the undermining of all Greco-Roman culture, followed by ostracism and almost total oblivion in the West for more than a millennium. Tatian militated on the very front of the ancient Church: which stretched from St. Ignatius (who rejected all contact with so-called pagan literature and could almost be said that rejected instruction in general) and his co-religionist Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, the polygraph Hermias and his *Satire on Pagan Philosophers* as crude as elemental, the father of the Church Irenaeus, the bishop Theophilus of Antioch and others who manifested their unrest against the old philosophy and condemned it as 'false speculations', 'ravings, absurd, delusions of reason, or all these things at once'. According to St Theophilus (a rather mediocre spirit, but the head of a prestigious site), what the representatives of Greek culture spread, without exception, is nothing more than 'babble' and 'useless talk' since 'they have not had the less hint of truth' and 'have not found even the slightest bit of it'.

For Tertullian, the height of impiety and the culmination of the seven deadly sins, which are generally assumed in the Gentiles, is the worship of multiple gods, not taking into account that in the end these are but the forces of nature personified and deified, or those of sexual potency. Tertullian, perhaps more than any other Christian author before him, undertook a systematic fight against this worship. He notes with satisfaction that the Hellenes had little respect for their own idols and for the uses of their religion and notes the impassibility of the gods and the indignity of their myths. It is a scandal for Tertullian that Christians cannot go anywhere without stumbling over the gods. He prohibits them from any activity remotely related to

'idolatry', as well as the elaboration and sale of images and all professions useful to Hellenism, including military service. Even a friend of Greek philosophy, as was Clement of Alexandria, in his *Exhortations to the Gentiles* rebutted all those 'sanctified myths', 'impious altars', 'diviners, insane and useless oracles' and all their 'schools of sophistry for unbelievers and gambling dens where madness abounds'. As regards the 'mysterious cults of the ungodly' Clement intends to 'reveal the delusions hidden in them', their 'holy frenzy' since there is nothing more in them than 'deceitful orgies', 'totally inhuman', 'seed of all evil and perdition', 'abominable cults' that would no doubt only impress 'the most uncultured barbarians among the Thracians, the most foolish among the Phrygians, and the most superstitious among the Greeks'.

The Christians of antiquity did not understand the fascinating cycle of the life of plants, so celebrated by the Hellenes, or the interpretation of ancient myths in relation to fecundity, which implied the participation in tellurian and cosmic realities, as well as the experience, deeply religious, of the echo of the beautiful and the vital in every human being. Therein lies their destructive tendency, of consequences that even reach us today, that instead of the 'natural cosmos' there is an 'ecclesiastical cosmos': a radical religious anthropocentrism, whose numerous repercussions and 'progress' endure beyond medieval theocracy. While condemning the divinisation of the Cosmos, Clement launches in his *Protrepticus* a systematic anathema against sexuality, so linked with pagan cults, 'with your demons and your gods and demigods, properly called as if we were talking about semi-donkeys' (mules).

At the beginning of the 4th century, the Synod of Elvira promulgated a series of anti-Hellene provisions: against worship of 'idols', against magic, against 'Greco-Roman customs, against marriage between Christians and 'pagans' or idolatrous priests: all sanctioned with the highest ecclesiastical penalties. The 'pagan' cult involved excommunication even *in articulo mortis* (in the moment of death), as well as for murderers and fornicators. However, the council in question abstained from extremist positions. In Canon 60, for example, it denied the

categorisation of martyrs to those who had perished during the tumults resulting from the destruction of 'idolatrous images'. This was because Christianity was not yet an authorised religion. The tone would change when it was elevated to the category of official religion. (In the conflict with the old believers the great inflection would occur in 311, when emperor Galerius authorised Christianity, albeit grudgingly.)

### *Celsus and Porphyry*

Let us look briefly at two of the first great adversaries of Christianity in antiquity.

The Hellenists quickly learned how to spot the weak points in the argument of the holy fathers and refute them, when not leading them *ad absurdum*. While it is true that the first Christian emperors ordered the destruction of the anti-Christian works of these philosophers, it is possible to reconstruct them in part by cutting off the treatises of their own adversaries. Celsus' work, in particular, is derived from a response of eight books written by Origen (ca. 248). The most influential theologian of the early days of Christendom evidently invested a lot of time in refuting Celsus, which is all the more difficult because in many passages he was forced to confess the rationale of his adversary. In spite of being one of the most honest Christians that can be mentioned, and in spite of his own protests of integrity, in many cases Origen had to resort to subterfuges; to the omission of important points, and accuses Celsus of the same practices. Celsus was an author certainly not free of bias but more faithful to the reality of the facts. Origen reiterates his qualification of him as a first-class fool, although having bothered to write an extended retort 'would rather prove the opposite' as Geffcken says.

*The True Word (Alethés Logos)* of Celsus, originating from the end of the 2nd century, is the first diatribe against Christianity that we know. As a work of someone who was a Platonic philosopher, the style is elegant for the most part, nuanced and skilful, sometimes ironic, and not completely devoid of any will of conciliation. The author is well versed in the Old Testament, the Gospels, and also in the internal history of the

Christian communities. Little we know of his figure, but as can be deduced from his work he was certainly not a vulgar character.

Celsus clearly distinguished the most precarious points of Christian doctrine, for example, the mixing of Jewish elements with Stoicism, Platonism, and even Egyptian and Persian mystical beliefs and cults. He says that 'all this was best expressed among the Greeks, and without so much haughtiness or pretension to have been announced by god or the son of god in person'. Celsus mocks the vanity of the Jews and the Christians, and their pretensions of being the chosen people: 'God is above all, and after god we are created by him and like him in everything; the rest, the earth, the water, the air and the stars is all ours, since it was created for us and therefore must be put to our service'. To counter this, Celsus compares 'the thinness of Jews and Christians' with 'a flock of bats, or an anthill, or a pond full of croaking frogs or earthworms', stating that man does not carry as much advantage to the animal and that he is only a fragment of the cosmos. From there, Celsus is forced to ask why the lord descended among us. 'Did he need to know about the state of affairs among men? If god knows everything, he should already have been aware and yet he did nothing to remedy such situations before'. Why precisely then, and why should only a tiny part of humanity be saved, condemning others 'to the fire of extermination'? With all reason from the point of view of the history of religions, Celsus argues that the figure of Christ is not so exceptional compared to Hercules, Asclepius, Dionysus and many others who performed wonders and helped others.

Or do you think that what is said of these others are fables and must pass as such, whereas you have given a better version or more plausible of the same comedy, as he exclaimed before he died on the cross, and the earthquake and the sudden darkness?

Before Jesus, there were divinities that died and resurrected, legendary or historical, just as there are testimonies of the miracles that worked, along with many other 'prodigies' and 'games of skill that conjurers achieve'. 'And they are able to do such things, shall we take them for the sons of god?' Although, of course, 'those who wish to be deceived are always

ready to believe in apparitions such as the ones of Jesus'. Celsus repeatedly emphasises that Christians are among the most uncultured and most likely to believe in prodigies, that their doctrine only convinces 'the most simple people' since they are 'simple and lack scientific character'. In contrast to educated people, says Celsus, Christians avoid them, knowing that they are not fooled. They prefer to address the ignorant to tell them 'great wonders' and make them believe that

parents and teachers should not be heeded but listen only to them. That the former only say nonsense and foolishness and that only Christians have the key of the things and that they know how to make happy the creatures that follow them. And they insinuate that, if they want, they can abandon their parents and teachers.

A century after Celsus, Porphyry took over the literary struggle against the new religion. Born about 233 and probably in Tyre (Phoenicia), from 263 Porphyry settled in Rome, where he lived for decades and became known as one of the main followers of Plotinus. Of the fifteen books of Porphyry's *Adversus Christianos* (*Against the Christians*), the fruit of a convalescence in Sicily, today only some quotations and extracts are preserved. The work itself was a victim of the decrees of Christian princes, Constantine I and then, by 448, the emperors Theodosius II and Valentinian III, who ordered the first purge of books in the interest of the Church. Unfortunately, the conserved references of the work do not leave us as complete an idea, as in the case of Celsus. We may suppose that Porphyry knew *The True Word* as some arguments are repeated almost verbatim, which is quite logical. As to the coming of Christ, Porphyry asks, 'Why was it necessary to wait for a recent time, allowing so many people to be damned?'

Porphyry seems more systematic than Celsus, more erudite; he excels as a historian and philologist, as well as in the knowledge of the Christian Scriptures. He masters the details more thoroughly and criticises the Old Testament and the Gospels severely. He also discovers contradictions, which makes him a forerunner of the rationalistic criticism of the Bible. Porphyry also denies the divinity of Jesus: 'Even if there were

some among the Greeks so obtuse as to believe that the gods actually reside in the images they have of them, none would be so great as to admit that the divinity could enter the womb of virgin Mary to become a foetus and be wrapped in diapers after childbirth'. Porphyry also criticises Peter, and above all Paul: a character who seems to him, as to many others to date, remarkably disagreeable. He judges him ordinary, obscurantist and demagogue. He even claims that Paul, being poor, preached to get money from wealthy ladies and that this was the purpose of his many journeys. Even St. Jerome noticed the accusation that the Christian communities were run by women and that the favour of the ladies decided who could access the dignity of the priesthood. Porphyry also censures the doctrine of salvation, Christian eschatology, the sacraments, baptism, and communion. The central theme of his criticism is the irrationality of the beliefs and, although he does not spare expletives, Paulsen could write in 1949:

Porphyry's work was such a boast of erudition, refined intellectualism, and a capacity for understanding the religious fact, that it has never been surpassed before or since by any other writer. It anticipates all the modern criticism of the Bible, to the point that many times the current researcher, while reading it, can only nod quietly to this or that passage.

The theologian Harnack writes that 'Porphyry has not yet been refuted' and that 'almost all his arguments, in principle, are valid'.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Note of the translator:* Because the Christians destroyed all copies of Porphyry's book, we don't really know if Porphyry was a sort of early Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768). His literary remains have been published in Joseph Hoffmann's *Porphyry's Against the Christians* (Prometheus Books, 1994). One could barely imagine the revolution in thought that could have occurred since the later phases of the Roman Empire and the Early Middle Ages had Porphyry's biblical criticism been allowed to survive 1,300 years before Reimarus.



### *The persecution of the Christians*

The Christian accusations against the ‘pagans’ have been presented with enormous exaggeration. And in that vein we have followed well into the 20th century, when it is still written that during the 1st century Christianity was ‘bathed in its own blood’, ‘innumerable hosts of heroic characters’ are considered, and ‘the 2nd century is recalled by the procession of those bearing on the forehead the bloody mark of martyrdom’ (Daniel Rops); although, at times, it must be confessed that ‘they were not millions’ (Ziegler).

The most serious and undisputed investigations estimate the number of Christian victims sometimes at 3,000, others at 1,500 for the total of three centuries of persecution. A Christian as worthy of respect as Origen, who died in 254 and whose father was a martyr, says that the number of witnesses of the blood of Christianity was ‘small and easily countable’. As a matter of fact, it happens that most of the written statements about the ‘martyrs’ are forgeries. Many pagan emperors never persecuted Christianity, and the State did not meddle with Christians because of their religion. Instead, the civil service of the old regime treated them with enough tolerance. They granted them deferrals, they ignored the edicts, tolerated their deceptions, set them free, or taught them the legal arguments with which they could free themselves from persecution without abjuring their faith. Those who denounced themselves were sent home and the Hellenes often indifferently endured the provocations.

In the first half of the 4th century, however, Bishop Eusebius, ‘father of ecclesial historiography’, is inexhaustible in inventing stories about the wicked ‘pagans’, the terrible persecutors of Christianity. To this theme he devotes the whole eighth book of *Ecclesiastical History*, from which surely one can affirm what a scholar of this work said (which is almost the only available source on the history of the Church in the antiquity): ‘Emphasis, periphrasis, omissions, half-truths, and even falsification of the originals replace the scientific interpretation of reliable documents’ (Morreau). We see there how, again and again, the wicked ‘pagans’—actually the pen of our bishop Eusebius—torture Christians with lashes, ‘those really admirable

fighters'; they rip their flesh out, break their legs, cut their noses, ears, hands and other members. Eusebius throws vinegar and salt in the wounds, heaves sharpened reeds under the nails, burns backs with molten lead, fries the martyrs in grills 'to prolong the torment'. In all these situations and many more, the victims retain their integrity, even their good humour: 'They sang praises to the God of heaven and gave thanks to their torturers, to the last breath'. Other believers, Eusebius informs us, were drowned in the sea 'by order of the servants of the devil', or crucified, or beheaded 'sometimes in a number of up to a hundred men, young children [!] and women in a single day... The executioner's sword mended, and the tired executioners were forced to relieve themselves'. Others were thrown to 'the anthropophagous beasts' to be devoured by wild boars, bears, panthers. 'We have been eyewitnesses [!] and we have seen how, by the divine grace of our Redeemer Jesus Christ, of whom they bear witness, when the beast was ready to leap it receded again and again, as repulsed by a supernatural force'. The bishop tells about the Christians (five in all) who were to be 'shattered by an enraged bull': 'As much as he dug with its hooves and delivered goring from one side to the other, spurred by red irons, snorting with rage, the Divine Providence did not allow any harm on them'.

Christian historiography!

In one passage, Eusebius mentions 'a whole village of Phrygia inhabited by Christians' whose inhabitants, 'including women and children', were burned alive. But unfortunately, he forgot to tell us the name of the village in question. It is a habitual feature of Eusebius to get by without the details despite having been, as he says, an eyewitness. He prefers to speak of 'innumerable legions', of 'great masses' exterminated partly by the sword, sometimes by fire, 'countless men and women and children' who died 'in various ways by the doctrine of our Redeemer'. 'Their display of heroism defies description'. During the persecution of 177 in Gaul under Marcus Aurelius (161-180), the philosopher-emperor whose *Meditations* Frederick II of Prussia admired, Eusebius tells us that there were 'tens of thousands of martyrs'. However, the martyrology of the Gallic persecution under Marcus Aurelius totals... 48 victims. Of all

these, the so-quoted *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* only recounts eight, ‘St. Blandina with Bishop Photinus and six of his followers’. On the contrary, the number of ‘pagan’ victims in Gaul was, in later centuries, ‘far superior’ (C. Schneider).

On the persecution by Diocletian, the bloodiest (against the express will of this remarkable emperor), Eusebius could not regret (or perhaps it would be better to say to celebrate, since the leaders of the Church always considered providential the persecutions and popes of our 20th century have affirmed it) that the victims would have counted by tens of thousands, since many eyewitnesses still lived. Persecutions are a stimulus. They foster the unity of the persecuted and are the best propaganda imaginable of all time. Eusebius, author of a chronicle on the martyrs of Palestine wrote in his *Ecclesiastical History*: ‘We know the names of those who stood out in Palestine’ and cites a total of 91 martyrs, and not ‘tens of thousands’. In 1954, De Ste Croix reviewed for the *Harvard Theological Review* the figures of the ‘father of Christian historiography’ and only sixteen Palestinian martyrs were found, and that for the worst of the persecutions, which lasted there ten years, bringing the average not even two victims a year. In spite of all this, one of Eusebius’s modern panegyrists rejects the conclusion that Eusebius lacked ‘scientific scrupulousness’ (Wallace-Hadrill).

*Most of the written statements about the martyrs are false, but all of them were considered as totally valid historical documents*

The Christians first forged, from the 2nd century, the emperor’s edicts of tolerance: for example that of Antoninus Pius (about 180), or a Marcus Aurelius writing to the Senate a letter in which the emperor testifies about the salvation of the Roman troops from thirst thanks to the Christians. They also forged an epistle of the Tiberian proconsul to Trajan with the supposed imperial order to end the bloody persecution. An edict of Nerva was forged which revokes the harsh measures of Domitian against the apostle John. Indeed, Domitian himself, informs the historian of the Church Eusebius—relying on the Eastern

Christian Hegesippus,<sup>5</sup> the author of the five books of *Hypomnemata* (*Memories*)—, after having imprisoned ‘the relatives of the Lord’ as the successors of David, he released them and ordered to ‘cease the persecution of the Church’.

If the Christians began falsifying documents so that the emperor exonerated them, when the persecutions were a thing of the past, they began to persecute the adherents of classical culture. They ended up falsifying documents to accuse the Roman sovereigns; they forged, in series, a large number of anti-Christian edicts and letters of the sovereigns and consuls (especially by the end of the 3rd century): supposed records of non-historical martyrdoms, and also an infinity of martyrdoms. The Christians who appear as witnesses to these false biographies are countless.

Already the first of the presumed persecutions under Nero—which, for two millennia, made this emperor a monster without equal for Christians—was not a persecution against Christians but a process for arson. Even historians Tacitus and Suetonius, hostile to Nero, judged the process as just and reasonable. ‘Christianity was not discussed’, writes the evangelical theologian Carl Schneider. Also, the history of Christianity of the Catholic theologian Michel Clévenot establishes ‘that neither Nero, nor the police nor the Romans must have known that they were Christians; they were still moving too far in the dark and their number was still too small for their executions to have been a matter of public interest’. But since the logic of Catholic theologians is rarely brilliant, Clévenot finishes his chapter on the fire of Rome in July of the year 64, not without having first recorded the ‘surprisingly’ good memory about Emperor Nero among the Romans. Among the Christians, he is still considered a bloodthirsty madman. And according to Clévenot this would be ‘perhaps (!) the best demonstration that Christians were really the victims of the horrible massacre of July 64’. It is significant that religious motives did not play any role in

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<sup>5</sup> *Editor’s Note:* Hegesippus, a chronicler of the early Church, was a Jewish convert. One wonders how many of the Christians that Deschner has been mentioning also had Jewish ancestry.

the process, or at most a very accessory one. Significantly, Nero confined himself to the Christians of Rome. Although the written statements were later forged to locate martyrs elsewhere in Italy and in Gaul, according to the Catholic theologian Ehrhard: 'All these written statements of martyrdom have no historical value'.

The tolerance of the Romans in religious matters was generally great. They had it before the Jews, guaranteeing their freedom of worship, and even after the wars fought against Jewry, they were not forced to worship the gods of the state and released from the obligatory offerings to the emperors. Until the beginning of the 3rd century, the hatred against Christians—who considered themselves exclusive; who, with all humility (!) thought of themselves as special, like the 'God of Israel', 'chosen people', 'holy people'—came mostly from the common peoples. For a long time the emperors imagined themselves too strong before this dark sect to intervene seriously. 'They avoided whenever possible' the trials against Christians (Eduard Schwartz).

For two hundred years they were not subjected to any 'persecution'. Emperor Commodus had a Christian favourite. In Nicomedia, the main Christian church was in front of Diocletian's residence. Also his preceptor of rhetoric, the Father of the Church Lactantius, remained safe in the vicinity of the sovereign during the toughest persecutions against the Christians. Lactantius never appeared before the courts or went to jail. Almost everyone knew Christians, but they did not like to get their hands dirty by persecuting them. When it was necessary because the Greco-Romans were furious, the officials did everything possible to release the imprisoned. The Christians only had to renounce their faith—and they did it massively, it was the general rule—and nobody bothered them again.

During the most intense persecution, that of Diocletian, the state only demanded the fulfilment of the offering of sacrifices that the law imposed on all citizens. Non-compliance was punished, but in no case the practice of the Christian religion. Even during the persecution of Diocletian, the churches were able to dispose of their property. Even with Emperor Decius, in the year 250, we cannot speak of a general and

planned persecution of Christians. At that time the first Roman bishop is killed in a persecution. Fabian died in prison; there was no death sentence on him. But up to that date, the ancient Church already considered as ‘martyrs’ eleven of the seventeen Roman bishops, although none of them had been martyrs! For two hundred years Christianity had lived side by side with the emperors. And in spite of that, on the Catholic side they still lie—with ecclesiastical imprimatur (and dedication: ‘To the beloved mother of God’)—in the mid-20th century: ‘Most of the popes of that time died as martyrs’ (Rüger). The ‘pope’ Cornelius, who died peacefully in 253 in Civitavecchia, appears as beheaded in the written statements of the martyrs. Also forged are those that make the Roman bishop Stephen I (254-257) victim of the persecutions of Valerian. Pope St. Eutychian (275-283) even buried ‘with his own hands’ 342 martyrs, before following them himself.

The Church tried to cover up the apostasy of several popes at the beginning of the 4th century by falsifying the documents. The *Liber Pontificalis*, the official list of the papacy, points out that the Roman bishop Marcellinus (296-304), who had made sacrifices to the gods and had delivered the ‘sacred’ books, soon repented and died martyred: a complete forgery. In the *Roman Martyrology*, one pope after another gain the crown of martyrdom—almost everything is pure deception. (Interestingly, until the end of the 3rd century the cult of the martyrs had not begun in Rome.) But precisely the bishops—whose martyrdom was considered ‘something special’ before that of ordinary Christians—very rarely were martyrs. They fled *en masse*, sometimes from one country to another, to the limits of the Roman Empire, naturally at the behest of God and without forgetting to send from a safe place letters of support to the lesser faithful who were left imprisoned. In the old Church this was so well known that even in numerous spurious accounts of martyrs there are few bishops who figure as martyrs! (The patriarch of Alexandria, Dionysus, was in such a hurry when a local pogrom broke out that he fled on the back of a cavalry devoid of a chair—he rightly bears the nickname ‘the Great’.) But practically all of the ‘saints’ of the first centuries were later declared martyrs,

‘even if they had died peacefully. Anyone worthy of the veneration of Constantine had to be a martyr ‘(Kötting). Therefore, ‘very few’ of the *Acta Martyrum* are ‘true or based on real documentary material’ (Syme).

And especially after the 4th century Catholic Christians had records and accounts of martyrs that seemed forged by the ‘heretics’, so they ‘purified’ them by forgery. Although they admitted the miracles of the apostles that the accounts related, they did not want to consider valid the ‘false doctrines’ that accompanied them. In this way, orthodox forgers such as the so-called Pseudo-Melitus, the Pseudo-Jerome, the Pseudo-Obadiah and others, provided counter-falsifications. Christian ‘martyrs’ acts did not recoil at any exaggeration, no lack of truth, no kitsch. Since the Church made no use of the martyrdom of the woman of the apostle and first pope, St. Peter, a tale transmitted by a Father of the Church, St. Thecla, is considered the first martyr; although it is said that she escaped martyrdom by a miracle.

But Catholic martyrology is strictly documented with the martyrdom of Polycarp, even knowing the hour of his death, something almost unique in proto-Christian literature. However, the date is unknown. It is unknown either if it was under Marcus Aurelius or Antoninus Pius. In this ocular testimony of the death of a Christian martyr—the oldest text: a throughout forged text with revisions and interpolations with pre-Eusebian and a post-Eusebian false annexes—, the holy bishop knows in advance the type of his death. Upon entering the stadium he is encouraged by a voice from the sky: ‘Stand firm, Polycarp!’ Miraculously he is not burned at the stake, to which ‘especially the Jews’ throw firewood. All the flames burn in vain. The executioner must then finish him off, his blood extinguishes the fire and from the saint’s wound a pigeon ascends to the sky... These written statements ‘arose little by little and in a fragmentary way’ (Kraft).

However, even in the 20th century, in the Catholic *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* (Encyclopaedia of Theology and the Church) this story shines as ‘the most valuable testimony for the Catholic worship of saints and relics’. Even today, the brave martyr continues to be venerated, who, as befits a bishop, had previously fled several times and changed his hiding place:

the Byzantine and Syrian Churches celebrate it on February 23, the Melkites on the 25th and the Catholics on January 26, and Polycarp continues to act as 'patron saint against the pain of ears'.

Let us now take a look at the *Acts of the Persian Martyrs*.

The Christians are heading *en masse* towards their execution 'singing the psalms of David'. They smile as the executioner lifts the sword. All the teeth are ripped out and all the bones are grounded. New whips are bought on purpose. They are hit until only pulp is left of their bodies. Their joints are broken, they are skinned from head to toe, they are cut slowly from the middle of the neck to the skull, their noses and ears are cut, burning needles are stuck into their eyes, they are stoned, they are cut with a saw, they are left to starve until the skin falls from their bones. Once sixteen elephants step on the heroes... But the martyrs tolerate almost everything for a surprisingly long time and with good cheer, so to speak, with joy. Being only blood and shredded flesh, they launch the most edifying discourses. They shout with joy: 'My heart rejoices in the Lord and my soul rejoices in its bliss'. Or they recognise: 'This suffering is only relief'.

Mar Jacob, the one tear into pieces, after the ten fingers of the hands and three of the feet have been torn off, smiling, makes deep comparisons: 'Third toe, follow your companions and do not worry. For the same as the wheat that falls to the earth and in the spring makes your companions grow, you too will be reunited in an instant with your companions on the day of the resurrection'. Is not this well said? But after dropping the fifth toe, he cries out for vengeance: 'Oh God, direct my punishment and make my revenge fall on the ruthless people'. Often these saints become rude and insult their impious torturers or judges according to all the rules of the religion of love; they augur them 'gnashing of teeth for eternity', insult them by calling them 'impure, dirty, blood lickers', 'lewd ravens, who rest on corpses', 'a snake of a thirst-eater', 'greens' of hatred 'like a bad viper', a lascivious looking for 'women in the bedroom', an 'impure dog'. Saint Aitillah tells his executioner: 'You really are an irrational



animal'. And St. Joseph does not think precisely of loving his enemy, of offering him the other cheek. The writer says: 'Joseph filled his mouth with saliva and suddenly spit on his face and said: "You, impure and stained, you are not ashamed".'

After Mar Jacob had been cut one by one all fingers and toes, accompanied each time by a noble or poisonous sentence against the 'butcher wolves', he remains firm in the faith and ready for more torture. 'Why are you lounging?' he asks impatiently. 'Don't forgive your eyes. For my heart rejoices in the Lord and my soul rises up to him, who loves the mortified'. Thus, after the ten fingers and toes, the executioner's helpers systematically cut, with grinding teeth, new members and with each of those who fall, the holy man makes comments with a pious sentence. After losing his right foot, he says: 'Every limb you cut off from me will be a sacrifice to the king of heaven'. They cut off his left foot and he said: 'Hear me, O Lord, for You are good and great is Your goodness for all. They call you'. They cut off his right hand and he shouts: 'The grace of God was great with me; free my soul from the deep realm of the dead'. They cut off his left hand and he said: 'Look, you did miracles with the dead'. They approached and cut off his right arm and he spoke again: 'I want to praise the Lord in my life and sing hymns of praise to my God as long as I exist; He likes my praise; I want to rejoice in the Lord'. The perverse 'pagans' cut off his left arm, tear off the right leg of the knee... and finally 'the glorious' is reduced to 'head, thorax and abdomen'. Then he reflects briefly on the situation and 'opens again the mouth' to tell God a brief speech. It is already daring to talk in such a reduced state—he has lost everything for Him!:

Lord, God, merciful and compassionate. I beg you, listen to my prayer and listen to my pleas. Here I am without my members. I'm here in half body and I'm silent. I have nothing, Lord, I do not have fingers to implore you; nor have the persecutors left me hands to extend them toward You. They have cut my feet off, my knees have been ripped off, the arms are away, the legs are cut. Here I am before You as a destroyed house, of which only a crown of tiles remains. I beg you, Lord, God...

And at night the Christians stole the corpse, or rather, 'picked up the twenty-eight dismembered members' and the rest. And then fire fell from heaven that 'licked the blood from the straw until the members of the saint blushed and became like a ripe rose'.

#### Acts of martyrs!

Following the above examples, as many Christian heroes could have died as the writer wanted. Let us compare the martyrdom of Mar Jacob in Persia with that of St. Arcadius in North Africa, which is still honoured by the Catholic Church on January 12, and also recorded in the Roman martyrology. Like St. Jacob, Saint Arcadius is a hero and a Christian from the top of his head to the soles of his feet, that is, literally unbreakable. Confronted finally with the instruments of torment by the rabid consul, he only scoffs: 'Do you order that I have to undress?' And he listens to the sentence to cut him slowly one member after another with 'happy mood'. The text continues: 'Now the executioners rush on him and cut off the joints of his fingers, arms and shoulders, and crush the toes, feet and legs. The martyr voluntarily offered one member after another, swimming in his blood, praying aloud: 'Lord, my God! All these members you have given me, I offer them all to you', etcetera. And all those present swim in tears just as the saint does in blood. Even the executioners curse the day they were born. Only the wicked Roman consul remains undaunted. When the holy confessor had cut off all the lesser members, he ordered the elders to cut off the larger members with blunt axes, so that only the trunk remained. The holy Arcadius, still alive (!) offered God his scattered limbs and shouted: 'Happy members!' after which—as has been said, 'nothing but the trunk'—it followed an ardent religious sermon to the adepts of the classical world...

The editor of the gigantic Catholic work cited, which in the prologue assures us that he only wishes to 'offer facts founded on the place (!) of the so-called legends', and 'only facts that are true and historically proven', offers in this work an infinity of horrifying stories. And starting from such horrible coarseness, still in the 20th century—with multiple authorisations of superiority—the government of the Catholic souls extracts the

‘doctrine’ with the words of none other than St. Arcadius: ‘To die for Him is to live! Suffering for Him is the greatest joy! Support, oh Christ, the hardships and adversities of this life and do not let anything divert you from the service of God. The heaven is a worthy reward for everything’.

For those who do not have enough wonder even with the martyrdom of Mar Jacob—supernatural things happen as well. To a Christian who owes and wants to kill another Christian, the ‘strength of God’ raises him twice and almost throws him to the ground; three hours is as dead. Saint Nerses’ head could not be cut off, not even with eighteen swords; only with a knife. And where these heroes die, since they must die, ‘often at night armies of angels ascend and descend’. And indeed, there is no doubt about the story, as even some ‘pagan’ shepherds saw that ‘three nights the armies of angels were floating above the place of death and praising God’.

Acts of martyrs!

It only remains to say that we are not talking about pious legends, but about written statements (acts), of historical stories; that these documents also expressly claim to be the ‘correct notes’ where we can read, ‘The exact history of those who were before us has been written down by the lips of elders and reliable bishops and priests who love the truth. They saw it with their own eyes in their day’. The Christians gave testimony of their faith with their blood in increasing groups, that in such quantities and so heroically died that the executioners ended up exhausted from the massacres. On one occasion they die with their sixteen bishops, on another 128 martyrs; then 111 men and nine women, then 275, then 8,940, then they cannot be counted since their number is greater than several thousand.

In fact, as already stated, there were far fewer Christian martyrs than the world was led to believe over the centuries. Some of the true ones disappeared without a trace, their ashes were thrown into the rivers or scattered by the wind. There were vast regions in which the martyrs were scarce or nonexistent; and, as relics began to be placed in the altars, pilgrimages to distant places were organised and painful travels were carried out, if indeed they were made. The remains of known martyrs

reached a high price, but the demand of pieces of martyrs was excessive, whether or not their names were known.

Group martyrs enjoyed special preference:

The 18 of Zaragoza,

the 40 of Sebaste, all the ‘servants of arms’,

the 70 companions of the holy monk Athanasius,

those who were drowned in a river, the 99 executed with

St. Nicon in Caesarea/Palestine,

the 128 who died with the holy Bishop Sadoth under the Persian King Shapur;

the nearly two-dozen bishops and 250 clerics who reached martyrdom also in Persia,

the 200 men and 70 women who suffered heroic martyrdom under Diocletian on the island of Palmaris,

the 300 suicides that Prudentius invented (the most admired and read Christian author in the Middle Ages), who, to avoid being slaughtered under Valerian, threw themselves into a pit of quicklime,

the—more stories of falsehood!—1,525 martyred saints of Umbria, the Theban legion,

no less than 6,600 men who were apparently martyred in Switzerland,

the thousands of martyrs that Emperor Diocletian burned alive in a church because they refused to do any ‘offering to idols’ (*Roman Martyrology*),

the 10,000 Christians crucified on Mount Ararat or the 24,000 Catholic companions of St. Pappus, who under Licinius died for Christ in Antioch.

Afterwards even the figures are left untold, speaking of ‘innumerable’ martyrs. The deaths of ‘many martyred saints’ are stereotyped as ‘almost all the flock’. There are accounts of ‘the suffering of many holy women who out of love for the Christian faith were martyred in the cruelest way’. The following can be read in the *Roman Martyrology*:

Record of all Christians crowned with holiness and death in martyrdom, whose life, written statements and heroic deaths the Roman Catholic Church has compiled from the most secure sources and which it records and

preserves for their eternal commemorative memory; with added summaries of the highlights of their lives, the reason for their conversion, their acts and their painful death.

It is understandable that very often the relics were designated with the formula: ‘whose name God knows’.

Although the number of Christian martyrs in the first three centuries could be calculated at 1,500 (a figure certainly problematic), although of the 250 Greek martyrs in 250 years only 20 are historical; although only written news of a couple of dozen martyrs remain, and although the greatest theologian of the pre-Constantine era, Origen, said that the number of Christian martyrs is ‘small and easy to tell’, in 1959, the Catholic theologian Stockmeier continues writing: ‘For three centuries they were persecuted to death’. Also in the middle of the 20th century, the Jesuit Hertling writes: ‘It is necessary to assume a six-digit number’.

Is it really necessary? Why? He himself says it: ‘The historian who critically analyses the sources and wants to relate things as they have been, constantly runs the risk of hurting pious feelings—if he does not reach the result that there were millions of martyrs’. But the Church has not only criminally exaggerated the number of martyrs, but also its description. Still in the middle of the 20th century, the Catholic Johannes Schuck boasts (with double imprimatur), as if the history of the Church by Eusebius of the 4th century continued:

It was a fight! On the one hand the beasts of the circus, the bonfire that burns the throbbing limbs, the torture, the cross and all the torments that seemed to come out of hell like a dirty sewer. On the other hand, the unwavering strength with which Christians faced the whole world, helpless... with the heart already under the first glows of eternity.

Schuck himself rejoices that the cruel persecutions against Christians ‘produced a great benefit to the kingdom of God’, and that ‘the Church only won’. While ‘the blood of their martyrs’ deprived ‘the Church from its most valuable souls’, these souls, who were the best, ‘passed into the fold of the Lord by faith and

the spirit of sacrifice, love and nobility of the Christians'. And with a tide of forgeries!



Fra Angelico, *Beheading of St. Cosmas and St. Damian* (1439-42), Musée du Louvre: a pair of saints that probably not even existed.

Forgeries of the above kind were also found in another very different, though interdependent, field of ecclesiastical politics. Just as in order to increase the faith the written statements about false martyrs were created to increase the clerical power, false catalogues of bishops were made. That is, little by little an apostolic origin was attributed to all episcopal sees.

### *The Roman emperors viewed retrospectively*

Even the emperors, in spite of being considered designated 'by God' and maintainers of the 'order', were subject to the pejorative treatment from the Fathers of the Church. The emperors of the 2nd century, which according to Athenagoras were still 'clement and kind', wise and truth-loving, peaceful and

enlightened benefactors, at the beginning of the 4th century were replaced by monsters without comparable parallels.

The triumphal shrieks of the Christians began around 314, with Lactantius. His pamphlet *De Mortibus Persecutorum* (*On the Deaths of the Persecutors*) is so bad by the choice of its theme, its style, and its level, that for a long time scholars wanted to deny the authorship to this Cicero Christianus, although today its authenticity is considered almost indisputable. In his writing, Lactantius pulls no punches on the Roman emperors. He published it in Gaul, as he educated Crispus, Constantine's son. He writes of 'enemies of God' and 'tyrants' whom he compares to wolves, and describes as 'beasts'. The political environment had barely changed, Campenhausen said, and 'the old ideology of martyrs and persecuted people disappears from the Church as if it had been carried away by the wind, and was replaced by its opposite'.

Although Emperor Decius (reign 249-251) was a persecutor of the Christians, he governed peacefully as he left recorded in his coins *pax provinciae* (provincial peace), and according to historical sources, Decius was a man of excellent qualities until he fell defeated by the Gothic leader Kniva and died in Abritus, a place corresponding to the present region of the Dobruja. Decius was for Lactantius 'an enemy of God', 'an abominable monster' that deserved to end as the pasture of 'beasts and vultures'. Of Valerian (reign 253-260), who also persecuted the Christians and who died as a prisoner of the Persians, Lactantius affirms that 'they stripped the skin, which was tanned with a red tint to be exposed in the temple of the barbarian gods as a reminder of that great triumph'. Diocletian (reign 284-305) had used Lactantius as *rhetor latinus* (a Latin teacher) in Nicomedia when he was a poor man. During the persecutions and Lactantius residing in the imperial capital, Diocletian did not touch a single thread of his clothing. But he deserves the appellation of 'great in the invention of crimes'. As for Maximian (reign 285-30), co-regent with Diocletian, according to Lactantius, 'he was not able to refuse any satisfaction of his low passions'. 'Wherever he went, they took

the maidens from the arms of their parents, and put them at his disposal’.

But the worst ‘of the wicked’ was Emperor Galerius (305-311), the son-in-law of Diocletian. Lactantius considers Galerius the true inspirer of the pogroms initiated in 303, in which he proposed to ‘mistreat the whole human race’. When ‘the mean-spirited man wanted to amuse himself’ he called one of his bears, ‘in fierceness and corpulence comparable to himself’ and cast it human beings as food. ‘And while he broke the limbs of the victim, he laughed, so that he never ate dinner without accompanying the outpouring of human blood’, ‘the fire, the crucifixions, and the beasts were the daily bread’, and he ‘reigned with the most absolute arbitrariness’. Taxes were so abusive that people and pets died of starvation, and only beggars survived... But behold, the so compassionate sovereign remembered them also, and wishing to put an end to their hardships had them assembled to take them out in boats to the sea and drown them there.

Christian historiography!

At the same time, Lactantius never fails to assure us in this ‘first contribution of Christianity to the philosophy and theology of history’ (Pichon), that he has compiled all these facts with the most conscientious fidelity, ‘so that the memory of them is not lost and that no future historian can disfigure the truth’. The punishment of God reached Galerius in the form of cancer, ‘an evil sore in the lower part of the genitals’ while Eusebius, more modest, prefers to allude to those ‘unnamed’ parts. Subsequently, other ecclesiastical writers such as Rufinus and Orosius invented the legend of a suicide. But Lactantius, after establishing Galerius’ fame in historiography as a ‘barbarian savage’ (Altendorf), devotes several pages to describing with a sneer the evolution of the disease. The lexicon is similar to that used in another passage where he explains, following the example of Bishop Cyprian, the satisfaction that the elect will experience when contemplating the eternal torment of the damned: ‘The body is covered with worms. The stench not only invades the palace, but spreads throughout the city... The worms devour him alive and the body dissolves in a generalized rot,



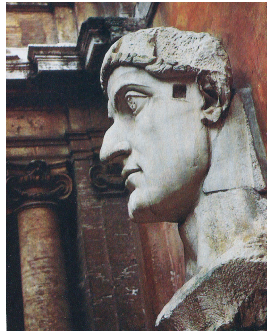
among unbearable pains'. Bishop Eusebius added to his account the following passage: 'Of the doctors, those who could not resist that repugnant stench above all measure were slaughtered there, and those who afterwards could not find a remedy, were tried and executed without compassion'.

Christian historiography!

Although Galerius, whose agony was painted by the Fathers of the Church without sparing any detail, died sick on 30 April 311, he signed the so-called Edict of tolerance of Nicomedia, by the which he ended persecutions against the Christians and proclaimed that Christianity was a lawful religion. Galerius was not a monster as painted by Lactantius and other Fathers of the Church. As described by more reliable sources, he was a just and well-intentioned sovereign, though certainly uneducated. Lactantius is the one who then states that the sovereigns of the gentiles were 'criminals before God', and he celebrates that they have been 'exterminated from the root with all their type'. 'Now those who pretended to defy God are laid prostrate on the ground; those who knocked down the Temple were slow to fall, but they fell much lower and had the end they deserved'.

In contrast, this Father of the Church only finds praise for the massacres perpetrated by Constantine with the Frankish prisoners in the amphitheatre of Trier. 'The Lord has annihilated them and wiped them out from the face of the earth. Let us sing, then, the triumph of the Lord. Let us celebrate the victory of the Lord with hymns of praise...'

SAINT CONSTANTINE: THE FIRST CHRISTIAN EMPEROR  
'Symbol of Seventeen Centuries of Ecclesiastical History'



In all the wars he undertook and captained he achieved brilliant victories.

—St. Augustine, Father of the Church

Of all the Roman emperors, he alone honoured God, the Highest, with extraordinary devotion; he alone boldly announced the doctrine of Christ; he alone exalted his Church like no other since there is human memory; he alone put an end to the errors of polytheism and abolished all kinds of worship of idols.

—Eusebius of Caesarea, Bishop

Constantine was a Christian. He who works this way, and above all in a world that was still largely pagan, must be a Christian at heart and not only according to external demonstrations.

—Kurt Aland, theologian

Christendom always had before its eyes, as a luminous example, the figure of Constantine the Great.

—Peter Stockmeier, theologian

His spiritual postures were also those of a true believer.

—Karl Baus, theologian

That monster Constantine... This hypocritical and cold executioner who slaughtered his son and strangled his wife; murdered his father-in-law and his brother-in-law, and kept in his court a bunch of bloodthirsty and untamed priests.

—Percy Bysshe Shelley

On July 25, 306, when Constantius I Chlorus died in Eboracum, present-day York (England) after a victory over the Picts, the troops appointed the young Constantine without delay. But Galerius, who tactically and formally remained as the first Augustus within the system of the Tetrarchy, only wanted to recognise Constantine as Caesar. That proclamation had been an illegal act that broke the order of the second Tetrarchy.

The restoration of the holy religion was the first of his decrees. Once he became the owner of Britain and Gaul, in 310 he undertook the sacking of Spain, presumably to deprive Rome of the supply of Iberian cereals, and to expose Maxentius to a hungry population. But what Constantine most cultivated were the border wars, which made him the terror of all the Rhine. His foreign policy 'was characterized from the outset by its aggressiveness, as he leads his campaigns in counter-attacks and deep penetrations in enemy territory' (Stallknecht). In 306 and 310 he decimated the Bructeri, stole their cattle, burned their villages and threw the prisoners into the circus to be pasture for wild beasts. 'Of the prisoners, those who were not worth soldiers for not being reliable, nor for slaves for being too fierce, he threw all to the circus and were so many that fatigued even the wild beasts'. The young emperor drowned in blood any attempt of rebellion; in 311 and 313 he crushed the Alemanni who had been greatly punished by his father, as well as the Franks, whose kings Ascaric and Merogaisus were destroyed by hungry bears, for general edification. The idolatrous Franks respected the life of the prisoners of war. But Constantine, after casting his victims (of the seventy-one well-known amphitheatres of antiquity, the Trier was

tenth in importance, with 20,000 seats) and seeing the acceptance of the spectacle, decided to make it a permanent institution.

While the young ruler thus made life easier for the inhabitants of Trier, there were in the Roman Empire three other emperors: Maxentius in the West, who had authority over Italy and Africa; Maximinus Daia in the East, whose territory included the non-European part of the empire (all the provinces south of the Taurus mountain range and also Egypt), as well as Licinius, owner of the Danubian regions. The fact that there were so many emperors seemed intolerable to Constantine, and he proposed to dismantle the system of the Tetrarchy instituted by Diocletian to consolidate that gigantic empire. So it began the destruction of the established 'order' by one warlike campaign after another, successively eliminating his rivals and establishing an ever-stronger bond between the empire and the Christian Church. Such a Constantinian 'revolution' was certainly a turning point in the history of Christianity, and it also brought about the rise of a new ruling class, the Christian clergy, while maintaining the old relations on war and exploitation. The revolution has been called 'the beginning of the world metaphysical age' (Thiess).

### *War against Maxentius*

To secure the flank, Constantine allied himself first with Licinius, one of the eastern Caesars. He waited for the death of Emperor Galerius and then attacked by surprise against the opinion of his advisers. Naturally, there are many historians who want to apologise to Constantine at this point, as do so with many others.

After arming himself to the teeth, Constantine unleashed a veritable deluge of propaganda against the 'tyranny' of the Roman emperor. The Church did not take long to set the tone and to paint Maxentius with all the colours of hell. Actually, Maxentius (reign 306-312) had suspended the persecutions of the Christians, endorsed the edict of Galerius by which he had granted, in 311, the freedom of Christians under some conditions and made it comply scrupulously by going, in Rome and in Africa, even beyond what the edict strictly required. It would not be historic, then, to present the campaign of Constantine against

Maxentius as a crusade, undertaken to rid the Church of the yoke of a fanatical tyrant. And although not even Constantine could claim that his rival had discriminated the Christians, and although Christian sources testify to the tolerance of Maxentius, the clergy soon turned that aggression into a kind of war of religion and Maxentius into a real monster. The first one to manipulate the story was Eusebius, who fails to specify his accusations about 'the crimes that this man used to subdue his vassals of Rome through the rule of violence'. This fictitious image of an 'impious tyrant' was spread by the Christians as soon as the emperor fell, whose biography they forged entirely. The sources do not cite a single concrete example of the cruelty that has been imputed to him. However, the popularity that Maxentius justifiably enjoyed among the Roman people vanished when food was lacking as Africa was lost and Spain shortly after. On the contrary, in the Constantinian aggression, the Christians wanted to see the action of 'God' and even that of the 'celestial hosts'.

On October 28 Constantine appeared at Ponte Milvio, today called Ponte Molle. Maxentius, and this is a subject that has been much discussed among historians, abandoned the protection of the walls and fought Constantine in the open field with the Tiber behind him. In addition, the bulk of his army fought with little ardour, except for the Praetorians, who did fight without giving ground until the last man fell. Maxentius was drowned in the river along with a good number of his soldiers 'fulfilling thus the divine prophecy' (Eusebius). Or as Lactantius says: 'The hand of God weighed on the battlefield'. To this victory of Constantine, celebrated by all historians of the Church as the birth of the Christian empire, the Germanic troops contributed, especially the so-called *auxilium* (a contingent of mercenaries) of the *cornuti* (because they wore helmets with horns, whose symbol introduced the emperor, as a sign of gratitude, on the shield of the Roman armies). They took Maxentius out of the mud, cut off his head, which was stoned and covered with excrement during the triumphal walk and then taken to Africa. Finally, the son of the vanquished and all his political supporters were slain, and the whole family of Maxentius exterminated.

On October 29 the winner forfeited the typical Roman sacrifice in honour of the Capitoline Jupiter and the Christian clergy was favoured immediately after the battle. In fact, there were more Christians in Italy and in Africa than in Gaul. In Rome, the Senate would build, in honour of Constantine, the triumphal arch that we can still see next to the Colosseum.

### *War against Maximinus*

Maximinus Daia was not a bad ruler. He knew how to manage and protect literature and science, despite being himself of humble origin and scarce culture. His persecutions against Christians, between 311 and 312, were quite moderate.

In February of 313, Constantine renewed in Milan the pact with Licinius, whom he married with his sister Constantia to endorse the agreement. In a constitution, the so-called Edict of Milan, both emperors granted legal status to Christianity, and with special reference to it, they proclaimed freedom of worship throughout the empire. If Maximinus were overthrown, tolerance would extend to the eastern part, but all religions were already equated from the legal point of view. Maximinus, who built temples in all the cities and ordered the reconstruction of the ancient temples, and who protected the most notable Greco-Roman priests, guessed without difficulty what was coming. During the harsh winter of 312 to 313 he took advantage of an absence of Licinius to invade Syria. After conquering Byzantium and Heraclea, on April 30, 313 he confronted in the place called Campus Serenus near Tzirallum an enemy that already had Christian symbols on its flags.

According to father Lactantius, this already was a true war of religion, a judgement with which Johannes Geffcken coincides when he calls it 'the first true war of religion in the world'. Licinius, to whom 'an angel of the Lord' had appeared in the eve of the day of the battle, made the soldiers take off their helmets to pray; his butchers 'raised their hands to heaven', invoked the name of God three times and then 'with hearts full of courage, they put on their helmets again and raised their shields'. It was then that a miracle occurred, when 'those few forces made a great slaughter'. The religion of love was used to paint war stories!

Maximinus was able to escape disguised as a slave in the direction of Nicomedia and then continued with his followers to Cilicia, passing the mountains of Taurus. The same year he died in Tarsus, suicidal or sick, while the troops of Licinius were advancing on the city by land and by sea. The ‘good news’ had triumphed for the first time in all the Roman Empire and the other ‘enemies of God’, according to Eusebius, that is to say, the supporters of Maximinus Daia ‘were exterminated after long torments’, ‘especially those who, to flatter the sovereign, had persecuted our religion blinded by their arrogance’, the holy bishop congratulates himself.

Licinius, as Eduard Schwarz says, ‘documented his sympathy for the Church mainly through a tremendous bloodbath, welcomed by Christians with a great shouting of joy’. There the women and children who had survived the performance of other emperors or Caesars perished. Among the assassinated were Severianus, son of the emperor Severe (in turn, assassinated in 307), Candidianus, son of the emperor Galerius (that had been entrusted by the dying father to the trusteeship of Licinius); Prisca and Valeria were also murdered, and in the most brutal way, the wife and daughter of Diocletian along with Valeria’s children despite the supplications of the old emperor, who had already abdicated and who died that same year. The wife of Maximinus Daia was also killed; an eight-year-old son and a seven-year-old daughter, Candidianus’ fiancée. And ‘also those who were proud of their kinship with the tyrant suffered the same fate, after great humiliations’, that is, entire families were exterminated and ‘the wicked were wiped from the face of the earth’ (Eusebius). Lactantius also comments that ‘the wicked received truly and justly, with God’s judgment, the payment of their actions’ and the whole world could see their fall and extermination, ‘until there was no trunk or roots left’.

### *War against Licinius*

Two emperors had disappeared, ‘two men beloved by God’, according to Eusebius, remained. It must have been around 316 (and not 314 as it is said) when Constantine opened hostilities against Licinius in the Balkans since the highest

divinity, according to himself, 'in his heavenly designs' had entrusted him 'the direction of all earthly affairs'. The battle took place on October 8 next to Cibalae, on the banks of the Save, where Constantine, 'a luminous beacon of Christianity' (writes the Catholic Stockmeier) annihilated more than twenty thousand of his enemies. This was followed, in Philippolis, one of the most frightful massacres of the time which did not decide the final result, but in any case, Constantine had managed to snatch from his brother-in-law almost all European provinces (current Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Dalmatia, Macedonia, and Greece). Then he made peace with him, although Licinius was no longer a 'beloved man of God' but a 'treacherous enemy' (according to Eusebius). Constantine dedicated ten years to rearmament and propaganda in favour of Christianity as in the East; for example in Asia Minor, half of the population was already Christian in some areas. After those ten years he rose again in search of the 'final solution'.

The 'saviour and benefactor' had prepared the decisive battle through a series of political-religious measures; the Christians worked for Constantine and discredited Licinius as an 'enemy of the civilised world'. In addition, Constantine encircled Licinius with a pact with the Armenians, by then already converted to Christianity (cf. the next chapter) and prepared the future war as a crusade and 'war of religion'—as the Catholic Franzen has said—with its regimental chaplains, its banners with the initials of Jesus Christ as an emblem of the imperial guard, and with a campaign of 'holy enthusiasm'. On the other side, Licinius revitalised Hellenism and persecuted the Church by forbidding synods, dismissing Christians from the army and the civil service, putting obstacles to the public celebration of the cult and promulgating various punishments and destructions. At the same time, Licinius celebrated other cults and oracles and put on his banners the images of various gods 'against the false foreign god' and 'his dishonourable flag'. In reality, what mattered to one and the other was the exclusive power of universal monarchy.

In the summer of 324 two armies of enormous size for the time faced each other: 130,000 men, allegedly, with 200 warships and more than two thousand transport ships by Constantine, and



165,000 men (including a strong Gothic contingent) with 350 warships on the part of Licinius: figures that imply the most ruinous looting of all the resources of the empire. On July 3, Licinius' army was defeated on land, and so was his fleet in the Hellespont; on September 18 he lost the last and definitive battle of Chrysopolis (the current Skutari), in front of the Golden Horn, on the Asian shore of the Bosphorus.

After the defeat of Chrysopolis, Licinius retained about thirty thousand followers. At the request of Constantia, Constantine swore to respect his life, but a year later and while Licinius was in Thessalonica, where he was conspiring with the Goths according to accounts, he was strangled along with his top general. In all the cities of the East began the extermination of the most notable supporters of Licinius, with or without judgment. So after ten years of civil war and constant campaigns of aggression on the part of Constantine, this 'victorious general of all nations' and 'leader of the whole world', a titular he made of himself, remained—and with him, Christianity—as the definitive winner and owner of the Roman Empire.

### *The Catholic clergy, increasingly favoured*

An earthly paradise was inaugurated for the Constantinian 'court bishops', and for the Catholic hierarchy whose servility before the emperor assumed, like Eusebius in his writings, 'the psalmist's tone when he speaks of the Lord' (Kühner). Others sang in chorus, like the Fathers of the Church: Ambrose, Chrysostom, Jerome, Cyril of Alexandria. And they did not lack motives. The Christian religion, once persecuted, became recognised and official. Moreover, the Catholic Church and its prelates enjoyed growing privileges that were worthy of power and wealth. The emperor made donations to the clergy of large estates in Syria, in Egypt, as well as in Tarsus, Antioch, Alexandria, and other great cities. We must bear in mind that Oriental donations meant, in addition to income, import operations especially in the market of spices and essences of the East, much appreciated by the Romans. In a word, the famous *Patrimonium Petri* (Peter's heritage) began to accumulate, of

which we will have occasion to occupy ourselves very often later on.

In Constantine's time begins the metonymy (both in Latin and in Greek) of the word 'church' to mean both the community of believers and the building, formerly also called *templum*, *aedes*, and other names. Constantine continued to erect churches in Ostia, Alba, Naples, and also in Asia Minor and Palestine. As he himself wrote to Eusebius, 'all of them must be worthy of our love for the splendour'. All these churches—the Basilica of St. Peter in Rome, the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, inaugurated by the emperor in person (335), whose pomp should be superior to that of all others: that of the Nativity in Bethlehem, that of the Apostles and that of Peace (Irene) in Constantinople; the great basilica of Antioch, those of Tires and Nicomedia, endowed with 'truly imperial' splendour, 'decorated with many and rich votive offerings of gold, silver and precious stones'—consumed immense sums. All the more so because the construction mania of the emperor was emulated by other members of the imperial family, and especially by his mother, Helena. Eusebius, as the chronicler of the court, never tires of praising 'the inexhaustible generosity of imperial donations'.

The clergy, in particular, received from Constantine 'the greatest honours and distinctions, as men consecrated to the service of the Lord'. Again and again, Eusebius reiterates that 'they were honoured and envied in the eyes of all', 'he increased their prestige through laws and decrees', 'the imperial generosity opened wide the coffers of the treasure and distributed its riches with a generous hand'. And many bishops were able to emulate the grandeur and splendour of the imperial court itself. They received special titles and incense cleansings; honours were given to them on their knees, they were seated on thrones conceived in the image and likeness of the throne of God. Others recommend humility in their sermons! So many and such were the signs of Constantine's favours that the influence and economic power of the bishops increased rapidly. They participated in the free distribution of wheat. In their favour only for them, the emperor annulled the laws that disadvantaged the single people or without

children. He equated them with the highest officials, those who were not obliged to genuflect in the presence of the sovereign.

In 321, the churches were authorised to receive inheritances, a right that pagan temples had never enjoyed, except in very special cases. On the other hand, for the Church this privilege was so lucrative that only two generations later the State was forced to issue a decree 'against the plundering of the most gullible devotees, especially women' (Caspar). This was not an obstacle to the fact that, only a century later, the ecclesiastical patrimony had reached gigantic proportions, as there were more and more Christians who 'for the salvation of their souls' made donations to the Church, or left whole fortunes. That custom became a kind of epidemic during the Middle Ages, as the Church seized a third of the extension of all Europe.

Constantine trusted so much the prelates that he even delegated to them part of the powers of the State. In the trials, the testimony of a bishop had more strength than that of the 'distinguished citizens' (*honoratiores*) and was unassailable. But there was more, the bishoprics acquired their own jurisdiction in civil cases (*audientia episcopalis*). That is, anyone who had litigation could go to the bishopric, whose sentence would be 'holy and venerable', as decreed by Constantine. The bishop was authorised to sentence even against the express wish of one of the parties, and in addition, the ruling was unappealable; the State is limited to the execution of the sentence with the power of the secular arm. 'Soon the Church became a State within the State' (Kornemann).

### *Constantine as saviour, deliverer, and vicar of God*

Rudolf Hernegger says he does not know any other historical personage 'whose influence has remained so unchanged for seventeen centuries' and underlines, to our understanding, that 'for the past 1,700 years the Church has deserved the epithet of 'Constantinian'. The predecessors of Constantine feared the Christians and some of them fought them. Instead, Constantine favoured the Christians and won them for his cause, to the point that he called himself 'bishop for foreign affairs' (*episkopos ton ektós*) of the Church, or as Grégoire

ironized, 'the gendarme of the Church'. In effect, Constantine placed the clergy at his service and imposed his will on it. 'He soon dominated the episcopate as he dominated his officials and demanded unconditional obedience on public decrees, even when they intervened in the internal affairs of the Church' (Franzen, Roman Catholic). The Church thus gained influence but lost its independence, and some men, already during the 4th century, began to see it. The Church became part of the Empire, instead of the Empire being a part of the Church. The bishops owed gratitude to the emperor, their protector, who had favoured them so much. And they obeyed Constantine: He was the master, he convened the councils and even decided on questions of faith, however confused his own Christology was (which Christology is not?). Constantine imposed theological formulas which he and his successors commanded to respect. He and they constructed the Church of the State 'where the word of the emperor, without becoming the highest commandment, nevertheless had a decisive weight and not only in matters of external order but also in matters of doctrine' (Aland).

Although Constantine, during misfortunes, continued to consult the signs of the sky and the viscera of the animals, he made all his family Christian and ended up receiving also the baptism, calling himself a saviour appointed by God, sent by the Lord and a man from God. He declared that he owed everything he had to 'the greatest God'. He ordered that honours be performed as 'representative of Christ' (*vicarios Christi*) and that he be buried as the 'thirteenth Apostle'. 'Pagans' and Christians were to greet him with genuflection, of which perhaps only the bishops were dispensed. And anything he had touched was also sacred. (*Sanctus and sanctitas*, well-known notions of the pre-Christian culture, were preached about imperial dignity.)

The central point of the new capital of Constantine, which was named after him, was the court: of exaggerated luxury in the Oriental manner, built *iubente Deo*, that is, by divine order, on a land four times more extensive than the old Byzantium, and with the help of forty thousand Goth operatives. With the founding of this 'New Rome' the former capital of the empire was definitively relegated to a second place; the influence of the

Hellenic East was reinforced and the conflicts between the Eastern and Western Church became acuter. Constantine, on the other hand, surpassed the old emperors when he named his palace, a prototype of the primitive basilica and 'house of the king' not 'encampment' (*castra*) like the former houses, but temple (*domus divina*) in the image and likeness of the celestial throne room. The throne room was shaped like a basilica as if it were a sanctuary, and a ceremonial of strong ecclesiastical flavour was created, which later the Byzantine emperors intensified, if possible.

The Eastern Church has Constantine as the 'thirteenth apostle'. He and his mother are considered among the saints, and many Greek churches have his image and celebrate with great pomp his festival on May 21.

#### *No more a pacifist Church*

That prince, buried among the funeral steles of the apostles and sanctified by the Eastern Church—although among western heroes there is not lacking of the same genre: Charlemagne for example, a Saxon butcher—, that very saint Constantine who never lost a battle, a 'man of war' (Prete) and the 'personification of the perfect soldier' (Seeck) fought countless wars and great campaigns, most of them 'with a terrible hardness' (Kornemann).

In summer or autumn of 306 he waged war against the Bructeri, first in Roman territory and then invading them. In 310, again against the Bructeri, Constantine burns the villages and orders the dismemberment of the ringleaders. In 311, against the Franks; the chiefs of the tribes pay with life. In 314, against the Sarmatians, already vanquished by himself in the time of Galen, now deserving the title of 'great slayer of the Sarmatians' (*sarmaticus maximus*). In 315, against the Goths (*gothicus maximus*). In 320, his son Crispus defeated the Alamanni; in 322, it is he himself who again defeats the Sarmatians. All this is worth a rich booty and thousands of prisoners deported to Roman lands as slaves. In 323, he defeats the Goths and orders to burn all their allies alive. The survivors are also thrown into slavery. His new title is *gothorum victor triumphator* and there is a new

foundation: the games *ludi gothici*, which are held every year from 4 to 9 February (after having founded the ‘Frank games’). During the last decades of his life, Constantine fought often in the Danubian regions, trying to make ‘land of a mission’ (Kraft) and inflicts on the Germans defeats that influenced even their religious history (Doerries). In 328, he subdues the Goths in Banat. In 329, Constantine II almost exterminated an army of Alamanni. In 332, father and son again crush the Goths in Marcianopolis; the number of deaths, including hunger and freezing (*fame et frigore* as the Anonymous Valesian says), was calculated in hundreds of thousands, not excepting women and children, victims of the ‘great diaspora of the Goths’.

In the year 313, Constantine and Licinius enact their Edict of Tolerance. Christianity, once forbidden, becomes a licit religion (which from that moment hastens to declare all other religions unlawful), and overnight comes the amazing metamorphosis of the pacifists into regimental chaplains! If before they faced everything, even martyrdom, as long as they did not provide the Greco-Roman service, now the need to kill seems obvious to them. The Church became the party of the predators from that moment on; it shared the direct and indirect responsibility of a millennium and a half of massacres.

Lactantius ‘was one of the first to enjoy, as favourite of the emperor, the new regime of the alliance between the sword and the cross’ (Von Campenhausen); in other words, one of the first to change colours. In 314 he wrote an epitome where he crossed out all the pacifist passages. The grateful writer corrects the dedication of his main work and begins to praise the war and legislative activity of the sovereign. It is then when Christianity happens to become a ‘bloody struggle between good and evil’ (Prete). Thus Lactantius betrayed his own convictions, denying almost three centuries of pacifist tradition—and with him, in the background, the whole Church, obedient to the will of the emperor who had recognised and made her rich and influential, who had no job for a pacifist or passive clergy but for those who agreed to bless their weapons. And they have not stopped blessing them since then, or as Heine has written: ‘It was not only the clergy of Rome, but also the English and the Prussian; in a

word, always the privileged priesthood associated with the caesars and their ilk, in the repression of the peoples’.

Modern theologians, who do not dare to deny in their entirety that bankruptcy of the doctrine of Jesus, speak of an ‘original sin’ of Christianity. With this they try to play down the importance of the event, as if remembering the story of the snake and the apple, as if the whole question were nothing more than ‘a small Edenic slip’. As if we did not speak of massacres perpetrated for millennia, now committed in the name of ‘the good news’, of the ‘religion of love’: massacres that now turn out to be fair, necessary and even excellent. Thus a new theology is born, although wrapped in the terminological garb of the old woman to disguise it. And the new theology is not only political but also militaristic: now they speak of *Ecclesia triumphans* (triumphant Church), of *Ecclesia militans* (militant Church), and of the theology of the emperor or of all the emperors, at least of the Romans of Antiquity who brought their line back to Caesar, but much further on in reality.

### *Christian family life and savage criminal practices*

The first Christian emperor, in addition to revealing himself as a great military leader, was consistent in the application of capital punishment, also emulated in this by the Catholic theologians of all times, not excepting ours. In the year 310, the son of St. Helena is still assured by Christian historians of the second half of the 20th century that ‘few of his successors reached his political and human greatness’ (Baus) and that ‘in his private life he did no secret of his Christian convictions, leading an exemplary Christian family life’ (Franzen).

He had his father-in-law, Emperor Maximian, hanged in Massilia (Marseille) after which all the statues and images that represented him were destroyed. He ordered to strangle his brothers-in-law Licinius and Basian, husbands of his sisters Constantia and Anastasia. He enslaved Prince Licianus, son of Licinius, who was then flogged and murdered at Carthage. He made Crispus, his son (from his spouse Minervina shortly before marrying Fausta) to be poisoned along with ‘numerous friends of his’ (Eutropius)—incidentally, a few months after the Council of

Nicaea in which the symbol of faith was promulgated. And finally, this paragon of human greatness accused of adultery with Crispus his own wife Fausta, mother of three children and two daughters, who was shortly before recognised on coins as *spes reipublicae* (hope of the State); although nothing was demonstrated. She was drowned in a bath and all her properties of the old Lateran district adjudged definitively to the Pope.

‘Exemplary Christian life’, indeed (Franzen above)!

The Byzantine historian Zosimus, a diehard pagan whose well-documented history of the emperors is, together with *Rerum gestarum libri XXXI* (*Achievements books, vol. 31*) of Ammianus, our main source of information on the events of the 4th century, claims that after the liquidation of his son and his wife the unpopularity of Constantine in Rome had become so great, that he preferred to change residence.

The decline of the Law became more acute during the 4th and 5th centuries of our era. The mentality of the classic era was displaced by the vulgar right of the late Roman era and the legislation fell ‘to a level of unscientific primitivism’ (Kaser), which justifies the assertion of Jerome, doctor of the Church that beside Caesar’s there are Christ’s other laws, *aliae sunt leges Caesaru Christi*. During the Republican period, the death penalty, although not formally abolished, was severely limited in its application. Under the Caesars, the tolerance was even greater. Constantine sanctioned, with the death penalty instead of the traditional exile, the publication of anonymous libels, and ordered that the tongue be ripped off from the slanderers, ‘the greatest plague of human life’ before executing them. Constantine also criminalised the kidnapping, until then a private crime. So he not only condemned to death the abductor, and in a horrible way, but also the bride if she had consented; and also those who had acted as mediators, casting molten lead in the mouths of the slave owners and burning the slaves alive.

Shelley wrote: ‘The punishments promulgated by that monster, the first Christian emperor, against the pleasures of forbidden love were so unutterably grave that no modern legislator would even consider them against the worst crimes’. Constantine also authorised the interrogation through torture



during the trials, 'the methods envisaged were of extraordinary cruelty' (Grant). And if Diocletian forbade parents to sell their children as slaves, Constantine allowed it in cases of serious necessity, provided that it was made under a repurchase agreement. If a slave took liberty on his own and took refuge among the barbarians, once captured they cut off his foot and sent him to forced labour in the mines, which almost always amounted to a death penalty.

### *Constantine against Jews and 'heretics'*

The emperor was not very friendly with the Jews, surely he was greatly influenced by the permanent anti-Semitic attacks of the doctors of the Church and the recent Synod of Elvira, which had sanctioned with very strong penances the relations between Christians and Jews, in particular the attendance to blessings of fields and banquets celebrated by Jews. The Roman emperors were quite tolerant of Judaism; not even Diocletian tried to force them to comply with the pagan rites. But after the Council of Nicaea Constantine comes to the conclusion, reflected in an epistle to all the communities, that the Jews 'tainted by delirium', 'wounded by the blindness of the spirit', 'deprived of the right judgment' are 'an odious nation' and except for one day a year forbids them to set foot on the city of Jerusalem, that he and his mother had filled with churches. In addition, he forbade them to have slaves like Christians. This provision had serious consequences, as it was one of the first to deprive Jews, in practice, of owning farms. The Christian who fell into Judaism was sentenced to death. In addition, Constantine renewed a law of Trajan, promulgated two hundred years before, according to which the Hellene who converted to Judaism was condemned to the stake.

Even harder was the policy against the 'heretics', and this already from the time of the Regency, from the year 311, on the grounds that many of those who had abjured Christianity wanted to receive baptism again. This resulted in a schism with bloody repercussions that lasted for several centuries. It is at that time when the definition of 'catholic', as opposed to the figure of the 'heretic', appears for the first time in an imperial document.

The Donatists rejected the association with the State, the Constantinian alliance between the throne and the altar. They judged that they were the true *Ecclesia sanctorum* (congregation) and that the Roman Church was the *civitas diaboli* (devil city). They appealed to the Christian's beliefs by demanding greater austerity for the clergy. Constantine's campaign against Licinius turned against the Donatists at the instigation of Bishop Caecilianus in a campaign that lasted several years, presided over by the decision to 'not tolerate even the slightest hint of division or disunity, wherever it may be'. Moreover, in a letter from early 316 to Celsus, vicar of Africa, Constantine threatened: 'I intend to destroy the errors and repress all the nonsense, in order and effect to offer to all the human race the only true religion, the only justice and unanimity in the worship of the almighty Lord'. He took away their churches from the Donatists, and their fortunes; exiled their chiefs and commanded the troops, who slaughtered men and women. The hecatomb of the adepts of Hellenism had not yet begun, and the Christians were already making martyrs of other Christians. Constantine also fought against the Church of Marcion, an older church and at some point with more followers than the Catholic Church. Constantine prohibited the offices of the Church of Marcion even when they were held in private homes; he had their images and properties confiscated, and ordered the destruction of their temples. His successors, most likely instigated by the bishops, intensified the persecution of this Christian sect after having defamed it by all means, including through falsifications during the 2nd and 3rd centuries. In 326, shortly after the Council of Nicaea, Constantine issued a scathing edict 'against heretics of every kind', in case it was authentic of course and not a figment of Eusebius.

Constantine's actions against the 'heretics' set an example, but at least he respected life most of the time. After all, he did not care about religion as much as the unity of the Church on the basis of the Nicaea Council, and hence the unity of the empire. Undoubtedly, he had an exclusively political concept of religion; although religious problems always, and from the first moment, were presented in relation to social and political conflicts. In the interest of state power, he promoted the unity of

the Church. This, and not another, was the cause of his hatred of all kinds of discord. 'I was sure that, if I could complete my purpose of uniting all the servants of God, I would reap abundant fruits in the public interest', he wrote in a letter to Arius and Bishop Alexander.

### *Constantine against the Greco-Roman culture*

In the year 330, Constantine sends a sentence against the Neo-Platonic school and even orders the execution of Sopater, who had been presiding over this school since the death of Iamblichus. The adepts of Hellenism become 'fools', 'people without morals' and their religion a 'hotbed of discord'. Constantine's true intention was that all humans 'revered the one true God' and that they forsake 'the temples of the lie'. While the adepts of Hellenism of the western provinces still enjoyed relative tranquillity, in the East the persecutions began after the definitive defeat of Licinius (324). Constantine forbade the erection of new statues to the gods, the worship of existing ones, and the consultation of oracles and all other forms of Greco-Roman worship.

In 326 Constantine came to order the destruction of all the images, while in the East he began the confiscation of temple properties and the plundering of valuable works of art. In his new capital, blessed on May 11, 330 after six years of work funded in part through the treasures confiscated from the temples, Constantine banned the worship and the festivals of the adepts of Hellenism and rents were no longer paid to the temples of Helios, Artemis Selene, and Aphrodite. Constantine, described as a 'renegade' and 'innovator and destroyer of ancient and venerable constitutions' by Emperor Julian, but praised by many modern historians, soon prohibited the repair of Greco-Roman temples and ordered numerous closures and destructions 'directed precisely against those who had been most revered by the idolaters' (Eusebius).

He arranged the closing of the Serapis of Alexandria, the temple to the Sun-God in Heliopolis, the demolition of the altar of Mamre (because the Lord himself had appeared there to Father Abraham, in the company of two angels), and that of the temple

of Aesculapius in Aegae, the latter being fulfilled with such diligence 'that not even the foundations of the ancient ravings remained' (Eusebius). Constantine also ordered the destruction of the temple of Aphrodite on Golgotha, for the 'great scandal' that it represented for the believers; it was then the turn of Aphaea in Lebanon from whose sanctuary came 'a dangerous web to hunt souls' and which, according to the emperor, 'does not deserve the sun to shine'. There was no stone left upon a stone, and the very famous Heliopolis was burned down and reduced to rubble by a military command.



Hestia, Dione and Aphrodite mutilated by fanatic Christians.

Constantine burned Porphyry's controversial writings. From the year 330, when Neo-Platonism was forbidden, Christians abounded in the looting of temples and the breaking of the statues, as all Christian chroniclers celebrated and despite such activities having been implicitly prohibited by the Council of Elvira. Contrary to what Christian historians would like us to believe, the emperor, naturally, was not interested in fighting face to face with the old culture, which still held the majority in much of the empire and retained part of its strength. This of course does not mean that there were not well received 'the small material expropriations' (Voelkl): the stones, the doors, the bronze figures, the vessels of gold and silver, the reliefs, 'the valuable and artistic ivory votive offerings confiscated in all the provinces', as Eusebius highlights.

'Everywhere they went stealing, looting and confiscating the images of gold and silver and the bronze statues' (Tinnefeid).

Constantine did not even respect the famous tripods of the fortune-teller of the sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi. The historian Kornemann notes 'a theft of works of art as has never been seen in all of Greece'. Even St. Jerome criticised that the city of Constantinople had been built with the booty of almost all other cities. 'In the blink of an eye, whole temples would disappear', rejoices Eusebius. The entire Olympus was gathered in the 'new Rome' where the emperor, even without daring to tear down the temples, had all the statues removed from them. The most venerated gods were installed in bath-houses, basilicas and public squares. The deified Apollo, which had been the most venerable monument in the Hellenic world, was converted into a Constantinian monument. 'Immense riches disappeared from the coins or went to fill the empty coffers of the Church', Voelkl reminds us. Eusebius tells us that the temples and sanctuaries, once so proud, were destroyed without anyone ordering it, and churches were built in their place and the old delirium was forgotten.

However, at the Easter of 337, the sovereign fell ill. First, he sought a remedy in the hot baths of Constantinople, and then in the relics of Lucian, a protective patron of Arianism and disciple of Arius himself. Finally, he received on his farm, Achyronas of Nicomedia, the waters of baptism despite his desire to take them on the banks of the Jordan in imitation of Our Lord. At that time (and until about 400) it was customary to postpone baptism until the last minute, especially among princes responsible for a thousand battles and death sentences. As Voltaire suggests, 'they believed they had found the formula to live as criminals and die as saints'. After the baptism, which was administered by another colleague of Lucian named Eusebius, Constantine died on May 22 of the year 337.

While the Christians have almost dispensed with their common sense for praising Constantine, obviously there are very few testimonies of his critics that have reached us, among them those of Emperor Julian and the historian Zosimus.

## INTERIM REPORT

### *Persia, Armenia and Christianity*

The conversion of Armenia was the work of Gregory the Illuminator, the apostle of the Armenians. As a converso to the Christianity of Caesarea, he began to preach the new religion towards the year 280, when Tiridates re-conquered Armenia. He had great ascendancy over Khosrovidukht, a sister of the king, thanks to which he ended up enjoying the favouritism of the sovereign: a very common characteristic process since we know that the clergy has always used women, sisters, wives or beloved of the princes to dominate them. By this procedure, the 'Christianisation' of entire nations was achieved. Persuaded by his sister, King Tiridates sent a delegation headed by Gregory to Caesarea. Once there, the ordinary Leontius made him bishop and spiritual head of the Armenian Church. Shortly after Tiridates and his wife Ashkhen were converted, they promulgated an edict by which all the subjects (as Sozomen, historian of the Church, recounts) were forced to embrace the religion of the monarch. It is the first proclamation of Christianity as the official religion, although from the 4th century the exact date of the disposition is subject to controversy, mainly because almost all the ecclesiastical chroniclers of the period systematically silenced the case. As strange as that may seem, and while the date is still being discussed, the fact remains that the proclamation of Christianity as the official religion of Armenia initiates a period of tremendous persecutions against Hellenism.

Backed and protected by the king, Gregory devoted himself to thoroughly destroying the temples to replace them with Christian churches, which were also endowed with generosity. In Artaxata, which had been a prominent centre of polytheism, 'the wonderful Gregory' (as Faustus of Byzantium called him) razed the temple of Vahagn (Hercules), that of Astiik

(Venus) and that of Anahit; then he built a splendid Christian church destined to be the new 'national sanctuary' of Armenia. At the same time, Gregory had a palace built for his own use. He was named archbishop, the first dignitary of the kingdom after the king and *katholikos* (Catholic). This title, also adopted by the archbishops of Persia, Ethiopia, Iberia, and Albania, was very significant since it used to correspond to a high official of the public treasury. Gregory the Illuminator, revered as a saint by the Armenian Church and also included in the *Roman Martyrology* by Pope Gregory XVI (his dedication is celebrated on September 30), did not fail to attend his own needs and those of his own, using the properties of the Church for personal benefit and of his relatives. The Byzantine writer Faustus, author of the grandiloquent history of Armenia in the year 400, devotes dozens of chapters to the successive slaughters that totalled 29 victories over thirty-four years, if we are to believe what this Christian author says (of quite debatable veracity). Although the Christians fought in numerical inferiority from one to ten, or even from one to a hundred, they always exterminated their enemies: women and children included. In 1978, a remarkable dignitary of the Armenian Apostolic Church, Mesrob Krikorian, echoes those dithyrambs: 'In any case, the Christian religion assumed paramount importance for Armenia and for all Armenians of the time'. Faustus emphasises again and again that 'all the Persian soldiers were put to the sword by the Christian troops, not sparing one of them', 'not even the women of the entourage', 'not one escaped alive', 'they did a general bloodbath'.

A new and beautiful face!

The reading of these chronicles vividly recalls the Old Testament and the massacres and raids of the Israelites. 'The Armenians made an incursion through the Persian provinces', 'they returned loaded with treasures, weapons, jewels and great booty, covering themselves with imperishable glory and enriching themselves inappropriately', 'the country was passed over fire and iron'. On occasion, they also fought against Christian Rome, allied or not with the non-Christian Persians (and with no less success, as is already understood). Thus, for example, according to Faustus, 'for six years in a row they

devastated the Greek provinces’, ‘they put all the Greeks to the sword in such a way that not a single one was spared’ and ‘there is no measure or account of the treasures they brought with them’. Always, naturally, fighting under the banners of God, trusting in God, overcoming in the name of God; it is God who grants ‘the fate of great victories’. The clergy and war... united in the first Christian state in the world. Heroic actions ‘by Christ Our Lord’. Undoubtedly, the Armenians did not need the ecclesiastical blessing to start fighting and killing. But the fact is that the blessing was not lacking.

#### CONSTANTINE’S SUCCESSORS

Since Constantine, the emperors were much more devoted Christians than they had ever been as pagans.

—Frank Thiess

During the 4th and 5th centuries, the alliance between Christianity and the *Imperium Romanum* provided the inhabitants of the empire... an entirely new image of the world.

—Denys Hay

Everything seemed very promising: a new idea of the world, the *Imperium* as a Christian institution oriented towards peace, the emperors turned into zealous Christians... The sons of Constantine, Constantine II, Constantius II and Constans, along with the father, were compared by Eusebius with the Trinity! Almost since they began to walk they were accompanied by experienced prefects and dressed in purple in the ranks of the army. They were barely fifteen, twelve, eleven years old, and they took part in campaigns on remote fronts. Good Christians and intrepid soldiers: an ideal combination advocated for centuries by the religion of peace that has never brought peace anywhere.



*The first Christian dynasty founded on family extermination*

The imperial father did the pioneering work. Scarcely had he died when Constantius II, who considered himself an envoy of God and ‘bishop of bishops’, and once even practiced sexual continence, began in August 337 the extermination of almost all the male members of the imperial house in Constantinople: his uncle Dalmatius, half-brother of Constantine who had lived many years surrounded by spies, and the father of Emperor Julian, Julius Constance, very hated by the Empress St. Elena, amen of six cousins and other badly seen courtesan personalities; among these the almost omnipotent Ablabius, prefect of the praetorians, whose daughter Olympias was promised as a child to Constantine. (Later, Constantius married her to the king of the Armenians, Arsaces III, and she was killed by the former wife of the sovereign with the complicity of a priest who mixed poison in the wine of mass.) Christian mercy only respected Julian, who was five years old (he would be assassinated during a campaign against the Persians); his stepbrother Gallus was also saved because he was so sick that he seemed lost anyway (he would die in Istria in 354). Constantius was a Christian, so were most of his obedient assassins and guard soldiers. Julian deduced from all this that ‘there is no beast as dangerous to man as Christians are to their fellow-believers’. And just as no man in the Church had criticised the murders of relatives by Constantine, no one censured those of the devotee Constantius, ‘one of the most notorious Christian princes of the century’ (Aland). Eusebius alludes to the ‘inspiration from above’ to justify the carnage. In Constantius one could contemplate a revived Constantine, the bishop wrote, and he was not mistaken. The praises dedicated to the multiple parricide and bellicose Constantius are almost as dithyrambic as those deserved by the military leader and exterminator of relatives, Constantine.

As a paradigm of cruelty, according to Amianus, Constantius did not take long in sending a message to the bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia, the preceptor of Julian, asking him never to speak with him about the destinies of his family. Six years later, Julian and Gallus were imprisoned in Macellum, a sinister fortress hidden between mountains ‘without authorising anyone

to approach us, without studies worthy of such a name, without conversations, although we were surrounded by a splendid service', remembers Julian. A secret agent of the emperor suggested Gallus, the first-born, that Constantius was not guilty of the death of his father, and that the extermination of his family had been an uncontrolled act of the soldiery.

### *First wars among devout Christians*

After the massacre, the sons of Constantine shared the spoils. The eldest, Constantine II (337-340) stayed within the western provinces, Gaul, Hispania, Britannia, and established his residence in Trier; the youngest, Constans, the centrals, Italy, Africa and Greece, with its capital in Sirmium (the current Mitrovicz, in Serbia). Constantius II (337-361), who survived and inherited them all, was awarded East and resided in Antioch until 350, when he was not campaigning.

Soon war broke out between the eldest and the youngest on a question of border demarcation. In early 340, Constantine II left Gaul and invaded Italy by surprise, but fell into an ambush near Aquileia, while trying to force an Alpine pass. The generals of Constans killed him and threw the corpse into the river. Constantius II had been very busy with the quarrels between Christians and especially with the incursions of the Persians in the East, so that Constans could stay with the western provinces without any discussion.

Constans, that seventeen-year-old adolescent, the owner of two thirds of the immense empire, was the only one baptised among the sons of Constantine and had been educated in chastity, the ultimate Christian virtue, as we know. In fact, he shied away from women but used to enjoy the company of blond Germans, hostages or slaves, with whom he went out to hunt in remote solitary forests, while publicly declaring himself an enemy of pederasty. Within the domains of Constans the first temple destructions, sporadic at the beginning, happen in Rome as well as a renewed persecution against the Donatists. As they did not allow themselves to be corrupted by the monies of the emperor, which the old Donatus had brusquely rejected, Constans decided to expropriate the unbowed clerics and, by force of arms, handed

over the Donatist churches to the Catholics. In 347 there was the bloody crushing of the Bagai insurrection, where the ordinary was assassinated; another Donatus, and Bishop Majorinus, principal saint of the Donatists. Others were tied to columns and whipped by order of Macarius, the imperial commissioner, praised by Catholics as 'advocate of the holy cause'. They began to speak of 'the Macarian persecution'. Some Donatists died tortured in prisons. Many fled and others were exiled. Donatus himself died, apparently in the wreck of the ship where he was travelling deported. The assets of the exiles were confiscated.

Meanwhile, on January 18, 350, there was in Autun (Lyon) the pronouncement of General Magnentius, born in Amiens and the son of a Frankish and a Breton, who seized the western provinces. According to some later sources he was 'pagan'; however, the coins he minted suggest the opposite, that is, he was a Christian. The Franks and the Saxons supported him at once, and all the towns and fortresses of the Rhine fell into his hands. Britain, Gaul, Italy, and Africa hastened to recognise him as emperor. Certainly, Magnentius, the first Germanic anti-Caesar and the most dangerous of all the usurpers who threatened the throne of Constantius (up to six in all), failed to enjoy his victory for a long time. The emperor left the Balkans for the Danube to initiate the 'holy war', with troops that doubled those of his opponent. According to Theodoret, even the non-Christians of the army had to be baptised by order of Constantius. Magnentius was expelled from Italy in 352; he was also defeated in Gaul, and on August of 353, seeing himself surrounded in his castle of Lyon, he threw himself on the tip of his own sword, not without having finished with his intimate friends before; his brother Desiderius and his mother. Constantius had the enemy's head roved around the country, and had many others cut off.

### *Constantius and his Christian-style government*

Not content with these perfidious massacres, the *religiosissimus imperator* (very religious emperor) undertook continuous wars against the Alamanni, the Sarmatians, the Persians and other nations; always very cautious, slow but conscientious, always preparing his campaigns thoroughly from

Mesopotamia to the Rhine. He used to leave only a scorched earth behind him.

That politician of whispering and cabinet, in whose court an extraordinary accumulation of bishops met, had very intimate relations with religion. 'The first ruler who considered himself enthroned by the grace of God' (Seeck), and liked to be called officially lord of the whole earth and 'my eternity' (*aeternitatem meam*). He was convinced of being an instrument appointed by the Most High and enjoyed the special protection of an angel, whose vague and vaporous contours he even thought he saw sometimes floating in the air. He practiced chastity with more conviction than his brother, the fan of the epebes.

This emperor favoured the Christian priests even more than his father, and confirmed, enlarged and multiplied the privileges granted. If Constantine had dispensed them from the artisanal contribution, Constantius forgave them the territorial contribution and the tax for the use of mail. In the year 355 he ordered that the bishops could not be tried by the common courts 'to avoid false testimonies promoted by the fanatical spirits'. And not only did he exempt them from the common services. Their wives and children as well as their servants of both sexes would be exempt in perpetuity from all kinds of taxes and benefits on behalf of the State. However, and this is typical of all ecclesiastical history, such concessions only served to make the clergy claim even more privileges.

Constantius, who was not baptized until the end of his life, as his father had done (and in that case, too, being the Arian officiant Eudocius of Antioch), was an Arian Christian. Father Athanasius, his main adversary, includes him in the large list of great Biblical sinners: he calls him perjurer, unjust, irresponsible and worse than the pagan emperors; leader of the impious, accomplice of bandits and Antichrist. 'There is hardly room for insults worse than those lavished by Athanasius' (Hegel). Like his father, Constantius used Christianity as an instrument of his politics and not the other way around. Therefore, as soon as he saw himself as the sole emperor, his first concern was the unity of the Church; although unlike his father, he preferred to look for it in the Arian patriarchs. Hence he banished, one after another,

numerous Catholic patriarchs, including Athanasius, Paul of Constantinople and Hilary de Poitiers. Others, like Pope Liberius and Hosius of Corduba, suffered the weight of his authority: 'My will must be law for the Church', he explained to those gathered in Milan in 355. 'You will obey or you will be banished'. At the same time a persecution continued against the Donatists of Africa that Constantine did not initiate, and even proceeded against a sect of Arianism, that of the Anomoeans, seventy of whose bishops are said to have been exiled by his order.

With the Jews a law of the year 339 calls them a 'nefarious sect' and calls 'markets' their places of assembly. But Constantius prohibits under pain of death at the stake to make it difficult for any Jew to pretend to convert to Christianity. Even if the Jews were authorised to become Christians, the Christian who converted to Judaism faced the 'deserved punishment' according to the emperor: confiscation of all his property. He also forbade marriages between Christians and Jews; in particular, he persecuted the entry of women into the Hebrew communities with the death penalty. The Jews could not buy slaves, even if they were pagans, under penalty of confiscation of property, or death penalty if they dared to circumcise them. Consequently, he forbade them any economic activity whose exploitation necessitated the employment of slaves. That was the moment when the Jews' dedication to financial activities began, which made them even more hated. The repression was severe, especially with the Jews of Palestine, after an insurrection that was bloody crushed. The attitude of Constantius against the Hellenes was also very hard, probably instigated by the Christian party.

#### *A father of the Church who preaches looting and killing*

And it was time for Firmicus Maternus, who expressed with joy that 'although in some regions the dying members of idolatry still revolt, the complete eradication of such a pernicious aberration in all the Christian provinces' seems near, which served to launch this proclamation to the Christian emperors: 'Out with all the pagan ornaments of the temples! To the mint and the crucible with the metal of the idolatrous statues, so that

they melt in the heat of the flames!’ In the diatribe *De errore profanarum religionum* (*On the error of profane religions*), written about the year 347, Firmicus incites emperors Constans and Constantius, called *sacratissimi imperatores* and *sacrosancti* to the extermination, above all, of mystery cults: the most dangerous for Christianity. These were the cults of Isis, Osiris, Serapis, Cybele and Attis, Dionysus-Bacchus and Aphrodite, and the solar cult of Mithraism, the most powerful of the time, characterized by numerous and surprising parallels with the Christian religion.

Many Catholic authors still deny (despite that in 1897 it has been proved incontestably) that Firmicus was the author of those bloodthirsty diatribes, which are discredited by their fanatical style full of pleonasm: the prototype of future Catholic rhetoric and pamphlets. Christ, the father of the Church congratulates himself, ‘He has knocked down the column where the devil had his image’, which appears thus ‘almost defeated, turned into fire and ashes’.

Little is left now for the devil, totally overwhelmed by your laws, to be totally destroyed, putting an end to the disastrous contagion, once the worship of idols, that poison has been exterminated. Celebrate with jubilation the annihilation of paganism, sing in full voice the hallelujah, for you have won as soldiers of Christ.

Not yet, however, as the *religiones profanae* (secular religions) still existed; almost all the temples still stood and the ‘pagans’ still came to their sanctuaries. For this reason, the agitator demands the confiscation of their property and the destruction of the centres of worship.

Melt the figures of the gods and mint your coins with them; incorporate the votive offerings into the imperial treasury. The Lord has called you to higher undertakings, when you have crowned the task of annihilating all the temples.

The spread of Christianity was the highest enterprise, along with the eradication of the pernicious ‘pagan’ doctrines. Of course, the adepts of the Greco-Roman world did not think so, but the other way around. ‘The opinion that, with the irruption of

Christianity in the world, it had begun a general decline of the human species' (Friedlander) was gaining strength. Always invoking the Yahweh of the Old Testament, as is logical, until then no Christian had claimed with so much emphasis heir to the biblical hecatombs, nor had he used the precedent so systematically to justify resorting to brutality and terror. God threatens even the family and children of the children, 'lest the cursed seed survive, and there be no trace of the heathen generations'. As soon as the Church found itself in a position of strength, it stopped rejecting violence in order to exercise it 'by all means', as the theologian Carl Schneider says. The old apologetics that spoke of freedom of cults is displaced by libel and diatribe; the ideology of martyrdom and the exemplary lives of the martyrs no longer matters. It is the hour of persecuting fanaticism, of 'the powerful calls to the crusade' by a Firmicus 'denigrating non-Christian religions like no other before him' (Hoheisel).

The emperors, certainly, were the ones who had the means to apply coercion and violence. They were also Christians and many proofs will not be necessary to suppose that the book of Firmicus Maternus, dedicated to the emperors Constantius and Constans would fail to influence in some measure the anti-'pagan' policy. And these, in turn, would determine the position of the author of that Christian pamphlet.

### *First assaults on the temples*

Paganism still had many followers among the peasants, the many rectors and philosophers; it was also preserved among the cultivated aristocracy, especially among the most rancid senatorial families, even those of the Eastern empire. In the year 341, a decree attributed to Constans began not with the classic exposition of motives, but with a propagandistic cry: 'Let the superstition cease! May the delirium of sacrifices be abolished!' (*caesat superstitio sacrificiorum aboleatur insania*). Consequently, the sovereign ordered in 346 the closing, with immediate effects, of the temples located in the cities; in 356, the closing of all the temples was ordered. The question was to prevent the wicked (*perditi*) from doing their bad things, which

triggered a wave of assaults on the temples. The confiscation of property and death by stepping on a temple, or by participating in the ‘aberration’ of sacrifices or worshipping an image, was one of the points of the laws of Constantius: ‘Whoever such things do, be struck down by the avenger sword’.



Libanius, an Hellene rector of Antioch, wrote that Constantius inherited from his father ‘the spark of the inclination to evil deeds, converted by him into a great fire, because he plunders the treasures of the gods, demolishes the temples and annuls the sacred canons’. Libanius comments that Constantius ‘generalised to the art of rhetoric (*logoi*) the contempt of Greco-Roman worship, and it is not surprising, because both, worship and rhetoric are related and go together’. The contemporary reader will understand that with this he accused the emperor of going against religion and against classical culture at the same time.

The most fanatical Christians already attacked altars and temples. The deacon Cyril of Heliopolis, for example, became famous with his actions. In Arethusa of Syria, the priest Marcus ordered the demolition of an old sanctuary (what later, being a bishop and during the reaction of Julian, it was worth a serious beating). In Caesarea of Cappadocia, the Christian community razed a temple of Zeus, patron of the city, and another of Apollo. In Alexandria, the Arian Georgios destroyed a whole series of sacred ancient places.



## JULIAN

### *Hecatombs under the pious Gallus*

In Palestine, the scene of the process of Scythopolis, occurred the deeds of Gallus, a cousin of Constantius who was saved from the dynastic slaughter of the year 337. We find here another good Christian, assiduous to the church since childhood, a great reader of the Bible and supposedly faithful husband of old Constantina, sister of the emperor and married in second nuptials: a notorious harpy, 'an unleashed fury' Amianus wrote 'as bloodthirsty as his own husband'. Gallus sent his brother Julian several letters of reprimand, inviting him to return to Christianity. In 351, the year of his proclamation as Caesar, Gallus scandalised the Hellenes by carrying the bones of Saint Babylas—the first well-documented relocation we know—to the famous Apollo sanctuary in Daphne, which was thus rendered denaturalised. The Christian Gallus, a great fan of boxing (at that time boxing was very bloody, with frequent breaking of bones), was revealed as a little tyrant in his residence of Antioch, through arbitrariness of all kinds and trials for high treason and witchcraft in which he made fun of all the legal norms and that brought a wake of confiscations, exile, horrible tortures and executions.

The fight against the old customs was tinged with true fanaticism, and he used a network of spies that covered the entire city. The Caesar Gallus, of whom Theodoret says with emphasis that 'he was orthodox to death until the day of his death', even induced some lynching by the plebs to get rid of certain uncomfortable fellow citizens. In 352, when the Jews suffered another of their periodic attacks of messianic excitement and rebelled against the prohibition of having slaves who were not Jews, assaulting a Roman garrison to procure weapons and naming someone of name Patrician, the pious Gallus burned entire cities and cut the throats even of the children. Nor were the high imperial officials saved from this regime of terror; thus it

fell the prefect of the East, Thalasius, directly responsible to the emperor. He was succeeded by Domitian, who shortly after his arrival in Antioch was captured by the soldiers, dragged through the streets, hung by his legs and thrown into the river Orontes; the same end suffered his quaestor. There were several other murders, and towards the beginning of the summer of 354 the population rose 'for varied and complicated reasons', as Ammianus writes, but above all because of famine and general misery. Governor Theophilus was killed and dismembered.

Constantius called his cousin. Despite having promised him full immunity, he asked Gallus to be accompanied by his wife, 'the lovely Constantina', since he had not seen her for a long time. Gallus understood that there was something fishy, but he trusted the support of Constantina, the emperor's sister. But his supporter died in those days as a result of a fever and the emperor beheaded his man of confidence one autumn morning in 354, in Istria. After the execution, he proceeded with the rack, the axe of the executioner or exile all the friends of Gallus, his officers and officials, and even some religious people.

Only the death of the sovereign, at forty-four years of age on November 3, 361, avoided Constantius a confrontation with his cousin Julian.

### *Emperor Julian*

Like his brother Gallus, Julian was also spared from the killing of relatives, although as a member of the imperial dynasty he was kept closely guarded: first in a magnificent estate of Nicomedia, which had been owned by his mother (Basilina, deceased shortly after the birth of Julian), and then in the lonely fortress of Macellum, located in the heart of Anatolia, where his older brother was also imprisoned. The distrustful emperor wove a dense network of spies around both princes, to transmit them each and every one of their words. They lived 'like prisoners in that Persian castle' (Julian), practically arrested and surely threatened with death. In Nicomedia, Julian was given a preceptor, Bishop Eusebius, a relative of Basilina, ecclesiastic and man of the world already known at the time, who, following the custom of Oriental prelates, used to dye his nails with

cinnabar and his hair with henna. He was instructed to educate the child severely in the Christian religion; to prevent him from contacting the population, and to ‘never talk about the tragic end of his family’, although at seven Julian was very aware of it and this caused frequent crying spells and terrible nightmares.

In Macellum, where he was confined for seven years with scarcely any other company than that of his slaves, he had as his educator the Arian Jorje of Cappadocia, who was in charge of training him for the priesthood. But then Julian was able to leave the place and settled in Constantinople, where he lived the disputes between Arians and Orthodox and knew the real life of that world of violent riots and fiery mutual excommunications. Towards the end of 351, when Julian was twenty years old, Constantius ordered him to continue his studies in Nicomedia. Julian visited Pergamum, Ephesus, and Athens, where he had notable teachers who won him for Hellenism.



Appointed Caesar in 355 by Constantius, and proclaimed Augustus by the army in Paris in 360, Constantius, who had no offspring, at the time of death appointed Julian as successor when the two opposing armies marched to the encounter of the other. An ephemeral restoration of polytheistic traditions took place, with the establishment of a Hellenistic ‘state religion’, whose organisation followed in many respects the pattern of Christian canons. Julian tried to replace the cross and the nefarious dualism of Christians by a formula composed of certain streams of Hellenistic philosophy and a ‘solar pantheism’. Without

neglecting the other gods of the pagan pantheon, he had a temple built for the Sun god—probably identified with Mithra—in the imperial palace; on numerous occasions, he proclaimed his veneration for the Basileus Helios, the Sun King, which was already a bi-millennial tradition:

Since my childhood, I was inspired by an invincible longing for the rays of the God, who have always captivated my soul, in such a way that I constantly wanted to contemplate it and even at night, when I was in the country. I forgot everything to admire the beauty of starry heaven...

Today we have become accustomed to interpreting Julian's reaction as a nostalgic movement, a romantic anachronism or the absurd attempt to turn the hands of the clock backwards. But why do we interpret it that way? Was he refuted, or could he be, instead of being drowned in blood? What is certain and undeniable is that Emperor Julian (from 361 to 363), called 'the Apostate' by the Christians, was far superior to his Christian predecessors in character, morality, and spirituality. Trained in philosophy and literature, not only was he 'the first truly cultured emperor for more than a century' (Brown), but also deserved 'a prominent place among writers of the time in the Greek language' (Stein), and he knew to surround himself with the best thinkers of his time. Julian was zealous in the fulfilment of his duty and enemy of all gentleness. He never had mistresses or ephebes and never got drunk.

The emperor went to work since dawn. He tried to rationalise the bureaucracy and place intellectuals in top government and administrative positions. Julian abolished the splendours of the court, the possession of eunuchs and jesters, and the whole system of flatterers, parasites, spies, and whistleblowers who were fired by the thousands. He reduced the service, reduced the taxes by a fifth, acted with severity against the unfaithful collectors and sanitised the state mail. He also abolished the *labarum*, that is, the banner of the army with the anagram of Christ, and tried to resurrect ancient cults, festivals and the Paideia: classical education. He ordered the return of the old temples or the reconstruction of those that had been destroyed, and even the return of the statues and other sacred

ornaments that adorned the gardens of the individuals who had appropriated them.

But he did not ban Christianity; on the contrary, he allowed the return of the exiled clerics, which only served to foment new conspiracies and tumults. The Donatists of Africa, while praising the emperor as a paragon of justice, disinfected their newly recovered churches by scrubbing them up and down with sea water, sanded the wood of the altars and the plaster of the walls, regained the influence lost under Constans and Constantius II, and prepared to enjoy their revenge. The Catholics were converted by force, their churches expropriated, their books burned, their chalices and monstrances thrown by the windows and the hosts thrown to the dogs; some abused clerics died. Up to 391, the Donatists continued to have high status, at least in Numidia and Mauritania. It is true that Julian, as a supporter of polytheism, criticised the Old Testament and its monotheistic rigours, as well as the arrogance of the supposed chosen people, but he granted Yahweh a rank equal to that of the other gods and even admitted that the God worshiped by the Jews was 'the best and most powerful of all'.

A Jewish delegation that visited him in Antioch in July 362, obtained the authorisation to rebuild the Temple of Jerusalem and the promise of new territories, in a kind of anticipation of the current 'Zionism', which motivated the jubilation of the diaspora. The reconstruction of the temple was initiated with great eagerness the following spring, while Julian undertook his campaign in Persia, but towards the end of May a fire, judged 'providential' by the Christians, as well as the death of Julian, meant the end of the works forever. Julian was always in favour of tolerance, even towards the Christians. If his dispositions regarding the 'Galileans', he said on one occasion, were benign and humanitarian, they should reciprocate by not bothering anyone, nor be trying to impose assistance on their churches. In a letter to the citizens of Bosra, he wrote:

To convince and to teach men it is necessary to use reason and not blows, threats or corporal punishment. I will not tire of repeating it: If you are sincere supporters of the true religion, you will refrain from bothering, attacking or offending the community of the Galileans, who are more

worthy of pity than hatred, since they are wrong in matters of such power and transcendence.

Although Julian was a supporter of tolerance he could not avoid the use of violence against the violent, the Christians who were dedicated to desecrating and even destroying the newly rebuilt temples in Syria and Asia Minor, as well as the statues. His legislation in the matter of education provoked many hatreds, inasmuch as he forbade Christians to study Greek literature (saying 'let them stay in their churches interpreting their Matthew and Luke'). He also demanded the return of the columns and capital stolen from the temples by the Christians to adorn their 'houses of God'.

If the Galileans want to have decoration in their temples, congratulations, but not with the materials belonging to other places of worship.

Libanius tells how the ships and chariots that returned their columns to the sacked gods could be seen everywhere. On October 22, 362, the Christians set fire to the temple of Apollo in Daphne, which had been restored by the sovereign, and destroyed the famous statue. In retaliation, Julian had the Basilica of Antioch and other churches consecrated to various martyrs razed. (Incidentally, the Christians said that the temple had been struck by lightning but according to Libanius, there were no storm clouds on the night of the fire.) In Damascus, Gaza, Ashkelon, Alexandria and other places the Christian basilicas burned, sometimes with the collaboration of the Jews; some believers were tortured or killed, including Bishop Marcus de Arethusa, so he entered the payroll of the martyrs. But, in general, 'more offended had been the rights of the pagans' (Schuitze), and in any case said pogrom was no more than a reaction to the excesses of the Christians, their abuses and their diatribes against paganism. Throughout the empire, from Arabia and Syria, through Numidia, and even the Italian Alps, Julian was celebrated as a 'benefactor of the state', 'undoing past wrongs', 'restorer of temples and the empire of freedom', 'magnanimous inspirer of the edicts of tolerance'. Even one of Julian's main intellectual detractors, Gregory of Nazianzus, confessed that his ears ached from hearing

so much praise from his liberal regime, according to Ernst Stein, ‘one of the healthiest the Roman Empire ever had’.

During the campaign in Persia, initiated by the emperor from Antioch (which was the main base of operations of the Romans against the Persians), on March 5, 363, a favourable occasion was presented. Julian, who was not wearing a breastplate, fell north of Ctesiphon, on the banks of the Tigris. Why was he unprotected? Was he wounded by an enemy spear or, as some claim, from his own ranks? Nobody knew. Libanius, who was friend of Julian, assures that the author was a man ‘who refused to render cult to the Gods’. And even a Christian historian claims that Julian died at midnight on June 26, 363, when he was thirty-two years old and had governed for twenty months, victim of an assassin in the pay of the Christians, a hero without blemish, naturally, who ‘perpetrated this audacious action in defence of God and religion’. The Persians argued that he could not be one of their own, because they were out of range when the emperor was wounded in the midst of his troops. ‘Only one thing is certain’, Benoist-Méchin wrote, ‘and it is that he was not a Persian’, although he does not provide any definitive proof. ‘Be that as it may’, wrote Theodoret, father of the Church, ‘was he man or angel who wielded the sword, the truth is that he acted as the servant of the divine will’.

### *Christian tall stories*

The Christians, preachers of love of the enemy and of the doctrine that all authority emanates from God, celebrated the death of the emperor with great public banquets, festivals in churches and chapels and dances in the theatres of Antioch: the city that, as Ernest Renan says, ‘was full of puppeteers, charlatans, actors, magicians, thaumaturges, witches and religious swindlers’. The diatribe in three volumes that Julian had written shortly before his death, *Against the Galileans*, was promptly destroyed, but fifty years later, Cyril, the doctor of the Church still bothered to argue against it: *Pro sanela Christianorum religione adversas libros athei Julian (The Sanela Christian religious books, atheist Julian)* in thirty volumes, of which ten have reached us in their Greek text and ten others in Greek and

Syriac fragments. Naturally, a bishop like Cyril, an avowed enemy of philosophy who even tried to prohibit its teaching in Alexandria, did not intend to grasp the thought of Julian, but only 'crush it with maximum energy' (Jouassard). The Christians also destroyed all the portraits of Julian and the epigraphs that commemorated his victories, without sparing means to erase from the memory of men the remembrances of him.

During Julian's life, the most famous doctors of the Church had kept a prudent silence, but shortly after his death, and for a long time more, they dedicated themselves to attacking him. Ephrem, another saint whose odious songs were repeated by the parishioners of Edessa, dedicated a whole treatise to 'Julian the Apostate', the 'pagan emperor' and, according to him, 'frantic', 'tyrant', 'trickster', 'damned' and 'idolatrourous priest'. 'His ambition caught the deadly release' that 'tore his body pregnant with oracles from his magicians' to send him definitively 'to hell'. The clerical historians of the 5th century, who sometimes were also jurists, such as Rufinus, Socrates, Philostorgius, Sozomen, and Theodoret, speak of Julian in a still worse tone.

While the Christian world defamed the 'Apostate', the Enlightenment corrected that image in the diametrically opposite sense. In 1699 the Protestant theologian Gottfried Arnold, in his *Impartial History of the Church and of Heresy*, rehabilitated the figure of Julian. A few decades later Montesquieu praised him as a statesman and legislator. Voltaire wrote: 'Thus, that man who has been described to us horribly was perhaps the noblest of all or at least the second'. Montaigne and Chateaubriand count him among the greatest historical figures. Goethe praised himself for understanding and sharing Julian's animosity against Christianity. Schiller wanted to make him the protagonist of one of his dramas. Shaftesbury and Fielding praised him, and Gibbon believes that he deserved to have owned the world. Ibsen wrote *Caesar and Galilee* and Nikos Kazantzakis his tragedy *Julian the Apostate* premiered in Paris in 1948. More recently, between 1962 and 1964, the North American Gore Vidal dedicated a novel, *Julian*, to him. On the other hand, the Benedictine Baur (representative, in this, of many current Catholics) continues to defame Julian in the 20th century.



After the death of Julian, and having renounced the designated successor, Salutius, a moderate pagan philosopher and prefect of the praetorians of the East who had been a personal friend of Julian, the Illyrian Jovian acceded to the throne.

#### AFTER JULIAN

Although a 'convinced Christian', at the time of accessing the throne, Jovian ordered to celebrate a sacrifice and consult the viscera. His first act of government was a shameful treaty with the Persians, in which he made great territorial concessions. Very different from the ascetic Julian, the Catholic emperor Jovian, of mediocre culture although fond of playing being a patron, celebrated by the Church as 'companion of the saints', was a lover of the wine, women and the celebrations. He restored the *labarum* as an imperial banner and not only murdered a senior notary of the same name, whom he feared as a possible candidate for the throne but also deposed numerous civil and military officials among those named by Julian, confiscating their property and exiling them or executing them. According to Theodoret, these measures only affected those who had committed abuses against Christians or against the Christian Church. Jovian spared the life a certain Vindaonius Magnus, who had destroyed a 'house of God' in Berytus, in exchange for his paying for the reconstruction from his pocket. 'Paganism' was not especially persecuted, even if one or another temple (such as that of Corfu) was closed or destroyed, sacrifices were forbidden or a library established by Julian in the temple of Trajan burned in Antioch (mainly because it contained anti-Christian works).

A little incapable, but obedient to the suggestions of the clergy, as soon as he stepped on Roman lands Jovian restored the privileges to the jubilant priests, in addition to giving them others that they did not have before. In the course of time they snatched many more. The exiled priests returned; the prelates crowded the court in droves, and even in the East the Nicene faith revived. Saint Athanasius, distinguished by the emperor with an epistle and triumphantly received at Hierapolis, prophesied to Jovian in

writing 'a long and peaceful reign'. But only eight months later, on February 17, 364, the emperor died in Dadastana (Bithynia), at the young age of thirty-one years, 'beautifully prepared for death' according to Theodoret but actually intoxicated by a coal brazier. He was buried in the apostolic temple of Constantinople.

Once more, Second Salutius rejected the purple.<sup>6</sup>

After hard discussions the dignitaries of the empire chose, at the end of February of the year 364, Valentinian, descendant of some farmers of Pannonia and son of the general Gratian. On March 28, in the field of Mars, the new emperor appointed co-regent for the eastern part of the empire his brother Valens, although he reserved for himself *lapotior auctoritas*. It is from the time of Valentinian and Valens that the use of the word *pagani* was generalized to designate the adherents of the old religion. Among the high positions of the army and of the administration the Hellenes (now called 'pagans') still predominated, although for the last time and by the scarce majority of 12 to 10. In the part assigned to Valens, the payroll of the known officials gives us, along with nine polytheists, a Manichaean, three Arians and ten Orthodox. Many prestigious senators from Julian's time and before left office, evidently because of their beliefs. In addition, the co-regulators enacted confiscations of temple properties (to incorporate them into their private funds), punishments against astrologers and threats of capital punishment for practitioners of night spells.

Both emperors were confessed Christians; it is even said that Valentinian had been retaliated for it in Julian's time, while there is no similar incidence for Valens' case. Both announced by decree (supposing it to be authentic) that 'the Trinity is constituted by only one essence and three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and we order that this is what everyone should believe'. Soon, however, there were doctrinal differences between them and each one devoted himself to promoting his

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<sup>6</sup> *Note of the translator:* This is incredible. Hadn't the Hellenist Salutius rejected the purple and with time named his own Hellene successor, the course of history could have been very different. 'All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing' (Edmund Burke).

own. While Valentinian I, the emperor of the West, remained faithful to the Nicene Creed, Valens, who 'had been orthodox at the beginning' (Theodoret) promoted Arian beliefs in the East. In a certain way, it could be said that this is how the eternal rivalry between the East and the West was expressed. Both, and especially Valens, were quite uneducated; both were brutal, in particular, Valentinian, and both had a deer-like panic of witchcraft. After their proclamation, Valentinian and Valens travelled together through Thrace and Dacia, to separate themselves at Sirmium.

### *Rivers of blood under the Catholic Valentinian*

The Catholic Valentinian I (364-375), who resided frequently in Milan and Trier, born in 321 in Cibalae, an important military post in Pannonia, was blond and blue-eyed, diligent, daring and cunning. Officer of the personal guard of Julian, and of forty-three years of age at the time of accessing the throne, he cared little about the dogmas or the disputes of the clergy. But he restored the privileges of the clergy created by Constantine and forbade Christians to be condemned to fight as gladiators. As a puritan Catholic he was, he sanctioned adultery with the death penalty and he himself was a faithful husband (at least with his second wife, Justina, younger than the first).

In a law of November of 364, the emperor provided that judges and officials who had intentionally harmed Christians would be sentenced to death or confiscation of property. In contrast, both Valentinian and Valens were tolerant of the Jews and granted privileges to their theologians. In this way, Valentinian tolerated almost all the sects, and above all showed a surprising indulgence to Auxentius, the Arian bishop of Milan, although he was the first Christian emperor to persecute the Manichaeans, arranging against them, in 372, the exile and confiscation of their places of worship. In 373 he made a bloodbath among the Donatists, who had rebelled. Then the *magister militum* (officer) Theodosius, a Hispanic Catholic and father of the future emperor, was launched against usurper Firmus; twice he offered peace through several bishops, and broke his promise. The rebellious troops were put to the sword

after surrendering, and they could consider themselves lucky those who were saved with only both hands cut. To those thus deceived they had no choice but to fight with the vigour of despair, from which resulted a terrible war of an unusual cruelty, which ravaged all of North Africa. General Theodosius not only burned alive or at least mutilated the soldiers who deserted or were tired of fighting, but also practiced the tactic of scorched earth over vast territories and exterminated the Mauritanian tribes until he made hundreds of thousands of victims. Once the rebellion was crushed, the pope forbade the celebration of the Donatist cults.

Valentinian, in his capacity as a ‘convinced Christian’ (as Bigelmair and even Joannou describe him), did not back down from the judicial crime against wizards, fortune-tellers and ‘sex offenders’. His motto: severity and not clemency is the mother of justice. His judges were instructed to proceed harshly, and the benignity of some provisions was more than compensated for by the lack of scruples of many of them. ‘The most elementary principles of justice were mocked by death sentences without proof, or founded on confessions taken away by torture’ (Nagl). The emperor, the son of peasants, hated the old Roman nobility and had his houses searched for magic recipe books and love filters. Men and women of the best families were banished or executed, and their property confiscated. In his fits of rage, Valentinian ordered executions without blinking; minor faults were punished with the bonfire or the decapitation, the major ones with the death by torture. A page who during a hunting party had released the dogs too soon was whipped to death, and it was not an exceptional case. He never exercised his right of pardon.

The delinquents were sometimes thrown to two she-bears that the sovereign had in cages next to his bedroom. In recent times, Reinhold Weijenborg has tried to refute this anecdote referred to by Amianus by saying that ‘it cannot be true in its literal sense’. So a second reading has been invented, according to which those two cages would be the rooms of the empresses, Marina Severa and Justina. Following the emperor’s instructions, Theodosius was a ‘great terror of the Saxons’ during the years

368 and 369. He pacified Britannia as far as the old wall of Adriano. Theodosius also made frequent raids on the other side of the Rhine. He twice fought against the Alamanni, although during the second campaign they inflicted heavy losses until their King Vithicab (whose father, Vadomar, had served the Romans in Julian's time) was killed by some assassins sent by Valentinian. Theodosius also ravaged with the fire and the sword the territories of Franks and Quadics. In 370, he obtained from the Saxons a withdrawal by treaty, to then attack them with treachery and exterminate them.

Emperor Valentinian, who considered himself a peaceful person (a frequent error of perspective among his class and condition), died of a fit of rage. He was parleying with poor Quadics whose king, Gabinus, Marcellianus had invited in 374 to assassinate him with a stab in the back during a banquet (cf. the murder of the king of the Alamanni which we have just recounted). Then, having mounted in anger, his face became congested, purple, and fell as if struck by lightning. Valentinian had a vomit of blood and died immediately, on November 17 of the year 375, in the border city of Brigetio. He was buried in Constantinople.

### *Trembling and gnashing of teeth under the Arian Valens*

Valentinian's brother, Valens (364-378), was the last emperor who officially supported Arianism. He acted against the sects and other deviations, even against the semi-Arians who, in order to thrive, had made a shameful abjuration in Rome. The Catholics were very harshly persecuted during the last years of the regime of this emperor, which made even the exiled be considered martyrs. Among these were the bishops Athanasius of Alexandria, Meletius of Antioch, Pelagius of Laodicea, Eusebius of Samosata, Barses of Edessa and many others. Some Catholics were drowned in Antioch, and there were also martyrs in Constantinople. It is even said that in the year of the Lord 370 Valens sent secret letters to his prefect Modesto, arranging that eighty Catholic bishops and priests be led with deceit aboard a ship, which was burned with all its passengers on the high seas; it

is also said that whole hosts of 'true faith supporters' were thrown into the Orontes.

'A persecution has fallen upon us, my venerable brothers, the most bitter of all' lamented in 376 Basil, doctor of the Church, in a letter to the bishops of Italy and Gaul (although he personally had not been molested). Houses of prayer were closed, the service of the altars abandoned, the bishops imprisoned under any false pretext and sent at night to exile and death. 'It is well known', continues Basil, 'although we have preferred to silence it' the desertion of priests and deacons, the dispersion of the clergy; in a word, 'the mouth of the believers has been closed, while the blasphemous languages are loose and dare everything'.

Valens was so afraid of witchcraft that he punished it with the death penalty from the first year of his term. For this reason, he continued the persecution started by Constantine against the followers of black magic, the clairvoyants and the interpreters of dreams since the winter of 371 and for two years 'like a beast in the amphitheatre his fury was so great that he seemed to regret not being able to prolong the martyrdom of his victims after death' (Amianus). In the year 368 a senator lost his head because a lady with whom he was in relationships felt the victim of an enchantment. Prosecutor Marino suffered the death penalty because he had procured the hand of a certain Hispanila with magical arts. The coachman Athanasius died burned for exercising the arts of black magic. Fear spread throughout the East; thousands were detained, tortured, liquidated, including high public officials and wise philosophers. Participants or simple witnesses were burned alive, strangled, and beheaded, as in Ephesus; for example, despite being ill, the philosopher Maximus who had been a friend and preceptor of Julian. Their property was confiscated, they were extorted with heavy fines; it was enough a reckless word, or have dared to make a scallop.

The demagoguery burned entire libraries, claiming that they were 'magic books'.<sup>7</sup> And since the machinery of justice

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<sup>7</sup> *Note of the translator:* The practice started in the New Testament. Acts 19 records how 'a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And

was still too slow for Valens, beheadings, and bonfires were dispensed with judicial formalities. At the same time, he considered himself a merciful sovereign, like his brother Valentinian, as well as a faithful Christian, a good husband and a chaste man. No one denies that the 'purity of manners' prevailed in his court. An executioner who led to the execution of a naked adulteress was also burned alive in punishment for such shamelessness.

Procopius, forty years old and a relative of Julian, rose up in Constantinople, mainly with the support of the Hellenes. Valens had him beheaded without delay on May 27, 366 AD. Valens 'lost all sense of the measure' (Nagl). He persecuted even the women of the insurgents, burned countless books and continued to enrich himself along with his executioners. All this happened in the middle of almost a decade of conflicts with the Persians. In the year 367, the emperor also began a campaign against the Ostrogoths, who had helped Procopius. The operations ran between peat bogs and swamps, and although a price was placed on the heads of the Goths, the war ended without success in 369. On August 9, 378, in Adrianople, Valens lost the battle and his life.

We have seen how that formidable empire was ruled by the first Christian majesties: Constantine, his sons, and the emperors Jovian, Valentinian I, Valens. Did they behave in a more benign, humanitarian or peaceful way than their predecessors or Julian the Apostate?

Along with the constant massacres inside the empire, at the borders, in enemy territory, the eternal clerical quarrels intervened. The internal politics of the 4th century was determined by the struggle between the two main confessions, the Arians, and the Orthodox. At the crucial point was Athanasius of Alexandria, the most prominent bishop straddling between Constantine and Valens and one of the most nefarious of all times, whose imprint would be noted in the days to come.

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they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver'.

## ATHANASIUS, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH (295-373)

Saint Athanasius was the greatest man of his time and perhaps, pondering everything in a scrupulous way, the greatest that the Church could ever have presented.

—Abbé de Bletterinni

The grateful posterity gave the efficient Alexandrian bishop the deserved nickname of 'the Great'; both the Eastern and Western churches venerate him as a saint.

—Joseph Lippl

Every political question is taken to the field of theology; his adversaries are heretics while he is the defender of pure faith. The adversaries learn from him the association between theology and politics. As a kind of anti-emperor, he anticipated the prototype of the great Roman popes.

—G. Gentz

From the 4th century to the 7th the popes, and the patriarchs fought with every means at their disposal. They judged, degraded and proscribed each other; there began to operate secret services and propaganda machinery; the controversies degenerated into wild ecstasies; there were riots and street skirmishes. There was murder; the military crushed the revolts; the anchorites of the desert, with the support of the court of Byzantium, instigated the multitudes; intrigues were hatched for the favour of emperors and empresses. State terror was unleashed; the patriarchs fought among themselves, they were elevated to the throne and dethroned again as soon as a new trinitarian conception succeeded.

—Hans Kühner



Any science worth its salt is based on experience, but what comes to be known about God, if it exists? In the early days of Christianity ‘a whole mass of the most diverse ideas’ about the celestial spirits was considered (Weinel, theologian). In the 2nd and early 3rd centuries ‘hardly anyone’ cared about the ‘Holy Spirit’ (Harnack, theologian) and in the 4th century, according to Hilarius, doctor of the Church, no one knows what will be the creed of the following year. However, the theologians went deeper and deeper into the subject in the course of time. They came to discover that God was something like a single being (*ousia*, substance) in three people (*hypostaseis personae*). That this triple personality was a consequence of two ‘processes’ (*processiones*): of the generation (*generatio*) of the Son from the Father and of the ‘exhalation’ (*spiratio*) of the Spirit between the Father and the Son. That these two ‘processes’ were equivalent to four ‘interactions’ (*relationes*): the quality of father and son, the exhalation and the exhaled being, and these four ‘interactions’ in turn give five ‘particularities’ (*proprietaes, notiones*). That in the end, all this, in mutual ‘permeation’ (*perichoresis, circuminsessio*) would give only one God: *actus purissimus!*

### *The complicated nature of God*

As much as they have given themselves the headaches over the centuries, the theologians know ‘that any intellectual work on the Trinity dogma will remain an unfinished symphony’ (Anwander) or, no matter how deep they delve into it, ‘a mystery of impenetrable faith’ as the Benedictine Von Rudloff humbly writes, asserting with all seriousness that none of it ‘speaks against reason; we do not say that three is equal to one but that three people are a being’. However, in 1977, it seems to Karl Rahner ‘that the history of dogmas, in the broadest sense of the word, continues and must continue—and therefore the history of dogmas continues’. No matter how much theologians may say—an endless process of often nebulous concepts, especially because in the history of dogmas they have imposed their beliefs by all means, including violence—: those disputes have never possessed any basis of experience. Because of this, and speaking

through Helvetius, 'the reign of theology was always seen as the domain of darkness'.

In the 4th century, an attempt was made to shed light on this darkness, and everything became even darker. 'Everyone suspects their neighbour', recognises Basil, father of the Church, 'the blasphemous tongues have been released'. But the councils, enlightened by the Holy Spirit that tried to clarify the mysteries, only contributed to creating greater confusion. Even Gregory of Nazianzus, the holy father of the Church, mocks the clerical conferences and admits that they seldom come to a good end, stoking more controversy instead of softening it: 'I avoid the meetings of bishops because until now I have never seen any synod ending well; they do not solve any ill but simply create new ones. In them, there is only rivalry and struggles for power'. On the one hand, of the important Council of Nicaea (325) hardly something survived, as well as some other synods. On the other, the victors prevented the circulation of the writings of their opponents, when they did not manage to destroy them.

Only a few fragments of Arius, or Asterius of Cappadocia, a moderate Arian, have come to us through quotations in replication writings. Although Catholic treatises were frequently disseminated, especially those written by the fathers of the Church Hilarius de Poitiers (died 367) and Athanasius of Alexandria (died 373), they are only subjective propaganda products. The no less tendentious historians of the 5th century Socrates, Sozomen, Theodoret, and Philostorgius, of strict Arian tendency, are already of later generations. A good idea of the spiritual historiography of that era and its unscrupulous tendency to falsify is provided by the first global history of the Church after Eusebius, that of Gelasius of Caesarea (died between 394 and 400). Unknown until recently, it has been largely reconstructed and its importance lies in its sources: descriptions of the historians of the 5th century Church (Rufinus, the oldest in the West, Socrates and Gelasius of Cyzicus). Gelasius was also successor (the second) of Eusebius, a high dignitary and archbishop of Caesarea with jurisdiction throughout Palestine.

Friedrich Winkelmann has presented in a very concise manner the method of this unique and great contemporary history of the Church during the Trinitarian dispute: the stereotyped defamation of the adversary. The archbishop hardly cares about the advances or the differentiations produced. Of the Arians, he only relates reticences and intrigues; they are nothing but inconvertible troublemakers, ‘puppets of the devil who speaks through their mouth’. Gelasius attributes to Arius a perjury. He also lies in saying that it was not Constantius, but Constantine, who wanted to rehabilitate Arius. On the other hand, Constantine—another lie—did not banish Athanasius, the opponent of Arius, but sent him back to Alexandria full of honours. Gelasius is also the first to expose the falsehood that Constantine named in his testament Constantine II, the Catholic, heir to his kingdom; but that a local priest gave the testament to Constantius in exchange for the promise to support Arianism. The bishop of Caesarea not only masks all the negative, overlooking most of the events, but he also runs his imagination against the strict truth. In sum, what manifests itself is ‘a great complex of a gross falsification of history’.

But was it Athanasius, doctor of the Church, no less scrupulous, agitator and apologist? Globally, he reprimands the Arians: ‘Whom haven’t they not outraged at their will? Whom have they not mistreated to the point that he died in misery or his relatives were harmed? Where is a place that does not show any memory of their wickedness? What adversary have they not annihilated, wielding pretexts invented in the manner of Jezebel?’ Even the Benedictine Baur speaks of a ‘civil war between Catholics and Arians’. Naturally, the same happens with all the Catholic apologists: the Arians—whose name would soon become one of the worst insults in history of the Church—were prey to the devil and degraded the Christian name before a world, still half pagan, ‘with abominable intrigues, persecutory rage, lies, and infamies of all kinds, even by means of mass murders’. Therefore, it was time ‘for this poisonous plant to disappear at last from the world’.

At the centre of this dispute among theologians was the question of whether Christ was true God if he had the same

nature as God himself. The Orthodox, although sometimes disappointed, affirmed this, while the Arians, the majority of the Eastern bishops at the height of their power (after the Council of Milan, 355), denied it. When it seemed that the latter had almost won, they split into radicals, who considered the 'Son' and the 'Father' as totally disparate and different (*anhomoios*), the semi-Arians, who in their opinion were considered more or less *homousians*, and a party that rejected the previous two and defended *homoism*, pointing out the similarity (which was left intentionally vague) or equality of 'Father' and 'Son', but not the 'identity of nature', the *homousios* of the Nicaeans.<sup>8</sup>

The Arians and the Orthodox remained attached to monotheism; the former no doubt closer to the primitive Christian faith, believed that the 'Son' was totally different from the 'Father'. He was a creature of God, although complete and very on top of all the others. Arius speaks of him with the utmost respect.

For the Orthodox Jesus was, in the mouth of Athanasius, 'God made flesh' (*theos sarkophoros*) but not a 'man, who leads to God' (*anthropos theophoros*); the 'Father' and the 'Son' is a

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<sup>8</sup> *Note of the translator:* There is a splendid passage in Gore Vidal's novel *Julian* (a novel mentioned by Deschner in the previous chapter) describing the minutiae over which early Christians killed each other:

Bishop George suddenly spun round; the long finger was again pointed at me.

"*Homoiousios*. What does that mean?"

I knew. I rattled my answer like a crow taught to speak. "It means that Jesus the son is of similar substance to God the father."

"*Homoousios*. What does that mean?"

"That Jesus the son is of one substance with God the father."

"The difference?"

"In the first case, Jesus was created by the father before this world began. He is God's son by grace but not by nature."

"Why?"

"Because God is one. By definition singular. God cannot be many, as the late Bishop Arius maintained at the council of Nicaea."

"Excellent." I received a series of finger-snappings as applause.

"Now in the second case?..."

single nature, an absolute unit; they were *homousios*, of the same nature. For only in this way was it possible to sustain the dogma of the double, or even triple, divinity and pray to the ‘Son’, the new one, as well as to the ‘Father’ as the Jews already did. The Arians were accused of ‘polytheism’ and ‘having a big God and a small one’. For the popular masses of Constantinople, who, as everywhere, flocked to the preferred national Church, the question of faith was apparently captivating and fascinating, with the Christological dispute reaching a great popularity in streets, squares, and theatres, as ironically says a contemporary of the late 4th century:

This city is full of artisans and slaves who are profound theologians, who preach in stores and on the streets. If you want to change a coin with a man, first he will inform you about where the difference between God the Father and God the Son lies, and if you ask for the price of a loaf of bread, instead of answering you they will explain that the Son is below the Father; and if you want to know if you have the bathroom ready, the bathroom attendant will answer you that the Son has been created from nothing.

*It was not fought for faith but for power*

The exacerbated interest in faith was not really more than the obverse of the question. From the beginning, this secular dispute was less about dogmatic differences than about the core of a typical clerical policy. ‘The pretext was the salvation of souls’—admitted even Gregory of Nazianzus, son of a bishop and holy bishop in turn, who avoided meddling in worldly matters and who often eluded his ecclesiastical offices by fleeing—, ‘but the motive was anxiety of domain, not to mention tributes and taxes’.

The hierarchical ambitions for power and the disputes over the Episcopal sees, in which course the theological rivalries were often forgotten, provided duration and vehemence to those enmities. It not only excited the Church but, at least in the East, the state as well. Not only did the council fathers sometimes engage in quarrels until the Holy Spirit spoke, but also lay people beat themselves bloody in public. Any dispute produced there between the clergy, Arian, monophysite or iconoclastic exceeds

the limits of a mere quarrel between friars and shocks all political and social life for centuries. This makes Helvetius affirm, in a lapidary way: 'What is the consequence of religious intolerance? The ruin of the nations'. And Voltaire assures that 'If you count the murders perpetrated by fanaticism from the brawls between Athanasius and Arius up to the present day, you will see that these disputes have contributed to the depopulation of the Earth rather than the warlike confrontations', which undoubtedly has been very often a consequence of the complicity between the throne and the altar.

However, just as the policies of the State and the Church were intimately intertwined, so were the latter and theology. Of course, there was no official doctrine about the Trinity, but only different traditions. Binding decisions 'were only made in the course of the conflict' (Brox). In spite of this, each of the parties, especially Saint Athanasius, liked to call his desire for prestige and power a matter of faith. Thus accusations could be constantly presented and justified. Athanasius immediately theologises any political impetus and treats his rivals as heretics. Politics becomes theology and theology politics. 'His terminology is never clear enough' (Loofs). 'With Athanasius it is never about formulas' (Gentz). What most characterizes the 'father of orthodoxy' is that he leaves his extremely confused dogmatic position, using it until the 350s, to designate as the 'true faith' those topics that would later be used to stigmatise the Arian or semi-Arian 'heresy': that he, the defender of Nicaea and the *homousios*, rejected for a long time the theory of *hypostasis*, thereby delaying the union; and that he, the bulwark of orthodoxy, even cleared the way for an 'heretical doctrine', monophysitism. For that reason, the Catholics of the 5th and 6th centuries had to 'touch up' the dogmatic treatises of their doctor of the Church. However, for a long time the Arians proposed a formula of a profession that coincided literally with that often used by Athanasius, but then appeared as 'Arian heresy' since whatever the opponent said it was always bad in advance, malignant and diabolical; and any personal enemy was an 'Arian'.

All this state of affairs was facilitated by the fact that for a time there had been total confusion in theological concepts, and

the Arians had split again. Even Constantine II, who had gradually favoured them more and more radically—‘to all the corrupt bishops of the Empire’ (Stratmann, Catholic), ‘to the caricatures of the Christian bishop’ (Ehrhard, Catholic)—, became so disgusted of the dispute over the ‘nature’ of Christ that ended up forbidding it. The theologians of the post-Constantinian era compared this war of religion, increasingly unintelligible, with a naval battle in the midst of the fog, a nocturnal combat in which it was impossible to distinguish the friend from the foe, but in which one attacks with viciousness, often changing sides towards the side of the strongest in which all means are allowed; one hates intensely, intrigues are plotted, and jealousies provoked. Even Jerome, the father of the Church, affirmed in his moment that he did not manage to find peace and tranquillity even in a small corner of the desert because every day the monks asked him accounts of his faith. ‘I declare what they want, but it is not enough for them. I subscribe to what they propose to me and they do not believe it. It is easier to live among wild beasts than among such Christians!’ Numerous aspects of the chronology of the dispute are still controversial, including the authenticity of many documents. However, the direct starting point was the revolt provoked by a debate about the Trinity around the year 318 in Alexandria, a city in which they fought for more than faith.

Founded in 332-331 by Alexander the Great, the city of the poet Callimachus, the geographer Eratosthenes, the grammarian Aristophanes of Byzantium, Aristarchus of Samothracem, Plotinus and later of Hypatia, was the main metropolis of the East: a cosmopolitan city of almost a million inhabitants, whose luxury only rivalled that of Rome. Alexandria was mapped out with broad views, it was rich and an important commercial plaza, with a fishing fleet that obtained not insignificant catches and stood out for its monopoly in the papyrus industry, which supplied to the whole world. It was also the place where the Old Testament was translated into Greek (the Septuagint), the seat of a patriarchy—it is not true that St. Mark founded it; the first bishop of whom there is historical record is Demetrius I—, and within the whole of the Church including that

of the West, it was the largest and most powerful of all Episcopal sees. The two Egypts, Thebes, Pentapolis and Libya were under its jurisdiction. This position had to be maintained, consolidated and expanded. The Alexandrian hierarchs, called 'popes' and who soon became immensely wealthy, intended, during the 4th and 5th centuries to get at all costs the domination of the totality of the Eastern dioceses. Their theology was also opposed to that of Antioch, which also joined the struggle for rank between the two patriarchs, always winning he who supported the emperor and the ecclesiastical and imperial seat of Constantinople. In the constant struggle against ecclesiastical competitors and the State, a political apparatus of the Church arose here for the first time, similar to what would later be in Rome. Due to this, the bishops of the secondary seats acted, who paid any change with the loss of their Episcopal armchairs, or either they won them.

Not one of the innumerable paleo-Christian churches of Alexandria was preserved. Around the year 318, Patriarch Alexander would have preferred to silence the burning question about the *ousia*, the nature of the 'Son'. There was a time when he was personally linked to the orator Arius (around 260-336), denounced by the Meletians and since 313 he was the presbyter of the church of Baucalis, the most prestigious in the city and the centre of a large group of followers formed by young women and workers of the dams. But Arius, who was a kind and conciliatory scholar and probably composed the first popular songs of the Christian era (now totally forgotten), had renounced the Episcopal seat in favour of Alexander, and in the contest he participated less in a personal capacity than as an exponent from the school of theologians of Antioch, which he had neither founded nor directed. But Bishop Alexander had previously defended, which was also reproached by Arians, ideas and doctrines similar to those he was now pursuing; he affirmed that Arius spent 'day and night in insults against Christ and against us'.

After two public debates, at a synod that brought together a hundred bishops, St. Alexander excommunicated and exiled Arius and all his followers, a decision that undoubtedly contributed to the struggle of the high office against the



privileges of his priests, and warned of the intrigues of the 'heresiarch'. He also informed the Roman bishop Silvestre (314-335) and by means of two encyclicals, in 319 and probably in 324, he appealed to 'all other beloved and venerable servants of God' and 'to all the bishops beloved by God of all places'. This resulted in measures and countermeasures being taken. Some princes of the Church anathematized Arius while others expressed their appreciation. Among the latter was the important intercessor before the court, the influential Bishop Eusebius, supreme pastor of Nicomedia, the city of residence of the emperor, who welcomed his banished friend. Two synods that resolved in favour of Arius made possible his rehabilitation and return. The Arian party of Alexandria was acquiring more and more force, coming to name a counter-bishop. Alexander defended himself in vain, lamented the 'den of thieves' of the Arians and came to fear for his own life. Riots followed which spread throughout Egypt, and finally the Eastern Church split. New Episcopal conferences, such as the Synod of Antioch in 324, again condemned Arius.

### *The Council of Nicaea*

Constantine had recommended the place, Nicaea, for the bonanza of its climate and had promised a pleasant stay. He was the one who convened the council, not the 'pope'. He also opened it on May 20 and held the presidency. The emperor paid the expenses of the participants, on whose number the data oscillate between 220 and 318 (for the 318 children of Abraham!). Silvestre, the supreme pastor of Rome, missed the meeting.

The emperor presented himself before the bishops 'like an angel of God descending from heaven, resplendent in his bright garments, dazzling with light, with the fiery glow of purple and adorned with the clear gleam of gold and costly precious stones' (Eusebius). The lords of the clergy themselves were guarded by guards and halberdiers 'with sharply drawn swords'. By decree of the sovereign they were 'offered every day an opulent maintenance'. According to Eusebius, at a banquet 'some sat at the table on the same cushions as the emperor, while others did

on both sides. It could easily have been thought or imagined that it was an image of the kingdom of Christ, which was only a dream and not a reality'. As far as the dogmatic aspects are concerned—no recordings were made—, the great majority of these servants of God showed little or no interest, something that the host did not care about. Although Constantine may not have led the sessions—a problem that has been much discussed—he did determine its course and make the decisions. For this, he made sure to have the majority and even imposed the decision formula. The formula was the somewhat changeable concept (which means the same, identical, but also similar, of the Greek *homos*) of the *homousios* of the *homousia*: the equality of the natures of the 'Father' and of the 'Son': 'a sign of antagonism in front of science, which thought about the paths of Origen' (Gentz).

In the Bible, not a single mention is made about it. That slogan—which, notoriously the emperor himself had formulated—had been opposed by the majority of the Eastern episcopate, even though it stemmed from Gnostic theology. The Monarchians had also used it, other 'heretics' (anti-Trinitarians). However, the young Athanasius, who accompanied Bishop Alexander as a deacon, 'had not used it in his first writings as a motto of his theology' (Schneemelcher) and 'it took him twenty-five years to take a liking' (Kraft). Although already in the council 'he pronounced himself against Arianism' but did not put it in writing until a quarter of a century later. No reasons were given nor explained in more detail for that decision of faith. The emperor, who was undeniably interested in unity and who considered the dispute of the clergy only as an intransigence, forbade any theological discussion and simply demanded compliance with the formula. The 'Holy Father' (Athanasius), whose presence presumably gave the dictator a happiness 'that exceeded any other' and whom for a quarter of a year he honoured and covered with honours, obeyed. And today, millions of Christians continue to believe in the *fides Nicaena*, the faith confession of Nicaea which should be better called, according to Johannes Haller, the faith of Constantine: the work of a layman who was not even baptised. 'We believe in one God, the almighty

Father... and in one Lord, Jesus Christ... true God of the true God, begotten, not created, of the same nature (*homousios*) as the Father...'

In the West, the Nicaea confession of faith was still barely known a few decades later and in orthodox circles it was the subject of discussion. Even the father of the Church, Hilarius, initially opposed that baptismal faith; although he later returned to it. However, the holy bishop Zeno of Verona, a passionate enemy of the infidels and the Arians, mocked a creed that worked with formulas. At the end of the 4th century, in the sermons of Gaudentius of Brescia or Maximus of Turin, it is still mentioned 'Nicaea at no time' (Sieben, Jesuit). Even Luther, in 1521, admits to hating 'the word *homousios*' although in 1539, in his work *On the Councils and the Church* he accepts it. Goethe is right when he affirms that 'the dogma of the divinity of Christ decreed by the Council of Nicaea was very useful, even a necessity, for despotism'. The behaviour of Constantine was not in any way an isolated event. Since then, the emperors, and not the popes, were the ones who made the decisions about the Church. Throughout the 4th century the bishops of Rome did not play any decisive role in the synods nor were they determining authorities. From Constantine, the 'imperial synodal power' prevailed.

The confession of faith of the Arians, which contrasted the *homoiusios* (of a similar nature) to the *homousios*, was snatched from the speaker's hands, in Nicaea, shattering the document before he had finished reading it. 'At once it was rejected by all and branded as erroneous and false; there was a great tumult' (Theodoret). In the sacred meetings, speaking through the mouth of Eusebius, a participant in them, there reigned 'everywhere bitter disputes' as was often the case in councils. The emperor threw directly into the fire, without even reading them, the writings of complaints and quarrels of the bishops. All those who shared 'of good will the best opinion' received 'his highest praises; on the contrary, he rejected the undisciplined with horror'. Arius was again condemned.

### *Character and tactics of a Father of the Church*

Probably like Paul and like Gregory VII, Athanasius was

short and weak; Julian calls him homunculus.<sup>9</sup> However, like Paul and Gregory, each one of them was a genius of hatred.

This cleric, the most obstinate of his century, compensated his scarce physical presence with enormous activity. He was one of the ecclesiastical personages that with great tenacity and lack of scruples induced errors. However, the Catholics declared him Father of the Church, which is one of the highest honours for which the facts are adjusted. But they omitted the 'brutal violence against his near adversaries: mistreatment, beatings, burning of churches, murder' (Dannenbauer). We may add bribery and forgery; 'imposing' if we want to use the term used by Erich Caspar, but 'totally devoid of attractive human traits'. In an analogous way Eduard Schwartz expresses himself about this 'humanly repulsive nature but superb from the historical point of view' and records his 'inability to distinguish between politics and morality; the absence of any doubt about his own self-legitimacy'.

The theologian Schneemelcher, on the other hand, splits hairs distinguishing the 'pamphlets of ecclesiastical policy of Athanasius with his abhorrent polemics and lack of veracity' of his 'dogmatic writings which brighten the heart of orthodoxy', and considers Athanasius a man 'who wants to be a theologian and a Christian and who nevertheless remains always in his human nature', which means that the theologian and Christian, and many of his actions, combine the rewarding orthodoxy with hatred and lies. Schneemelcher himself cites the 'intrigues' and 'the violent impulses of the hierarchs'. St. Epiphanius (whose religious fervour contrasted, as is well known, strongly with his intelligence), revered as 'patriarch of orthodoxy', testifies about Athanasius: 'If he was opposed he resorted to violence'. When violence affected him, as in the years 357-358 fleeing from the officials of Constantius, he pathetically preaches tolerance and condemns force as a sign of heresy. But this always was the policy of a Church that, when defeated, preached tolerance and freedom in the face of oppression, but when accessing the

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<sup>9</sup> *Note of the translator:* This suggests that Athanasius did not belong to the Aryan race.

majority, did not retreat before coercion and infamy. For the Christian Church, especially the Catholic Church, never aspires to essential freedoms but only to its own freedom. When the Catholic Church was the State, St. Optatus of Milevis approved in 366-367 to fight against the 'heretics', even passing them by the arms. 'Why', the saint asks,

should it be forbidden to avenge God [!] with the death of the guilty? Do you want tests? There are thousands in the Old Testament. It is not possible to stop thinking about terrible examples.

And indeed: there is no lacking of texts in the Sacred Scriptures! However, when the Arians were in power, the Catholics presented themselves as defenders of religious freedom. 'The Church threatens exile and jail', lamented St. Hilary, 'it wants to take faith by force, exile and prison. It persecutes the clerics. The comparison between the Church of yesteryear, now lost, and what we have before our eyes, cries out to heaven'.

Athanasius similarly appeals to the emperor, who was on the side of the Catholics.

However, when the emperor supported the Arians, Athanasius advocated the *libertas ecclesiae* (freedom of the church); the emperor's politics suddenly became 'unheard of', and the emperor became the 'patron of atheism and heresy': a forerunner of the Antichrist, comparable to the demon on earth. Athanasius did not hesitate a moment to insult him gravely in a personal way, treating him as a man without reason and intelligence, a friend of the criminals and of the Jews. 'The truth is not announced with swords, spears, and soldiers', he says. 'The Lord has not used violence against anyone'. Even the Jesuit Sieben admits that 'Athanasius was forced to make such claims because of the difficulties caused by the persecution. As soon as the Nicaea faction reached supremacy and enjoyed the emperor's attention, those tones did not rise again'.

However, the same Athanasius could dedicate to that same emperor, when he hoped to recover through him his episcopal see, numerous panegyrics praising him with new attributes for his humanity and his clemency, even treating him as

a Christian who had always been full of divine love. In his *Apology to Constantius*, published in 357, he courts the sovereign in a disgusting way. However, in the year 358, in his *History of the Arians*, he fills Constantius with contempt and hatred. Athanasius constantly changes his mind about the emperor and the Empire, adapting or opposing him, according to the situation, according to the needs. During his third exile, he even dared to rebel openly against his Christian lord. The emperor's early death prevented him from having to draw conclusions about those considerations.

### *The death of Arius*

As he did to the emperor, Athanasius also attacked and defamed Arius. He constantly talks about Arius' 'delirium', his 'aberration', his 'deplorable and atheist speeches', his 'sour attitudes overflowing with atheism'. Arius is 'the liar', 'the impious', the precursor of the 'Antichrist'. And likewise, he rages against all the other 'philandering of the Arian nonsense', the 'malicious', the 'quarrelsome', the 'enemies of Christ', 'the ungodly who have fallen into thoughtlessness', 'in the trap of the devil'. However, Athanasius also reviled mercilessly, labelling as 'Arians' all his personal adversaries and even, what is historically false, all the Antiochene theology. The one who opposes him he 'declares without mercy, in a tone of utmost indignation, as a notorious heretic' (Domes). The holy father of the Church, who boasted saying 'we are Christians and we know how to appreciate the message of joy of the Redeemer', says about Christians of different faith: 'They are the vomit and the stool of the heretics'. He adds: 'their doctrine induces vomiting' and that they 'carry it in their pocket like filth and they spit it like a serpent his poison'. The Arians even overcome 'the betrayal of the Jews with their defamation of Christ'.

Nothing worse can be said. We already know this zeal and Christian rage against any other faith, which has remained throughout the ages. The fact that Athanasius not only lacks scruples but possibly even believes much of what he preaches, only makes things worse. He becomes more dangerous as he encourages bigotry, intolerance, obstinacy, and vanity of those

who never doubt of themselves. The scandalous election of the saint led to the establishment of an anti-bishop and in many places to such street riots that Emperor Constantine, in the year 332, complained in writing to the Catholics of Alexandria saying that they were not one iota better than the ‘pagans’. Athanasius continued with ‘his own policy of pacification’ (Voelkl), beatings, imprisonments and expulsions of the Meletians (recently discovered papyrus epistles show that these accusations are justified). John Arcaph, the successor of Meletius, even claimed that, by order of Athanasius, he had bound Bishop Arsenius to a pillar and had him been burned alive. The saint had to answer for it before the court and in two synods. With the emperor he was acquitted but he did not appear before a synod summoned in the spring of the year 334 in Caesarea, Palestine.

In Constantinople, in the year 336, immediately after being readmitted into the Church, Arius died suddenly and mysteriously on the street, apparently when he was going to take communion, or perhaps on the way back. For the Catholics it was a divine punishment, for the Arians a murder. In a story full of details, Athanasius explains twenty years later that Arius had expired in response to the prayers of the local bishop: that he burst in public toilets and that he disappeared in the dung: an ‘odious legend’ (Kühner), a ‘fallacious story’ (Kraft) ‘which since then remains rooted in popular controversy, but which is revealed to the critical reader as the report of a death by poisoning’ (Lietzmann).<sup>10</sup>

Whoever in this way literally throws an enemy into the mud is capable of everything, not only as a politician of the Church but also as a religious writer. Athanasius did not just adorn his *Vita Antonii* (*Life of Antony*) (Saint Anthony or Antony

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<sup>10</sup> *Note of the translator:* In his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, chapter XXXVIII, ‘The Death of Arius’, Socrates of Constantinople writes: ‘Soon after a faintness came over him, and together with the evacuations his bowels protruded, followed by a copious haemorrhage, and the descent of the smaller intestines: moreover portions of his spleen and liver were brought off in the effusion of blood, so that he almost immediately died.’

was a monk who played an important role in the conversion of Augustine: the archetype of the lives of Greek and Latin saints, and for centuries inspired the monastic life of the East and the West) with increasingly crazy miracles, but he also forged documents in the worst of styles, so to speak. In a letter written by Athanasius, after the death of Constantine and written in Constantine's name, Athanasius wanted to see all those who kept even a writ of Arius, without appeal or clemency, condemned to death.

### *The 'battlefield' of Alexandria*

The departure of Athanasius in June from Trier, the city of the West that had received him triumphantly and had treated him in an extraordinary way, was the first act of the government of Constantine II. During his long trip back, the repatriated Athanasius took the opportunity to establish peace in his own way in Asia Minor and Syria, that is, helping Catholics to regain power. For that reason, after his campaign, so-called anti-bishops, discord and new splits appeared everywhere. 'Where there were anti-bishops there were regular riots and street fights, after which the pavement was covered with hundreds of corpses' (Seeck).

When the remaining exiles returned to their homeland, orthodoxy flourished everywhere. In the first place, the churches stained by the 'heretics' were thoroughly cleaned, although not always with sea water, as the Donatists did. These Catholic bishops practiced more drastic customs. In Gaza, the supreme pastor Asclepius had the 'desecrated' altar destroyed. In Akira, Bishop Marcellus tore from his adversaries their priestly garments, hung the 'debased' hosts around their necks and threw them out of the church. In Hadrianopolis, Bishop Lucius fed the dogs with the Eucharistic bread and, later, when they returned, he denied communion to the eastern participants of the Synod of Serdica, provoking even the population of the city against him. The first official act, so to speak, of the repatriated Athanasius at the end of November of the year 337 was to interrupt the supply of grain (destined by the emperor to feed the poor) to appease with the surplus the new members of his Praetorian guard.



In mid-March of 339, Athanasius fled to Rome with a criminal complaint on his back addressed to the three emperors and accusing him of new ‘murders’. Now he could not use the imperial courier he used in his exile and travels; Athanasius travelled by sea. His people burned the church of Dionysus, the second ‘divine temple’ in terms of Alexandria’s size so that he could escape at least from the profanation. While, with the help of the State, Bishop Gregory exercised a strict command, Athanasius, with other deposed Church princes, settled in Rome at the side of Bishop Julius I who, with almost the entire West, favoured the Nicene Council. For the first time in the history of the Church, excommunicated prelates by oriental synods obtain their rehabilitation in a Western episcopal tribunal. The only ones we know with certainty are Athanasius and Marcellus of Akira, the profaner of clerics and hosts mentioned above. After demonstrating his ‘orthodoxy’ Julius I admitted them, along with the remaining fugitives, into the fellowship of his church. And it is here, in Rome and in the West, that Athanasius acquires a decisive importance for his politics of power; where he works towards ‘a schism of the two halves of the Empire’ (Gentz) which is embodied in the year 343 in the Synod of Serdica. The Arians, furious at the intrusion of Rome, ‘surprised to a great degree’ as stated in the manifesto they presented in Serdica, excommunicate Bishop Julius I, ‘the author and ringleader of evil’. And while Athanasius incites the spirits and promotes his cause in one of the halves of the Empire against the other, religiosity reaches culminating peaks in the East.

### *Antioch and Constantinople*

For a long time, the divisions had split the great patriarchal seat of Antioch. The current Turkish Antakya (28,000 inhabitants, including 4,000 Christians) does not reveal what it once was: the capital of Syria, with perhaps 800,000 inhabitants, the third largest city in the Roman Empire after Rome and Alexandria: the ‘metropolis and eye’ of the Christian East. Located not far from the mouth of the Orontes in the Mediterranean, built majestically by the ostentatious Syrian kings, famous for its luxurious temples, churches, arcaded streets,

the imperial palace, theatres, baths and the stadium, an important centre of military power, Antioch played a great role in the history of the new religion from the beginning. It was the city in which the Christians received their name from the non-Christians; the city in which Paul preached and already entered into conflict with Peter; where Ignatius stirred the spirits, and where the theological school founded by Lucian, the martyr, taught his teachings, representing the 'left wing' in the Christological conflict, and marked the history of the Church of that century, although most of the members of the school (even John Chrysostom) were accused of heresy throughout their life or part of it, especially Arius. Antioch was a place of celebration of numerous synods, especially Arian synods, and more than thirty councils of the old Church.

It was here where Julian was residing in the years 362-363 writing his *Against the Galileans* and where John Chrysostom 'saw the light of the world'. Antioch became one of the main bastions of the expansion of Christianity, 'the head of the Church of the East' (Basil) and seat of a patriarch who in the 4th century ruled the political dioceses of the East: fifteen ecclesiastical provinces with more than two hundred bishoprics. Antioch was full of intrigue and turmoil, especially since the Arians had deposed the patriarch Eustochius, one of the most passionate apostles of the Nicene doctrine, for 'heresy' (because of his immorality and his rebellion against Emperor Constantine, who banished him until his death). However, at the time of the Meletian schism, which lasted fifty-five years, from 360 to 415, there were three suitors who fought among themselves and who tore at their disputes both the Eastern and the Western Church: Paulinians (fundamentalists) followers of the doctrine of Nicaea, semi-Arians, and Arians.

In Constantinople, at the end of the year 338, the enraged follower of Nicaea, Archbishop Paul—the assassin of Arius according to the Arians—was sent back into exile, chained, to whom Constantine had already exiled in the Pontus. (Actually, the news about his life and his destiny are very contradictory.) His successor, Eusebius of Nicomedia, the prominent protector of Arius, died about three years later. With imperial authorisation,

Paul, who lives as an exile with the Bishop of Rome, returns in the year 341. The fanatical Asclepius of Gaza, also with the permission of Constantine, returns from his exile and prepares the entry of the patriarch, with a whole series of deaths, including inside the churches. It prevails a ‘situation analogous to that of a civil war’ (Von Haehling). Hundreds of people are killed before Paul makes his triumphal entry into the capital and excites the spirits of the masses.



The capital of the Empire: Constantinople

Macedonius, the semi-Arian who was his old enemy, is called ‘anti-bishop’. However, according to the sources, the main fault of the constantly increasing bloody disorders is Paul’s. The cavalry general Hermogenes, commissioned by the emperor in 342 to restore order—the first intervention of the army in an internal conflict of the Church—, is cornered by the followers of the Catholic bishop in the church of St. Irene, the church of peace, who, after setting fire to the temple kills Hermogenes and drag his corpse through the streets, bound by the feet. Direct participants: two ascribed to the patriarch, the sub-deacon Martyrdom, and the lector Martian, according to the Church historians, Socrates and Sozomen. The proconsul Alexander managed to flee. In Constantinople the revolts of religion do not cease. Only in one of them 3,150 people lost their lives. However, Patriarch Paul, led away by the emperor himself, is taken from one place of exile to another until he dies in Armenia, allegedly strangled by Arians, and Macedonius remains for a long time as the only supreme pastor of the capital. After the triumph of Orthodoxy, in the year 381 Paul’s body was moved to

Constantinople and it was buried in a church taken from the Macedonians. Since then, that church has his name.

*Shelter with a twenty-year-old beauty*

After the worldly events of Trier and Rome,<sup>11</sup> Athanasius now began something more intimate: the relationship with a maid of about twenty years and ‘of such extraordinary beauty’, as all the clergy testified, ‘that for her and her beauty they avoided any meeting with her to prevent suspicions and reproaches’. The story comes not from a malicious ‘pagan’ but from a monk and bishop of Helenopolis in Bithynia, Palladius, also a good friend of St. John Chrysostom. In his famous *Lausiatic History*, an important source on ancient monasticism which as a whole ‘closely approximates the true story’ (Kraft), Bishop Palladius speaks of the girl who was shunned by all the clergy so as not to provoke gossiping.

But it was different with Athanasius. Suddenly approached by the minions in his palace, he took ‘dresses and mantle and fled in the middle of the night to this maid’. She welcomed him kindly, but also fearful ‘in view of the circumstances’. But the saint reassured her. He had fled only because of a ‘supposed crime’, so as not to be considered a fool ‘and not to sink those who want to condemn me to sin’. How considerate! And since the assault on his cathedral had as a result some wounded and dead individuals, his new flight had been censored even by friends and ridiculed by his enemies. He defended himself with references to biblical celebrities inspired by God who, like him, had escaped: Jacob from Esau, Moses from Pharaoh, David from Saul, and others. ‘For it is the same to kill oneself as to give oneself to your enemies to be killed’.

Athanasius always managed to justify his actions. He knew that running away was the right thing to do at that moment, ‘to worry about the persecutors so that their fury does not claim blood and they become guilty’. Supposedly he did not think

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<sup>11</sup> *Note of the translator:* This refers to the previous page, about Athanasius’ return to his town in the year 346, that does not appear in this abridged translation.

about his own life when he left his people abandoned to fate. To censure him would be ingratitude to God, disobedience to his commandments. He could also take advantage of the flight to announce the Gospel while he flees. Even the Lord, writes Athanasius, ‘hid and fled’. Of course, not everyone who runs away finds shelter with a beautiful woman of twenty years. Athanasius had luck or grace:

God showed me tonight: ‘Only with her can you save yourself’. Full of joy she left all her scruples and gave herself completely to the Lord.

Well said!

Apparently, she hid the holiest man for six years, while Constantius lived. She washed his feet, got rid of his waste, took care of everything he needed...

It is hilarious to learn about Athanasius’ great sanctity at the same time of his long shelter with the young woman: a timeframe that is also confirmed by other sources. However, today it is assumed, in favour of the saint, that he stayed with that beauty ‘only transiently’ (Tetz), an elastic concept. The coexistence of a cleric with a maiden consecrated to God, a *gyná syneísaktos* or ‘spiritual wife’, was widespread in the 3rd and 4th centuries, and even included the closest community: that of the bed. However, naturally, Athanasius was above suspicion.

I took refuge in her [he defends himself] because she is very beautiful and young [!]. Thus I have won twice: her salvation because I have helped her, and my reputation.

Some men are always immaculate. (In our century, the man who would later be Pope Pius XII took, when he was 41-years-old, as a companion a nun of twenty-three until he died.) Finally—after Julian again banished him in 362; the Catholic Jovian made him return in 363, and the Arian Valens would exile him for the last time in 365-366—, Athanasius slept in the Lord on May 2 in the year 373, old and much appreciated.

AMBROSE, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH  
(toward 333 or 339 to 397)



Mosaic of Ambrose <sup>12</sup>

An outstanding personality in which the virtue of the Roman with the spirit of Christ was united to give a complete unity: man, bishop and saint from the feet to the head. Together with Theodosius the Great, the most important figure of his time, the counsellor of three emperors, the soul of their religious policy and the support of their thrones: a formidable champion of the Church.

—Johannes Niederhuber, Catholic theologian

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<sup>12</sup> *Note of the translator:* Christianity arose in the lower strata of non-whites, and in the Semitic regions of the Roman Empire: people who harboured a deep rancour towards the white Greco-Roman world. Ambrose, like most Christians, was non-white, as can be seen in this early mosaic.

Ambrose, the friend, and counsellor of three emperors was the first bishop to whom the princes came to support their tottering thrones. His extraordinary personality exuded an enormous influence, carried by the purest thought and a complete altruism. Together with Theodosius I, the most brilliant figure of his time.

—Berthold Altaner, Catholic theologian

Ambrose is a bishop who, in terms of the importance and scope of his activity, leaves in the shade all the others... not only surpasses the popes of the first period but also all the other guides of the Western Church we know.

—Kurt Aland, Protestant theologian

The same as Athanasius, Ambrose (in his post of 374-397)—according to Augustine’s testimony, ‘the best and most renowned bishop of Milan’—was not so much a theologian as a politician of the Church: equally inflexible and intolerant, although not so direct, and more versed and ductile and acquainted with power since birth. His methods, more than those of Athanasius, remain to date an example for ecclesiastical politics. The agents of the saint are among the highest officials of the Empire. He acts skilfully from the background and prefers letting the ‘community’ do things, which he fanaticised with so much virtuosity that even the military proclamations directed against it fail. Son of the prefect of Gaul, Ambrose was born about 333 or 339 in Trier. Orphaned at an early age, he grew up with two brothers under the tutelage of Roman aristocrats. Having studied rhetoric and law he was appointed, around 370, administrator (*consularis Liguriaie et Aemiliae*) in Milan. On December 7, 374 he would be consecrated bishop, barely eight days after his baptism and without even having the Christian knowledge of an educated layman.

Milan (Mediolanum), founded by the Gauls and a remarkable knot of communications, especially with important roads that lead to the alpine passes, was in the 4th century the capital of Italy and increasingly the imperial residence. Valentinian II sought to stay there as long as possible; Gratian still more, and Theodosius I remained there from 388 to 391, and

also after his victory over Eugene (394). Sometimes Bishop Ambrose saw the sovereigns daily. Since when Valentinian II was proclaimed Augustus (375) he was barely five years old, his tutor and half-brother Gratian had just turned sixteen and the Spanish Theodosius was at least a very determined Catholic, the illustrious disciple of Jesus could handle perfectly their majesties. Valentinian I died a few years after Ambrose's inauguration. His son Gratian (375-383), of just sixteen years of age, succeeded him on the throne. The emperor, blond, beautiful and athletic had no interest in politics. 'I have never learned what it means to govern and be governed' (Eunapius). He was a passionate runner, javelin thrower, fighter, rider, but what he liked most was killing animals. Neglecting the affairs of state, every day he killed countless of them, with an almost 'supernatural' ability, even lions, with a single arrow. In any case, he also prayed every day and was 'pious and clean of hearing', as Ambrose affirmed: 'His virtues would have been complete had he also learned the art of politics'. However, this art was practiced by Ambrose for him. Not only did he personally guide the young sovereign, effectively since 378: he also influenced his government measures. At that time the sovereign had promulgated, by an edict, precisely tolerance towards all confessions, except a few extremist sects. However, Ambrose, who four years before was still unbaptized, hastened to write a statement, *De fide ad Gratianum Augustum* (*Faith for Gratian*), which he quickly understood.

As soon as Gratian himself arrived at the end of July 379 in Milan, neutral as he was from the point of view of religious policy, he annulled on August 3, after an interview with Ambrose, the edict of tolerance promulgated the year before. He decided then that only would be considered 'Catholic' what his father and he in numerous decrees had ordered eternal, but that 'all heresies' should 'be muted for eternity'. He thus prohibited the religious services of the other confessions. Year after year, except for 380, he issued anti-heretic decrees, ordering the confiscation of meeting places, houses, and churches; he dictated exiles and, as a fairly new means of religious oppression, repealed the right to make wills. He was also the first of the Christian emperors who got rid of the title of *Pontifex Maximus*



that the Roman monarchs used since Augustus, or rather, he refused to accept it, although the year is still the subject of discussions. The military under Sapor was ordered to ‘expel from religious facilities the Arian blasphemy as if they were wild animals and return them to the true shepherds and flocks of God’ (Theodoret). Tolerance towards Hellenism, which was common among his predecessors, also soon disappeared. In fact, his father still allowed the reparation of damaged temples, making the government pay the expenses. In 381, Gratian moved to northern Italy. In 382 he attacked ‘paganism’ in Rome, most probably advised by Ambrose; although sanitation of the State coffers may also have played an important role. He also persecuted the Marcionists and, like his father, the Manichaeans and the Donatists: whose communities in Rome had been dissolved without further ado, at the request of Pope Siricius (papacy 383-399), with state aid.

Valentinian II (reign 375-392), much younger still, had a remarkable influence on the saint. He habitually used him against the Senate of Rome, mostly Hellenist, and against the entire Council of the Crown. And the last Westerner on the throne of the East, the independent Theodosius (reign 379-395), dictated in almost every year of his government laws against the ‘pagans’ and the ‘heretics’. However, according to Father Stratmann, he was more tolerant than the bishop of the court, who encouraged him to take stricter measures on all sides against the ‘pagans’, the ‘heretics’, the Jews, and the extreme enemies of the Empire. Ambrose’s reason: ‘It is no longer our old life that we continue to live but the life of Christ, the life of maximum innocence, the life of divine simplicity, the life of all virtues’.

*Non-white Ambrose drives the annihilation of the Goths*<sup>13</sup>

The way in which Ambrose lived the life of Christ, the life of maximum innocence, of divine simplicity and of all the virtues, manifests itself in multiple ways—for example, in his behaviour against the Goths. We will deal with them because the

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<sup>13</sup> *Note of the translator:* In this heading the words ‘non-white’ and ‘blond’ are mine.

Goths played a very important role in the history of Europe, especially between the 5th and 6th centuries. The sources are better in this case than in the other tribes of eastern Germans, and richer is the historiography on them.

The Goths—Gutans or *Gut-piuda* in their language—were the main people of the East Germans. Coming from Sweden, Gotland, Östergötland or Västergötland, they settled on the lower Vistula in the ‘transition period’, about the year 150 on the Black Sea. In the middle of the 1st century they split into Eastern and Western Goths (Ostrogoths, of *austro*, ‘bright’, and Visigoths, from *wisi*, ‘good’), although they continued to be considered as a single people and usually called themselves only Goths.



Gothic soldiers on the Missorium of Theodosius I, made in 388 AD.

The Ostrogoths settled between the Don and the Dnieper (in present-day Ukraine), and the Visigoths between it and the Danube, from where they spread to the Balkans and Asia Minor; historians citing generally the year 264. Dacia and Moesia—approximately the current Romania, Bulgaria, and Serbia—were constantly under their pressure. In the year 269 Emperor Claudius II defeated them, Constantine often fought against them, and in 375 both towns, except the Catholic Crimean Goths, who remained there until the 16th century, were expelled by the Huns, who were advancing towards West. This tribe of nomads, the Huns, from the interior of Asia, were defeated and expelled in turn by the Chinese and only lived on horseback—‘animals of

two legs' as Ammianus wrote—, advancing irresistibly from the northern shore of the Caspian Sea, extending the Russian plain and conquering a gigantic empire. Around 360 they had crossed the Don and reached Hungary by 430. However, allied with the Visigoths, the imperial general Flavius Aetius—who had sought and found protection among the Huns in the past—, defeated them in 451 in Gaul, in the Battle of the Catalaunian Plains. A few years later their king died, and more quickly than they had arrived, they largely withdrew towards Asia, in the Pontic steppes, the North Caucasus and the Sea of Azov. They were disbanded into several tribes and were henceforth known under the new name of Bulgarians.

The Goths of the Balkans, the Lower Danube and the shores of the Black Sea were soon 'converted': the first among the Germanic peoples. This began in the 3rd century through contacts with the Romans and the captives. In the 4th century there was a notable increase of Christians among the Visigoths. In the year 325, the bishopric of Gomia already exists, under the orthodox bishop Theophilus; one of the participants in the Council of Nicaea. In 348 there is a persecution of Christians and in 369 a second one, which lasts three years. But soon after most of the Visigoths are Christians. The Ostrogoths, on the other hand, if we give credence to Augustine, when penetrating Italy in 405 under King Radagaisus were still 'pagans'; while in 488, when they invaded Italy with Theodoric, they were already Christians. The persecution of 348 by a 'judge of the Goths, without religion and profaner of God', that is, a 'pagan', led to the expulsion of Ulfilas, the author of the Gothic Bible, consecrated around 341 by Eusebius of Nicomedia as 'bishop of Christians in the land of the Goths'. With him, a group of his followers fled, to whom Emperor Constantius II settled south of the Danube, in the province of the Lower Moesia, where their descendants lived for two centuries.

The second persecution against the Christians under the Visigoths (in 369-372) was led by the prince Athanaric. It is perfectly understandable that already the ancient authors were fascinated with a man who, for example, refused to address Emperor Valens with the treatment of Basileus, arguing that he

preferred the title of judge, which embodies wisdom, while the king only the power. The second persecution was not solely due to questions of faith. It was mainly an anti-Roman reaction and was closely related to the war between Goths and Romans between 367 and 369, evidently also with the struggle for power between the princes Athanaric and Fritigern, the latter representing a policy favourable to the Romans and the Christians. After a meticulous preparation, Valens crossed the Danube in the year 367 and resumed a fight against the Goths that Constantine had already initiated, ending it in 332 by means of a formal treaty of peace with the Visigoths. Valens, without the warrior carving of the 'great emperor', ravaged the country, went hunting the heads of an enemy in disarray but failed to reach the bulk of their opponents, as Athanaric always managed with great skill to flee to the Carpathians. And although in 369 he stopped with a part of his people and was defeated, it was so undecided that Valens had to accept his refusal to step on the Roman ground and had to spend a whole September day negotiating in a boat anchored in the river. Finally, the Gothic prince had free hands to dominate the adversaries in his own town, which led to three years of persecution.

The reign of Athanaric did not tremble until the Huns overwhelmed the Ostrogoths and the Visigoths, at which time Athanaric and Fritigern, in spite of their enmity, fought side by side against the powerful invaders, and apparently the Ostrogothic king Ermanaric committed suicide in desperation. One part of his people were subjugated while the other crossed the Dnieper and fled towards the Visigoths. However, the defence sank before the hurricane of the Huns. With Athanaric they fled again to the impassable Carpathians. (In 1857 the workers who built a road there found, near a ruined fortress in Pietroasele, the Visigoth 'treasure of the crown'. In a choker, the following runic inscription appeared: *utani othal ik im hailag*: that is, a treasure of the Goths, 'I am invulnerable'.) Defeated again, between forty and seventy thousand Visigoths fled to the south and asked in 376 Emperor Valens to admit them into the Roman Empire. While Athanaric left *Gut-þiuda*, the country of the Goths and settled in the territories that would later be

Transylvania, Valens authorised the immigration of the great mass of the Goths ruled by Fritigern as *foederati*; that is, colonists with the obligation to go to the army when they were needed: an ancient method of obtaining peasants, but above all soldiers.

In the autumn of 376 they crossed the river, an event of great historical significance, probably by Durostorum (Silistra): a long row of chariots, often carrying their ancient gods but also with some bishop among them, a Christian priest. And Fritigern, who with many of his own had become Arian in 369, promised Valens the 'conversion' of the part of his people that was still 'pagan', something that pleased the ears of the fanatical 'heretic', but that for the Goths was more a question of opportunism: misery and the Huns on the one hand and the attractive Roman Empire on the other. However, their exploiters and their officials, the monopolists of food and hunger caused that not a few Goths, even some bosses, sell as slaves their own wives and children, even in exchange for dog meat, a business quite common on the Danube. The thrust of the new 'barbarians', Visigoths, Taifals, Alans, and Huns on the open border pushed the newcomers, who occupied all of Thrace, to rebel and march on Constantinople, joining them bands of Huns, Alans and also slaves, peasants, and workers of the mines of the country.

The Goths saw in their bishop Ulfilas, born about 311 of Gothic parents of Cappadocian descent, a 'sacrosanct man'. He would write on his deathbed: 'I, Ulfilas, bishop and confessor', an honorary title that is related to the persecution of the Christian Goths, probably in 348. However, like him, only in Arianism did he see the *una sancta* (one holy); in all others, antichrists. In their churches he saw 'synagogues of the devil' and especially in Catholicism a 'lost theory of evil spirits'. Bishop Ambrose, for his part, believed that the fact that they did not accept salvation by the cross but only in imitation of Christ, whatever they understood by it, constituted 'The most outstanding characteristic of Gothic Arianism' (Giesecke). Even when commenting on the Gospel, Ambrose could quote praisefully the words of Paul: 'Love is patient, it is kind, it does not show zeal, it does not boast'. He could let the imagination run: 'But would not it be wonderful to offer the other cheek to the one who hits you?'

However, in reality Ambrose did not offer one cheek or the other, as he incited with especially Christian (and Pauline) consideration: ‘Is it not achieved with patience to return the blows twice [!] to the one who hits, in the form of the pain of the repentance?’ It is significant that Ambrose often speaks of the love of his neighbour and that he even approaches the subject as a whole in his monograph *De officiis ministrorum* (*The ministers’ offices*), but apparently only alludes to the love of enemies. For him—the same for Augustine and the whole Church—it was not useful, but only a sign of the greater perfection of the New Testament before the Old. However, this does not imply any binding requirement for Ambrose. What he rather does is ‘not to reject anywhere war, categorically, as illicit’ (K.P. Schneider). On the contrary. The idea of a ‘justified war’ is constantly and ‘indirectly’ sketched by him.

And not only indirectly, because while in the East the philosopher and educator of Princes, Themistius, who stood by several emperors and never adhered to Christianity, tried to mediate between the ecclesiastical parties and also between non-Christians and Christians (and, at the same time, vigorously supported the policy of a peaceful compromise between the Goths and Valens), St. Ambrose did just the opposite. As soon as he could, he sent his nineteen-year-old protégé Gratian against the Goths, the ‘barbarians’, in the name of Jesus. The bishop did not cease to show passion. ‘There is no certainty from where they will attack the faith’, he exclaimed upset before the emperor.

Raise up, O Lord, and unfold your standard! This time it is not the military eagles that lead the army and it is not the flight of the birds that directs it; it is your name. Jesus is the one who is cheered and it is your cross that goes before them. You have always defended it against the barbarian enemy. Now take revenge!

Although he should not take revenge precisely in the name of Jesus! However, Ambrose took as a reference—as the clergy have done in all wars to date—the Old Testament, where Abraham, with a few men, annihilated numerous enemies; where Joshua triumphed over Jericho. The Goths are for the saint the Gog people, ‘*Gog iste Gothus est*’ (Gog is the Goth), whose

annihilation predicts the prophet, *de quo promittitur nobis futura Victoria* (which promised future success): a people that Yahweh, in his lapidary style, wants to ‘give to devour’ to raptors and other animals, and also to their own. ‘And you must eat the fat until you are fed up and drink blood until you get drunk of the victim I sacrifice for you’. According to Ambrose, for whom ‘Germanic’ and ‘Arian’ (or ‘Roman’ and ‘Catholic’) were almost equivalent terms, to defeat the Goths one thing is needed: true faith. This, in spite of the fact that the emperor of the East, Valens, was Arian! But the bishop conveniently ignored these facts. Faith in God could not be separated from fidelity to the Empire. ‘Where fidelity to God is lost, the Roman State is also broken’. Where the ‘heretics’ appeared, they were followed by the ‘barbarians’.

Of course, the military aspect was accompanied by an aspect of ecclesiastical politics. In occupied Illyria, that is, near northern Italy and Milan, in addition to the war with the outside adversary, the internal enemy—the disputes with the Arians—also wreaked havoc. Secundianus resided in Singidunum as bishop, Palladio in Ratiaria, Julian Valens in Poetovium, Auxentius in Durostorum, but Ulfilas also lived there, who displayed his activity mainly in the eastern provinces of the Danube. Ambrose incited the emperor against these influential Christians, especially when the Illyrian Arians made propaganda also in Milan and other cities in northern Italy, and the entry of Goths gave new impulses to the ‘heresy’. Thus, this Catholic did not cease to invoke the religious situation and the performance of the Arians as a danger to the Empire and to military security, which would provide the ‘heretical’ subjects with a protection against the Goths, their fellow believers, much smaller than the Orthodox.

Nevertheless, it is evident that the military aspect was now more important for Ambrose than the religious one that he highlights, insofar as his diocese was not far from the Goths. And in Roman Christianity, according to an ancient tradition, the same distinction was done between Romans and ‘barbarians’ as between human beings and animals. The danger arose from the enemies of the country. Thus, the religious zeal of the bishop is

now anticipated by the national zeal. Ambrose especially emphasised the propensity to the vices of the ‘barbarians’, their depravity ‘worse than death’. For him, the unquestioning patriot, the enemy is also any ‘stranger’ and an ‘alien’, something almost equivalent to an infidel. To the Goths and the like, *Gothi et diversarum nationum viri* (Goths and the different countries) he calls ‘people who once dwelt in wagons’, beings more fearsome than the Gentiles (*gentes*). Thus, he does not fight the infidel Romans. What he does is to place the army of the ‘pagans’ on his side and incite it against the ‘barbarians’, and to win over the emperor with pretexts of religious motives, while seeking the predominance of ‘Roman culture’, which he himself provides protection and a very prestigious life.

The holy bishop constantly incites against the Goths, conjures the world not to let down the guard, and for him ‘practically any means is not only justified but also necessary’ (K.P. Schneider). Ambrose had sent the holy emperor his pastoral work *De fide* (*The Faith*), written during the conflict with the Goths, to the battlefield of Illyria, knowing that a victory should provide ‘more faith in the emperor of the courage of the soldiers’ (*fide magis imperatoris quam virtute militum*), with which he again incites against the Arians, who in reality are only human beings in their outward appearance, because in their interior they are ferocious animals. Although he prophesies the triumph, he is sure of victory ‘as a testimony of the true faith’. The Arians, who ‘arrogated to themselves the name of Christians’ and yet ‘tried to wound with deadly weapons’ the Catholics, seemed, according to Ambrose, more like the antichrist and the devil himself. They had ‘gathered the poison of all heresies’, ‘they were human beings only in their external aspect, but inside they were full of the rage of animals’.

### *Emperor Theodosius ‘the Great’*

Theodosius I (reign 379-395) found in the father of the Church, Ambrose, an energetic travelling companion. ‘There is hardly a year of his reign’, says the Protestant theologian Von Campenhausen, ‘that he does not proclaim a new law or other



measures to fight paganism; to suppress heresy, and to favour the Catholic Church’.

The annihilation of those who thought differently was, from the beginning, the goal of his government and the ecclesiastical tradition, which describes Theodosius as an indefatigable protector of Catholicism and an enemy of all heresies and paganism [the ancient Greco-Roman culture], has portrayed him with complete fidelity.

However, the special merit of the Catholic sovereign consisted of a new policy towards the Germans. In his reorganisation of the army, seriously severed, he incorporated ‘barbarians’ following a trend that existed since Constantine, even in the leadership: Franks, Alemanni, Saxons and especially Goths, and with this ‘Gothfied’ army he cleansed the Balkans of Goths, that although officially they belonged to the Empire, were not citizens but servants. In his first year of reign, he thus won victories over the Goths, the Alans, and the Huns.

Theodosius, as they always say full of ‘magnanimity towards the vanquished’ (Thiess), ‘the last great protector of the Germans on the Roman imperial throne’ (von Stauffenberg), never fought battles following every rule. Following Valens’ hunting of Gothic heads, he carried out a kind of guerrilla warfare, for which he sacrificed ‘unscrupulously or intentionally’ also the Gothic troops themselves (Aubin). The same as Gratian, he sought to annihilate one after another the various groups of ‘barbarians’. Thus, he attacked isolated Goth contingents where he thought fit, as for example in 386 a troop of Ostrogoths led by Prince Odotheus. In autumn, they had requested permission to cross the river at the mouth of the Danube, although at first Promotus, the *magister militum* (official) that ruled Thrace, denied it. However, a dark night drew them to the river to fall into the hands of the Roman army. They set out to cross it with three thousand boats—the river was full of corpses. They were immediately defeated, while the women and children were left in captivity. Theodosius hurried to celebrate the feat and on October 12, with his chariot drawn by elephants (a gift of the Persian king), entered triumphantly in Constantinople, where he had a commemorative column of 40 meters high in memory of this and

other massacres of 'barbarians'. Some years later, his general Stilicho caused a serious setback to another group of Goths. Bishop Theodoret informs with joy about 'killings' with 'many thousands' of 'barbarians' massacred. On the other hand, the prisoners of such operations flooded the slave markets throughout the East. And from then on, thanks to the 'merits' of Theodosius, in all the battles of the invasion of the barbarians there are Germans fighting on both sides.

### *Against the Greco-Roman religion*

Like many other Church fathers, Ambrose was subject to the influence of Greco-Roman philosophy, especially Plotinus. However, he speaks of it quite critically, relating it to 'idolatry', a special invention of Satan, and also to the 'heretics', especially the Arians. If this philosophy has something good it is that it comes from the 'Holy Scriptures', from Ezra, David, Moses, Abraham, and others. It also considers all the natural sciences as an attack on the '*Deus maiestatis*' (God of glory). Hellenism is for him, as a whole, an '*arma diaboli*' (devil's weapon), and the fight against it 'a fight against the Empire of the devil' (Wytzes). The young Gratian at first had given a good treatment to the 'pagans', but he learned from his spiritual mentor 'to feel the Christian Empire as an obligation to repress the old religion of the state' (Caspar). This was no longer difficult since Christianity was established and the old ways were in retreat. After the visit to Rome by Gratian and his co-regent in 376, the city, still largely clinging to the old faith, experienced the destruction of a sanctuary of Mithras by the prefect Gracchus, who, pending baptism, thus demonstrated his merits.

In the summer of 382 Ambrose was in Rome, probably horrified by the many Gentiles, the 'demented dogs', as were called by Pope Damasus I, a Spaniard; and while he was talking about persecution, the Christian members of the Senate had to pay their official oath before the image of the goddess Victoria. At the end of that same year, the sovereign disposed, 'evidently by the advice of Ambrose' (Thrade) 'with all certainty not without the influence of his paternal adviser Ambrose' (Niederhuber), a series of peremptory anti-Hellene edicts for the

city, by virtue of which the support of the State was withdrawn from various cults and clergy, like the popular Vestals; the exemption from taxes was annulled and the ownership of the land of the temples was denied. The monarch also ordered the removal of the statue of the goddess Victoria, a masterpiece of Tarentum taken from the enemy and also a highly venerated symbol of Roman rule. Since Victoria was one of the oldest national deities, with a cult statue in the Senate hall since the time of Augustus (only Constantius II had recently withdrawn her), most of the senators and Hellene citizens of Rome felt offended about what was most sacred.

What Theodosius ‘the Great’ was capable of is a good example of what happened in the year 387 in Antioch, after a revolt of the people as a result of an increase in taxes in February. The tax was exorbitant. Death sentences were issued, and countless people, including children, were beheaded, burned or thrown to the beasts—and yet, almost a trifle compared to the bloodbath of Thessalonica. In February of the year 390 the people of Thessalonica killed Butheric, the Gothic military commander, because of the imprisonment of a popular charioteer, who was courting Butheric’s beautiful cup washer. The pious Theodosius, one of the ‘notoriously Christian sovereigns’ of the century (Aland), immediately ordered to gather the population into the circus with the lure of a spectacle, and had them killed right there. Bishop Theodoret describes it in poetic terms: ‘as in the harvest of the ears, they were all cut off at once’. Although Theodosius later denied it, his slaughterers put to the knife, for several hours, more than seven thousand women, men, children and the elderly. It is one of the most monstrous massacres of Antiquity, which does not prevent St. Augustine from glorifying Theodosius as the ideal image of a Christian prince. The Church granted the sovereign the nickname of ‘the Great’ and went down in history as the ‘exemplary Catholic monarch’ (Brown).

An anti-pagan law passed the following year sanctioning the offering of sacrifices as a crime of *lèse-majesté*. In case incense was offered, the emperor confiscated ‘all the places that would have been hit by the smoke of the incense’ (*turis vapore fumasse*). If they were not owned by the person who burned it, he

had to pay 25 pounds of gold, as well as the owner. The indulgent administrative chiefs were punished with 30 pounds of gold and their staff was charged the same amount. Geffcken considers this law ‘almost in the tone of a rhetorical missionary sermon’. Gerhard Rauschen speaks of the ‘funeral song of paganism’. It resulted in the prohibition of worship of the gods throughout the Empire. In this way, many temples were victims of the Christian *furor*, such as that of Juno Caelestis in Carthage or that of Serapis in Alexandria. Theodosius, who ‘eliminated the sacrilegious heretics’, as Ambrose praised him in his funeral address, transformed the temple of Aphrodite of Constantinople into a garage. He also threatened with exile or death those performing religious services of the *gentilicia superstitio* (Gentile superstition).<sup>14</sup> It was forbidden to offer incense, light candles, place crowns and even private worship in the house itself. Augustine also praises this fanatic because ‘from the beginning of his government he had been tireless’, ‘helping the threatened [!] Church by very just and merciful laws against the pagans’, and because ‘he had the images of the pagan idols destroyed everywhere’.

But Theodosius repressed ‘paganism’ even through a violent war; in circumstances that, once again, show the behaviour of Ambrose. Augustine was also glad that the victor overthrew the statues of Jupiter placed in the Alps and that he gave his gold rays ‘gladly and obligingly’ to the messengers of the troops. ‘He had the images of the idols destroyed everywhere, for he had discovered that the granting of the earthly gifts also depends on the true God and not on the demons’. ‘That’s how the emperor was in peace and in war,’ says the devout Theodoret, full of joy.

On January 17, 395, at 48 years of age, Theodosius died of dropsy. And Ambrose himself died, on April 4, 397. His remains rest today, which he had never imagined, in a coffin with those of the saints Gervase and Protase.

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<sup>14</sup> *Note of the translator*: ‘Gentile’ is the standard word that Jews use for non-Jews.

## THE FATHER OF THE CHURCH AUGUSTINE <sup>15</sup>

(354-430)

Augustine is the greatest philosopher of the patristic age and the most brilliant and influential theologian of the Church, full of ardent love for God and selfless altruism, surrounded by the soft glow of infinite goodness and the most attractive affability. —Martin Grabmann

As a brilliant thinker, acute dialectician, intelligent psychologist, of a rare religious ardour, at the same time an affable man, Augustine was already during his life the great guide of the Latin Church. For the later time, his importance cannot be greater. —E. Hendrikx

The force that moves me is love. —Augustine

Hidden vengefulness, petty envy, became *master!* Everything wretched, intrinsically ailing, and invaded by bad feelings, the whole *ghetto-world* of the soul was at once on top! One needs but read any of the Christian agitators, for example, St. Augustine, in order to realise, in order to *smell*, what filthy fellows came to the top. —Friedrich Nietzsche

Augustine, the spiritual guide of the Church of the West, was born on November 13, 354 in Thagaste (now Souk-Ahras, Algeria), of petit-bourgeois parents. His mother, Monica, of strict Christian formation, educated her son in Christian thought, although she did not baptise him. His father, Patricius, a pagan whose wife ‘served as a lord’, ‘became a believer towards the end of his temporary life’ (Augustine); he barely appears in all his work and Augustine only mentions him on the occasion of his

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<sup>15</sup> *Note of the translator:* Scholars generally agree that Augustine and his family were Berbers, a non-white ethnic group indigenous to North Africa.

death. Agustin had at least one brother, Navigius, and perhaps two sisters. One of them, when she was a widow, ended her life as the superior of a convent of nuns.

As a child, as a curious anecdote, Augustine did not like to study. His training began late, ended soon, and at first was overshadowed by coercion, beatings, useless protests and the laughter of adults for it, even his parents, who harassed him. At seventeen, the young man went to Carthage, rebuilt under Augustus. A rich bourgeois Romanian had supported the father of Augustine, who died at that time, allowing the son to carry out his studies. To tell the truth, he did not do it very hard. 'What I liked', admitted in his *Confessions*, was 'to love and be loved'. He was seduced by 'a wild chaos of tumultuous amorous entanglements', he wandered 'aimlessly through the streets of Babel', he wallowed 'in his mud, the same as in delicious spices and ointments' while the Bible did not appeal to him either because of its content or its form, which seemed too simple. Although he went to church, he went there to meet a female friend. And when he prayed, among other things he asked: 'Give me chastity but not yet'. He feared, indeed, that God would listen to him and 'heal me of the disease of the carnal appetite, which I wanted to satiate rather than extirpate'. At eighteen he became a father. A concubine, who lived with him for about a decade and a half, gave him a son in 372, Adeodatus (gift of God), who died in 389.

Augustine, whom on the night of Easter on April 25, 387 Ambrose baptised in Milan together with his son and his friend Alypius, was appointed in 391, despite a desperate opposition, presbyter of Hippo: a millennium-old port city, the second largest seaport in Africa. And in 395 Valerius, the old Greek bishop of the city, who spoke bad Latin, names him illegitimately, so Augustine confesses, 'auxiliary bishop' (coadjutor) contrary to the provisions of the Council of Nicaea, whose eighth canon prohibits the existence of two bishops in a city.

*'Genius in all fields of Christian doctrine'*

Augustine often dictated at the same time discussions to several writings: ninety-three works or 232 'books', he says in

the year 427 in his *Retractationes* (*Retractions*) which critically contemplate, so to speak, his work in chronological succession; to which we must add the production of his last years of life, in addition to hundreds of letters and sermons with which he 'almost always' felt dissatisfied. The intellectual production of Augustine has been overrated, particularly from the Catholic side. 'An intellectual giant like him only the world offers once every thousand years' (Görlich). Maybe from the Catholic world! However, what he calls 'intellectual stature' is what serves him, and what serves him is detrimental to the world. Augustine's existence precisely reveals it drastically. However, J.R. Palangue praises him as 'a genius in all fields of Christian doctrine'. And Daniel-Rops goes on to say: 'If the word genius has any meaning, it is precisely here. Of all the gifts of the spirit that can be fixed analytically, none was missing; he had all, even those that are generally considered mutually exclusive'. Who is startled by such nonsense is called malevolent, malicious, 'a creeping soul' (Marrou). However, even the father of the Church Jerome, although out of envy, called his colleague 'a little latecomer'. In the 20th century, the Catholic Schmaus flatly denies Augustine's genius as a thinker.

The thought of Augustine? It is totally dominated by ideas of God, partly numbed by euphoria, partly terrified. His philosophy is, basically, theology. From an ontological point of view it is based on hypotheses without any foundation. And there is a multitude of painful absences. Augustine, whom Palangue praises saying: 'With a flap, he rises above any superficial objection' usually is a prodigy of superficiality. Also, this 'professional orator' of yesteryear (and today!) cheats through rhetorical tricks. He contradicts himself, especially in *The City of God*, a work with a strong influence of Arnobius that appeared between 413 and 426, his 'magnum opus' as he says, where he sometimes equates and others clearly differentiates his own fundamental concepts: 'Roman Empire' and 'Diabolic State', and 'Church' and 'God's State'.

When he was a young Christian he believed that miracles no longer occur, so that 'no one is raised from the dead anymore'; when he gets old he believes otherwise. Already in

412 he had the idea of ‘collecting and showing everything that is rightly censured in my books’. And so, three years before his death he begins, since everything was ‘altered’, a complete book with rectifications, *Retractationes*, without really ‘rectifying’ everything. In any case, he introduced 220 corrections. However, as many times as Augustine ‘rectified’ something, he refuted the work of others, placing the heading of many of his writings a ‘*Contra...*’ By the end of the 4th century he attacked the Manichaeans: Fortunatus, Adeimantus, Faust, Felix, Secundinus, as well as, in another series of books, Manichaeism, of which he himself was formally a follower for almost a decade, from 373 to 382, although as ‘listener’ (*auditor*), not as an *electus*. In three books *Against Academics* (386) he confronts scepticism. From the year 400 on he criticises Donatism; from 412 Pelagianism, and from 426 semi-Pelagianism. But next to these main objectives of his struggle he also attacks with greater or lesser intensity the adepts of Greco-Roman culture, the Jews, the Arians, the astrologers, the Priscillians and the Apollinarians. ‘All the heretics hate you’ he praises his old rival Jerome, ‘just as they persecute me with the same hatred’.

More than half of Augustine’s writings are apologetics or have a controversial character. On the other hand, while being a bishop, in thirty years he only once visited Mauritania: the less civilised province. He travelled thirty-three times to the incredibly rich Carthage, where, apparently as compensation for his modest convent diet, he liked copious lunches (for example roasted peacock); he talked to important people and spent whole months with colleagues in hectic activity. The bishops already lived near the authorities and in the court, and were themselves courtiers; Augustine’s friend, Bishop Alypius, was arguing in Rome until the saint’s death.

Peter Brown, one of the most recent biographers of the leading theologian, writes: ‘Augustine was the son of a violent father and an inflexible mother. He could cling to what he considered objective truth with the remarkable ingenuity of his quarrelsome character’. It should be noted that the increasingly violent aggression of Augustine, as manifested in his dispute with the Donatists, could also be a consequence of his prolonged



asceticism. Before, as he himself confessed, he had had remarkable vital needs. 'In lewdness and in prostitution' he had 'spent his strength', and later he had energetically conjured 'the tingling of desire'. He lived a long time in concubinage, later he took a girl as a girlfriend (she had almost two years to reach the legal age to get married: in girls twelve years) and at the same time a new darling. But for the cleric, sexual pleasure is 'monstrous', 'diabolical', 'disease', 'madness', 'rotteness', 'nauseating pus', and so on. Apart from that, was not he also feeling guilty about his long-time companion, whom he had forced to separate from himself and his son?

### *Augustine's campaign against the Donatists*

To the Donatists, whom the African Augustine had never mentioned before, he finally paid attention when he was already a priest. Since then he fought them year after year, with greater fury than other 'heretics'. He threw his contempt to their faces and expelled them from Hippo, their episcopal city. Because the Donatists had committed 'the crime of schism' they were nothing but 'weeds' and animals: 'these frogs sit in their pond and croak: "we are the only Christians!" but they are heading to hell without knowing it'. What was a Donatist for Augustine? When he was elected bishop the schism was already eighty-five years old. It was a local African issue, relatively small, though not divided into 'countless crumbs' as he claimed. Catholicism, on the other hand, absorbed the peoples; it had the emperor on his side, the masses, as Augustine blurts out, 'the unity of the whole world'. Frequently and without hesitation Augustine insists on such demonstration of the majority, incapable of making the reflection that Schiller will later formulate: 'What is the majority? Most is nonsense; intelligence has always been only in the minority'.

The Donatist was convinced of being a member of a brotherhood. Throughout their tragic history they collaborated with a religious-revolutionary peasant movement, which inflicted vexations on the landowners: the Circumcellions or Agonistici—temporary workers of the countryside and, at the same time, the left wing of this Church who first enjoyed the support of Donatus of Bagai and later that of Gildo. According to the adversary,

Augustine, who characterised them with the psalm of ‘rapids are their feet to shed blood’, they robbed, looted, set fire to the basilicas, threw lime and vinegar in the eyes of Catholics, claimed promissory notes and started with threats his emancipation. Often led by clerics, including bishops, ‘captains of the saints’, these *Agonistici* or *milites Christi* (followers of martyrs, hobby pilgrims, terrorists) beat the landowners and Catholic clerics with decks called ‘israels’ under the war cry of ‘Praise be to God’ (*laus deo*), the ‘trumpets of the massacre’ (Augustine). The Catholics ‘depended to a great extent on the support of the Roman Empire and the landlords, who guaranteed them economic privileges and material protection’, as can be read in the *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* (*Real lexicon for antiquity and Christianity*). It was also not uncommon for the exploited to kill themselves in order to reach paradise. As the Donatists said, because of the persecution they jumped from rocks, as for example the cliffs of Ain Mlila, or to mighty rivers, which for Augustine was not more than ‘a part of their habitual behaviour’.

The centre of their offices was the cult to the martyrs. Excavations carried out in the centre of Algeria, which was the bulwark of the Donatists, have brought to light innumerable chapels dedicated to the adoration of the martyrs, which undoubtedly belonged to the schismatics. Many carried biblical quotes and their favourite text, *Deo laudes* [God praises]. A Donatist bishop boasted that he had reduced four churches to ashes with his own hand. They, as so often emphasised, even by Augustine, could not be martyrs ‘because they did not live the life of Christ’. The true background of the Donatist problem, which not only led to the religious wars of the years 340, 347 and 361-363 but caused the great uprisings of 372 and 397-398, Augustine failed to understand or did not want to understand. He thought he could explain through a theological discussion what was less a confessional than a social problem: the deep social contrasts within North African Christianity, the abyss between a rich upper class and those who owned nothing; that they were not

in any way just the ‘bands of Circumcellions’ but also the slaves and the free masses who hated the dominant ones.<sup>16</sup>

Augustine did not know or did not want to see this. He defended with all tenacity the interests of the dominant class. For him the Donatists were never right: they simply defamed and lied. He maintained that they were looking for a lie, that their lie ‘fills all of Africa’. Initially, Augustine was not in favour of violence; he questioned any attempt to use it. ‘I have no intention of forcing anyone against their will to the religious community’. Of course, when he learned about the wickedness of the ‘heretics’ and saw that they could be improved with some force, which the government already commissioned in an increasing way from the year 405, he changed his mind. The faith of the Donatists, no matter how similar it was—even, essentially, identical—was nothing but error and violence. Catholics, on the other hand, only acted out of pure compassion, out of love. ‘Understand what happens to you! God does not want you to sink into a sacrilegious disunity, separated from your mother, the Catholic Church’. As the *Handbuch der Kirchengeschichte (Handbook of Church History)* says, or more precisely the Catholic Baus,

here speaks the voice of a man who was so driven and encouraged by the religious responsibility to bring back to an *ecclesia* [church] the lost brothers in the error, that all the other considerations remained for him in the background.

How typical! He must exonerate Augustine, make his thoughts and actions understandable. Thus, over the course of two millennia, the great crimes of history have been constantly apologised and exalted; they have been glorified. Only in the name of God can they always allow and commit certain crimes, the most atrocious, as will be demonstrated more clearly each time throughout this criminal history.

With an extensive series of astute sentences, without missing those corresponding to the Old and New Testaments, the great lover now demands coercive measures against all those who

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<sup>16</sup> *Note of the translator*: This happened even a thousand years later, as Umberto Eco portrays so well in *The Name of the Rose*.

‘must be saved’ (*corrigendi atque sanandi*). The coercion, Augustine teaches now, is sometimes inevitable, because although the best ones can be handled with love, unfortunately it is necessary to force, with fear, the majority. ‘He who spares the rod hates his son’ he says, quoting the Bible. ‘A spoiled man is not corrected with words’. And did not Sara chase Hagar? And what did Elijah do with the priests of Baal? For many years Augustine had justified the brutalities of the Old Testament against the Manichaeans, from whom came that book of princes of darkness. But the New Testament could also be used. Did not Paul also deliver some people to Satan? ‘You know?’, Augustine says to bishop Vixens, explaining the Gospel—:

no one can be forced to justice when you read how the head of the family spoke to his servants: ‘Whoever finds them compels them to enter!’

—which Augustine translates most effectively as ‘force them’ (*cogitare intrare*). Resistance only demonstrates irrationality. Do not the feverish patients, in their delirium, also revolt against their doctors? Augustine calls tolerance (*toleratio*) ‘fruitless and vain’ (*infructuosa et vana*) and is excited by the conversion of many ‘through healthy coercion’ (*terrore percussi*). It was nothing else than the program of Firmicus Maternus, ‘the program of a general declaration of war’ (Hoheisel), whether Augustine had read it or not. ‘Under extreme coercion’ the ‘professional speaker’ preaches, rich in tricks, ‘the inner will is realised’ referring to the Acts of the Apostles, 9,4, to John, 6,44, and finally, starting from the year 416-417, to Luke, 14, 23, the Gospel of love! In proceeding against his enemies Augustine gave the impression that he was also ‘sometimes a little nervous’ (Thomas), although what seemed to be persecution, in reality, was only love, ‘always only love and exclusively love’ (Marrou). ‘The Church presses them against their hearts and surrounds them with motherly tenderness to save them’—through forced labour, fustigations, confiscation of property, elimination of the right of inheritance. However, the only thing that Augustine wants is to ‘impose’ on the Donatists ‘the advantages of peace, unity, and love’:

That is why I have been presented to you as your enemy. You say you want to kill me, although I only tell you the truth and, as far as I'm concerned, I'll not let you get lost. God would avenge from you and kill, in you, the error.

God would take revenge on you! The bishop does not consider himself by any means an inciter. But, yes, when it seemed appropriate, he demanded to apply the full weight of the law to the recalcitrant, not granting them 'grace or forgiveness'. Better said, he authorised torture!

The most famous saint of the ancient Church, perhaps of the whole Church, a 'so affable person' (Hendrikx), the father of 'infinite kindness' (Grabmann) 'and generosity' (Kotting), who against the Donatists 'he constantly practiced the sweet behaviour' (Espenberger), which against them does not formulate 'any hurtful word' (Baus), which tries to 'preserve from the harsh penalties of Roman law' even 'the guilty' (Hümmeler)—in short, the man who becomes spokesman of the *mansuetudo catholica*, of Catholic benevolence—, allows torture! The thing was not so bad after all! 'Remember all the possible martyrdoms', Augustine consoles us:

Compare them with hell and you can imagine everything easily. The torturer and the tortured are here ephemeral, eternal there... We have to fear those pains as we fear God. What the human being suffers here supposes a cure (*emendatio*) if it is corrected.

Catholics could thus abuse as much as they liked, it was unimportant compared to hell, with that horror that God would impose upon them for all eternity. The earthly torture was 'light', 'transient', just a 'cure'. A theologian is never disconcerted! That's why he does not know shame either.

In the Christian Empire of those times there prevailed everything except liberality and personal freedom. What prevailed was slavery. Children were chained instead of the parents, everywhere there was secret police 'and every day could be heard the cries of those whom the court tortured and could be seen the gates with the whimsically executed' (Chadwick). The emperor's assassins automatically liquidated the Donatists who had mutilated Catholic priests or who had destroyed churches. Augustine endorsed in practice the death penalty. 'The greater the

hardness with which the State acts, the more Augustine applauds' (Aland). Here we see the celebrated father of the Church in all its magnitude: as a desk author and hypocrite; as a bishop who not only exerted a terrible influence during his life, but who was the initiator of political Augustinism: the archetype of all the bloody inquisitors of so many centuries, of their cruelty, perfidy, prudishness, and a precursor of horror: of the medieval relations between Church and State. Augustine's example allowed the 'secular arm' to throw countless of human beings, including children and the elderly, dying and disabled, into the cells of torture, the night of the dungeons, the flames of the fire—and then hypocritically ask the State to respect their lives! All the henchmen and ruffians, princes and monks, bishops and popes who from now on would hunt martyrs and burn 'heretics' could lean on Augustine, and in fact, they did it; and also the reformers.

When in 420 the state minions persecuted the bishop of Ta-mugadi, Gaudentius, he fled to his beautiful basilica; fortified himself there and threatened to burn himself along with his community. The chief of the officials, a pious Christian, who nevertheless persecuted people of his own faith, did not know what party to take and consulted Augustine. The saint, inventor of the *sui generis* doctrine of predestination, replied:

But since God, according to secret but just will, has predestined some of them to eternal punishment, without a doubt it is better, although some are lost in their own fire, that the vastly greater majority is gathered and recovered from that pernicious division and dispersion, instead of all be burned in the eternal fire deserved by the sacrilegious division.

Once again Augustine was himself, 'of course the first theoretician of the Inquisition' who wrote 'the only complete justification in the history of the ancient Church' about 'the right of the State to repress non-Catholics' (Brown). In the application of violence, the saint only saw a 'conversion by oppression' (*per molestias eruditio*) and compared it to a father 'who punishes the son who loves' and that every Saturday night, 'as a precaution' beats his family. The 'edict of the unit' of 405 followed other state decrees in the years 407, 408, 409, 412 and 414. The

obligatory withdrawal of the Donatists was ordered, their Church was relegated more or less to the underground and they started pogroms that would last several years. The Donatist Church was forbidden and its followers forced to convert to Catholicism. 'The Lord has shattered the teeth of the lion' (Augustine). Entire cities of hitherto convinced Donatists became Catholic out of fear of sorrow and violence, such as the episcopal city of Augustine, where once the ovens could not bake bread for Catholics. Finally, he himself expelled the Donatists. However, when the State tolerated them temporarily during the invasion of Alaric and they returned, for the great saint they seemed 'wolves to whom it would be necessary to kill with blows'. Only by chance did he escape from an ambush that the Circumcellions had laid out for him.

The masses of slaves and settlers, of whom only their labour force was of any use, were to be maintained within the Catholic Church through forced labour and the lash of their lords, for the maintenance of 'Catholic peace'. In the year 414 the Donatists were deprived of all their civil rights and the death penalty was threatened to those who celebrated their religious services. 'Where there is love, there is peace' (Augustine). Or as our bishop later declared triumphantly: *Quodvult deus de Cartago*: the viper has been crushed, or better still, it has been devoured.

After the year 418 the theme of the Donatists disappears for decades from the debates held in the synods of the North African bishops. In 420 it appears the last anti-Donatist writing of Augustine: *Contra Gaudentium*. In 429, with the invasion of the Vandals the anti-Donatist imperial edicts also ended, which continued to call for annihilation. However, the schism lasted until the 6th century, although very weakened. The sad remains that managed to escape the constant persecutions were destroyed a century later, along with Catholics, by Islam. African Christianity was undermined and bankrupt; finally, completely separated from Europe in the religious aspect, and escaped from its area of influence to fall into that of the Near East. The most important of the ancient Christian churches, the only one in the Mediterranean, disappeared without a trace. There was nothing

left of them. 'But it was not due to Islam but to the persecutions against the Donatists, which made North Africa hate the Catholic Church so much that the Donatists received Islam as a liberation and converted to it' (Kawerau).

### *The overthrow of Pelagius*

Rather than the struggle against the Donatists, Augustine was internally motivated by the prolonged quarrel with Pelagius, who convincingly refuted his bleak complex of original sin, along with the mania of predestination and grace which the Council of Orange of the year 529 dogmatized (partly literally) and the Council of Trent renewed. According to most sources, Pelagius was a Christian layman of British origin. From approximately the year 384, or sometime later, he imparted his teachings in Rome, enjoying great respect. Interestingly, when he disembarked at Hippo in 410, Pelagius was in the retinue of Melania the Younger, her husband Valerius Pinianus and her mother Albina; that is, 'perhaps the richest family in the Roman Empire' (Wermelinger). The father of the Church, Augustine, had also intensified his contacts with this family for a short time. Indeed, he and other African bishops, Aurelius and Alypius, had convinced the billionaires not to squander their wealth with the poor, but to hand them over to the Catholic Church! The Church became heir to this gigantic wealth. Melania was even elevated to sanctity (her holiday: December 31). 'How many inheritances the monks stole!' writes Helvetius 'but they stole them for the Church, and the Church made saints of them'.

From Pelagius, a man of great talent, we have received numerous short treatises, whose authenticity is subject to controversy. However, there are at least three that seem authentic. The most important of his works, *De natura* (*On Nature*), we know by the refutation of Augustine, *De natura et gratia* (*On Nature and Grace*). Also the main theological work of Pelagius, *De libero arbitrio* (*On Free Will*) has been transmitted to us, in several fragments, by his opponent, although his theory is often distorted in the course of the controversy.

Impressive as a personality, Pelagius was a convinced Christian. He wanted to stay within the Church and what he least



wanted was a public dispute. He had many bishops on his side and did not reject prayers or deny the help of grace, but rather defended the need for good works, as well as the need for free will, the *liberum arbitrium*. But for him there was no original sin: the fall of Adam was his own; not hereditary. It was precisely his experience with the moral laziness of the Christians that had determined the position that Pelagius adopted, in which he also included an intense social criticism tainted with religiosity, appealing to Christians to ‘feel the pains of others as if they were their own, and shed tears for the affliction of other human beings’. This was not, of course, a subject for the irritable Augustine; he, who did not see the human being, like Pelagius, as an isolated individual but devoured by a monstrous hereditary debt, the ‘original sin’, and considered humanity a *massa peccati* (sinner mass) fallen because of the snake, ‘an elusive animal, skilled on the sinuous roads’, fallen because of Eve, ‘the smaller part of the human couple’ because, like the other fathers of the Church, he despised the woman.

In strict justice, all mankind would be destined for hell. However, by a great mercy, there would be at least a minority chosen for salvation, but the mass would be rejected ‘with all reason’. ‘There is God full of glory in the legitimacy of his revenge’. According to the *doctor ecclesiae* (Church doctor) we are corrupted from Adam since the original sin is transmitted through the reproductive process; in fact, the practice of the baptism of children to forgive sins already presupposes those in the infant. On the other hand, the salvation of humanity depends on the grace of God; the will has no ethical significance. But in this way, the human being becomes a puppet that is stirred in the threads of the Supreme: a machine with a soul that God guides as he wants and where he wants, to paradise or to eternal perdition. Why?

Why? Because he wanted. But why did he want it?  
‘Man, who are you who want to talk to God?’

Augustine warned against Pelagius and launched, increasingly busier in the *causa gratiae* (cause of grace), his theory of predestination which Jesus does not announce and which he himself did not defend in his early days, for more than a

decade and a half, until the year 427, when he published a dozen controversial writings against Pelagius.

St. Jerome, at odds with the Bishop of Jerusalem, then wrote a very wide-ranging polemic, the *Dialogi contra Pelagianos* (*Dialogue Against the Pelagians*), in which he defamed his adversary by calling him a habitual sinner, an arrogant Pharisee, ‘greasy dog’ and more: dialogues that Augustine extolled as a work of wonderful beauty and worthy of faith. In 416 the Pelagians set fire to the monasteries of Jerome, and his life was in grave danger. Pope Zosimus was left out of play in a clever stratagem of Emperor Honorius, and in a letter addressed on April 30, 418 to Palladius, prefect praetorian of Italy, he ordered the expulsion of Pelagius and Caelestius from Rome—the harshest decree by the end of the Roman Empire. He also censured his ‘heresy’ as a public crime and sacrilege, with a special emphasis on the expulsion from Rome, where there were riots and violent disputes among the clergy. All the Pelagians were persecuted, their property was confiscated and they were exiled.

In the final phase of the conflict, the young bishop Julian of Eclanum (in Benevento) became the great adversary of Augustine, who by age could have been a son: the authentic spokesman of the opposition, who often cornered the bellicose African through a frontal attack. Julian was probably born in Apulia, at the bishop’s headquarters of his father Memor, who was a friend of Augustine. As a priest, he married the daughter of a bishop, and Pope Innocent appointed him in 416 as bishop of Eclanum. Unlike most prelates, he had an excellent education, was very independent as a thinker and very sharp as a polemicist. He wrote for a ‘highly intellectual’ audience, while Augustine, who found it difficult to refute the young man, did so for the average clergy: the majority. Although Julian theologically subscribes the theory of grace, he does not see it as a counterpart of nature, which would also be a valuable gift of the Creator. He highlighted free will, attacked the Augustinian doctrine of original sin as Manichaean, fought the idea of inherited guilt, of a God who becomes a persecutor of newborns, and throws into

eternal fire little children—the God of a crime ‘that can scarcely be imagined among the barbarians’ (Julian).

Along with the eighteen bishops who gathered around him, Julian was excommunicated in 418 by Zosimus and, like most of those expelled from their position he found refuge in the East. Augustine became more and more severe in his assertions about predestination and the division of humanity between the elect and the condemned. Already on his deathbed he attacked Julian in an unfinished work.

### *Augustine attacks classical culture*

Just as he repressed the ‘heretics’ evidently Augustine also repressed the so-called ‘pagans’.

The bishop fought against ‘the infamous gods of all kinds’, ‘the ungodly cults’, ‘the rabble of gods’, the ‘impure, abominable spirits’; ‘they are all bad’, ‘throw them away, despise them!’ Augustine insults Jupiter by calling him ‘seducer of women’, speaks of his ‘numerous and malignant acts of cruelty’, of the ‘irreverence of Venus’; defines the cult of the mother of the gods as ‘that epidemic, that crime, that ignominy’, to the great mother herself as ‘that monster’ who ‘through a multitude of public gallants gets the Earth dirty and offends the sky’, and says that Saturn surpasses them ‘in that shameless cruelty’. Like Thomas Aquinas or Pope Pius II, Augustine defends the maintenance of prostitution so that ‘the violence of the passions’ does not ‘throw everything down’: the usual Catholic double standard. (Popes like Sixtus IV, creator of the feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, and bishops, abbots, and priors of honourable convents, kept profitable brothels!) Augustine repeats the already trite arguments against polytheism, from the matter and insensibility of the statues to the inability of the gods to help. And, like many others before him, he identifies them with demons.

The scope, the methods and the disrespectful mockery that the saint shows are evident, and extraordinarily detailed, in his magnum opus *The City of God Against the Pagans* (413-426), directed specifically against the adepts of classical culture: twenty-two books that were one of Charlemagne’s favourite

readings. In this work, as the Catholic Van der Meer ponders, Augustine ‘sets accounts, from a high point of view, with all the old culture of lies’, in favour of a new and far worse culture!<sup>17</sup> Augustine even resorts to fabrication, since in *The City of God*, in which the belief in the gods appears as the capital vice of the Romans; in which polytheism appears as the main cause of moral defeat as well as the fall of Rome in 410; as the main motive of all crimes, of all the *mala, bella, discordiae* (bad, beautiful, discord) of Roman history—in his masterpiece, then, Augustine does not hesitate to ‘discredit by means of conscious deformations’ (F.G. Maier) the world of the gods, allowing himself, when writing about the so-called pagans ‘any means’, even the ‘falsification of quotations’ (Andresen). ‘Lying and scandal are the two great things on which everything is based on the polytheistic faith’ (Schuitze).

Augustine fights the adepts of classical culture with the same lack of scruples as the ‘heretics’. The Roman state itself is bad, a second Babylon, ‘*condita est civitas Roma velut altera Babylon*’ (the city of Rome as the second Babylon). He justifies with resolution the eradication of the Old Faith; he orders the destruction of temples, centres of pilgrimage and images, the annihilation of all cults: a measure of reprisal against those who had previously killed Christians. He also affirmed that there was a common front of all those he condemned—‘heretics’, ‘pagans’ and Jews. Thus, around the year 400 he says triumphantly: ‘Throughout the Empire, temples have been destroyed, idols are broken, sacrifices abolished, and those who worship the gods, punished’. In response to Augustine’s phrase in which he says to

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<sup>17</sup> *Note of the translator:* Since the word ‘pagan’ is Christian Newspeak, it is worth saying that the original title of the book that in our bookstores appears as *The City of God* was *De civitate Dei Contra Paganos* (*The City of God against the Pagans*). Charlemagne, who loved *The City of God against the Pagans*, was the first European emperor since the fall of Rome and he slaughtered thousands of those Germanics who were not Christians or refused to become Christians. The Nazis even created a stone memorial to those Saxon victims in 1935.

welcome the pagans ‘with pastoral kindness and generosity’, the theologian Bernhard Kötting writes:

But he agrees with the laws and the measures of the emperor against the pagan cult and the sacrifices and the places where they are practiced, the temples. It is based on precepts of the Old Testament, where it is ordered to destroy the places of sacrifice to the idols, ‘as soon as the country is in your hands’.

As soon as the Christian has power, annihilation follows ‘with pastoral goodness and generosity’! Several times Augustine rejected a literal understanding of the Old Testament in favour of an allegorical exegesis. However, the same as so many, other times he conveniently rejected the allegorical in favour of the literal. The Catholic State fulfilled the requirements of the Catholic Church. Just as with the dispute with the ‘heretics’, in confrontations with the adepts of the classical culture there were first defamatory sermons by the clergy; strict canons, and then the corresponding civil laws. Then Greco-Roman culture in Africa was pushed back and annihilated.

In March of 399, the Gaudentius and Jovius committees profaned in Cartago the temples and the statues of the gods, according to Augustine, a milestone in the fight against the infernal cult. Later, Gaudentius and Jovius also destroyed the temples of the cities of the province, evidently with enormous satisfaction on the part of the holy bishop, for which the demolition of the idols already foreseen in the Old Testament is fulfilled. Augustine approves the decrees of 399 by the Christian emperor—who, based on Psalm 71:11, he finds justified—, in which he demands the destruction of idols and warns with the capital punishment those who worship them. On June 16, 401, the fifth African synod decided to ask the emperor to demolish all the Greco-Roman shrines and temples that still remain ‘all over Africa’. The synod did not even allow so-called pagan banquets (*convivio*), because they performed ‘impure dances’, sometimes even in the days of the martyrs. The Church again threatens Christians who participate in such meals with penances of several years or excommunication. There would be no communication with those who think differently.

At the time, in June 401, Augustine again incited the destructive rage. In a Sunday sermon in Carthage, he congratulated himself about the fervour against 'idols', and mocked them so primitively that the listeners laughed. At the foot of the golden-bearded statue of Hercules, we read *Herculi Deo* (God Hercules), Who is? He should be able to say it. 'But he can't. He remains as silent as his sign!' And when he remembers that even in Rome the temples have been closed and the idols have been thrown down, a clamour resounds throughout the church: 'As in Rome, also in Carthage!' Augustine continues to stir: the gods have fled Rome to come here. 'Think about it, brothers, think about it! I already said it, do it now!'



Unlike most Nordicized paintings of the African Father of the Church, *St. Augustine in His Study* by Vittore Carpaccio (1511) shows him as a non-white.

Emperor Honorius (393-423), one of the sons of Theodosius I, made great concessions in his time to the Church. He was subject to both the influence of Ambrose and that of his pious sister Galla Placidia, founder of temples and persecutor of 'heretics' by legal means, which in turn influenced Saint Barbatian (festivity: December 31), his counsellor for many years and great miracle worker. Thus, after repeated requests of the Church, the emperor, through a series of edicts promulgated in 399, 407, 408 and 415, ordered to remove in Africa the images of the temples, destroy the altars and close or confiscate the sanctuaries, assigning the goods for other purposes. When

Augustine asked in court a more severe application of the laws, Honorius did so, threatening even to resort to the garrison. 'The Government was increasingly inclined to meet the demands raised from the Christian side' (Schulze).

With the support of the Church and the State, the Catholic hordes were no less brutal in the 'cleansing' of the rural properties of Greco-Roman gods than the Circumcellions. At times, Augustine even established as a rule that those who converted to Christianity should destroy the temples and the images of the gods themselves. This happened in Calama, near Hippo, where Bishop St. Possidius, biographer and friend of Augustine, was so hated that neither the members of the curia, the councillors, protected him. However, while they assaulted the monastery and beat a monk with blows, the prelate escaped. And when the Christians demolished the temple of Hercules in Sufes, a tumult arose such that Augustine, who denounced the government of the city, still of the old religion, had to mourn the loss of 60 slaughtered brothers of faith. He reports it with a strange mixture of indignation, hatred, and sarcasm without saying a single word about how many Hellenes lost their lives in the uproar caused by the Christians. It should be noted that in Sufes, as a response from the Church, the temples and images of gods that were still preserved were destroyed, with bloody fights, partly in the sanctuaries themselves. If out of fear of the fanaticism of their adversaries the Hellenes abjured their faith, Augustine mocks: 'These are the servants that the devil has'. He considered the destruction of the Greco-Roman cult centres and their statues as an act of devotion. On the battlefield against the Hellenes, he celebrated the final victory. Is it surprising that, in a letter to the father of the Church, the Neo-Platonist Maximus called the saints knaves?

At the request of Augustine, his disciple Orosius, an Iberian priest, continued the defamation of classical culture. Following the tendency of his teacher, he wrote *Historiarum Adversum Paganos Libri VII* (*Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*). This apologetic, a sloppy and superficial product, became one of the most read works during the Middle Ages, perhaps the history book by antonomasia. It appeared in almost

all clerical libraries and has completely contaminated historiography. Until the 12th century, this image of history manufactured by Augustine and Orosius predominated in the Christian world and continued for a long time.

*Augustine sanctions the 'holy war'*

The *amantissimus Domini sanctissimus* (most loved by God), as the bishop Claudius of Turin of the 9th century called Augustine, recorded, like no one before him the compatibility between service to war and the doctrine of Jesus. The father of the Church Ambrose had already celebrated a pathetic instigation of war, and the father of the Church Athanasius had declared that in war it was 'legal and praiseworthy to kill adversaries'. However, none of them accepted the bloody office with as few scruples and as the hypocrite 'angel of heaven' who looks 'constantly to God'. Certainly, Augustine did not share the optimism of a Eusebius or an Ambrose, who equated the hope of the *Pax Romana* with that of *Pax Christiana* as providential since 'The wars to the present are not only between empires but also between confessions, between truth and error'. By weaving his web of grace, predestination, and angels, Augustine theoretically committed himself in an increasingly negative way before the Roman state. Every State power based on the *libido dominandi* (lust for power) rests on sins and for that reason must submit to a Church based on grace, but in fact not free of sin either. This philosophy of the State, which constituted the historical-philosophical basis of the medieval power struggle between the popes and the emperors, was decisively influential until the times of Thomas Aquinas. Until the year of his death, Augustine not only asked for the punishment of the murderers but also to crush the uprisings and subdue the 'barbarians', taking it as a moral obligation. It was not difficult for him to consider the State malignant but he praised its bloody practices and, like everything else, also 'attribute it to Divine Providence' since 'its way of proceeding' is 'to avoid human moral decay through wars'.

*Christianity sanctions the mistreatment of animals*

Whoever thinks so, in a childlike and cynical way at the



same time, obviously interprets in the same sense the commandment 'Thou shalt not kill'. That commandment should not be applied to the totality of nature and the animal kingdom. Augustine discusses with the Manichaeans that it does not include the prohibition of 'pulling a bush' or the 'irrational animal world' because such beings 'must live and die to our advantage; submit them to you!' 'Man owns animals', complains Hans Henny Jahnn in his great trilogy *Fluss ohne Ufer (River without Shore)*. 'He does not need to try. He just has to be naive. Naive also in his anger. Brutal and naive. This is what God wants. Even if he hits the animals, he will go to heaven'. Earlier, authors such as Theodor Lessing and Ludwig Klages had persuasively shown that, as the latter affirms, Christianity conceals something with its connotation of 'humanity'. What it really means is that the rest of living beings lack value—unless they serve human beings! They write: 'As is well known, Buddhism prohibits the killing of animals, because the animal is the same being as we are. Now, if one scolds an Italian with such a reproach when he torments an animal to death, he will claim that "senza anima" [without soul] and "non è cristiano" [is not Christian] since for the Christian believer the right to exist lies only in the human beings'. Augustine, on the other hand, believes that the human being 'even in situations of sin is better than the animal': the being 'of lower rank'. And he treats vegetarianism as 'impious heretic opinion'.

That God can be pleased with arms is shown by the example of David and that of 'many other righteous' of that time. Augustine quotes at least 13,276 times the Old Testament, about which he had previously written that he had always found it unpleasant! But now it was useful. For example: 'The just will rejoice when contemplating revenge; He will bathe his feet in the blood of the wicked'. And of course all the 'just', logically, can make a 'just war' (*bellum iustum*). This is a concept introduced by Augustine. No Christian had used it before, not even the easy-going Lactantius, whom he read carefully. Soon the whole Christian world made a *iusta bella*, based upon a 'just' reason for war any minimal deviation from the Roman liturgy. Augustine strongly recommends military service and cites quite a few cases

of 'God-fearing warriors' from the Bible; not only the 'numerous righteous' of the Old Testament, so rich in atrocities but also a couple of the New Testament.

Augustine experienced the collapse of Roman rule in Africa when the Vandal hordes invaded Mauritania and Numidia in the summer of 429 and in the spring of 430. He witnessed the annihilation of his life's work: whole cities were grass of the flames and its inhabitants assassinated. Anywhere the Catholic communities, depleted by the Church and the State, opposed no resistance; at least there is no relation of it. Augustine died on August 28, 430, and was buried that same day. A year later Hippo, retained by Boniface for fourteen months, was evacuated and partially burned. Augustine's biographer, the bishop Possidius, who like the teacher was a fervent fighter against the 'heretics' and the 'pagans', still lived some years among the ruins.



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