

THE AGE OF FAITH
(to 787)

Volume I
of
AN ESSAY IN UNIVERSAL HISTORY
From an Orthodox Christian Point of View

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*Dedicated to the Memory of a good pastor,
Archbishop Nikodem of Richmond and Great Britain (Russian Church in Exile)
(+1976).*

*“Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken
the word of God to you, whose faith follow.”*

Of mercy and judgement will I sing unto Thee, O Lord.
Psalm 100.1.

By Me kings reign, and princes decree justice. By Me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth.
Proverbs 8.15-17.

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon His Kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgement and with justice henceforth even for ever.
Isaiah 9.6-7.

It is he that shall build the Temple of the Lord, and shall bear royal honour, and shall sit and rule upon his throne. And there shall be a priest by his throne, and peaceful understanding shall be between them both.
Zechariah 6.13.

The Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will, and setteth up over it the basest of men.
Daniel 4.17.

Man is made by his belief. As he believes, so he is.
Bhagavad Gita, ch. 17.

The rule of many is not good; let there be one king.
Homer, Iliad 2.204-5.

God has no better dwelling-place on earth than a pure soul.
Pythagoras.

And so far has our city [Athens] distanced the rest of mankind in thought and in speech that her pupils have become the teachers of the rest of the world; and she has brought it about that the name Hellenes suggests no longer a race but an intelligence, and that the title Hellenes is applied rather to those who share our culture than to those who share a common blood.
Isocrates, Panegyricus (c. 380 BC).

I would advise those who seek liberty and shun the yoke of servitude as evil, not to fall into the plague of despotic rule, to which an insatiable passion of unseasonable freedom brought their fathers. In excess, servitude and liberty are each wholly bad; in due measure, each are wholly good. The due measure of servitude is to serve God; its excess is to serve man. Law is the god of the right-minded man; pleasure is the god of the fool.
Plato, Letters, viii, 354.

Only a few prefer liberty – the majority seek nothing more than fair masters.
Sallust, Histories.

After receiving by universal consent the absolute control of affairs, I transferred the respublica from my own control to the will of the Senate and People of Rome.
Deeds of the Divine Augustus, 34.

*Let the soldier carry arms only to repress arms.
Let the trumpet sound only for ceremony.
Let the ends of the earth stand in awe of the men of Rome:
If not fear, let there be love.*
Ovid, Fasti, I, 715.

They [the Romans] make a desolation and they call it peace.
Tacitus, Agricola, 30.

Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.
Matthew 22.21.

Since the day a popular assembly condemned Jesus Christ to death the Church has known that the rule of the majority can lead to any crime.
Bishop Jacques Bénigne Bossuet.

The Lord's Resurrection has indeed remained to this day the most proven fact in human history. What other fact from the distant past stands so comprehensively and carefully proven as this?
Bishop Nikolai Velimirovič.

No other city has endured such horrors, and no generation in history has fathered such wickedness.
Josephus, The Jewish War.

Christ is King of Israel, and Christians are the Israelite Race.
St. Justin the Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho.

Philosophers are as children until they become mature in Christ.
St. Clement of Alexandria.

For [the heretics'] behaviour is exactly like that of someone who, when an exquisite mosaic of a king has been fashioned by a great artist out of rare stones, takes the mosaic completely to pieces and rearranges the jewels, and puts them back together to make the image of a dog or a fox – and a poorly executed one at that.
St. Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies, 1.8.1.

Democracy, indeed, has a fair sounding name... Monarchy... has an unpleasant sound, but is a more practical form of government to live under. For it is easier to find a single excellent man than many of them... for it does not belong to the majority of men to acquire virtue... Indeed, if ever there has been a prosperous democracy, it has in any case been at its best for only a brief period.
Dio Cassius, Roman History, 44.2 (early third century).

From Him and through Him the king who is dear to God receives an image of the Kingdom that is above and so in imitation of that greater King himself guides and directs the course of everything on earth... He looks up to see the archetypal pattern and guides those whom he rules in accordance with that pattern... Monarchy is superior to every other constitution and form of government. For polyarchy, where everyone competes on equal terms, is really anarchy and discord.

Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea, Oration in Honour of Constantine, 1, 3.

It is true that it [the Faith] must be protected; but by dying for it, not by killing others; by longsuffering, but not by violence; by faith, not by crime. If you attempt to defend religion by bloodshed and torture, what you do is not defense, but desecration and insult.

Lactantius, advisor to St. Constantine the Great.

Heretics bring sentence upon themselves since they by their own choice withdraw from the Church, a withdrawal which, since they are aware of it, constitutes damnation. Between heresy and schism there is this difference: that heresy involves perverse doctrine, while schism separates one from the Church on account of disagreement with the bishop. Nevertheless, there is no schism which does not trump up a heresy to justify its departure from the Church

St. Jerome, Commentary on Titus 3:10–11 (386).

Our royalty is an imitation of yours, modelled on your good purpose, a copy of the only Empire.

King Theodoric of Italy to Emperor Anastasius of New Rome.

The priest is the sanctification and strengthening of the Imperial power, while the Imperial power is the strength and firmness of the priesthood.

Acts of the Seventh Ecumenical Council (787).

In monarchy is incarnate the moral principle of power. In a republic – the financial principle. In dictatorship – the principle of physical force. It is precisely for that reason that monarchy is inevitably bound to the Church, the republic to banks, and dictatorship – to emergency

(chrezvychajkoj): God, the ruble or the Cheka.

Ivan Lukyanovich Solonevich.

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INTRODUCTION: THE MEANING OF UNIVERSAL HISTORY

History is the teaching of philosophy by example.
Thucydides.

What is the life of a man, if not interwoven with the life of former generations by a sense of history?
Cicero.

I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.
Ecclesiastes 9.11.

We know that the Race is not to the swift, nor the Battle to the Strong. Do you not think an Angel rides in the Whirlwind and directs this Storm?
John Page to Thomas Jefferson (1776).

The history of the world is the world's court of justice.
Friedrich von Schiller (1786).

The statesman's task is to hear God's footsteps marching through history, and to try and catch on to His coattails as He marches past.
Count Otto von Bismarck.

Religion is the Key of History.
Lord Acton.

Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it.
George Santayana (1905).

Short-sighted is he who sees in history only fact; in it, as in the whole world, spirit rules over matter.
I.P. Yakoby (1931).

*In order to become the genius of the future, you have to be an academic of the past.
In order to sense the storm coming, you have to know quietness in yourself.*
Andrei Platonov (1921)

The longer you look back [in history] the further you can see forward.
Sir Winston Churchill.

The most effective way to destroy people is to deny and obliterate their own understanding of their history.
George Orwell.

Man does not live in a state of nature, but in history, and history as we know it began with Christ, it was founded by Him on the Gospels.

Boris Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago* (1975), I, 5.

Dwell on the past, and you'll lose an eye. Forget the past, and you'll lose both eyes.
Alexander Solzhenitsyn (1973).

This book is written in the profound conviction that Nietzsche was wrong when he wrote: "To view nature as if it were a proof of the goodness and providence of God, to interpret history to the glory of a divine reason, as the perpetual witness to a moral world order and moral intentions – that now seems to belong to the *past*..."¹ But for history to make sense, and to reveal its meaning, it has to be viewed as far as possible as a whole, from the beginning to the end, that is, *universally*. And *sub specie aeternitatis*.

A universal history is not a summary of all the histories of all the nations, but an attempt to discern a thread unifying and making sense of them all. As the great Russian-Ukrainian novelist, Nikolai Gogol, put it: "Universal history, in the true meaning of the term, is not a collection of particular histories of all the peoples and states without a common link, plan or aim, a bunch of events without order, in the lifeless and dry form in which it is often presented. Its subject is great: it must embrace at once and in a complete picture the whole of humanity, how from its original, poor childhood it developed and was perfected in various forms, and, finally, reached the present age. To show the whole of this great process, which the free spirit of man sustained through bloody labours, struggling from its very cradle with ignorance, with nature and with gigantic obstacles – that is the aim of universal history! It must gather into one all the peoples of the world scattered by time, chance, mountains and seas, and unite them into one harmonious whole; it must compose out of them one majestic, complete poem. The event having no influence on the world has no right to enter here. All the events of the world must be so tightly linked amongst themselves and joined one to another like the rings of a chain. If one ring were ripped out, the chain would collapse. This link must not be understood in a literal sense: it is not that visible, material link by which events are often forcibly joined, or the system created in the head independently of facts, and to which the events of the world are later arbitrarily attached. This link must be concluded in one common thought, in one uninterrupted history of mankind, before which both states and events are but temporary forms and images! They must be presented in the same colossal size as it is in fact, penetrated by the same mysterious paths of Providence that are so unattainably indicated in it. Interest must necessarily be elicited to the highest degree, in such a way that the listener is tormented by the desire to know more, so that either he cannot close the book, or, if it is impossible to do that, he starts his reading again, so that it is evident how one event gives birth to another and how without the original event the last event would not follow. Only in that way must history be created..."²

¹ Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, 357.

² Gogol, "O Prepodavanii Vseobschej Istorii" (On the Teaching of Universal History), in *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenij* (Complete Works), vol. 8, pp. 50-51. "I shall write a Universal History," he wrote, "which, in its proper form, does not unfortunately yet exist, either in Russia or even in Europe" (Letter of 23 December, 1833, vol. 15, 1000).

If Gogol's grandiose conception is far beyond the powers of this writer, he can nevertheless agree with, and attempt to emulate, his basic aim: to discern in a very general way how and why the world has developed to its present condition, to "the end of history", in Hegel's phrase. Such an aim means that this book cannot be *purely* historical (as if any history could be "purely" historical!). But neither is it *historicist* in Hegel's sense. There is nothing *determined* in history; in it the dominant roles are played by the free will of God, men and demons. However, the future, and its meaning in God's eyes, is communicated by Him in part to His holy prophets. And this knowledge, being from God, cannot err. For, as He Himself said: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away" (Luke 21.33).

Thus in trying to discern the footsteps of God on the paths of history, history is necessarily *theological*. For "theology and history," as Peter J. Leithart reminds us, "are not ultimately divisible."³ Again, as Archimandrite Lazarus Moore writes, "Christian theology is essentially the knowledge of God and His will revealed to man through God's action in history, which is truly *His story*..."⁴

This being so, the history of the kingdoms of this world should be intertwined with that of the kingdom that is not of this world – the Kingdom of God, which since the Resurrection of Christ is the history of the Church. This is what I try to do in this series of books. For the Church and the world are like soul and body, distinct yet united.

And so the historical flesh of this book is held up by a theological skeleton, as it were, a "theology of politics". According to this, there is no such thing as chance, randomness. God holds in His almighty hands the threads of the destinies of every individual human being, civilization and social and political institution. Without violating free-will, but always honouring it, God invisibly steers the destinies of nations towards one end: *the salvation for eternity of as many people as He has chosen*. If we cannot see how certain events contribute to this end, this is because the comprehension of such things is beyond our fallen human capacities, corrupted by sin, and because we live in the middle, and not at the end of the historical process, lacking the gift of prophecy that transcends these limitations.

Nevertheless, it is not wrong to attempt in fear and trembling to lift a little the veil on God's judgements in history, using those clues and guiding principles that He has given us in the Holy Scriptures and Holy Tradition, and always calling on His help, without which we can see nothing. For, as Samuel Taylor Coleridge said, "The reading of *histories*, my dear Sir, may dispose a man to satire; but the science of HISTORY - History studied in the light of philosophy, as the great drama of an ever-unfolding Providence - has a very different effect. It infuses hope and reverential thoughts of man and his destination..."⁵

*

³ Leithart, *Defending Constantine*, Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Press, 2010, p. 306.

⁴ Moore, *The Orthodox Psalter*, <http://orthodoxyinfo.org/psalter.html>, p. 5.

⁵ Coleridge, *On the Condition of the Church and State*, 1830.

This book attempts to study history from what Dominic Lieven calls “the God’s-eye view. This looks at events in the round and in the long term. It is interested in the impact of geopolitics, at shifts in... ideology and cultural values..., and in global patterns of trade and finance.”⁶

Essentially this book represents a Dostoyevskyan view of history, an attempt to justify in detail Dostoyevsky’s words: “The whole destiny of Russia lies in Orthodoxy, in the light from the East, which will suddenly shine forth to the mankind of the West, which has become blinded and has lost its faith in Christ. The cause of the whole misfortune of Europe, all of its ills, everything without exception, hearkens back to its loss of Christ with the establishment of the Roman Church, followed by its subsequent decision that it could manage just fine without Christ at all.”⁷

Of course, there is much more to history than Russia’s relations with the West, and the first two volumes in particular will study several other civilizations, Christian and pre-Christian, going back to the very beginning of civilization in Nimrod’s Babylon. And towards the end of the last volume, history will turn back on itself as we witness Saddam Hussein’s attempt to restore the Babylonian empire in the late twentieth century. However, the contest between Russia and the West from the eleventh century onwards remains the heart of the series. I go back to the beginning precisely in order to establish the basis of my (or rather, Dostoyevsky’s) that it was Russia, in God’s Providence, that took the place of the fallen Roman Church from the eleventh century onwards. In later volumes I go on to argue that Western Christianity, and western civilization in general, which is now the global civilization, has been like the Prodigal Son of the Gospel parable - only the son has not yet returned to his father’s embrace...

Thus this series of books can be viewed as an account of the struggle between two civilizations: between, on the one hand, the civilization of Orthodox Christianity, which was conceived at the time of Christ, was born under St. Constantine the Great and his Byzantine successors, and was reborn under St. Vladimir the Great and his Kievan, Muscovite and Petersburgian successors, and, on the other hand, the civilization of apostate Western Christianity, which was conceived in the 9th-11th centuries, reached its first peak under the late medieval papacy, and then evolved into a bewildering series of mutants from the Renaissance to the present day. Other civilizations are described only insofar as they impinge on, or have been drawn up into, this titanic global struggle. At the time of writing, western civilization appears to have conquered the world; but it is the faith and hope of the author that the civilization of Orthodox Christianity, which we may call God’s civilization, will make a major comeback before the end of the world.

History can be studied on three levels, which we may call, by analogy with individual human psychology, the levels of *the spirit, the soul and the body*. The lower levels of the soul and the body are the domain studied by 99% of historians, and 100% of contemporary secular historians. It concerns the economic and the geographical factors that appear to govern the rise and fall of nations, together with the passions

⁶ Lieven, *Russia against Napoleon*, London: Penguin, 2016, p. 17.

⁷ Dostoyevsky, Letter to A.N. Maikov, 1870.

and the desires, the ideas and the capacities of both the rulers and the ruled. The higher level of the spirit is that of God's Providence, His direction of history in certain directions, not denying or overruling the lower levels but using them and influencing them. This, of course, presupposes the old-fashioned view that God is an Actor in history. "From Augustine till the eighteenth century," writes Leslie Newbiggin, "history in Europe was written in the belief that divine providence was the key to understanding events." Unfortunately, this attitude went out of fashion from the time of Gibbon and Hume – the Enlightenment abolished belief in Divine Providence. However, it Providence remains, writes Herbert Butterfield, "a living and active agency both in ourselves and in its movement over the length and breadth of history."⁸

This book presupposes that, without violating human freedom, God acts in history in order to give opportunities for repentance to all. In it He administers mercy and justice, albeit only partially; for the fullness of both mercy and justice must await the Day of the Last Judgement, which both brings history to an end and goes beyond history into eternity. It also presupposes that we can see, albeit through a glass darkly, whither we are going, that God lifts the veil, albeit partially, on His judgements.

It follows that the centre of history is multiple: the destiny of each and every human being that has taken or will take part in it. The rise and fall of kingdoms and nations and institutions, the movements of ideas and styles and arts and technologies - all these are real and impinge to a greater or lesser degree on the destinies of individual human souls. But they are not the heart of history, which is *the movement of individual souls to their final end in or outside God*. We know for certain about the salvation (and damnation) of only a fraction of men. These are the saints and the Judases. So quintessential history is, as it were, biographical. For, as Bishop Nikolai Velimirovič writes, "the person is all-important. Everything that is added to the essential person is, from the eternal point of view, of no account; kingly rule and empires, riches and crowns, mechanical devices and cultural refinements, honour and glory – all these are secondary, being of some service but of no intrinsic value to the essential person. A saintly person is a soul conformed to Christ, a renewal brought about to a greater or lesser extent in multitudes of men..."⁹

The historian generalizes from the lives of saints and sinners to the more abstract processes, structures and laws that work in their lives in the context of God's Providence. The story this book tells, therefore, following the terminology of the historian Christopher Clark in *Sleepwalkers*, involves answering not only the *hows* and the *whys* of history but also its *whithers*. Thus, for example, when considering the death of Julius Caesar at the hands of Brutus, we can ask "Why did Brutus do it?", which can be answered in terms both of individual psychology and of the influence of despotic and republican ideas, and "How did he do it?", which can be answered in terms of the details of the senatorial conspiracy.

⁸ Both quotations in John C. Lennox, *Against the Flow. The Inspiration of Daniel in an Age of Relativism*, Oxford: Monarch, 2015, p. 10.

⁹ Velimirovič, Preface to *The Prologue from Ochrid*, part one, Birmingham: Lazarica Press, 1985, p. 4.

But there is third, higher question: “Why did God allow it?” or “Whither was God leading mankind in allowing the murder?” And the answer to that might be along the lines of: “God allowed it in order to bring down the republican system, and bring in the imperial era of Roman history, in order, eventually, to create the Orthodox Christian Autocracy, the New Rome of St. Constantine the Great, as the main protector on earth of His Holy Church.”

Since the distance between the higher-level *whither* questions and the lower-level *how* and *why* questions is great, and adequate answers to the higher-level questions require a long exposition, this work will inevitably be controversial, even among those who share the author’s Orthodox Christian world-view; for theodicy, like eschatology, is among the most controversial branches of theological science. But the attempt is worth making; for unless we believe that history is “a tale full of sound and fury, signifying nothing”, we must try to make some sense of it in its broadest sweep. Only in this way can we become fully conscious and responsible actors in history.

*

It is necessary to distinguish at the beginning between two ways in which God works within history: through the outer kingdom of nature and the inner Kingdom of Grace. When the Lord Jesus Christ ascended into heaven, He declared: “All power hath been given unto Me in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28.18). *All* power means just that: power over both angels and men, both believers and unbelievers, both souls and bodies, both galaxies and sub-atomic particles. Jesus Christ is the supreme King of kings and Lord of lords, “the prince of the kings of the earth” (Revelation 1.5): there is nothing that is not both created and preserved in existence by Him.

Holy Scripture and the Holy Fathers make a particular distinction between the power that Christ wields in the *spiritual* realm, and in the *secular or physical or natural* realm. His power is supreme in both, but is wielded in different ways, corresponding to their different natures. The spiritual realm is the “inner Kingdom”, the Kingdom that is “not of this world”. In it Christ rules in an inner, mystical way those who through faith have voluntarily submitted to His dominion, receiving the grace of Holy Baptism, declaring Him to be their King and their God, and promising to obey all His commandments. The secular realm, on the other hand, is the “outer kingdom”, the kingdom “of this world”, which Christ rules through His providential power.

As St. Theophylact of Bulgaria writes: “‘All is delivered’ to the Son by the Father (Luke 10.22) in that all is to be subject to the Son. There are two ways in which God rules over all. First, He rules over all independently of their own will [the outer kingdom]. And second, He rules over those who willingly subject themselves to Him [the inner Kingdom]. Hence I can say: God is my Master independently of my will, inasmuch as He is my Creator. But He is also my Master whenever I, as a grateful servant, fulfill His will by working to keep the commandments.”¹⁰

¹⁰ St. Theophylact, *The Explanation by Blessed Theophylact of the Holy Gospel according to St. Luke*, House Springs, Mo.: Chrysostom Press, p. 114.

Divine Providence uses the whole of nature, rational and irrational, to attain Its ends. As St. John of Kronstadt says: "The Lord has full respect for nature, which He has created, and for her laws, as the production of His own infinite, most perfect wisdom; this is why He usually accomplishes His will through the medium of nature and her laws; for instance, when He punishes men or blesses them."¹¹

So the kingdom of this world embraces the whole of nature, including *the State*, which is that part of it that is organized by human beings to embrace the whole of society. *The Church*, on the other hand, is God's inner kingdom on earth. Although it has a visible presence and organization on earth, its essence is not of this world, being the Kingdom of Grace.¹²

The inner Kingdom of the Church ministers to the inner needs of man, his salvation for eternity; for "the Kingdom of God is within you". As such it is itself eternal, being the Body of the Eternal Christ. The outer kingdom of the State ministers to man's external needs - food and shelter and security from external enemies. It has its origins in time, and will die in time.

"One must distinguish two Kingdoms of Christ," writes M.V. Zyzykin, "and consequently two of His powers. 'The Son of God, having received human nature into the unity of His Divine Hypostasis, is called a king,' says St. Gregory the Theologian, 'but in one sense He is king as the Almighty and king of both the willing and the unwilling, and in the other, as leading to obedience and submitting to His kingdom those who have willingly recognised Him as king' (quoted in Metropolitan Makary, *Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 2, pp. 178-179). In the first case the kingdom of Christ is without end and all three Persons of the All-Holy Trinity participate in Providence. In the second it will end with the leading of all the true believers to salvation, when Jesus Christ hands over the Kingdom to God and the Father, when He will annul every authority and force, that God may be all in all (I Corinthians 14.18). The power of which it is said: 'all power has been given to Me in heaven and on earth' was *handed over by Him to nobody*. He remains the Highest Teacher (Matthew 23.8), the Highest Priest (Hebrews 7.24-25) and the highest Ruler of His kingdom, the Pastor of pastors (I Peter 5.4).

"The Church is the visible form of the Kingdom of Christ, its realization on earth, whereby it is destined to embrace the world (Mark 16.15-16; Matthew 28.19-20; Luke 24.47; John 20.23). It is the kingdom that is not of this world (John 18.36), the sphere in which the relationship of man with God is developed (Matthew 22.21; Luke 20.25). Church power by its spiritual character does not consist in the mastery and lordship that are characteristic of earthly power, but in service (Matthew 20.25-27; Mark 9.35)."¹³

¹¹ St. John of Kronstadt, *My Life in Christ*.

¹² New Hieromartyr Mark (Novoselov), Bishop of Sergievo, distinguished between the mystical and spotless inner *organism* of the Church and her outer and flawed *organization* (*Pis'ma k Druziam* (Letters to Friends), Moscow, 1994).

¹³ Zyzykin, *Patriarkh Nikon*, Warsaw: Synodal Press, 1931, p. 231.

The relationship between the two kingdoms was highlighted during Christ's trial before Pilate. While recognizing Pilate's power as lawful, the Lord at the same time insists that both Pilate's and Caesar's power derived from God, the true King and Lawgiver. For "you could have no power at all against Me," He says, "unless it had been given to you from above" (John 19.11). These words, paradoxically, both limit Caesar's power, as being subject to God's, and strengthen it, by indicating that it has God's blessing in principle (but not in all its particular manifestations).

Nor is this conclusion contradicted by His words: "My Kingdom is not of this world" (John 18.36), which refer to the inner Kingdom of Grace. For, as St. Theophylact of Bulgaria writes: "He said: 'My Kingdom is not of this world', and again: 'It is not from here', but He did not say: 'It is not in this world and not here.' He rules in this world, takes providential care for it and administers everything according to His will. But His Kingdom is 'not of this world', but from above and before the ages, and 'not from here', that is, it is not composed from the earth, although it has power here".¹⁴ Again, Bishop Nikolai Velimirovič writes: "Let no-one imagine that Christ the Lord does not have imperial power over this world because He says to Pilate: 'My Kingdom is not of this world.' He who possesses the enduring has power also over the transitory. The Lord speaks of His enduring Kingdom, independent of time and of decay, unrighteousness, illusion and death. Some man might say: 'My riches are not on paper, but in gold.' But does he who has gold not have paper also? Is not gold as paper? The Lord, then, does not say to Pilate that He is not a king, but, on the contrary, says that He is a higher king than all kings, and His Kingdom is greater and stronger and more enduring than all earthly kingdoms. He refers to His pre-eminent Kingdom, on which depend all kingdoms in time and in space..."¹⁵

Now God has created three instruments by means of which He steers us towards salvation: nature, the State and the Church. Through nature, including our own human nature, He sustains and protects, chastises and punishes us. Through the State He enables the basic unit of human society, the family, to survive from one generation to another. And through the Church He provides us with the Holy Spirit, Whose acquisition is the aim of our life on earth.

Of these three instruments, the most essential is the Church. For the Church is the vineyard of the Lord; "and the purpose of its husbandmen", as St. Theophan the Recluse says, "has been the same from the beginning of the world - to bring to the Lord the fruit of the vine - saved souls".¹⁶ The State is in essence an auxiliary instrument designed, in the first place, to protect the Church, the only Ark of salvation, from physical destruction, and facilitate her spread, and in the second place to ensure the survival of those non-Christian societies that contain, or will contain, God's elect. As for nature, it certainly plays a very important part in history. Examples include the Flood of Noah, the Black Death of 1348-49, the severe Russian winters of 1812 and 1941.

¹⁴ Blessed Theophylact, *On John* 18.36.

¹⁵ Velimirovič, *The Prologue from Ochrid*, Birmingham: Lazarica Press, 1986, part III, September 30, pp. 395-396.

¹⁶ St. Theophan, *Thoughts for Each Day of the Year*, Platina, Ca.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2010, p. 269.

But it is not on such natural – albeit God-directed or God-permitted - catastrophes that this work will concentrate, but on the central and vital relationship between *the Church and the State*.

In addition to the two kingdoms, there are three major forms of State structure that differ radically in their relation to God and man: *autocracy*, *despotism* and *democracy*. In modern parlance, “autocracy” is virtually equivalent to “absolutism” or “despotism”. But in Orthodox terminology it signifies something different: *monarchy in union with the Church*, respectful of her independence and submitting to her in matters of faith.

Despotism is monarchy that attempts to control the people in all aspects of its life, including the Church, thereby necessarily going against God’s will. For “there are powerful figures,” writes St. Theophan, “who act apart from God’s will and even against it. These can seem great - not in and of themselves, but only because of the great opposition put forth by God’s Providence to efface the evil caused by them.”¹⁷

As for democracy, the dominant form of governance in modern times, it is *the despotism of public opinion*, usually directed from behind the scenes by an oligarchy of powerful actors acting in defiance of the teaching of the Church.

The alternation of despotism and democracy in politics parallels the alternation of zealotry and ecumenism in religion. For the despot is likely to impose his own religion on his subjects with fanatical zeal. As for the democratic leader, anxious as he is to be popular with all his subjects and keep them in peace with each other if at all possible, will allow them to believe what they want – and if what the people want is antichristian, he will allow it and zealously support it.

Autocracy is neither despotic nor democratic. It is the only form of government that is pleasing to God; for only the autocrats, writes St. Theophan, strives to fulfill God’s will for the human race, and so only they “are truly great, for there is much that happens only by God’s allowance.” The Orthodox autocracies guided multitudes of men to the Church and salvation, in spite of the many sins of their rulers. Despotism and democracy are two aspects of the same bipolar disease; in them Providence still guides men to salvation, but *in spite of* rather than *with the help of* governments.

This is not an original thought. Essentially this same thesis was put forward in 1877 by the famous philosopher Vladimir Soloviev, a friend of Dostoyevsky. He identified three basic forces incarnate in his time in Islam, the West and the Russian Autocracy. The first force he defined as “the striving to subject humanity in all its spheres and at every level of its life to one supreme principle which in its exclusive unity strives to mix and confuse the whole variety of private forms, to suppress the independence of the person and the freedom of private life.” Democracy he characterized as being under the dominating influence of the second force, which he defined as “the striving to destroy the stronghold of dead unity, to give freedom everywhere to private forms of life, freedom to the person and his activity; ... the extreme expression of this force is

¹⁷ St. Theophan, *op. cit.* p. 283.

general egoism and anarchy and a multitude of separate individuals without an inner bond." The third force, Autocracy, which Soloviev believed was incarnate especially in the Slavic world, is defined as "giving a positive content to the two other forces, freeing them from their exclusivity, and reconciling the unity of the higher principle with the free multiplicity of private forms and elements."¹⁸

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Following Soloviev and Dostoyevsky, I contend that only autocracy – that is, a monarchy in “symphony” with the True Church of Christ, the One, Holy, Orthodox-Catholic Church - is truly pleasing to God; and that absolutism and democracy represent two sides of a single coin, equal and opposite deviations from the ideal, both of which reject the true God as the ultimate source of all true authority, replacing Him with one man (despotism) or everyman (democracy), in each case divorced from Christ and the Church.

This is not to say that some Orthodox autocrats like Ivan the Terrible may not have been evil men who did harm to the Church, or that some despots and democrats may not have helped the Church. But all this happens through the Providence of God; and through His Providence “all things work together for good for those who love God” (Romans 8.28). Even when the Church suffers terribly, and is severely reduced in power and influence, God is working His justice and His mercy simultaneously, as will be revealed in time: for there is nothing hidden that will not be revealed. On the one hand God the Vine-dresser is pruning His Vine, the Holy Church, purifying it from all impurity through suffering, so that it may bring forth more fruit. And on the other hand, He is working His justice on those who defy His will, casting them like withered branches into the fire; for our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12.29).

The meaning of universal history consists in the struggle between the Orthodox Christian Autocracy, on the one hand, and “the revolution” on the other, a process of apostasy extending over the last three millennia (since the reigns of David and Solomon) that has progressively undermined autocracy through the bipolar sickness of despotism-democracy. The three basic modes of politics have alternated throughout history. Thus despotism alternated with democracy in the prehistoric period before the rise of Israel, and has done so again in the most recent phase of history, since the Russian revolution. In the intermediate period, from King David in about 1000 BC to Tsar-Martyr Nicholas’ abdication in 1917 AD, despotism-democracy alternated with autocracy.

However, although this is the basic “rhythm” of history, it never truly repeats itself; for both unconscious memories and conscious invocations of previous incarnations of autocracy, democracy and despotism interact with, and modify, their reappearance in later ages in an increasingly complex series of combinations.

¹⁸ Soloviev, “Tri Sily” (Three Forces), *Sobranie Sochinenij* (Collected Works), St. Petersburg, 1911-1914, volume I, pp. 228-229.

This alternating process culminated in what appeared to be the final fall of the Orthodox Autocracy in the Russian revolution of 1917. This ushered in what Holy Scripture calls “the last times”, a period of increasing anarchy that will lead in the end to the reign of the most despotic of tyrants, the Antichrist. The only hope for the world consists in the return of autocracy, which is called by St. Paul “that which restrains” the appearance of the Antichrist (II Thessalonians 2.7)...

Since, as the historian Shlomo Sand rightly points out, “the best way to define a concept is to follow its history”¹⁹, I have attempted to explicate the concepts of autocracy, despotism and democracy in the context of a universal history spanning twelve volumes and the whole sweep of history until the end of the Cold War and the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992, when it looked as if the apparent victory of Democracy and Free Trade had brought us to “the End of History”. Needless to say, it hasn’t... But this history has to end somewhere, and this is as good a place to end it as any...

In this first volume, which covers the ancient and medieval periods from the beginning to the Seventh Ecumenical Council, we see the origins and nature of autocracy, despotism and democracy with particular clarity. This was the Age of Faith, in which most men, even pagans and heretics, believed in God and the age to come, and in the important role of the State - almost always a monarchy - in helping to bring men to salvation through God’s Providence. In later volumes we shall see how secular, humanist ideologies undermined this faith and more or less eliminated the role of Providence. These ideologies include Papism, Humanism, Protestantism, liberalism, socialism, democratism and nationalism, which since the French revolution have come to be believed in more fervently than the traditional religions, even in supposedly Christian countries. Nevertheless, underneath these modern ideologies the basic forms of autocracy, despotism and democracy are still discernible. It is my task to make these basic forms visible beneath the flux of history.

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In the writing of this book I am indebted above all to the Holy Fathers. St. Augustine’s massive and famous work, *The City of God*, written after Alaric’s sack of Rome in 410, was probably the first major attempt to see the whole of history in the light of God’s saving Providence, as the history of crime and punishment and redemption. While accepting his basic schema, I have as it were tried to “fill in the blanks” in his project, bringing the narrative up to date - or, at least, as far as 1991, the year of the fall of the Soviet Union.

Among more recent Church writers, I have especially drawn on the works of the Serbian Bishop Nikolai Velimirovič (+1956), and of the Russian Fathers: Patriarch Nikon of Moscow, St. Philaret of Moscow (the supreme theologian of the Orthodox autocracy), St. Ignaty Brianchaninov, St. Theophan the Recluse, St. Ambrose of Optina, Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky, Lev Alexandrovich Tikhomirov, M.V. Zyzykin, Archbishop Seraphim (Sobolev) of Boguchar, St. John Maximovich of Shanghai and San Francisco, St. Theophan of Poltava and Archpriest Lev Lebedev.

¹⁹ Sand, *The Invention of the Jewish People*, London: Verso, 2010, p. 25.

But I have also drawn extensively on many other contemporary writers and historians, both Orthodox and western, which in no way implies that I agree with all their opinions.

Inevitably in a work of this scope I have had to rely to a large extent on sometimes lengthy quotations from secondary sources; only a small minority of chapters (such as those on the history of the Orthodox Church in the twentieth century) have benefited from a detailed study of primary sources. In justification of a similar approach, Francis Fukuyama writes: “While many of the individual chapters will not pass muster with people whose job it is to study particular societies and historical periods in depth, it does seem to me that there is a virtue in looking across time and space in a comparative fashion. Some of the broader patterns of political development are simply not visible to those who focus too narrowly on specific subjects...”²⁰

Another justification of this approach is that this method of extensive quotation was used by “the father of English history”, the Venerable Bede, and in the very first history of the world from a Christian point of view: that of the *Preparation for the Gospel* by Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea (early fourth century).

Aaron P. Johnson writes: “Since 71 per cent of the 15 books of the *Preparation* are direct quotation it would have appeared to have reduced its stature as an intellectual product to a mere anthology and its usefulness has seemed to many to be limited to its preservation of sources that would otherwise be lost to us. Eusebius has thus been seen as a second-rate thinker, whose display of erudition fails because of what are alleged to be loosely connected and poorly ordered sequences of quotations, which comprise inappropriately lengthy fragments from source texts.

“Such a reaction to the *Preparation* is, however, too severe and exhibits a failure to appreciate the ways in which it participated to a broader cultural shift in aesthetic sensibilities, which valued the juxtaposition of traditional units of previous art or literature into new composite wholes evincing what has been called elsewhere a ‘cumulative aesthetic’... Beyond this aesthetic milieu, the *Preparation* placed itself within other ancient discursive contexts that deepen our understanding of its quotational prolixity. The work is a fascinating literary experiment of a character at once creative, wide-ranging, judicious and thoughtful.”²¹

This book aims to be similarly “wide-ranging, judicious and thoughtful”; it will be for the reader to judge whether it has attained that aim. But it must be admitted from the beginning that none of its theses is original, and to that extent I willingly plead guilty to a charge of a lack of creativity. So if this book is called “a mere anthology”, I have no objection. I would only say that an anthology can be useful, even illuminating. And I would contend that my anthology contains some of the finest and most illuminating historical writing ever penned, drawing from the earliest to the most recent historians...

²⁰ Fukuyama, *The Origins of Political Order*, London: Profile, 2012, p. xvi.

²¹ Johnson, *Eusebius*, London: Tauris, 2014, pp. 26, 27.

Although I have tried to be accurate to the best of my ability, it goes without saying that I, and I alone, am responsible for any errors that may have crept into this book, for which I ask forgiveness of all my readers.

Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers, Lord Jesus Christ, our God, have mercy on us! Amen.

*December 24 / January 6, 2021/2022.
The Forefeast of the Nativity of our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ.
137 Woking Road, Guildford, GU1 1QX.*

I. PREHISTORY

1. THE ORIGINS OF THE STATE: (1) FROM CAIN TO NOAH

Concerning the origins of all things, there is only one reliable authority and eyewitness – God. For He is Himself “the Beginning” (John 8.25), Who “in the beginning made the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1.1). God communicated an account of the creation to the holy Prophet and God-seer Moses, the world’s first historian; and all subsequent historians and scientists who try to reconstruct the beginning without heeding or trying to understand the witness of Moses, are bound to go wrong.

St. John Chrysostom, writes: “In the beginning, says Moses, God created heaven and earth. Here we rightly ask why this holy prophet, who lived only several centuries after the creation of the world, tells us the story. Certainly he does not [do it] at random and without serious motives. It is true that in the early days the Lord, who created man, spoke to man himself in the way that he could hear it. Thus he conversed with Adam, then he took again Cain, then he gave his orders to Noah, and then he sat down under the hospitable tent of Abraham. And even when mankind had rushed into the abyss of all vices, God did not break any relationship with him, but he treated men with less familiarity because they had become unworthy through their crimes... Now Moses is the bearer of these letters, and this is the first line: In the beginning, God created heaven and earth.

“But consider, my dear brothers, how great and admirable this holy prophet is... Does he not seem to be saying to us loudly and intelligibly: ‘Have men taught me what I am about to reveal to you? By no means, but He alone who has worked these wonders, leads and directs my tongue to teach them to you.’ I adjure you therefore to impose silence on all human reasoning, and not to listen to this narrative as if it were only the word of Moses. For it is God Himself who speaks to us, and Moses is only His interpreter. The reasoning of man, says the Scripture, is timid, and his thoughts uncertain (Wisdom of Solomon, 9.14). Let us, then, accept the divine word with humble deference, without exceeding the limits of our intelligence, nor curiously seeking what it cannot attain. But the enemies of the truth do not know these rules, and they want to appreciate all the works of the Lord according to the lights of reason alone. Insane! they forget that the mind of man is too narrow to probe these mysteries. And why speak here about the works of God, when we cannot even understand the secrets of nature and the arts?”²²

Thus pure rationalism is excluded when approaching the subject of the origins of man and human society. We must think with humility, “without exceeding the limits of our intelligence”. We must rely on the Word of God alone.

Since this book is a study of history, that is, of man in society, we shall leave the details of the material and animal creations, and the creation of Adam and Eve, and their fall, to the sciences of theology, anthropology and creationism...²³

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²² St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 2 on Genesis*.

²³ See V. Moss, *The Theology of Eros*, lulu.com, 2021.

In Paradise, before the Fall, there was no such thing as political authority, no dominion of man over man. There was the mild and loving headship of Adam over Eve; but this was hardly comparable to political power... It is only after the Fall, in the words of the Lord to Eve after the fall: "He [Adam] will rule over you" (Genesis 3.16), that we hear the first note of authority of man over man.²⁴ As Metropolitan Anastasy (Gribanovsky) writes: "Political power appeared on earth only after the fall of the first people. In Paradise the overseer's shout was not heard. Man can never forget that he was once royally free, and that political power appeared as the quit-rent of sin."²⁵ Adam's dominion over Eve, a symbol of God's dominion over creation, and of Christ's over the Church, was only a mild and embryonic form of power relationship. It was infused by love and involved no compulsion. Moreover, if the man was the master, the woman was the mistress, sharing in his dominion over the rest of creation, insofar as both man and woman were made in the image of God the Master.²⁶

Thus St. John Chrysostom writes: "From the beginning He made one sovereignty only, setting the man over the woman. But after that our race ran headlong into extreme disorder, He appointed other sovereignties also, those of Masters, and those of Governors, and this too for love's sake."²⁷ Again, political inequality, according to St. Maximus the Confessor, is the result of the fall. All men were initially created equal, but the fall fragmented mankind into self-serving individuals who needed political authority to stop them destroying each other. In response to the question why God allows kings to rule over men, St. Maximus writes that kingship is a response to evil. It is the king's responsibility to maintain order and justice so that men would not devour each other as large fish do small fish.²⁸

The origins of the Church are in Paradise. For Paradise is a real place that was located near the modern Iranian city of Tabriz, according to British archaeologist David Rohl. But this real place is the real origin of another reality - the Church, of which it is the symbol. For "this is our God, providing for and sustaining His beloved inheritance, the Holy Church, comforting the forefathers who had fallen away through sin with His unlying Word, laying the foundation for Her already in Paradise."²⁹

The State's foundation is also in Paradise - but after the Fall, which indicates its inferiority to the Church.

²⁴ As S.V. Troitsky writes, "according to the Bible the basis of every authority of man over man is to be found in the words of God about the power of the husband over the wife: 'he will rule over you'" (*Filosofia khristianskago Braka* (The Philosophy of Christian Marriage), Paris: YMCA Press, p. 178).

²⁵ Metropolitan Anastasy, *Besedy s sobstvennym serdtsem* (Conversations with My Own Heart), Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1998, p. 159.

²⁶ Compare the ancient Russian custom of calling bridegroom and bride "prince" and "princess", and the ancient Roman custom of calling married couples - *only* married couples - "dominus" and "domina", which is reflected in the modern Greek "kyrios" and "kyria". See V. Moss, *The Theology of Eros*, Rollinsford, NH: Orthodox Research Institute, 2010, pp. 9-16.

²⁷ St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 34 on I Corinthians*.

²⁸ St. Maximus, *Epistle 10.449D*, 452B. Cf. John Boojamra, "Original Sin According to St. Maximus the Confessor", *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 20 (1976), p. 26.

²⁹ *The Order for the Sunday of Orthodoxy*.

The State is a product of the fall of man from the primeval Paradise-Church, and would not have been necessary if Adam had not sinned. It is necessary because “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6.23), and the political order can, if not conquer death (for, since the Fall, every man has been sentenced to death by God in that “dust thou art, and unto death shalt thou return” (Genesis 3.19)), at any rate slow down its spread, enabling man to *survive*, both as an individual and as a species. For to survive he needs to unite in communities with other men, forming families, tribes and, eventually, states.

The process of politicization is aided by the fact that man is social by nature, and comes into the world already as a member of a family. So, contrary to the teaching of some, it is not only out of fear that men unite into large groups, but out of the natural bonds of family life. In this sense the state is simply the family writ large; for, as Aristotle says, “the king is in the same relationship with his subjects as the head of a family with his children”; just as the family has a father as its head, so the state has a king as its head. So the king’s rule in the State is a reflection of the father’s rule in the family, which in turn reflects the rule of God “the Father, from Whom every fatherhood in heaven and on earth is named” (Ephesians 3.15).

The family, writes St. Augustine, is “the beginning, or rather a small component part, of the city, and every beginning is directed to some end of its own kind, and every component part contributes to the completeness of the whole of which it forms a part. The implication is that domestic peace contributes to the peace of the city, for an ordered harmony of those who live together in a house contributes to the ordered harmony concerning authority and obedience obtaining among citizens.”³⁰

Again St. Philaret of Moscow says: “The family is older than the State. Man, husband, wife, father, son, mother, daughter and the obligations and virtues inherent in these names existed before the family grew into the nation and the State was formed. That is why family life in relation to State life can be figuratively depicted as the root of the tree. In order that the tree should bear leaves and flowers and fruit, it is necessary that the root should be strong and bring pure juice to the tree. In order that State life should develop strongly and correctly, flourish with education, and bring forth the fruit of public prosperity, it is necessary that family life should be strong with the blessed love of the spouses, the sacred authority of the parents, and the reverence and obedience of the children, and that as a consequence of this, from the pure elements of family there should arise similarly pure principles of State life, so that with veneration for one’s father veneration for the tsar should be born and grow, and that the love of children for their mother should be a preparation of love for the fatherland, and the simple-hearted obedience of domestics should prepare and direct the way to self-sacrifice and self-forgetfulness in obedience to the laws and sacred authority of the autocrat...”³¹

³⁰ St. Augustine, *The City of God*, XIX, 16.

³¹ Metropolitan Philaret, *Sochinenia* (Works), 1848 edition, volume 2, p. 169. Cf. St. Ignaty Brianchaninov: “In blessed Russia, in accordance with the spirit of the pious people, the Tsar and the fatherland constitute one whole, just as in a family the parents and their children constitute one whole.” (*Sobranie Pisem* (Collected Letters), Moscow, 2000, p. 781)

Bishop Dionysius (Alferov) writes: "Both the familial and the monarchical systems are established by God for the earthly existence of sinful, fallen man. The first-formed man, abiding in living communion with God, was not subject to anyone except God, and was lord over the irrational creatures. But when man sinned and destroyed the Divine hierarchy of submission, having fallen away from God, he became the slave of sin and the devil, and as a result of this became subject to a man like himself. The sinful will of man demands submission for the limitation of his own destructive activity. This Divine establishment has in mind only the good of man – the limitation of the spread of sin. And history confirms that whatever the defects of monarchy, they cannot compare with the evil brought upon men by revolution and anarchy."³²

St. Philaret writes: "The State is a union of free moral beings, united amongst themselves with the sacrifice of part of their freedom for the preservation and confirmation by the common forces of the law of morality, which constitutes the necessity of their existence. The civil laws are nothing other than interpretations of this law in application to particular cases and guards placed against its violation."³³ To the extent that the laws are good, that is, in accord with "the law of morality", and executed firmly and impartially, the people can live in peace and pursue the aim for which God placed them on the earth – the salvation of their souls for eternity. To the extent that they are bad, and/or badly executed, not only is it much more difficult for men to pursue the supreme aim of their existence: the very existence of future generations is put in jeopardy.

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One of the main functions of the State is the punishment of crime. If the State did not exist, crime would not be punished and society would swiftly degenerate into anarchy. The difference between sin and crime is that sin is transgression of the Law of God only, whereas crime is transgression both of God's Law and of the law of the State. Adam and Eve's original transgression of the Law of God was a sin that was punished by their expulsion from Paradise and from intimate communion with God, which inevitably, since God is Life, – meant death. The second sin, Abel's murder of his brother Cain, was, in accordance with all legal codes, a crime as well as a sin. But since there was as yet no State in the proper sense of the word, it was God Himself Who imposed the punishment. Man had already been punished by expulsion from Paradise and communion with God, so now the punishment was different: expulsion from the society of men: "a fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth" (Genesis 4.12). The first criminal became the first outlaw.

Although no man before Christ was able to receive again Divine grace and innocence in the measure that Adam had enjoyed them, men were able to reverse the Fall to this extent: that where Adam had shown unbelief in the word of God, they

³² Hieromonk Dionysius, Priest Timothy Alferov, *O Tserkvi, Pravoslavnom Tsarstve i Poslednem Vremeni* (On the Church, the Orthodox Kingdom and the Last Time), Moscow, 1998, p. 15.

³³ Metropolitan Philaret, quoted in Lev Regelson, *Tragedia Russkoj Tserkvi, 1917-1945* (The Tragedy of the Russian Church, 1917-1945), Paris: YMCA Press, 1977, pp. 24-25.

showed *faith*. Faith in the Providence of God, and hope in His promises, was characteristic of all the Patriarchs. The very first words of Eve after the expulsion from Eden express this faith: "And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the Lord" (Genesis 4.1). Thus Eve saw the hand of God in the birth of Cain. According to one interpretation of the Hebrew text, what she actually said was: "I have gotten the God-man", by which she expressed her belief that Cain was that Redeemer, "the seed of the woman" (Genesis 3.15), whom the Lord had promised while she was still in the Garden – a mistake, but one based on faith. And in his murder of Abel she no doubt saw the fulfilment of His word that she would bring forth in sorrow (Genesis 3.16).

The same faith was manifest in her immediate descendants, as the Apostle Paul witnessed: "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witnesses that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and by it he being dead yet speaketh. By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him; for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith. By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God." (Hebrews 11.4-7)

The faith of the Patriarchs expressed itself in other ways that show their spiritual kinship and prototypical relationship with the New Testament Church - for example, in the offering of sacrifices well-pleasing to God. In this respect, the relationship between Abel and Cain is typical of the relationship between the True Church and the false; for while the sacrifice of the True Church, like Abel's, is accepted by God, the sacrifice of the heretics and schismatics, like Cain's, is rejected. Indeed, according to the Theodotion text of this Scripture, "the Lord kindled a fire over Abel and his sacrifice, but did not kindle a fire over Cain and his sacrifice".

On which the Venerable Bede comments: "By fire sent down from heaven He accepted Abel's victim, which we read is very often done when holy men offer. But he held back from consuming Cain's sacrifice by fire. For the Apostle also seems to signify this when he says, 'By faith Abel offered a greater sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying over his gifts' (Hebrews 11.4). Therefore God 'testified to the gifts' of Abel through fire, receiving them from the heavens, by which testimony of the Apostle we are also taught that the victim of Abel was made acceptable to God through the devotion of his faith, and on the contrary we should understand that Cain was condemned because he did not serve his Creator with integral faith."³⁴

³⁴ The Venerable Bede, *Homilies on Genesis*.

In his famous work *The City of God*, St. Augustine traced the beginning of The City of God to Abel and his brother Seth. But the city of man takes its origin from Cain. The Cainites are separated "from the Church in which God reveals His grace-filled presence".³⁵ Thus Abel, according to Augustine, means 'Sorrow' and Seth - 'Resurrection', prefiguring the Death and Resurrection of Christ.³⁶ And in the time of Seth's son Enos it is said that "men began to call upon the name of the Lord" (Genesis 4.26 (Hebrew text)) because the sons of the resurrection live in hope, calling upon the name of the Lord. The name Cain, on the other hand, means 'Possession', and that of his son Enoch, the first city-builder - 'Dedication', indicating that the sons of perdition aim to possess the cities of this earth, being completely dedicated to their pleasures, like heavy metal (Jabal and Tubal-Cain invented metal instruments.)

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So the State began with Cain. And since the first form of state is the city, *polis* in Greek, we may say that Cain, as the first city-builder (Genesis 4.17), was the first *politician*.³⁷ He was also the first murderer, for he murdered his brother Abel... The fact that the first State was founded by the first murderer has cast a shadow over Statehood ever since... On the one hand, the State exists in order to curb sin in its crudest and most destructive aspects. To that extent state power is *in principle* of God (Romans 13.1), that is, established by Him "Who rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He will" (Daniel 4.17). For, as St. Irenaeus of Lyons writes: "God imposed upon mankind the fear of man as some do not fear God. It was necessary that they be subject to the authority of men, and kept under restraint by their laws whereby they might attain to some degree of justice and exercise mutual forbearance through dread of the sword..."³⁸

³⁵ However, the City of God is not to be identified *precisely* with the Earthly Church because the Church contains both good and bad. Nor is the City of Man to be identified *precisely* with the State because the State contains both good and bad)....

³⁶ St. Gregory Palamas writes: "The name Seth can be interpreted to mean "resurrection" , or rather "a rising up from", which actually refers to the Lord, who promises and gives everlasting life to those who believe in Him. How appropriate a figure Seth was to represent Christ! Seth was born to Eve, as Eve herself says, "instead of Abel" (Genesis 4:25), whom Cain envied and murdered, whereas the Virgin's son Christ, came to the human race instead of Adam, whom the prince and patron of evil killed out of envy. Seth, however, did not raise up Abel, as he was merely a prefiguration of the resurrection, but our Lord Jesus Christ resurrected Adam, for He is the true life and resurrection of mankind (*cf.* John 11:25), through whom Seth's descendants were deemed worthy, in hope, of divine adoption, being called sons of God (*cf.* Genesis 6:24)" (*Homily* 52).

³⁷ What was this city? David Rohl (*Legend: The Genesis of Civilization*, London: Random House, 1998, pp. 198-200) suggests three alternatives from three neighbouring Mesopotamian cities: 1. Erech, known as Uruk, Unuk or Unug in Sumerian. The latter may be the same name as Enoch, Cain's son, after whom the city was named according to the usual reading of Genesis 4.17. A later ruler of Erech-Uruk-Enoch was Nimrod, the builder of the Tower of Babel. 2. Eridu, which may be the same name as Jared, Cain's grandson, after whom the city was named according to another reading of Genesis 4.17. 3. Ur, whose original name may have been Uru-Unuki or 'City of Enoch'. This was, of course, the "Ur of the Chaldees" that Abraham was ordered to leave.

³⁸ St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, V, 24; quoted in Fr. Michael Azkoul, *Once Delivered to the Saints*, Seattle: Saint Nectarios Press, 2000, p. 219.

Again, St. John Chrysostom says: "Since equality of honour often leads to fighting, He has made many governments and forms of subjection."³⁹

Again, St. Gregory the Great writes that, although men are created by nature equal, God has ordained that "insofar as every man does not have the same manner of life, one should be governed by another."⁴⁰

On the other hand, the greatest crimes known to man have been committed precisely by the State, and to that extent it is an instrument of evil, permitted but not blessed by God – for God sometimes "sets over it the lowest of men" (Daniel 4.17). Moreover, from the time of Cain and at least until Saul and the kings of Israel, all states known to man were not only the main agents of mass murder and of slavery, but also of the worship of demons, to which they compelled their citizens.

St. Augustine could see the Providence and Justice of God working even in the most antichristian states - including Rome.⁴¹ This is why the history of Church-State relations from Cain to Constantine is a history of almost perpetual conflict. Until David and the foundation of the state of Israel, the people of God – that is, the Church – was not associated with any state, but was constantly being persecuted by contemporary pagan rulers, as Moses and the Israelites were by Pharaoh. And this symbolises a deeper truth: that the people of God, spiritually speaking, have *never* lived in states, but have always been stateless wanderers, desert people, as it were; "for here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come" (Hebrews 13.14) - that is, the City of God, the new Jerusalem (Revelation 21-22).

The people who reject God are spiritually speaking citizens of the kingdoms of this earth, rooted in the earth of worldly cares and desires. That is why they like to build huge urban civilizations that enable them to satisfy these desires to the maximum. And that is why, as we have seen, Cain and his descendants were the creators not only of cities, but also of all the cultural and technological inventions that make city life so alluring.

For, as New Hieroconfessor Barnabas, Bishop of Pechersk, writes: "In its original source culture is the fruit, not of the fallen human spirit in general, but a consequence of its exceptional darkening in one of the primordial branches of the race of Adam... The Cainites had only one aim - the construction of a secure, carnal, material life, whatever the cost. They understood, of course, that the Seed of the Woman, the Promised Deliverer from evil that was coming at the end of the ages, would never appear in their descendants, so, instead of humbling themselves and repenting, the Cainites did the opposite: in blasphemous despair and hatred towards God, they gave themselves over irrevocably to bestial passions and the construction on earth of their kingdom, which is continually fighting against the Kingdom of God."⁴²

³⁹ St. Chrysostom, *Homily 23 on Romans*, 1.

⁴⁰ St. Gregory, *Morals on the Book of Job*, XXI, 15, 22, 23; cf. Azkoul, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

⁴¹ St. Augustine, *The City of God*, XIX, 15.

⁴² Bishop Barnabas, *Pravoslavie (Orthodoxy)*, Kolomna: New Golutvin monastery, 1995, pp. 128, 129.

Cain's descendant Lamech killed two men instead of one (and had two wives instead of one). This illustrates the iron law of history: the sin that is not repented of unfailingly multiplies, bringing in its wake a multiplication in suffering according to the Justice of God. Lamech repented, and therefore stopped the onslaught of suffering in his own person. But the race of man as a whole did not repent of their sins. Between Adam and Noah only one man, Enoch, "walked with God" and was therefore found worthy to be taken out of this vale of tears and even to escape death.

And so, just as sin multiplied, so did its punishment, and the Flood came and destroyed the whole of humanity and animal life with the exception of Noah and his sons and those who entered with them into the Ark. And Paradise, which before had been at least visible from the earth, was taken completely away from it...

The Cainites eventually became the overwhelming majority of mankind, and the first-century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus writes that they corrupted even most of the Sethites: "This posterity of Seth continued to esteem God as the Lord of the universe, and to have an entire regard to virtue, for seven generations; but in process of time they were perverted... But Noah was very uneasy at what they did; and being displeased at their conduct, persuaded them to change their disposition, and their actions for the better: but seeing they did not yield to him, but were slaves to wicked pleasures, he was afraid they would kill him, together with his wife and children, and those they had married; so he departed out of the land."⁴³

Since cities were built soon after the fall of man, we must presume that there was some kind of political organization in the antediluvial world. Archaeological research carried out in the last few decades at Varna in Bulgaria and Tell-Hamoukar in Syria has discovered remains of urban civilizations of the fifth and fourth millennia BC (i.e. older than the Flood) with evidence of social stratification.⁴⁴ In this period, the earth was filled with sin and criminality, and the Holy Spirit departed from men (Genesis 6.3). So God decided to wipe out human civilization, the civilization of Cain, and even the whole of the animal kingdom, and start again. Hence the Flood of Noah, a universal catastrophe that destroyed all life except Noah and his family and the animals that were with him in the Ark, who represent the Church that survives the destruction of the world.

So Statehood in its first historical examples was antichristian and was destroyed by the just judgement of God.

Archbishop Andrew of Rockland writes of Noah: "It was revealed to him by God that there would be a world-wide flood which would destroy all those who remained in ungodliness. But for the salvation of those who would remain in godliness, those who still preserved all that is God's in honor, God commanded Noah to build an ark. And Noah began to build an ark, and at the same time to call the people to repentance.

"But the sky was clear, not a cloud; the whole of nature, as if indifferent to the sins

⁴³ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, I, 3.

⁴⁴ See Sky History's documentary "Civilization Lost".

of men, remained solemnly silent. Men heard Noah, but shrugged their shoulders and went away. The building of the ark was finished, but only the family of Noah entered it. They entered the ark, not yet to escape the flood, but to escape the ungodliness which was everywhere... And finally the rain came; the water began to rise and inundate everything. Now the frightened people hastened to the ark, but the doors closed by themselves, and no one else was able to enter..."

The historicity of the Flood was witnessed by the Lord Himself and the Apostle Peter (Matthew 28.38-39; II Peter 3.5-6), as well as by the folklore of almost all human races.⁴⁵ Recent archaeological research has discovered the Ark itself in the mountains of eastern Turkey. After many false findings, this seems to be the genuine Ark, and is now recognized as such officially by the Turkish government.⁴⁶

According to the Greek Septuagint text of the Bible, the oldest Biblical text and the only one officially recognized by the Holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church⁴⁷, the world was created in 5508 BC⁴⁸, and the Flood took place in 3289 BC. It covered the whole earth; only one part of the globe remained untouched – Paradise. For as St. Ephraim the Syrian wrote:

*With the eye of my mind
I gazed upon Paradise.
The summit of every mountain
Is lower than its summit;
The crest of the flood
Reached only its foothills,
These it kissed with reverence
Before turning back
To rise above and subdue the peak
Of every hill and mountain.
The foothills of Paradise it kisses,
While every summit it buffets.⁴⁹*

The Flood, combined with the volcanic eruptions that accompanied it, altered the climate and geography of the earth, making fossils of the animals that were killed by it. It also marked a new beginning for the human race. From Noah and his three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth and their wives came all the nations of man. Spreading south from the mountains of Ararat, where the ark came to rest, Noah's descendants came to Sumeria (Iraq), and built the world's first postdiluvial civilization.

⁴⁵ See Fr. Seraphim Holland, "Why I became a Creationist", *Orthodox Christianity*, May 9, 2016.

⁴⁶ See the film at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nL_RXCEeWjo&feature=share.

⁴⁷ Some of the reasons why the Greek Septuagint must be preferred to the Hebrew Masoretic text are well explained in the video "Were the Pyramids Built before the Flood (Masoretic text vs. Original Hebrew",

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VI1yRTC6kGE&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR0dQWdUTXtCJS1h04JUQXeE_P-If9OTEI7la0ISsD94B4biRruuwTvqmqYo.

⁴⁸ Fr. Seraphim Rose, *Genesis, Creation and Early Man*, Platina, Ca.: St. Herman of Alaska Press, 2000, p. 236.

⁴⁹ St. Ephraim, *Hymns on Paradise*, 1.4; in Andrew Louth (ed.), *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture I. Genesis 1-11*, Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, p. 141.

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Immediately after the flood, Noah offered a sacrifice to God of all the clean beasts that entered with him into the ark. For God accepts as sacrifices in the Church only those whose lives have been cleansed by repentance. "Then shalt Thou be pleased with a sacrifice of righteousness, with oblation and whole-burnt offerings" (Psalm 50.19).

In return, God blessed Noah and his sons, and established a covenant with him whereby He promised never to destroy the earth again by a flood. "And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between Me and the earth..." (Genesis 9.12-13) St. Victorinus of Petau wrote: "The rainbow is called a bow from what the Lord spoke to Noah and to his sons, that they should not fear any further deluge in the generation of God, but fire. For thus He says: 'I will place my bow in the clouds, that you may now no longer fear water, but fire.'"⁵⁰

A judgement of fire came quite soon, with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah; but the main reference here is to the judgement and cleansing by fire that will come upon the whole world at the end of time (II Peter 3.10-12). This is the first of many Old Testament covenants between God and the people of God, but the last that relates to the *whole* of mankind, irrespective of their faith or lack of it. For the flood was a judgement inflicted on the whole of mankind when it was not yet divided into different nations and languages.

God then commanded Noah to establish a system of justice that is the embryo of statehood as it should be: "The blood of your lives will I require: at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made He man" (Genesis 9.5-6).

Commenting on these words, Protopriest Basil Boshchansky writes that they "give the blessing of God to that institution which appeared in defence of human life" – that is, the State.⁵¹

"The word 'require' is a judicial term, God appearing as a judge who exacts a strict and severe penalty for infraction of a sacred law. If a beast kills a man, the beast must be put to death (note also Exodus 21.28). If a man kills another man (wilfully and culpably, it is assumed), then he also must be put to death by 'every man's brother'. This latter phrase is not intended to initiate family revenge slayings, of course, but rather to stress that all men are responsible to see that this justice is executed. At the time these words were first spoken, all men indeed were blood brothers; for only the three sons of Noah were living at the time, other than Noah himself. Since all future

⁵⁰ St. Victorinus, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*.

⁵¹ Boshchansky, "Zhizn' vo Khriste" ("Life in Christ"), in *Tserkovnaia Zhizn'* (Church Life), NN 3-4, May-August, 1998, p. 41.

people would be descended from these three men and their wives, in a very real sense all men *are* brothers, because all were once in the loins of these three brothers. This is in essence a command to establish a formal system of human government, in order to assure that justice is carried out, especially in the case of murder. The authority to execute this judgement of God on a murderer was thus delegated to man."⁵²

But not to every man. The authority to judge can only be given to one whom God has appointed to judge – that is, to rulers. We see this in the story of Moses, who went out and saw two Hebrews quarrelling. He said to the one who did the wrong, “Why are you striking your companion?”, who replied: “Who made you a prince and a judge over us?” (Exodus 2.13-14). And indeed, Moses had not at that time received the power to judge Israel. Only when he had fled into the wilderness and been given power by the true King of Israel, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, was he accepted by the Israelites as having true authority. Only then was he able to deliver his people from Pharaoh, who was imposing his despotic rule over them...⁵³

As the revolutionary-turned-monarchist Lev Alexandrovich Tikhomirov writes, the idea that “the state is ‘the monopoly of violence’ completely coincides with the Christian attitude to the state. The complete removal of violence from private right and its exclusive concentration in the hands of the state means that violence in personal interests is unconditionally removed and forbidden. But it is allowed only in those hands in which there is in principle no personal interest, but only the interest of justice. With the monopolization of violence in the hands of the state violence is released only to support justice.”⁵⁴

That is why political authority *as such and in principle* is good and established by God: “there is no authority that is not from God” (Romans 13.1). This is true especially of the political leaders of the people of God, for whom the Lord established a special sacrament, the anointing to the kingdom: “I have found David My servant, with My holy oil have I anointed him” (Psalms 88.19). Even certain pagan kings were given an invisible anointing to enable them to rule justly and help the people of God, such as Cyrus of Persia (Isaiah 45.1).

⁵² Henry Morris, *The Genesis Record*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1976, p. 224.

⁵³ E. Kholmogorov, “O Khristianskom tsarstve i ‘vooruzhennom narode’” (“On the Christian Kingdom and ‘the Armed People’”), *Tserkovnost’* (Churchness), N 1, 2000, pp. 35-38.

⁵⁴ Tikhomirov, *Religioznie-philosophskie osnovy istorii* (The Religio-Philosophical Foundations of History), Moscow, 1997, p. 268.

2. THE ORIGINS OF THE STATE: (2) NIMROD'S BABYLON

Moses writes: "Cush [the son of Ham] fathered Nimrod, who was the first potentate on earth. He was a mighty hunter in opposition to Yahweh, hence the saying, 'Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter in opposition to Yahweh'. The mainstays of his empire were Babel, Erech and Accad, all of them in the land of Shinar. From that country he went forth to Assyria and built Nineveh, that vast city, and Caleb." (Genesis 10.8-12).⁵⁵ The British Egyptologist David Rohl identifies Nimrod with the Sumerian king Eamerukar ("ea" means "god", from which comes "Yah" and "Yahweh", and "kar" means "hunter").⁵⁶

The Jerusalem Targum explains: "He was powerful in hunting and in wickedness before the Lord, for he was a hunter of the sons of men, and he said to them, 'Depart from the judgement of the Lord, and adhere to the judgement of Nimrod!' Therefore it is said: 'As Nimrod is the strong one, strong in hunting, and in wickedness before the Lord.'" The Targum of Jonathan tells us: "From the foundation of the world none was ever found like Nimrod, powerful in hunting, and in rebellions against the Lord."

According to St. Jerome, "Nimrod was the first to seize despotic rule over the people, which men were not yet accustomed to."⁵⁷

For, as Josephus writes, "it was Nimrod who excited them to such an affront and contempt of God; he was the grandson of Ham, the son of Noah, a bold man, and of great strength of hand. He persuaded them not to ascribe it to God, as if it were through his means that they were happy, but to believe that it was their own courage that procured their happiness. He also gradually changed the government into tyranny, seeing no other method of turning men from the fear of God, but to bring them into a constant dependence on his own power."⁵⁸

One-man rule in antiquity was of two kinds: *God-hating Despotism or Tyranny* and *God-loving Autocracy*. In the post-diluvial world, despotism appeared first – in Nimrod's Babylon, the mystical fount and root of all antichristian despotic power down the ages.

⁵⁵ The Chaldean paraphrase of I Chronicles 1.10 reads: "Cush begat Nimrod, who began to prevail in wickedness, for he shed innocent blood, and rebelled against Jehovah."

⁵⁶ Rohl, *From Eden to Exile*, London: Arrow Books, 2002, p. 59. In another work, Rohl writes: "Look at what we have here. Nimrod was closely associated with Erech – the biblical name for Uruk – where Enmerkar ruled. Enmerkar built a great sacred precinct at Uruk and constructed a temple at Eridu – that much we know from the epic poem 'Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta'. The Sumerian King List adds that Enmerkar was 'the one who built Uruk'. Nimrod was also a great builder, constructing the cities of Uruk, Akkad and Babel. Both Nimrod and Enmerkar were renowned for their huntsmanship. Nimrod, as the grandson of Ham, belongs to the second 'generation' after the flood (Noah-Ham-Flood-Cush-Nimrod) and this is also true of Enmerkar who is recorded in the Sumerian King List as the second ruler of Uruk after the flood (Ubartutu-(Utnapishtim)-Flood-Meskiagkasher-Enmerkar). Both ruled over their empires in the land of Shinar/Sumer." (*Legend: The Genesis of Civilization*, London: Random House, 1998, p. 216).

⁵⁷ St. Jerome, *Hebrew Questions on Genesis*, 10.9.

⁵⁸ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, book 1, chapter 4, paragraph 2.

With the scattering of the peoples, God-hating despotism spread from Babylon to all the developed pagan States throughout the world – to Egypt, the Indus valley, Greece and Rome, China, Central and South America – before the rise of Athenian democracy introduced a new kind of government. Despotic rulers recognize their power as absolute, unlimited by any other power in heaven or on earth. Democratic rulers recognized their power as limited by no power in heaven, but only the people on earth, who thereby becoming the gods of democracy. Autocracy, on the other hand, recognizes its power to be neither unlimited, as in Despotism, nor limited by the people, as in Democracy, but as limited by the Law of God alone as interpreted by God’s faithful priesthood in the Church. Autocracy first appeared in embryonic form in the pilgrim Israelite State led by Moses and the Judges, and then more clearly in the Israelite State founded by Samuel and Saul and David.⁵⁹ Sometimes pagan despotic rulers allowed themselves to be led by the True God. Such was the Pharaoh who venerated Jacob and Joseph, and Cyrus the Persian when he ordered the Temple in Jerusalem to be rebuilt, and Darius the Mede when he rejoiced in the salvation of Daniel and ordered his slanderers to be cast into the lions’ den instead. In those moments, we can say that despots behaved, albeit fleetingly, as autocrats.

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Josephus continues: Nimrod “also said he would be revenged on God, if he should have a mind to down the world again. For that he would build a tower too high for the waters to be able to reach. And so (by that method) he would avenge himself on God for destroying their forefathers.” As St. John the Romanian writes, “After the flood, people again turned away from God’s ways; and having turned away, they again began to expect a flood. Therefore they decided to build the Tower of Babel, that is, the Babylonian fortress. They wanted to build it up higher than the clouds, so that water would no longer be a threat to them. For this madness God confused their tongues, and they weren’t able to do any of this.”⁶⁰

Rohl believes that the Tower of Babel was dedicated to the god Ea, transcribed into Hebrew as Jahweh; that is, to the true God. But perhaps he transferred his allegiance from God to Satan. For according to other sources, Nimrod built the Tower to Marduk (or Merodach, “brightness of the day”), with whom Nimrod and the later kings of Babylon may have identified themselves.⁶¹ Thus N. Smart writes: “If you drop the first consonant of Nimrod's name and take the others M, R, D you will have the basic root of the god of Babylon, whose name was Marduk, and whom most scholars identify with Nimrod. In the Babylonian religion, Nimrod (or Marduk) held a unique

⁵⁹ Some monarchist authors – for example, Archbishop Seraphim (Sobolev), – identify the term “autocracy” (*samoderzhavie*) with all forms of one-man, monarchical government (*yedinerzhavie*). However, I have found it useful to make a distinction between monarchy and autocracy for reasons explained in the introduction. *The Economist* describes Putin’s Russia as “an autocracy, not a dictatorship” (August 29 – September 11, 2010, p. 17) – that is, a not very severe despotism. But autocracy in the sense used in this book is different in kind from despotism insofar as it implies a knowledge of, and obedience to, God, that despotism does not possess (or want to possess).

⁶⁰ St. John of Neamts, the new Chozebite, “Today’s Tower of Babel”, *Orthodox Christianity*, October 3, 2017, <http://orthochristian.com/106787.html>.

⁶¹ I.R. Shafarevich, *Sotzializm kak iavlenie Mirovoj Istorii* (Socialism as a Phenomenon of World History), Paris: YMCA Press, 1977.

place. His wife was Semiramis. (In Cairo, Egypt, the Semiramis Hotel is named after this woman.) Marduk and Semiramis were the ancient god and goddess of Babylon. They had a son whom Semiramis claimed was virgin-born, and they founded the mother and child cult. This was the central cult of ancient Babylon, the worship of a mother and child, supposedly virgin-born. You can see in this a clever attempt on the part of Satan to anticipate the genuine Virgin Birth and thus to cast disrepute upon the story when the Lord Jesus would later be born in history. This ancient Babylonian cult of the mother and child spread to other parts of the earth. You will find it in the Egyptian religion as Isis and Osiris. In Greece it is Venus and Adonis, and in the Hindu religion it is Ushas and Vishnu. The same cult prevails in various other localities. It appears in the Old Testament in Jeremiah where the Israelites are warned against offering sacrifices to 'the Queen of Heaven.' This Queen of Heaven is Semiramis, the wife of Nimrod."⁶²

We may presume that it was in this transfer of allegiance from the True God to a false god – perhaps himself - that constituted Nimrod's real rebellion against the true God... Human self-deification is the root motive of despotism...

The Babylonian state religion was a mixture of nature-worship and ancestor-worship introduced by Nimrod. Thus the Babylonians worshipped the stars and planets, and practised astrology as a means of discovering the will of the gods. "They believed," writes Smart, "that they could predict not merely by earthly methods of divination, but also by a study of the stars and of planets and the moon".⁶³ One of the purposes of the temples or towers or ziggurats, whose remains can still be seen in the Iraqi desert, may have been as platforms from which to observe the signs of the zodiac. The great spring festival of the chief god, Marduk/Nimrod, took place at Babylon, at the splendid temple with ascending steps called in the Bible the Tower of Babel.

Nimrod's Babylon, like all the early urban civilisations, was characterised by, on the one hand, a despotic, totalitarian state structure, and, on the other hand, a pagan system of religion. Both the governmental and the priestly hierarchies culminated in one man, the king-priest-god. Thus N.N. Alexeyev writes: "The cult of the god-king was confessed by nations of completely different cultures. Nevertheless, at its base there lies a specific religious-philosophical world-view that is the same despite the differences of epochs, nations and cultural conditions of existence. The presupposition of this world-view is an axiom that received perhaps its most distinct formulation in the religion of the Assyro-Babylonians. The Assyro-Babylonians believed that the whole of earthly existence corresponds to heavenly existence and that every phenomenon of this world, beginning from the smallest and ending with the greatest, must be considered to be a reflection of heavenly processes. The whole Babylonian world-view, all their philosophy, astrology and magic rested on the recognition of this axiom. The earthly king was as it were a copy of the heavenly king, an incarnation of divinity, an earthly god."⁶⁴

⁶² Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind*, London: Fontana, 1971, p. 299:

⁶³ Smart, *op. cit.*, p. 299.

⁶⁴ Alexeyev, "Khristianstvo i Idea Monarkhii" ("Christianity and the Idea of Monarchy"), *Put'* (The Way), N 6, January, 1927, p. 660.

According to Hebrew tradition, the word “Babylon” comes from the Hebrew word meaning “confusion”, or “mixing up”. “Ironically,” writes Juan Luis Montero Fenollos, “this interpretation was itself a confusing of languages. In Akkadian, the root of the words Babylon and Babel does not mean to mix: it means ‘gateway of the gods’.”⁶⁵ In either case, the name is appropriate; for the Tower of Babel was begun as a gateway of the gods, an ascent to heaven, in order to “quarrel” with heaven, but ended up as the cause of the confusion of languages and the dispersal of the nations around the world...

“If, before the flood,” write two Catacomb Church nuns, “the impious apostates were the Cainites, the descendants of the brother-murderer, then after the flood they became the sons of the lawless Ham. The Hamites founded Babylon, one of the five cities of the powerful hunter Nimrod (Genesis 10.8). ‘Nimrod, imitating his forefather, chose another form of slavery...’ (St. John Chrysostom, *Word 29 on Genesis*). Nimrod invented a form of slavery at which ‘those who boast of freedom in fact cringe’ (*ibid.*). He rebelled against God, against the Divine patriarchal order of governing families and governing peoples. The times of Nimrod were characterized by the appearance of the beginnings of godless monarchism and future imperialism...”⁶⁶

“Now the multitude,” writes Josephus, “were very ready to follow the determination of Nimrod, and to esteem it a piece of cowardice to submit to God; and they built a tower, neither sparing any pains, nor being in any degree negligent about the work: and, by reason of the multitude of hands employed in it, it grew very high, sooner than anyone could expect; but the thickness of it was so great, and it was so strongly built, that thereby its great height seemed, upon the view, to be less than it really was. It was built of burnt brick, cemented together with mortar, made of bitumen, that it might not be liable to admit water. When God saw that they acted so madly, he did not resolve to destroy them utterly, since they were not grown wiser by the destruction of the former sinners [in the Flood]; but he caused a tumult among them, by producing in them diverse languages, and causing that, through the multitude of those languages, they should not be able to understand one another. The place wherein they built the tower is now called Babylon, because of the confusion of that language which they readily understood before; for the Hebrews mean by the word Babel, confusion...”⁶⁷

The date of the Flood according to the Septuagint text of the Bible is 3289 BC. This is a little earlier than the earliest kingdoms of Babylonia and Egypt, and also, not coincidentally, the approximate date of the origins and dispersal of the Indo-European languages according to the latest linguistic research...⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Fenollos, “Envy of the World: Babylon”, *National Geographic History*, January/February, 2017, p. 43.

⁶⁶ “Taina Apokalipticheskogo Vavilona” (The Mystery of the Apocalyptic Babylon), *Pravoslavnaiia Zhizn’* (Orthodox Life), 47, N 5 (545), May, 1995, pp. 14-16.

⁶⁷ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, I, 4.

⁶⁸ Will Chang, Chundra Cathcart, David Hall and Andrew Garrett, “Ancestry-constrained Phylogenetical Analysis Supports the Indo-European Steppe Hypothesis”, *Language*, vol. 91, no. 1, 2015.

For, having destroyed the Tower of Babel and divided the languages, God scattered them in different directions across the face of the earth, which explains both the existence of different nations speaking different languages and the fact that all the primitive nations were pagan, worshipping a multiplicity of gods that often displayed a marked kinship with each other and the original Babylonian religion.

What was the meaning of the scattering of the nations? St. Paul provides the clue in his sermon to the Areopagus in Athens: "He made of one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, although he is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17.26-27). Thus on the one hand all nations have a single nature and origin, being "of one blood". On the other hand God has determined that they should live in different groups or nations in different places all over the world, so that the one God should be glorified in different ways and in different tongues throughout the world – but also so that the evil that arises in one people should not quickly or easily be communicated to the rest of the human race.

It was God's plan that all the nations, though sunk in paganism and separated geographically and linguistically through Nimrod's folly, should seek for the One True God and worship Him together "with one heart and lips". Moreover, this aim was in fact achieved with founding of the Church of all nations at Pentecost in 33 AD. For then the division and scattering of the nations in the time of Nimrod was reversed: "Once, when He descended and confounded the tongues, the Most High divided the nations. But when He divided the tongues of fire, He called all men into unity. And with one accord we glorify the All-Holy Spirit."⁶⁹

Nevertheless, for a time – more precisely, until the coming of Christ and the preaching of the Apostles – God tolerated paganism; for "in bygone generations He allowed all nations to walk in their own ways" (Acts 14.16). But even in those pre-Christian times "He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14.17). Moreover, as St. Augustine says, there is "a God-shaped hole" in the soul of every man, exactly fashioned to accommodate the One True God. And so now the apostles "preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, Who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and all things that are in them" (Acts 14.15)...

⁶⁹ *Pentecostarion*, Pentecost, kontakion.

3. THE ORIGINS OF THE STATE: (3) PHARAONIC EGYPT

Babylon's first "colony" in a cultural and religious sense was Egypt (Mizraim), whose religion, governmental structure and architectural style in many ways recalled those of Babylon. Indeed, Egypt presented pagan absolutism in a hardly less "pure" form than Babylon. The first king of Egypt, or pharaoh, Menes, ruled in about 3100 BC. The earliest of the pyramids (which were burial places for the pharaohs), the step pyramid of Saqqara, was built in about 2450 BC. Egypt therefore represents, with Babylon, the oldest urban civilization in world history since the Flood. (As discussed above, the Cainites built urban civilizations before the Flood.)

Now Egyptian religion was a very complicated mixture of creature-worship and ancestor-worship. Thus Diodorus Siculus writes: "The gods, they say, had been originally mortal men, but gained their immortality on account of wisdom and public benefits to mankind, some of them having also become kings; and some have the same names, when interpreted, with the heavenly deities... Helios [Re], they say, was the first king of the Egyptians, having the same name with the celestial luminary [the sun]..."⁷⁰

"Although Egypt had a pantheon of gods," writes Phillips, "the principal deity was the sun god Re (also called Ra), for whose worship a massive religious centre had grown up at Heliopolis, some fifty kilometres to the north of Memphis. It was believed that Re had once ruled over Egypt personally but, wearied by the affairs of mankind, had retired to the heavens, leaving the pharaohs to rule in his stead. Called 'the son of Re', the pharaoh was considered a half-human, half-divine being, through whose body Re himself could manifest. [Thus a typical letter to a pharaoh began: "To my king, my lord, my sun-god"⁷¹] However, as the falcon god Horus was the protector of Egypt, the king was also seen as his personification. By the Third Dynasty, therefore, Re and Horus had been assimilated as one god: Re-Herakhte. Depicted as a human male with a falcon's head, this composite deity was considered both the god of the sun and the god of Egypt, and his incarnation on earth was the pharaoh himself. Only the king could expect an individual eternity with the gods, everyone else could only hope to participate in this vicariously, through their contribution to his well-being."⁷²

The Egyptian Pharaoh was, according to John Bright, "no viceroy ruling by divine election, nor was he a man who had been deified: he was god – Horus visible among his people. In theory, all Egypt was his property, all her resources at the disposal of his projects"⁷³ – and these, of course, were on the most massive scale. "The system was an absolutism under which no Egyptian was in theory free,... the lot of the peasant must have been unbelievably hard."⁷⁴ Thus according to Herodotus, the largest of the pyramids, that of Pharaoh Khufu, was built on the labour of 100,000 slaves. It is far larger than any of the cathedrals or temples built by any other religion in any other

⁷⁰ Quoted in Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel*, II, 1.

⁷¹ Bernhard W. Anderson, *The Living World of the Old Testament*, London: Longman, 1967, p. 45, note.

⁷² Phillips, *op. cit.*, pp. 35-36.

⁷³ Bright, *A History of Israel*, London: SCM Press, 1980, p. 39.

⁷⁴ Bright, *op. cit.*, pp. 39, 40.

country, and it has recently been discovered to contain the largest boat found anywhere in the world.⁷⁵

Pharaoh was the mediator between heaven and earth. Without him, it was believed, the world would descend into chaos; he guaranteed that the sun shone, the Nile inundated the land and the crops grew. Hence the huge care the Egyptians devoted to his burial and mummification after death: it was a matter of the life and death, not only of the Pharaoh, but of his people.

As David Silverman writes: "The king's identification with the supreme earthly and solar deities of the Egyptian pantheon suggests that the king in death embodied the duality that characterized the ancient Egyptian cosmos. The deified ruler represented both continuous regeneration (Osiris) and the daily cycle of rebirth (as Re). In their understanding of the cosmos, the ancient Egyptians were accustomed to each of their deities possessing a multiplicity of associations and roles. It was a natural extension of this concept for them to view the deified Pharaoh in a similar way."⁷⁶

All the dead Pharaohs, with the exception of the "disgraced" Hatshepsut and the "heretic" Akhenaton (see below), were worshipped in rites involving food offerings and prayers. Even some non-royal ancestors were worshipped; they were called "able spirits of Re" because it was thought that they interceded for the living with the sun god. The pyramids and the tombs in the Valley of the Kings were all built, at colossal cost and effort, with only one religious aim: to ensure the Pharaoh's happiness in the life after death.

Another important Egyptian god was Osiris. Osiris was at times considered the eldest son of the earth god **Geb** and the sky goddess **Nut**, as well as being brother and husband of **Isis**, with **Horus** being considered his posthumously begotten son. In the Old Kingdom (2686 - 2181 BC) the pharaoh was considered a son of the sun god Ra who, after his death, ascended to join Ra in the sky. Osiris was the judge of the dead and the underworld, and the agency that granted all life, including sprouting vegetation and the fertile flooding of the Nile River. He was described as "He Who is Permanently Benign and Youthful" and the "Lord of Silence". The kings of Egypt were associated with Osiris in death – as Osiris rose from the dead so they would be in union with him, and inherit eternal life through a process of imitative magic. ⁷⁷

The history of ancient Egypt is a story of unparalleled stability and faithfulness to tradition, even immobility. For, as E.H. Gombrich writes, it lasted "longer than any empire the world has ever known: nearly three thousand years [from Menes to Cleopatra]. And [the Egyptians] took just as much care as they did with their corpses, when they preserved them from rotting away, in preserving all their ancient traditions over the centuries. Their priests made quite sure that no son did anything his father had not done before him. To them, everything old was sacred.

⁷⁵ Barbara Watterson, *Ancient Egypt*, Stroud: Sutton Publishing Company, 1998, pp. 18-19.

⁷⁶ Silverman, *Ancient Egypt*, London: Piatkus, 1998, pp. 18-19.

⁷⁷ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Osiris>.

“Only rarely in the course of all that time did people turn against this strict conformity. Once was shortly after the reign of King Cheops, about 2100 BC, when the people tried to change everything. They rose up in rebellion against the pharaoh, killed his ministers and dragged the mummies from their tombs: ‘Those who formerly didn’t even own sandals now hold treasures, and those who once wore precious robes go about in rags,’ the ancient papyrus tells us. ‘The land is turning like a potter’s wheel.’ But it did not last long, and soon everything was as strict as before. If not more so.

“On another occasion it was the pharaoh himself who tried to change everything. Akhenaton was a remarkable man who lived around 1370 BC. He had no time for the Egyptian religion, with its many gods and mysterious rituals. ‘There is only one God,’ he taught his people, ‘and that is the Sun, through whose rays all is created and sustained. To Him alone you must pray.’

“The ancient temples were shut down, and King Akhenaton and his wife moved into a new palace. Since he was utterly opposed to tradition, and in favour of fine new ideas, he also had the walls of his palace painted in an entirely new style. One that was no longer severe, rigid and solemn, but freer and more natural. However, this didn’t please the people at all. They wanted everything to look as it had always done for thousands of years. As soon as Akhenaton was dead, they brought back all the old customs and the old style of art. So everything stayed as it had been, for as long as the Egyptian empire endured...”⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Gombrich, *A Little History of the World*, London: Yale University Press, 2008, pp. 15-16.

II. ISRAEL AND THE GENTILES

4. FROM THEOCRACY TO AUTOCRACY: (1) ABRAHAM

The first state-like structure originating from God and blessed by Him was the extended family of Abraham. It can be called a state, albeit in embryonic form, because it was in obedience to a sovereign authority, the father of the family, Abraham, and because under his leadership it fought wars against other states, notably the kings of Babylon. It also had continuity, in that after Abraham's death the sovereign authority was passed on to his son Isaac and his grandson Jacob (or Israel).

Abraham's family-state constituted *a remnant*, the remnant of saved humanity that had survived three terrible moral falls with global consequences: that of Adam and Eve, that of Cain and his descendants, and that of Nimrod and the tower-builders. Each of these falls had been followed by a fitting and catastrophic punishment of the guilty: that of Adam by the death both of him and all his descendants, that of Cain and his descendants by the universal Flood, and that of Nimrod by the scattering of the tower-builders around the world and their mutual incomprehension. And yet a tiny but holy remnant was preserved in each case: that of Seth and his descendants, that of Noah and his descendants, and that of Abraham and his descendants...

The deification of the ruler of the City of Man in the person of Nimrod, and the building of the tower of Babel at his command, was, of course, a direct challenge to the truly Divine Ruler of the City of God. "However," writes Archpriest Lev Lebedev, "not all of humanity agreed to take part in the building of the tower. Our Russian *Tale of Burning Years* (The Chronicle of Nestor), relying on the chronicle of George Armatoll, says that righteous Heber ("from him came the Hebrews") refused to take part in the undertaking. And the Armenian and some other chronicles add that certain Japhethites also refused, because of which a war took place between them and Nimrod."⁷⁹

It is from this tiny remnant, descendants of Shem and Japheth, that a new beginning was made according to a new principle that was racial as well as religious - although, as we shall see, this racial principle admitted of many exceptions and was always intended to be only a preparation for the re-admittance of all nations into the Church. This new beginning was made with Abraham, a descendant of Noah's first son Shem and Shem's great-grandson Heber, who was the father of Peleg, which means "division", since it was in his time that the Tower of Babel was destroyed and the peoples divided and scattered across the earth. Heber and Peleg survived that catastrophe, and they alone preserved the original, pre-diluvial language.

Abraham was therefore the father of the Hebrews. And yet he was not the father of the Hebrews only, even in a purely genetic sense. His first son Ishmael is traditionally considered to be the father of the Arabs. And his grandson through Isaac, Esau, was the father of the Edomites. In the Apostle Paul's allegorical interpretation, Isaac represents the Church, and Ishmael - the unbelieving Jews enslaved to the Law (Galatians 3.16).

⁷⁹ Lebedev, "The Universal Babylon", *Pravoslavnaiia Zhizn'*, 53, N 5 (640), May, 2003, p. 16.

God commanded Abraham to depart from «Ur of the Chaldees» (Genesis 11.34; Acts 7.4)⁸⁰ and go to an unknown country, where he would live “in tents, while he looked forward to a city founded, designed and built by God” (Hebrews 11.10). For the worshippers of God, who wish to be at peace with heaven, cannot co-exist in peace with the worshippers of man, who seek to “quarrel with heaven”: better to be stateless and homeless than citizens of such a state. They must build their own state that is not founded on the worship of man, but of God.

Abraham built only the foundations of that state: its completion would be the work of Moses, David and Solomon. But he did beget the nation that received the faith that inspired that state - the kingdom of Israel. And that nation would be exceedingly fertile: as the Lord said to him when he seemed condemned to infertility: «I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you» (Genesis 17.6).

Abraham’s story, recounted in chapters 12 to 22 of Genesis, is that of a man who obeys no man or state or institution; his only king is God. Like every true son of God, he is free of men, and obeys them “only lest we offend them” (Matthew 17.27). So truly independent is he that we read of no priest or king to whom he defers. The only exception to this was Melchizedek, the mysterious king-priest of Salem, who blessed him on his return from the slaughter of the Babylonian kings. However, Melchizedek was the exception that proved the rule; for he was more like God than man, being both the first and the last man in the history of the People of God lawfully to combine the roles of king and priest⁸¹. Indeed, he was the first recorded true king and “priest of the Most High God”, who was called “Possessor of heaven and earth” (Genesis 14.18). This title shows, according to St. Paul (Hebrews 7.3), that he was the type, not of any merely human king, but of Christ God, the Supreme King and Chief High Priest.⁸² Like Christ in His Divine generation, he was “without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remaining a priest continually” (Hebrews 7.3). Again like Christ at the Last Supper, Melchizedek offers Abraham bread and wine, which is why Christ is called “a priest after the order of Melchizedek” (Hebrews 7.17). His offering is a figure of Christ’s offering of His Body and Blood under the appearance of bread and wine.⁸³

⁸⁰ Or, according to Ian Wilson, it may have been Urfa in Turkey (*The Bible Is History*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999, pp. 22-23). However, St. Stephen’s witness that Abraham “came out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran” (Acts 7.4, Genesis 11.31-12.4) appears to settle the question in favour of the Ur in Iraq, while confirming that he went from there to Haran in what is now Turkey.

⁸¹ Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow, *Zapiski rukovodstvuiuschaia k osnovatel’nomu razumeniu Knigi Bytia* (Notes Leading to a Fundamental Understanding of the Book of Genesis), Moscow, 1817, p. 78. An exception may be found in the history of the tiny kingdom of Montenegro in the Ottoman period.

⁸² Melchisedek’s combining the roles of king and priest may also signify the Divine origin of both offices. See Protopriest Valentine Asmus, “O monarkhii i nashem k nej otnoshenii” (“On Monarchy and our Relationship to It”), *Radonezh*, N 2 (46), January, 1997, p. 4.

⁸³ In fact, Mar Jacob considered it to be no figure of the Eucharist but the Eucharist itself: “None, before the Cross, entered this order of spiritual ministration, except this man alone. Beholding the just Abraham worthy of communion with him, he separated part of his oblation and took it out to him to mingle him therewith. He bore forward bread and wine, but Body and Blood went forth, to make the Father of the nations a partaker of the Lord’s Mysteries.” (“A Homily on Melchizedek”, *The True Vine*, Summer, 1989, no. 2, p. 44)

So in being blessed by Melchizedek, the “king of peace”, Abraham is blessed by Christ Himself, the true King of Peace.⁸⁴

The proverbial faith of Abraham, which merited for him the title "father of the faithful", was manifested, first of all, in his leaving Ur and setting out unquestioningly for an unknown Promised Land. Nor was this simply a physical departure from the land of his fathers: it also involved breaking with their pagan beliefs. For even his father “served other gods” (Joshua 24.2).

Secondly, it was manifested in his believing God's promise that he would be a father of nations, in spite of the fact that he was very old and his wife was barren.

And thirdly and most strikingly, it was manifested in his continuing to believe in this promise even after God ordered him to kill Isaac.

Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow writes: “The journey of Abram from the land of his birth to the promised land is an image of the journey of *self-abnegation*, by which man must pass from the condition of damaged nature to the condition of Grace.

“Every believer has the same commandment from God as the father of the faithful – to leave all and renounce himself. ‘He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me,’ says the Lord (Matthew 10.37).

“Every believer is also promised ‘the blessing of Abraham in Jesus Christ’ (Galatians 3.14). ‘There is no one who would leave home, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My sake and the Gospel’s, who would not receive now, in this time and with persecutions, one hundred times more: houses and brothers and sisters (and fathers) and mothers and children, and in the age to come eternal life’ (Mark 10.29,30).

“The believer who leaves his own will does God’s will with the same unlimited obedience with which Abram ‘went, as the Lord told him’. God speaks to us in nature, in the Holy Scriptures, in the conscience, in the adventures of life ruled by His Providence. ‘To go, as the Lord tells’ is the rule in which is included the whole path of those seeking the coming heavenly city.

“Like Abram, the believer comes closer to God to the extent that he leaves himself behind; and like Abram, he thanks Him for His gifts of Grace. He will receive them only so as to return them to their origin with faithfulness: and wherever and whenever he receives them, he offers them as a sacrifice to God.”⁸⁵

Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac is cited by the Apostle James as the paragon "work of

⁸⁴ Basil Willow writes: “According to St Isaac the Syrian, after the flood, the bones of Adam were given to young Melchizedek who took them to the place of the future Golgotha & there set up a shrine where he performed the sacrifice with leavened bread & wine. Hence Melchizedek is a priest foreshadowing Christ’s Communion.” (*Facebook*)

⁸⁵ St. Philaret, *Zapiski*.

faith", whereby "faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made manifest" (James 2.22). It shows that true morality is based, not on humanitarian kindness, but on absolute, unquestioning obedience to the word of God. Moreover, the sacrifice of Isaac is the clearest Old Testament prefiguring of the central act of the New, in which "God so loved the world that He gave His Only-Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3.16). And it merited for Abraham the first clear foreshadowing of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity - the visitation of the three angels speaking as one God at the oak of Mamre (Genesis 18).

St. Gregory Palamas writes: "Believing in God is different from believing God. To believe God is to believe His promises to us as sure and true, but to believe in Him is to have a right understanding of Him. Both are necessary for us and we must speak correctly in both respects, in such a way that people with correct understanding can be confident that we are faithful before the God in Whom our faith is directed and that, being faithful, we shall be justified by Him. 'Abraham believed God,' it says, 'and it was counted unto him for righteousness' (Romans 4.3; Genesis 15.6; cf. Galatians 3.6; James 2.23). He had received a promise from god that in his seed, that is, in Isaac, all the tribes of Israel would be blessed (Genesis 17.16; cf. 26.3-5, 24). Then he was commanded by God to sacrifice Isaac (Genesis 22.1), through whom the promise could be fulfilled (Genesis 17.21; 21.12), while he was still a child. Without contradicting he, the father, was hastening on his way to become his son's murderer while at the same time regarding the promise concerning his son as infallibly sure (Genesis 22.1-18).

"Do you see what sort of faith brings justification? But Christ also promised us that we would inherit eternal life, pleasure, glory and the kingdom, while then He commanded us to be poor, to fast, to live in lowliness and affliction, to be ready to die and to crucify ourselves together with our passions and desires (cf. Galatians 5.24). If therefore we eagerly do these things while at the same time believing God's promise to us, then we shall have really believed God in the way Abraham did, and it will be counted to our righteousness."⁸⁶

St. Gregory takes Abraham's heroic work of faith as his main illustration of the difference between philosophical or scientific knowledge and the super-rational knowledge of faith: "I believe that our holy faith is, in a certain manner, a vision of our heart which goes beyond all sensation and all thought, for it transcends the mental powers of our soul. I mean by 'faith', not the Orthodox confession, but being unshakably established upon it and upon the promises of God. For how through faith do we see those things which are promised for that unending age which is to come? By the senses? But faith is 'the basis of things hoped for' (Hebrews 11.1); and there is no way in which that which is to come and is hoped for may be seen by the senses; which is why the Apostle added: 'the proof of things not seen'. Is there, then, some mental power which will see the things hoped for? But how could there be if they 'have not gone up into the heart of man' (I Corinthians 2.9)? What, then? Do we not

⁸⁶ St. Gregory Palamas, Homily 8, "On Faith".

see through faith the things that have been promised by God, since they transcend all sensual and mental activity? But all those who from the beginning of time sought the heavenly fatherland through works died, according to the Apostle, 'without having obtained the promises' (Hebrews 11.39), but saw and greeted them from afar. There is, then, both a vision and an understanding of the heart beyond all mental activity... Faith is this supra-mental vision, while the enjoyment of that which is believed in is a vision surpassing that vision...

"But let us dwell a little longer on faith and on the Divine and joyous contemplation which it procures for Christians: faith, the vehicle of the power of the Gospel, the life of the Apostles, the justification of Abraham, from which all righteousness begins, in which it ends, and by which 'every righteous man shall live' (Romans 1.7), while he who withdraws from it falls away from the Divine goodwill, for 'without faith it is impossible to please God' (Hebrews 11.6); faith, which ever frees our race from every deception and establishes us in the truth and the truth in us, from which no-one will separate us, even if he takes us for madmen, we who through the true faith have gone out into an ecstasy beyond reasoning, witnessing both by word and deed that we are not 'being carried away by every wind of doctrine' (Ephesians 4.14), but possess that unique knowledge of the truth of the Christians and profess the most simple, most Divine and truly unerring contemplation. Let us then leave the future for the time being, let us consider the supra-mental contemplation which faith gives of those things which have happened from the beginning: 'It is by faith that we recognize that the ages were formed by the word of God, so that those things which are seen did not come to be from those which appear' (Hebrews 11.3). What mind could take in that all this which has come to be has come from that which is absolutely non-existent, and that by a word alone? For that which is accessible to the mental powers does not at all transcend them. Thus the wise men of the Greeks, understanding that no corruptible thing passes into non-existence, and no existent thing comes out of non-existence, believed that the world was without beginning or end. But the faith, surpassing the conceptions which come from a contemplation of created things, united us to the Word Who is above all and to the simple, unfabricated truth; and we have understood better than by a proof that all things were created, not only out of non-existence, but also by the word of God alone. What is this faith? Is it a natural or supernatural power? Supernatural, certainly. For 'no-one can come unto the Father except through the Son' (Matthew 11.27; John 10.9), Who has placed us above ourselves and turned us to unity with the Father Who gathers us together. Thus Paul 'received grace for obedience to the Faith' (Romans 1.5). Thus 'if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved' (Romans 10.9). Thus those who have not seen and believed are more blessed than those who have seen and believed in Him Who lives after death and is the Leader of eternal life (John 20.29; Acts 3.15). For through the super-cosmic eyes of faith they have seen and venerated that which the eye has not believed it can see and which reason cannot conceive.

"This is the victory which has conquered the world, even our faith' (I John 5.4). Paradoxical though it may be to say so, this faith is that which, in different ways and at different times, re-established the world which had previously fallen. Then it transformed it into a more Divine state, placing it above the heavens, and making a

heaven out of the earth. What preserved the seeds of the second world? Was it not the faith of Noah? What made Abram Abraham and the father of many nations, like the sand and the stars in number? Was it not faith in the promises which at that time were incomprehensible? For he held his only-begotten heir ready for slaughter and, O wonder!, never ceased to believe that through him he would have many children. What, then? Did not the old man appear to be a fool to those who see things by reason? But the final issue showed, through the grace of God, that his faith was not folly but a knowledge surpassing all reasoning."⁸⁷

Thus the new beginning for the Church which God created in Abraham He created in the *faith* of Abraham, which is the faith *in Christ*. For the Lord Himself said: "Abraham rejoiced to see My Day: he saw it, and was glad" (John 8.56). And Abraham's vision of Christ is precisely the vision of Christ *as the pre-eternal God*: "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8.58).

Indeed, Abraham's whole life is a model of the Christian life of faith demonstrated by works performed for God's sake. Purified and strengthened through a series of trials, in each of which he is called to obey God by performing a work of faith, in Abraham we see "faith working together with his works, and by works faith being made perfect" (James 2.22). These works of faith include: *exile from his native land* (Chaldea), *separation from his relatives* (Lot), *struggle against the enemies of the faith* (the four kings headed by the king of Babylon), *struggle against his fallen desires* (Pharaoh, Hagar), *reception of the sacraments* (circumcision as a figure of baptism, and bread and wine as a figure of the Eucharist), *charity* (rescuing his brother Lot and his household, the hospitality given to the Angels at the Oak of Mamre) and, finally, *the complete sacrifice of the heart to God* (the sacrifice of Isaac). The supreme demonstration of Abraham's faith was his belief that "God was able to raise [Isaac] from the dead" (Hebrews 11.19), which was a type of the Resurrection of Christ.

Since the foundation of the Church is the faith of Abraham, for Isaac his God is "the God of Abraham", while for Jacob He is "the God of Abraham and Isaac", and for all succeeding generations He is "the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob", or, more simply, "the God of our fathers". Thus our faith is an historical faith; we distinguish it from other faiths as being the faith of our fathers, and our God is distinguished from other gods as being the God of our fathers, and in particular the God of our father Abraham. And that is why we preserve the faith of our fathers in all things; for as the Scripture says: "Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set" (Proverbs 22.28).

As we have seen, Abraham believed in God's promise that from his seed would come *the Seed*, in Whom all the nations of the world would be blessed (Genesis 12.3). St. Paul explains that this Seed is Christ the Messiah and Saviour of the world, Jesus Christ (Galatians 3.16). In other words, as St. Theophan the Recluse writes, "the blessing given to him for his faith would be spread to all peoples, but not because of Abraham himself or all of his descendants, but because of One of his descendants – *his Seed*, Who is Christ; through Him all the tribes of the earth would receive the

⁸⁷ St. Gregory, *Triads*.

blessing.”⁸⁸ Thus while Abraham is the father of the Jewish race, the chosen people of the Old Testament, the new beginning that God made in Abraham related not only to the Jews but to all peoples of all ages. In fact, the nation which Abraham founded was not defined genetically, but by faith; it was a nation of believers, of those who believe in Christ; for, as St. Paul says, "they which are of the faith, they are the children of Abraham" (Galatians 3.7) - which faith the majority of the Jews of Christ's time did not share (John 8.33-58).

God's promises to Abraham and his descendants, known as *the Abrahamic Covenant*, prefigure the whole future history of the relationship between the City of God and the City of Man. They are so important that they are proclaimed in at least eight different versions, or "drafts" (Genesis 12.1-3, 12.7, 12.13,14-17, 14.18-20, 15.1-19, 16.10-12, 17.1-22, 22.17-18), not to speak of their repetition to his son Isaac and his grandson Jacob. Each successive draft makes the Covenant a little more precise and far-reaching, in response to Abraham's gradual increase in spiritual stature.

The promises relate to the two peoples who descend from the two sons of Abraham, Isaac and Ishmael. Isaac is the true heir of Abraham, the freeborn son of Sarah, who inherits the promises and blessings given to Abraham in full measure, being also a man of faith of whom it is also said that in his Seed, Christ, all the nations of the earth shall be blessed (Genesis 26.3-4). Ishmael is the son of a slave, Hagar, and does not inherit those blessings, although he does receive the promise that his heirs will be strong and numerous.

Now according to the popular conception, Isaac is the ancestor of the Jews, and Ishmael - of the Arab peoples. Certainly, the description of Ishmael's race as "wild" and warlike that is given by the Angel to Hagar (Genesis 16.10-12) appears to correspond closely, as St. Philaret of Moscow points out, to the character and life-style of the Arabs until Mohammed, who were constantly fighting and lived "in the presence of their brethren" - that is, near, or to the east of, the descendants of Abraham from his other concubine, Hetturah - the Ammonites, Moabites and Idumeans.⁸⁹

A similar interpretation appears to stand true for the next generation, to Isaac's sons Jacob and Esau, who are said to correspond to the Jews (Jacob), on the one hand, and the Idumeans (Esau), on the other. This fits very well with the Lord's words to Isaac's wife Rebecca, that "two nations are in thy womb..., and the one people shall be stronger than the other people, and the elder [Esau] shall serve the younger [Jacob]" (Genesis 25.23); for the Jews, from Jacob to David to the Hasmonean kings, almost always showed themselves to be stronger than the Idumeans and often held them in bondage. It was only towards the Coming of Christ that an Idumean, Herod the Great, reversed the relationship by killing the Hasmoneans and becoming the first non-Jewish king of Israel - the event which, according to the prophecy of Jacob, would usher in the reign of the Messiah (Genesis 49.10).

⁸⁸ St. Theophan, *Tolkovanie na Poslanie k Galatam* (Interpretation of the Epistle to the Galatians), 3.16.

⁸⁹ St. Philaret, *Zapiski*, part 2, p. 98.

But to return to the spiritual interpretation of the Apostle Paul: the two peoples – or two covenants, as he calls them – represent, not racial, but *spiritual* categories: “Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar – for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.” (Galatians 4.22-26).

In other words, Isaac stands for *the Christians*, both Jewish and Gentile, while Ishmael stands for *the Jews who reject Christ*. For the Christians, – and this includes the Jews before Christ who believed in His Coming, – become through faith in Christ the freeborn heirs of the promises made to Abraham and Isaac, whereas the Jews who remain slaves to the Law of Moses and refuse to believe in Christ, show themselves to be the children of the bondwoman, and therefore cannot inherit the promises together with the Christians.

Moreover, it can be said of the Jews, as of the men of Ishmael’s race, that ever since they rejected Christ they have become “wild”, with their hands against all, and the hands of all against them. They are always striving for “freedom” but remaining voluntarily in slavery to their Talmudic Law.⁹⁰ It may therefore be that the age-old phenomenon of mutual enmity between the Jews and the Gentiles, of anti-semitism and anti-Gentilism, is prophesied in these verses.

That Isaac is the ancestor of Christ and the Christians is indicated also by his choice of wife, Rebecca, who signifies the Bride of Christ, the Church. Rebecca is freeborn, being of the family of Abraham, and is an even closer image of the Church than Sarah; for she is Isaac's only wife as the Church is Christ's only Bride. Moreover, the Holy Fathers see in the story of the wooing of Rebecca a parable of Christ's wooing of the Church, in which Eleazar, signifying the Holy Spirit, conveyed Isaac's proposal to her at the well, which signifies Baptism, and gave her gifts of precious jewels, signifying the gifts of the Holy Spirit bestowed at Chrismation.⁹¹ Ishmael, on the other hand, receives a wife from outside the holy family – from Egypt. And she is chosen for him, not by a trusted member of the family, but by his mother, the slave-woman Hagar.

The relationship between Isaac and Ishmael is almost exactly mirrored in the relationship between Isaac’s two sons, Jacob and Esau. Thus St. Philaret comments on the verse: “The Lord hath chosen Jacob unto Himself, Israel for His own possession” (Psalms 134.4), as follows: “This election refers in the first place to the person of Jacob, and then to his descendants, and finally and most of all to his spirit of faith: for ‘not all [coming from Israel] are of Israel’ (Romans 9.6). The two latter elections, that is, the election of the race of Israel, and the election of the spiritual Israel, are included in the first, that is, in the personal election of Jacob: the one prophetically, and the other figuratively.

⁹⁰ St. Philaret, *Zapiski*, p. 100.

⁹¹ St. Ambrose of Milan, *On Isaac, or the Soul*.

“The reality of this prefiguration in Holy Scripture is revealed from the fact that the Apostle Paul, while reasoning about the rejection of the carnal, and the election of the spiritual Israel, produces in explanation the example of Jacob and Esau (Romans 9), and also from the fact that the same Apostle, in warning the believing Jews against the works of the flesh, threatens them with the rejection of Esau (Hebrews 12.16, 17).

“And so Jacob is an image, in the first place, of the spiritual Israel, or the Christian Church in general, and consequently Esau, on the contrary, is an image of the carnal Israel.

“Esau and Jacob are twins, of whom the smaller overcomes the larger: in the same day the spiritual Israel was born together with the carnal, but, growing up in secret, is finally revealed and acquires ascendancy over him.

“Isaac destines his blessing first of all to Esau, but then gives it to Jacob: in the same way the carnal Israel is given the promises from the Heavenly Father, but they are fulfilled in the spiritual [Israel].

“While Esau looks for a hunting catch in order to merit his father’s blessing, Jacob, on the instructions of his mother, to whom God has revealed his destinies, puts on the garments of the first-born and seizes it before him. While the carnal Israel supposes that by the external works of the law it will acquire the earthly blessing of God, the spiritual Israel, with Grace leading it, having put on the garments of the merits and righteousness of the First-Born of all creation, ‘is blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ’ (Ephesians 1.3).

“The sword of battle and continuing slavery is given to the rejected Esau as his inheritance. And for the carnal Israel, from the time of its rejection, there remained only the sword of rebellion, inner enslavement and external humiliation.

“The rejected Esau seeks the death of Jacob; but he withdraws and is saved. The rejected old Israel rises up to destroy the new; but God hides it in the secret of His habitation, and then exalts it in strength and glory...”⁹²

The wives of Jacob have the same signification. Thus Leah, whom Jacob married first, signifies with her weak eyes and fertile womb the weak faith of the carnal Israel and its abundant offspring. It is precisely blindness that “shall befall Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles shall come in” (Romans 11.25). But Rachel, whom he married later but loved first and most strongly, signifies the New Testament Church, which the Lord loved first but married later. For the Church of the Gentiles, that of Enoch and Noah and Abraham before his circumcision, existed before that of Moses and David and the Prophets. Moreover, Rachel brought forth her children in pain because the New Testament Church brought forth her first children in the blood of martyrdom, and is destined to inherit spiritual blessedness only through suffering - “we must through many tribulations enter the Kingdom of God” (Acts 14.22).

⁹² St. Philaret, *Zapiski*, part 3, pp. 27-28.

Christ recognized that the unbelieving Jews were from a genetic, physical point of view, the children of Abraham, saying: "I know that you are Abraham's seed" (John 8.37). And yet only a few moments later He denied them the honour of being his *spiritual* offspring, saying: "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill Me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God. This did not Abraham. Ye do the deeds of your father... Ye are of your father, the devil" (John 8.39-41, 44).

Ultimately, therefore, it is not physical, genetic descent that constitutes sonship from Abraham, but faith, the faith of Christ, and the good works that demonstrate that faith. Thus only the Christians constitute the chosen people. As St. Justin the Martyr writes in the second century A.D.: "The seed is divided after Jacob and comes down through Judah and Phares and Jesse to David. Now this is surely a sign that some of you Jews are surely the children of Abraham, and that you will share in the inheritance of Christ; but... a greater part of your people... drink of bitter and godless doctrine while you spurn the word of God."⁹³

⁹³ St. Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 34.

5. FROM THEOCRACY TO AUTOCRACY: (2) JOSEPH

Compelled by famine, the Israelites or Hebrews, 75 people under the leadership of Jacob, arrived in Egypt in about 1665 BC, where they remained for 215 years.⁹⁴

The distinguishing mark of the Hebrew nation (and, later, of the Israeli state) was its claim that its origin lay outside itself, in the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in the direct call by God to Abraham to leave his homeland, the Sumerian city of Ur, and go into a land which God had promised him.

The God of Abraham was different from the false gods of polytheism in several ways.

First, He revealed Himself as completely transcendent to the material world, being worshipped neither in idols nor in men nor in the material world as a whole, but rather as the spiritual, immaterial Creator of all things, visible and invisible. Secondly, He did not reveal Himself to all, nor could anyone acquire faith in Him by his own efforts, but He revealed Himself only to those with whom He chose to enter into communion - Abraham, first of all. Thirdly, He was a jealous God Who required that His followers worship *Him alone*, as being the only true God. This was contrary to the custom in the pagan world, where ecumenism was the vogue - that is, all the gods, whoever they were and wherever they were worshipped, were considered true.

The nation of the Hebrews, therefore, was founded on an exclusively religious - and religiously exclusive - principle. In Ur, on the other hand, and in the other proto-communist states of the ancient world, the governing principle of life was not religion, still less the nation, but the state. Or rather, its governing principle was a *religion of the state* as incarnate in its ruler; for everything, including religious worship, was subordinated to the needs of the state, and to the will of the leader of the state, the god-king.

But Israel was founded upon a rejection of this idolatry of the state and its leader, and an exclusive subordination to the will of the God of Abraham, Who could in no way be identified with any man or state or material thing whatsoever. It followed that the criterion for membership of the nation of the Hebrews was neither race (for the Hebrews were not clearly distinguished racially from the other Semitic tribes of the Fertile Crescent, at any rate at the beginning, and God promised not only to multiply Abraham's seed, but also that "in thy seed shall *all* the nations of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 22.18)), nor citizenship of a certain state (for they had no such citizenship at the beginning), nor residence in a particular geographical region (for it was not until 500 years after Abraham that the Hebrews conquered Palestine). The foundation of the nation, and criterion of its membership, was *faith* alone, faith in the God Who revealed Himself to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob - and acceptance of the rite of

⁹⁴ According to the Septuagint. The corrupted Masoretic text used today by the Jews and the West asserts wrongly that they were there for 430 years. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VI1yRTC6kGE&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR0dQWdUTXtCJS1h04JUQXeE_P-If9OTEI7la0lSsD94B4bIRruwTvqmYo.

circumcision. At the same time, the very exclusivity of this faith meant that Israel was chosen above all other nations to be the Lord's: "in the division of the nations of the whole earth, He set a ruler over every people; but Israel is the Lord's portion." (Wisdom of Sirach 17.17).

All the major States of antiquity were absolutist monarchies, or despotisms. The defining characteristic of such a State is the concentration of all power, secular and religious, in the hands of one man. In pagan societies this is combined with worship of the ruler as a god. Insofar as the worship of a created being is a blasphemous lie and places the state under the control of "the father of lies", Satan, such a state can be called a *satanocracy*. Israel was the opposite of this State system insofar as it worshipped no man, and had no ruler but God; and as such it can be called a *theocracy*. However, pure theocracy is an extreme rarity and cannot in practice be sustained for long: the only true theocracy in history has been the Church of Christ – which is not, and cannot be, a State like other States, since its essence and heart is not of this world, being in essence the kingdom that is not of this world. If, therefore, the people of God are to have a State organization, a system of government that comes as close as possible to rule by God must be devised. The form of government that is closest to theocracy is what Lev Alexandrovich Tikhomirov called "delegated theocracy"⁹⁵ – that is, *autocracy*, whose essence consists in a division of powers between a king having control over all secular matters and a high priest having control over all religious matters, with both recognizing the supreme lordship of the One True God.

The very first, embryonic example of autocracy is to be found, paradoxically, in Egypt – the Egypt of the time of Joseph. For the formal ruler of Egypt, Pharaoh, after incarcerating Joseph for a time on the basis of a false witness, placed virtually all power in his hands – that is, in the hands of a servant of the True God. As Joseph himself, said: "God has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and ruler throughout all the land of Egypt" (Genesis 45.8; Acts 7.10). Pharaoh "sent and loosed him, even the ruler of the people, and released him. He made him lord of his house, and ruler over all his substance, to instruct his princes as himself, and to teach his elders wisdom" (Psalms 104.19-21). The Egyptians also, following Joseph's example, showed great honour to his father, Jacob. This honour was particularly manifest at the burial of Jacob, when "all Pharaoh's servants and the palace dignitaries, joined by all the dignitaries of the land of Egypt" (Genesis 50.7), went up with Joseph and his family to bury the patriarch in Canaan. It was surely unprecedented that the whole elite of a great state should travel to a foreign and insignificant land to honour the father of a native of that land...

The relationship between father and son in Egypt was similar to that of the "symphony of powers" in Byzantium; for just as Joseph recognized the spiritual leadership of his father Jacob, so Jacob recognized the royal dignity of his son in his bowing down to his cross-like staff. As the Church says: "Israel, foreseeing the future, did reverence to the top of Joseph's staff [Genesis 47.31], revealing how in times to come the most glorious Cross should be the safeguard of royal power."⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Tikhomirov, *Monarkhicheskaia Gosudarstvennost'* (Monarchical Statehood), Buenos Aires, 1992.

⁹⁶ *Menaion*, September 14, Exaltation of the Cross, Mattins, Canon, Canticle 7, troparion.

It follows, according to St. Ignaty Brianchaninov, that it was the Hebrew Joseph, and not any of the pagan Pharaohs, who was “the founder of autocratic (or monarchical) rule in Egypt”⁹⁷, transforming it from patriarchal simplicity to a fully organized state with permanent citizenship and a land tax, which Joseph instituted to prepare for the years of famine, and which lasted, essentially, for hundreds of years. Records show that there were dramatic fluctuations in the level of Nile flooding, and therefore of the harvest yield, during the reigns of the 19th- and early 18th-century BC Pharaohs. One of those Pharaohs was Senwosret III, in whose time, as Ian Wilson writes, “uniquely in all Egyptian history, the great estates formerly owned by Egypt’s nobles passed to the monarchy. They did so in circumstances that are far from clear, unless the Biblical Joseph story might just happen to hold the key: ‘So Joseph gained possession of all the farmland in Egypt for Pharaoh, every Egyptian having sold his field because the famine was too much for them; thus the land passed over to Pharaoh’ (Genesis 47.20). So could Senwosret III or Amenemhet III, or both, have had an Asiatic chancellor called Joseph, who manipulated the circumstances of a prolonged national famine to centralise power in the monarchy’s favour?”⁹⁸

Of course, Egypt remained a pagan country, and on Jacob’s and Joseph’s deaths their embryonic “symphony of powers” disappeared, being replaced by the absolutist despotism of the Pharaoh “who knew not Joseph” (Exodus 1.8) and hated Israel. It was in the fire of conflict with this absolutist ruler that the first real autocracy based on a symphony with the One True God, Israel, came into being.

The wonderful story of Joseph perfectly illustrates one of the great themes of history: the intertwining of God’s justice and His mercy. St. Nikolai Velimirovich writes: “The innocent and chaste Joseph endured two great and difficult temptations and overcame them: the temptation of wicked envy on the part of his blood brothers, and the temptation of adulterous passion from the Egyptian temptress. Jealousy sold him as a slave, and the passion of adultery drove the innocent one to prison. In both cases he returned good for evil: he gave food to his hungry brothers and preserved the life, throne and people of frightened Pharaoh. His brothers thought to slay him, but God saved him; the adulterous woman thought to destroy him, but God saved him. Out of slavery and imprisonment, God crowned him with glory and unlimited authority. And him whom his evil brothers could have killed with one stroke and whom Potiphar's powerful wife could have crushed in an instant, God made the unlimited master over the lives of millions of people and the only nourisher of his starving brothers. Such is the wondrous mercy of God toward the righteous. Thus does the Lord know how to save and glorify the innocent and the chaste. In the greatness of the destiny of Joseph, we see the greatness of God's mercy. There is one eye that never sleeps, my brethren. Let us cling to God and not fear anyone. Let us be innocent and chaste and not fear evil, or slander, or prison, or ridicule, or misfortune. On the contrary, let us rejoice when all of this befalls us because of our innocence and

⁹⁷ St. Ignaty, “Iosif. Sviaschennaia povest’ iz knigi Bytia” (Joseph. A Holy Tale from the Book of Genesis), *Polnoe Sobranie Tvorenij* (Complete Collection of Works), volume II, Moscow, 2001, p. 37.

⁹⁸ Wilson, *The Bible is History*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999, p. 37.

chastity; let us rejoice and await with faith the revelation of God's wonders toward us. Let us, in every storm, await the thunder of God's justice - and afterward the calm.

O mysterious Lord, Who secretly but vigilantly accompanies the righteous in slavery and in prison, and manifests Thy mercy in Thine own time, help us to be innocent and chaste.

To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen."⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Velimirovich, *The Prologue from Ochrid*, Birmingham: Lazarica Press, 1986, part IV, pp. 330-331.

6. FROM THEOCRACY TO AUTOCRACY: (3) MOSES

Taken as a whole, the life of Moses is the clearest prefiguring of the Life of Christ in the Old Testament. His pre-eminence among the Old Testament saints is indisputable; the religion of the Jews is the religion of Moses and the following of God's commandments as dictated (literally) by Moses. So who was he?

After Joseph, the Hebrews lived as slaves of the Egyptian pharaohs. Then in about 1450 BC, God called the Hebrews out of the Egyptian despotism as he had called them out of the despotism of Babylon in the time of Abraham. The first battle between Church and State in history had been Abraham's battle with the Babylonian kings. The second took place between Moses and the Egyptian Pharaoh.¹⁰⁰ This was the first "war of national liberation" in history. The Hebrews won. However, the Egyptians did not record the fact of Pharaoh's defeat in their monuments, since gods, according to the Egyptian conception, could not fail.¹⁰¹

Moses had been brought up in Pharaoh's family in a near-miraculous manner, by being found as a baby among the rushes and given to the daughter of Pharaoh to be raised as her son. And so he acquired an Egyptian education – an ideal preparation for war against Pharaoh. The story of the Exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt under Moses' leadership is the foundation story of the Hebrew people. But, as the Church sings, Moses was as much a religious as a political leader: "Thou, O Moses, didst preserve the order of sacrifice precious to God, and the kingdom and the priesthood."¹⁰² After wandering for forty years in the desert, the Israelites' embryonic state-cum-religion finally acquired a territorial base in Israel under Kings Saul and David...

Moses added a fifth element, besides faith, sacrifices, the kingdom and circumcision (which Abraham had practised), to the life of Israel: *the law*. Josephus says that Moses "invented the very word 'law', then unknown in Greek, and was the first legislator in world history. Philo accused both philosophers and lawgivers of copying his ideas, Heraclius and Plato being the chief culprits." The law was necessary for several reasons. First, by the time of Moses, the Israelites were no longer an extended family of a few hundred people, as in the time of Abraham and the Patriarchs, which could be governed by the father of the family without the need of any written instructions or governmental bureaucracy. Since their migration to Egypt in the time of Joseph, they had multiplied and become a nation of four hundred thousand people, which no one man could rule unaided. Secondly, the sojourn of the Israelites in Egypt had introduced them again to the lures of the pagan world, and a law was required to protect them from these lures. And thirdly, in order to escape from Egypt, pass through the desert and conquer the Promised Land in the face of many enemies, a quasi-military organization and discipline was required.

¹⁰⁰ According to Daniel Rohl, this Pharaoh was called Djedneferre Dudimose (in other sources, Thutmose), who "was crowned in the temple of Amun at Karnak in 1450 BC" (*From Eden to Exile*, London: Arrow Books, 2002, p. 178).

¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, Josephus records in *Contra Apionem* that in the reign of Pharaoh Thutmose, according to an Egyptian priest called Manetho, "for what cause I know not, a blast of God smote us..."

¹⁰² *Menaion*, September 4.

Written Scriptures had also become necessary because the spiritual condition of men had deteriorated, as St. John Chrysostom explains: "Those ancient men of God who lived before the Law were not taught by words or writings; being pure in heart, they were enlightened by spiritual illumination, and thus they learned and were assured of the will of God. God Himself spoke with them, giving them information and commandments with His own lips. Such men were Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants Job and Moses. But because men grew weaker and became unworthy of receiving assurance and instruction (directly) from the Holy Spirit, God, in His love for mankind, bestowed the Scriptures, that at least through them men might remember (Him) and learn His will. Likewise, Christ also spoke to His disciples personally and sent them His grace as a teacher. But because heresies were later to spring up and spread, and because our morals were to become corrupt, He designed to have the Gospels written down, that from them we might learn the truth, that we might not be led astray by the falsehoods of heresy, and that our morals might not be utterly corrupted."¹⁰³

But the law was useless without knowledge of the lawgiver, God; so even before the beginning of the Exodus, God revealed His name for the first time to Moses in the vision of the Burning Bush on Mount Horeb (the bush can still be seen at the monastery of St. Catherine). The bush that burned without being consumed was a type, or prefiguring, of the Incarnation of Christ from the Mother of God, whose flesh was not consumed by the fire of the Divinity that was in her. God sent Moses to the people of Israel to announce to them their coming deliverance from slavery through the Exodus, and when Moses asked for God's name so that he could identify Who it was that was sending him, "God said unto Moses, 'I AM THAT I AM', and He said: 'Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, 'I AM hath sent me unto you'.'" (Exodus 3.13).

Up to that point, God had referred to Himself only as "God Almighty" or "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" – that is, without a specific allusion to the Second Person of the Trinity or His role in the salvation of mankind. But now that salvation was being brought to the Hebrews it was necessary to point to *the Saviour*, that is, Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, by the name by which He is known in the Old Testament - Jehovah, "I AM THAT I AM", or "He Who Exists" (in the Greek translation of the Septuagint). For it is the unanimous witness of the Holy Fathers that Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, is indeed Jehovah, "He Who Exists" from all eternity, Who saved the Israelites from Egypt and later the whole of humanity from sin, death and the devil on the Cross. This is confirmed a little later, when "God spake unto Moses, and said unto him, 'And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty; but by the name JEHOVAH was I not known to them. And I have established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, wherein they were strangers.'" (Exodus 3.2-3).

¹⁰³ St. John Chrysostom, *Homily for the Sunday of the Forefathers*.

The name “He Who Exists” points to the complete independence of God from everything created. For He does not exist in dependence on any other existing thing, which is the case with every other being, but is *absolute being, being itself*. This was in sharp distinction from pagan religion – of which Egyptian religion was the most developed kind in that period – which could never conceive of God as wholly independent of created beings, but always identified God or the gods with a part or the whole of created being.

The name also points, according to Archbishop Theophan of Poltava, to *the fullness of life*, which cannot be identified with any created condition, but only with the life of God Himself.¹⁰⁴ Being absolute being and the fullness of life, God wishes to save mankind from the false life that identifies itself with created being, as did Egypt. Thus it is in the Exodus from Egypt that God manifests Himself as *the Saviour* for the first time.

First, as we read in the Book of *Exodus*, when Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites flee their servitude in Egypt and go back to their homeland, God struck the whole of Egypt with ten plagues. Then He opened a path for the Israelites through the Red Sea (usually identified with “the Sea of Reeds” near what is now the Suez Canal), so that they could pass through on dry land. Then He brought the waters back to drown the Egyptian charioteers. Then He led them through the desert to the southern end of the peninsula dominated by Mount Sinai.

The law was given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai. Its God-giveness was vital. It meant, as Paul Johnson points out, that “the Israelites were creating a new kind of society. Josephus later used the word ‘theocracy’. This he defined as ‘placing all sovereignty in the hands of God’... The Israelites might have magistrates of one kind or another but their rule was vicarious since God made the law and constantly intervened to ensure it was obeyed. The fact that God ruled meant that in practice his law ruled. And since all were equally subject to the law, the system was the first to embody the double merits of the rule of law and equality before the law. Philo called it ‘democracy’, which he described as ‘the most law-abiding and best of constitutions’. But by democracy he did not mean rule by all the people; he defined it as a form of government which ‘honours equality and has law and justice for its rulers’. He might have called the Jewish system, more accurately, ‘democratic theocracy’, because in essence that is what it was.”¹⁰⁵

But this was no democracy in the modern sense. Although every man in Israel was equal under the law of God, there were no elections, every attempt to rebel against Moses’ leadership was fiercely punished by God (Numbers 16), and there was no way in which the people could alter the law to suit themselves, which is surely the essence of democracy in the modern sense. Even when, at Jethro’s suggestion, lower-level magistrates and leaders were appointed, they were appointed by Moses, not by any kind of popular vote (Deuteronomy 1).

¹⁰⁴ Theophan, *Tetralemma*, St. Petersburg, 1905, p. 61.

¹⁰⁵ Johnson, *History of the Jews*, pp. 40-41.

One of the major characteristics of the Mosaic law, notes Johnson, is that “there is no distinction between the religious and the secular – all are one – or between civil, criminal and moral law. This indivisibility had important practical consequences. In Mosaic legal theory, all breaches of the law offend God. All crimes are sins, just as all sins are crimes. Offences are absolute wrongs, beyond the power of man unaided to pardon or expunge. Making restitution to the offended mortal is not enough; God requires expiation, too, and this may involve drastic punishment. Most law-codes of the ancient Near East are property-orientated, people themselves being forms of property whose value can be assessed. The Mosaic code is God-oriented. For instance, in other codes, a husband may pardon an adulterous wife and her lover. The Mosaic code, by contrast, insists both must be put to death...

“In Mosaic theology, man is made in God’s image, and so his life is not just valuable, it is sacred. To kill a man is an offence against God so grievous that the ultimate punishment, the forfeiture of life, must follow; money is not enough. The horrific fact of execution thus underscores the sanctity of human life. Under Mosaic law, then, many men and women met their deaths whom the secular codes of surrounding societies would have simply permitted to compensate their victims or their victims’ families.

“But the converse is also true, as a result of the same axiom. Whereas other codes provided the death penalty for offences against property, such as looting during a fire, breaking into a house, serious trespass by night, or theft of a wife, in the Mosaic law no property offence is capital. Human life is too sacred where the rights of property alone are violated. It also repudiates vicarious punishment: the offences of parents must not be punished by the execution of sons or daughters, or the husband’s crime by the surrender of the wife to prostitution... Moreover, not only is human life sacred, the human person (being in God’s image) is precious... Physical cruelty [in punishment] is kept to the minimum.”¹⁰⁶

Now the Holy Church in her service to Moses makes what at first sight looks like an extraordinary claim: that he was the very first “God-seer”, who saw God face-to-face: As the Church sings: “Let Moses, the first among the prophets, be praised, for he was the first to converse openly with God, face to face, not in indistinct images, but beholding Him as in the guise of the flesh.”¹⁰⁷ “Not in indistinct images”, and “in the guise of the flesh”. So he must have had a clear vision of *the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ, in His Humanity*.

Now after his death Moses saw Christ clearly at the Transfiguration (Matthew 17).¹⁰⁸ But was it possible that he had seen Christ earlier and less distinctly on Sinai, when He was not yet incarnate? The answer is: only by seeing Him *in an image, or icon* – but one not made with hands.

¹⁰⁶ Johnson, *op. cit.*, pp. 33, 34.

¹⁰⁷ *Menaion*, September 4, Mattins canon, Ode 1, troparion.

¹⁰⁸ “Even after thy death, thou didst see the Lord, O God-seer, and not in dim images as before thou didst in the rock; but thou didst behold Him as Christ in a human body, illumining all with His Divinity” (*Menaion*, September 4, Mattins canon, Ode 9, troparion).

And yet, one will argue, was it not precisely to Moses that God emphasized the complete unknowability of God? And did He not, in His Ten commandments inscribed on tablets of stone for Moses, forbid the making of images and say: "Thou shalt have no other gods beside Me. Thou shalt not make thyself an idol (ειδωλον), nor likeness (ομοιωμα) of anything, whatever things are in the heaven above, and whatever are in the earth beneath, and whatever are in the waters under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down (προσκυνησεις) to them, nor worship (λατρευσεις) them" (Exodus 20:2-5 (LXX))? True, but Moses did not make any *idols*, nor did he *bow down* in order to *worship* anything created. However, on Sinai, as St. Gregory of Nyssa writes in his *Life of Moses*, "he sees that tabernacle not made with hands, which he shows to those below by means of a material likeness". So it is not too bold to suggest that it is precisely Moses who lays a beginning to the *contemplation* of visible icons of God incarnate, and even to the *creation* of material icons of heavenly things. The tabernacle, the ark, and later the Temple, were such icons, visible channels of the invisible Deity.

Indeed, so holy were these icons that God struck down those who treated them disrespectfully, as Patriarch Nikon of Moscow pointed out in his polemic against the attempts of the tsar to confiscate church lands: "Have you not heard that God said that any outsider who comes close to the sacred things will be given up to death? By outsider here is understood not only he who is a stranger to Israel from the pagans, but everyone who is not of the tribe of Levi, like Kore, Dathan and Abiram, whom God did not choose, and whom, the impious ones, a flame devoured; and King Uzziah laid his hand on the ark to support it, and God struck him and he died (II Kings 6.6,7)."¹⁰⁹

In this commandment, moreover, a distinction is made between veneration (προσκυνησις) and worship (λατρευσις) that was to become very important in the iconoclast controversy of the eighth and ninth centuries. Icons are to be venerated, but not worshipped; they are holy, but they are not idols. Thus an icon of Christ God, though holy and worthy of veneration, is not the same as Christ Himself, although we do truly see Him *through* the icon. For an icon, according to St. Stephen the Younger, is a "door" into heaven. A door is not part of a room, but it makes possible access to the room. In the same way an icon of Christ is not Christ Himself, but it facilitates our access to Him. Therefore insofar as, in the words of St. Basil the Great, the honour given to an icon is ascribed to its Prototype, when we bow down and venerate an icon of Christ, we are offering honour and worship to Christ Himself. Thus the commandment asserts both the essential difference between the Creator and creation, between spirit and matter, and the possibility of matter becoming a bridge to spirit, of the Creator becoming accessible through His creation.

In another passage, Moses was told that He could not see God face-to-face, but had to hide behind a cleft in the rock, from behind which He could see, not His face, but only His back parts. Does this contradict what has just been said? No, it clarifies it; for it explains to us that Moses was able to see God face-to-face, not in the sense that He saw His essence, which is unknowable, but in the sense that He recognized Him in

¹⁰⁹ Nikon, in M.V. Zyzykin, *Patriarch Nikon* (Patriarch Nikon), Warsaw: Synodal Typography, 1931, part II, p. 36.

His incarnation, in His visible Humanity. "Sheltered by the stone, thou didst not see the face of God, for it was hidden, O God-seer, but didst recognize the incarnation of the Word in His back parts." Or, to be more precise, since Christ was not yet incarnate, Moses saw Him in an *icon* of His humanity, an icon not made with hands.

A major part of the Mosaic law concerned a priesthood and what we would now call the Church with its rites and festivals. The priesthood was entrusted to Moses' brother Aaron and one of the twelve tribes of Israel, that of the Levites. As St. Cyril of Alexandria writes: "Moses and Aaron... were for the ancients a fine forefigure of Christ... Emmanuel, Who, by a most wise dispensation, is in one and the same Person both Law-Giver and First Priest... In Moses we should see Christ as Law-Giver, and in Aaron – as First Priest."¹¹⁰

Thus already in the time of Moses we have the beginnings of a separation between Church and State, and of what the Byzantines called the "symphony" between the two powers, as represented by Moses and Aaron.

As Moses lay dying on Mount Pisgah in Moab (modern-day Jordan) he stretched out his eyes over the Promised Land on the other side of the Jordan (which not he, but his successor Joshua (Jesus) was destined to enter and occupy), and prophesied to Israel: "When thou shalt beget children, and children's children, and ye shall have been long in the land, and shall do that which is evil in the sight of the Lord thy God, to provoke Him to anger, I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that ye shall soon perish from off the land whereunto you go over Jordan to possess it; ye shall not prolong your days upon it, but shall be utterly destroyed. And the Lord shall scatter you among the peoples, and ye shall be left few in number among the nations, whither the Lord shall lead you away. And from thence ye shall seek the Lord thy God, and thou shalt find Him, because thou shalt search after Him with all thy heart and soul when thou are in tribulation and all these things are come upon thee. In the latter days thou shalt return to the Lord thy God, and hearken unto His voice: for the Lord thy God is a merciful God, He will not fail thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which He sware unto them" (Deuteronomy 4.25-31).

Here the great prophet and God-seer lays out in summary form the whole history of the Jews after they would have been "long in the land": their falling away from God, followed by their expulsion from the land (first in the exile to Babylon, then more terribly and long-lastingly in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans and the dispersal of the Jews all over the world), and finally their conversion to God "in the last days". The last part of the prophecy has yet to be fulfilled, but it is confirmed by several Old and New Testament prophets and apostles (see especially Romans 11). But the first two parts have been confirmed with exactitude, providing yet another testimony that the central thread of human history, that illumines all the rest of it, consists in the history of Israel. But by "Israel" we mean not only the Old Testament Jews but also, especially, the "new" Jews, "the Israel of God, the Church of Christ" (Galatians 6.16).

¹¹⁰ St. Cyril, in Vyacheslav Manyagin, *Apologia Groznogo Tsaria* (Apology for the Awesome Tsar), Moscow, 2004, p. 167.

7. FROM THEOCRACY TO AUTOCRACY: (4) SAUL AND DAVID

We have seen that under Moses there was the beginning of a separation of Church and State in Israel. However, there was no radical separation of powers in the modern sense. Israel was a theocratic state ruled directly by God, Who revealed His will through His chosen servants Moses and Aaron.

Early Israel after Moses but before the kings had rulers, called "Judges". But these rulers were neither hereditary monarchs nor were they elected to serve the will of the people. They were charismatic leaders, who were elected because they served the will of God alone. They were elected by God, not the people, who simply had to follow the man God had elected, as when He said to Gideon: "Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the Midianites: have I not sent thee?" (Judges 6.14). That is why, when the people offered to make Gideon and his descendants kings in a kind of hereditary dynasty, he refused, saying: "I shall not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the Lord shall rule over you" (Judges 8.23).

Thus the Judges were truly God-fearing, charismatic leaders, like Joshua, Jephtha and Gideon. But they refused the honour of kingship because they knew that Israel was a theocracy, ruled by God alone. Moreover, when each of them died, his authority died with him; for there was no hereditary succession of judges.

The unity and continuity of Israel was therefore religious, not political - or rather, it was religio-political. It was created by the history of deliverance from the satanocracy of Egypt and maintained by a continuing allegiance and obedience to God - the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God Who appeared to Moses and Joshua and the Judges. He was their only King. Neither Abraham nor Moses was a king. Rather it was said to Abraham by God: "Kings will come *from* you" (Genesis 17.6; cf. 17.16, 35.2). Moses was a lawgiver, a priest from the tribe of Levi and prophet, rather than a king. Early Israel was therefore not a kingdom - or rather, it was a kingdom whose king was God alone. As Tikhomirov writes: "According to the law of Moses, no State was established at that time, but the nation was just organized on tribal principles, with a common worship of God. The Lord was recognized as the Master of Israel in a moral sense, as of a spiritual union, that is, as a Church."¹¹¹ Or rather, as indissoluble union of Church and State, the religious and the political principles. Ancient Israel, in other words, was a Theocracy, ruled not by a king or priest, but by God Himself. And strictly speaking the People of God remained a Theocracy, without a formal State structure, until the time of the Prophet Samuel, who anointed the first King of Israel, Saul. In Israel, the Church, the State and the People were not three different entities or organizations, but three different aspects of a single organism, the whole of which was subject to God alone. That is why it was so important that the leader should be chosen by God.

In the time of the Judges, this seems always to have been the case; for when an emergency arose God sent His Spirit upon a man chosen by Him (cf. Judges 6.34), and the people, recognizing this, then elected him as their Judge (cf. Judges 11.11). And if

¹¹¹ Tikhomirov, *Monarkhicheskaia Gosudarstvennost'* (Monarchical Statehood), Moscow, 1997, p. 126.

there was no emergency, or if the people were not worthy of a God-chosen leader, then God did not send His Spirit and no Judge was elected. In those circumstances, since "there was no king in Israel, everyone did what seemed right to him" (Judges 21.25) - in other words, there was anarchy.

The lesson was clear: if theocracy is removed, then sooner or later there will be anarchy - that is, no government at all.

Not only was there was no king of Israel: there was also no *land* of Israel. And this was important; for "a king is an advantage to a *land with cultivated fields*" (Ecclesiastes 5.8). Therefore Israelite kingship did not emerge until the Israelites had *permanently settled in a land* - that is, until the conquest of Canaan.

By the end of the period of the Judges, the need for a king was evident. For barbaric acts, such as that which almost led to the extermination of the tribe of Benjamin, are recorded. In their desperation at the mounting anarchy, the people called on God through the Prophet Samuel to give them a king. God fulfilled their request, but to ensure that the Israelite king would be a true autocrat, and not a pagan-style despot, He laid down certain conditions to the people through Moses: "When thou shalt come unto the land which the Lord thy God shall choose, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, 'I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me', thou shalt surely set a king over thee whom the Lord thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother... And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests, the Levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them: that his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left: to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel" (Deuteronomy 17.14-15,18-20).

Thus God blessed the institution of the monarchy, but stipulated three conditions if His blessing was to rest on it. First, the people must itself desire to have a king placed over it. Secondly, the king must be someone "whom the Lord thy God shall choose"; a true king is chosen by God, not by man. Such a man will always be a "brother", that is a member of the People of God, of the Church: if he is not, then God has not chosen him. Thirdly, he will govern in accordance with the Law of God, which he will strive to fulfil in all its parts.

Some democrats have argued that the Holy Scriptures do not approve of kingship. This is not true: kingship as such is never condemned in Holy Scripture. Rather, it is considered the norm of political leadership, as we see in the following passages: "Blessed are thou, O land, when thou hast a king from a noble family" (Ecclesiastes 10.17); "The heart of the king is in the hand of God: He turns it wherever He wills" (Proverbs 21.1); "He sends kings upon thrones, and girds their loins with a girdle" (Job 12.18); "He appoints kings and removes them" (Daniel 2.21); "Thou, O king, art a king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given a powerful and honourable and strong

kingdom in every place where the children of men dwell" (Daniel 2.37-38); "Listen, therefore, O kings, and understand...; for your dominion was given you from the Lord, and your sovereignty from the Most High" (Wisdom 6.1,3). "By Me kings reign, and princes write of righteousness. By Me noblemen become great, and by Me monarchs have power in the land" (Proverbs 8.15-16).

The tragedy of the story of the first Israelite king, Saul, did not consist in the fact that the Israelites sought a king for themselves - as we have seen, God did not condemn kingship as such. After all, the sacrament of kingly anointing, which was performed for the first time by the Prophet Samuel on Saul, gave the earthly king the grace to serve the Heavenly King as his true Sovereign. The tragedy consisted in the fact that the Israelites sought a king "*like [those of] the other nations around*" them (Deuteronomy 17.14), - in other words, a pagan-style despot who would satisfy the people's will and notions of kingship rather than God's., especially in terms of territorial aggrandizement, power and glory. For in fallen human nature there exists a desire to submit to a despot, sharing vicariously in his power and glory - there are many examples in human history - until, of course, submission to the despot brings intolerable suffering...

This fallen desire for a pagan-style despot amounted to apostasy in the eyes of God, the only true King of Israel. So the Lord said to Samuel: "Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should rule over them... Now therefore listen to their voice. However, protest solemnly to them, and show them the manner of the king that shall reign over them" (I Kings (I Samuel) 8.4-9). And then Samuel painted for them the image of a harsh, totalitarian ruler of the kind that was common in the Ancient World. These kings, as well as having total political control over their subjects, were often worshipped by them as gods; so that "kingship" as understood in the Ancient World meant both the loss of political freedom and alienation from the true and living God.

God allowed the introduction of this despotic kind of kingship into Israel because the religious principle had grown weak. For the history of the kings begins with the corruption of the priests, the sons of Eli, who were in possession of the ark at the time of its capture. "Look," said the elders to Eli, "you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. `Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations'" (I Kings (I Samuel) 8.5). Thus for the kings' subsequent oppression of the people both the priests and the people bore responsibility.

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Since the people's motivation in seeking a king was not pure, God gave them at first a king who brought them more harm than good. For while Saul was a mighty man of war and temporarily expanded the frontiers of Israel, he persecuted true piety, as represented by the future King David and the prophet Gad, and he disobeyed the Church, as represented by the Judge and Prophet Samuel and the high priests Abiathar and Ahimelech, and even killed Ahimelech and other priests who helped David.

God in His mercy did not always send such despotic rulers upon His people, and the best of the kings, such as David, Josiah and Hezekiah, were in obedience to the King of kings and Lord of lords. Nevertheless, since kingship was introduced into Israel from a desire to imitate the pagans, it was a retrograde step. It represented the introduction of a second, worldly principle of allegiance into what had been a society bound together by religious bonds alone, a schism in the soul of the nation which, although seemingly inevitable in the context of the times, meant the loss for ever of that pristine simplicity which had characterised Israel up to then.

And yet everything seemed to go well at first. Samuel anointed Saul, saying: "The Lord anoints thee as ruler of His inheritance of Israel, and you will rule over the people of the Lord and save them from out of the hand of their enemies" (I Kings 10.1). Filled with the Spirit of the Lord, Saul defeated the enemies of Israel, the Ammonites and the Philistines. But the schism which had been introduced into the life of the nation began to express itself also in the life of their king, with tragic consequences.

First, before a battle with the Philistines, the king grew impatient when Samuel the priest delayed his coming to perform a sacrifice. So he performed the sacrifice himself. For this sin, the sin of the invasion of the Church's sphere by the State, Samuel prophesied that the kingdom would be taken away from Saul. "The Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart" (I Kings 13.13-14). That man was David...

The example of Saul was quoted by Patriarch Nikon of Moscow: "Listen to what happened to Saul, the first king of Israel. The Word of God said to Samuel: 'I have repented that I sent Saul to the kingdom, for he has ceased to follow Me.' What did Saul do that God should reject him? He, it is said, 'did not follow My counsels' (I Kings 15.10-28)... This is the Word of God, and not the word of man: 'I made you ruler over the tribes of Israel and anointed you to the kingdom of Israel, and not to offer sacrifices and whole-burnt offerings,' teaching for all future times that the priesthood is higher than the kingdom, and that he who wishes for more loses that which is his own."¹¹²

Saul's second sin was to spare Agag, the king of the Amalekites, instead of killing them all, as God had commanded. His excuse was: "because I listened to the voice of the people" (I Kings 15.20). In other words, he abdicated his God-given authority and became, *spiritually speaking, a democrat*, listening to the people rather than to God. And so Samuel said: "Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, the Lord also shall reject thee from being king over Israel" (I Kings 15.23)...

It was no accident therefore, that it was an Amalekite who killed Saul at Mount Gilboa and brought his crown to David, who immediately killed him for murdering the Anointed of the Lord... God's justice is exact. Saul offended God by sparing the Amalekites. So he was killed by an Amalekite.

¹¹² Zyzykin, op. cit., part II, p. 17.

To modern readers Saul's sin might seem small, even non-existent. However, it must be understood in the context of the previous history of Israel, in which neither Moses nor any of the judges (except, perhaps, Samson) had disobeyed the Lord. That is why Samuel said to Saul: "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness as iniquity and idolatry" (I Kings 15.22-23). For even a king can rebel, in that even a king is in obedience - to the King of kings. Only the absolutist despot feels that there is nobody above him, that there is no law that he, too, must obey. His power is absolute; whereas the power of the autocrat is limited, if not by man and the laws of men, at any rate by the law of God, whose independent guardian and teacher is the priesthood of the Church.

To emphasize the truth that disobedience to God "is as the sin of witchcraft", Saul then falls into the most serious sin of consulting a witch on the eve of his last battle against the Philistines. Thus he asked the witch of Endor to summon the soul of Samuel from Hades, although he himself had passed laws condemning necromancy. It did him no good: the next day, at Gilboa, he lost the battle and his life...¹¹³ "So Saul died," according to the chronicler, "because of his transgression which he committed against the Lord... by seeking advice from a ghost... Therefore He slew him and gave the kingdom to David..." (I Chronicles 10.13, 14).

The falling away of Saul led directly to the first major schism in the history of the State of Israel. For after Saul's death, the northern tribes (Ephraim, first of all) supported the claim of Saul's surviving son to the throne, while the southern tribes (Judah and Benjamin) supported David. Although David suppressed this rebellion, and although, for David's sake, the Lord did not allow a schism during the reign of his son Solomon, it erupted again and became permanent after Solomon's death...

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David was anointed for the first time at the command of the Lord by the Prophet Samuel when he was still a young man: "Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward" (I Samuel 16.13). Immediately after this, "the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and a distressing spirit from the Lord troubled him" (I Samuel 16.14). For there cannot be two true kings over a kingdom, but the false king or tyrant or usurper will persecute the true one, as Saul persecuted David...

David had to prove himself as a warrior and faithful to God over many years in disgrace and exile before the people finally saw in him God's choice: "Then came all the tribes of Israel to David unto Hebron and spake, saying, Behold, we are thy bones and thy flesh. Also in time past, when Saul was king over us, thou wast he that leddest out the brightest in Israel, and the Lord said to thee, 'Thou shalt feed My people Israel, and thou shalt be a captain over Israel. So all the elders of Israel came to the king to Hebron before the Lord, and they anointed David king over Israel'" (II Samuel 5.1-3).

¹¹³ See St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Witch of Endor: A Letter to Bishop Theodosius*, translated in *Living Orthodoxy*, #124, vol. XXI, N 4, July-August, 2000, pp. 24-26.

The phrase “we are thy bones and thy flesh” remind us of Adam’s first words on seeing Eve (Genesis 2.23). In the same way, writes New Martyr and Protopriest John Vostorgov, “the king and the people merge into one powerful spiritual-moral union like the ideal Christian family, which does not think of division, does not allow mistrust and does not admit of any other relationship other than that of mutual love, devotion, self-sacrifice and care.”¹¹⁴

The greatness of David lay in the fact that he was the first true autocrat. Saul was true in the sense that he was called by God and anointed by the Church; but he did not live worthy of his calling, rejecting the advice of Samuel, and was rejected by God. David, however, both closed the political schism that had opened up between north and south, and closed the schism that was just beginning to open up between the sacred and the profane, the Church and the State.

Indeed, according to the author of the two books of Chronicles, it was David’s solicitude for the Church and her liturgical worship that was the most important fact about him. As Patrick Henry Reardon points out, nineteen chapters are devoted to David, and of these nineteen “the Chronicler allotted no fewer than 11 – over half – to describe the king’s solicitude for Israel’s proper worship (I Chronicles 13; 15-16 and 22-29). This material includes the transfer of the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem, the organization of the priestly and Levitical ministries, preparations for the sacred music, and David’s lengthy instructions to Solomon with respect to the temple.

“According to the Chronicler, David not only made all the arrangements for the consecration of the temple and the organization of the worship (I Chronicles 28.19), he did so by the Lord’s own command (II Chronicles 29.15). Even the musical instruments used in the worship are credited to David (II Chronicles 29.17; cf. Nehemiah 12.36).”¹¹⁵ Thus when the Lord tells David to “feed My people Israel”, this feeding is spiritual as well as material – a responsibility accepted by all later Christian autocrats.

“Like Gideon,” notes Paul Johnson, David “grasped that [Israel] was indeed a theocracy and not a normal state. Hence the king could never be an absolute ruler on the usual oriental pattern. Nor, indeed, could the state, however governed, be absolute either...”¹¹⁶

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The central act of David’s reign was his conquest of Jerusalem and establishment of the city of David on Zion as the capital and heart of the Israelite kingdom.

¹¹⁴ Vostorgov, in S. Fomin and T. Fomina, *Rossia pered Vtorym Prishesroviem* (Russia before the Second Coming), Moscow, 1994, vol. I, p. 362.

¹¹⁵ Reardon, *Chronicles of History and Worship*, Ben Lomond, Ca.: Conciliar Press, 2006, p. 12.

¹¹⁶ Johnson, *A History of the Jews*, London: Phoenix, 1995, p. 57.

This was, on the one hand, an important political act, strengthening the centralizing power of the State; for as the last part of the Holy Land to be conquered by the Israelites, Jerusalem did not belong to any of the twelve tribes, which meant that its ruler, David, was elevated above all the tribes, and above all earthly and factional interests. But, on the other hand, it was also an important religious act; for by establishing his capital in Jerusalem, David linked his kingship with the mysterious figure of Melchizedek, both priest and king, who had blessed Abraham at Salem, that is, Jerusalem.

Thus David could be seen as following in the footsteps of Abraham in receiving the blessing of the priest-king, a forerunner of Christ Himself, in his own city.

Moreover, by bringing the Ark of the Covenant, the chief sanctum of the priesthood, to a permanent resting-place in Zion, David showed that the Church and the priesthood would find rest and protection on earth only under the aegis of the Israelite Autocracy.

As John Bright writes: "The significance of this action cannot be overestimated. It was David's aim to make Jerusalem the religious as well as the political capital of the realm. Through the Ark he sought to link the newly created state to Israel's ancient order as its legitimate successor, and to advertise the state as the patron and protector of the sacral institutions of the past. David showed himself far wiser than Saul. Where Saul had neglected the Ark and driven its priesthood from him, David established both Ark and priesthood in the official national shrine."¹¹⁷

The Ark was a symbol of the Church (and of the Mother of God, the Mother of the Church); and it is significant that the birth of the Church, at Pentecost, took place on Zion, beside David's tomb (Acts 2). For David prefigured Christ not only in His role as anointed King of the Jews, Who inherited "the throne of His father David" and made it eternal (Luke 1.32-33), but also as Sender of the Spirit and establisher of the New Testament Church. For just as David brought the wanderings of the Ark to an end by giving it a permanent resting-place in Zion, so Christ sent the Spirit into the upper room in Zion, giving the Church a firm, visible beginning on earth.

The reign of David proved that State and Church could not only coexist, but also strengthen each other. In a certain sense, the anointed king in the Israelite kingdom could even be said to have had the primacy over the priesthood – although he never carried out the priestly rites. Thus David appears to have ordered the building of the temple without any prompting from a priest, and Solomon removed the High Priest Abiathar for political rebellion (I Kings 2.26-27).

So there were two spheres, "the king's matters" and "the Lord's matters". If the king ventured to enter "the Lord's matters", that is, the sphere of Divine templeworship, he would be punished. Thus King Uzziah was punished with leprosy for presuming to burn incense before the Lord... Nevertheless, the king was central to, and pre-eminent in, the life of the nation in a way that even the high priest could

¹¹⁷ Bright, *A History of Israel*, London: SCM Press, 1980, pp. 200-201.

not be. Thus Moses was higher than his brother Aaron, even though Aaron was the head of the priesthood; and David was higher than the high-priests Zadok and Ahimelech. The autocrat must not encroach on the priesthood – that was the sin of Saul and Uzziah; he cannot carry out the sacramental functions of the priest. But the *organization* of the priesthood is the task of the autocrat. He is a shepherd of souls just as the priest is; for “Thou leddest Thy people as sheep by the hand of Moses [the autocrat] and Aaron [the high priest]” (Psalm 76.20). And he is a teacher of the people, as is the priest; for “I was established as king by Him, upon Sion His holy mountain, proclaiming the commandment of the Lord” (Psalm 2.6). Here we see a foreshadowing of the leading role of the Orthodox autocrats of New Testament times, whose pre-eminence in the life of the nation is commonly mistaken for “caesaopapism”. The autocrat who does not attempt to change the dogmas of the Church or carry out any sacramental functions is not a “caesaropapist”. But he can and must serve as the focus of unity and organizational hub of the whole life of the nation.

The uniqueness of David’s dynasty was that, whatever the sins of its members, it was to be *eternal*, in accordance with God’s promise: “I have raised up one chosen out of My people. I have found David My servant, with My holy oil have I anointed him... And as for Me, I shall make him higher than the kings of the earth. For ever shall I keep for him My mercy, and My covenant shall be faithful unto him. And I will establish his seed unto ages of ages, and his throne shall be as the days of heaven. If his sons forsake My law, and if they walk not in My judgements, If my statutes they profane and keep not My commandments, I will visit their iniquities with a rod, and their injustices with scourges. But My mercy will I not disperse away from them, nor will I wrong them in My truth. Nor will I profane My covenant, nor the things that proceed from My lips will I make void. Once have I sworn by My holiness that to David I will not lie; his seed for ever shall abide. And his throne shall be as the sun before Me, and as the moon that is established for ever” (Psalm 88. 18-19, 26-35, cf. Isaiah 9.6). For “thine house and thy kingdom,” said the Lord to David, “shall be established for ever before thee; thy throne shall be established for ever” (II Samuel 7.16; cf. Luke 1.32-33). “Once have I sworn by My holiness: that to David I will not lie; his seed forever shall abide. And his throne shall be as the sun before Me, and as the moon that is established for ever” (Psalm 88. 34-35).

The eternity of David’s dynasty consisted in the fact that the last king of his line would be Jesus Christ, the eternal King and God, Whose Kingdom lasts forever... When the Kingdom of God came down in tongues of fire upon the apostles on the Day of Pentecost, St. Peter preached his first sermon beside King David’s tomb (Acts 2.29); for he was the ancestor of Christ, about whom his prophecies in the Psalms were now being fulfilled. And he witnessed that David, “being a prophet, knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne...” (Acts 2.30).

8. FROM THEOCRACY TO AUTOCRACY: (5) SOLOMON

The reigns of David and Solomon are especially important for the history of the people of God for three main reasons.¹¹⁸

First, in them the Israelite kingdom attained its greatest strength, subduing its enemies and almost reaching its geographical integrity as that had been promised to Abraham: "from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates" (Genesis 15.18). Secondly, the covenant which the Lord had sworn to the Family Church in the persons of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and to the Pilgrim Church in the persons of Moses and Joshua, He now renewed with the State Church in the persons of David and Solomon. The unconditional element of this covenant - the part which the Lord promised to fulfil whatever happened - was the promise of the Coming of Christ, "the Son of David". And thirdly, the worship of the Old Testament Church reached its maturity and most magnificent development in the building of the Temple and the establishment of all the Temple services.

Only this task was not entrusted to David in spite of his great zeal for the worship of God, because he was "a man of blood", having fought many wars and killed many men (sometimes unjustly), but to his son Solomon, who consecrated the Temple on the feast of Tabernacles, the feast signifying the end of the wanderings of the children of Israel in the desert and the ingathering of the harvest fruits. "When this massive project was finished," - it took twenty years - "a new citadel of white and gold had risen over Jerusalem..."¹¹⁹

The importance of Solomon's Temple as a figure of the New Testament Church can be seen in the many resemblances between the two, from the details of the priests' vestments and the use of the Psalter to the offering of incense and the frescoes on the walls. Even the structure of the Temple building, with its sanctuary, nave and narthex and two aisles, recalls the structure of the Christian basilica.

But there is this very important difference, that whereas the nave of the Temple was entered only by the priests, and the sanctuary only by the high-priest once a year, while all the services were conducted in the courtyard, the New Testament Church allows all Christians to enter the Church, inasmuch as they are "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people" (I Peter 2.9), for whom Christ the Great High-Priest has made "a new and living way" into the holy of holies (Hebrews 10.19-22) - not the earthly sanctuary built by Solomon, but the Kingdom of Heaven.

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¹¹⁸ The archaeological remains from David's and Solomon's reigns have been meagre, which has led to a school of "Biblical minimalists" led by scholars from the University of Copenhagen considering them to be fictitious characters. However, writes Robert Draper, "the credibility of that position was undercut in 1993, when an excavation team in the northern Israel site of Tel Dan dug up a black basalt stela inscribed with the phrase 'House of David'." ("Kings of Controversy", *National Geographic*, December, 2010, p. 79).

¹¹⁹ Jean-Pierre Isbouts, "Kings of the Bible", *National Geographic*, December, 2010, p. 39.

The consecration of the Temple by Solomon may be seen as the high point of the Old Testament, from which the rest of the Old Testament is a long and uneven, but inexorable fall until the Coming of Christ at its lowest point.

After completing the construction of the Temple, Solomon summoned all the elders and priests of Israel to take up the ark and the tabernacle from the City of David in Zion and bring into the newly-built Temple. At that point, the Holy Spirit, or Shekinah, descended into the Temple, as it had descended into the tabernacle, the forerunner of the Temple, in Moses' time. For "when the priests came out of the holy place, the cloud filled the house, so the priests could not stand there ministering because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house" (III Kings 8.10-11).

Solomon's Temple was the only place on earth where the true worship of God could be offered; its rites were the only true rites; and its priests were the only true priests. The people had to come to worship in the Temple three times in the years: on the feasts of Pascha, Pentecost and Tabernacles. In this way the unity and uniqueness of the true worship of the one true God was emphasized.

At the same time, this unique centre of the one and only true religion was to be open for all, "that all peoples of the earth may know Thy name and fear Thee, as do Thy people Israel" (III Kings 8.43). Christ Himself confirmed this: "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples'? But you have made it a den of thieves" (Mark 11.17). Only this did not mean any importing of foreign, pagan beliefs or rites into the purity of the one true faith. The Temple would truly become a house of prayer for all peoples if and when they abandoned their paganism and accepted the faith of Abraham...

The union of the kingship with the priesthood in the one Temple in the only major city of Israel not belonging to any of the tribes - for Jerusalem had been a Jebusite city until David and his men conquered it, - represented that ideal symphony of Church and State which was not to be recovered in its full glory until the Emperor Justinian consecrated the Great Church of the Holy Wisdom (*Hagia Sophia*) in Constantinople over 1500 years later, declaring: "Solomon, I have outdone thee!"

In response to Solomon's request for "an understanding mind to govern Thy people, able to discern between good and evil", "God said: 'I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you'" (I Kings 3.9, 11-12).

But in spite of his God-given wisdom, there lay within Solomon the seeds of that corruption which was to bring his kingdom down in ruins. For this great man whom God loved was not wise enough to heed the words inscribed in the Mosaic law about what a true king of Israel could not do: "He shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the Lord hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way. Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away; neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold." (Deuteronomy 17.14-17).

But Solomon did all these forbidden thing. Thus he "multiplied horses to himself", as has been discovered by archaeologists in the remains of his huge stables at Megiddo and Hazor. Moreover, he "multiplied wives to himself", pagan wives, who "turned his heart away" from the living God to idolatry. Finally, he "multiplied to himself silver and gold" on a vast scale. Thus with uncanny precision did the prophecy pinpoint the weaknesses of Solomon.

It may be objected that David, too, had many of these faults. After all, he, too, had many wives - some, like Solomon's mother Bathsheba, acquired by unlawful means. And by the end of his reign he had amassed fabulous wealth. But David's wives, unlike Solomon's, did not draw him away from the True Faith; and his wealth was not amassed to be spent on his own pleasures, but was handed over *en masse* towards the building of the Temple. Therefore for his sake God promised that the kingdom would not be divided in the reign of his son (I Kings 11.12).

When the Jews looked forward to the Messiah-King who was to restore their fortunes and usher in the Kingdom of God on earth, the image they conceived was compounded of the warlike prowess and courage of David and the peaceful splendour and wisdom of Solomon, ruling a kingdom as powerful and materially rich as was Solomon's.

Whereas David prefigures Christ as the Founder of the Church in Zion, Solomon, through his relationship with foreign rulers in Egypt, Tyre and Sheba, and his expansion of Israel to its greatest extent and splendour, prefigures the Lord's sending out of the apostles to spread the faith throughout the Greco-Roman world, the *oikoumene*. Thus David sang of his son as the type of Him Whom "all the kings of the earth shall worship, and all the nations shall serve" (Psalms 71.11). Moreover, at the very moment of the consecration of the Temple, the wise Solomon prays that foreign worshippers will also have their prayers heard (I Kings 8.41-43), looking forward to that time when the Jewish Temple-worship will be abrogated and the true worship of God will not be concentrated in Jerusalem or any single place, but the true worshippers will worship Him "in spirit and in truth" (John 4. 21-23). "For will God indeed dwell on earth? Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee: how much less this house that I have built" (I Kings 8.27). And yet God, without diminishing His infinity, would indeed dwell on earth, and in a temple - the temple of His human Body...

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As St. Philaret of Moscow demonstrates, the Israelite Autocracy is a model of God-given government for all nations in all times: "It is in the family that we must seek the beginnings and first model of authority and submission, which are later opened out in the large family which is the State. The father is... the first master... but since the authority of the father was not created by the father himself and was not given to him by the son, but came into being with man from Him Who created man, it is revealed that the deepest source and the highest principle of the first power, and consequently of every later power among men, is in God - the Creator of man. From Him 'every family in heaven and on earth is named' (Ephesians 3.15). Later, when sons of sons

became a people and peoples, and from the family there grew the State, which was too vast for the natural authority of a father, God gave this authority a new artificial image and a new name in the person of the King, and thus by His wisdom kings rule (Proverbs 8.15). In the times of ignorance, when people had forgotten their Creator... God, together with His other mysteries, also presented the mystery of the origin of the powers that be before the eyes of the world, even in a sensory image, in the form of the Hebrew people whom He had chosen for Himself; that is: in the Patriarch Abraham He miraculously renewed the ability to be a father and gradually produced from him a tribe, a people and a kingdom; He Himself guided the patriarchs of this tribe; He Himself raised judges and leaders for this people; He Himself ruled over this kingdom (I Kings 8.7). Finally, He Himself enthroned kings over them, continuing to work miraculous signs over the kings, too. The Highest rules over the kingdom of men and gives it to whom He wills. 'The Kingdom is the Lord's and He Himself is sovereign of the nations' (Psalms 21.29). 'The power of the earth is in the hand of the Lord, and in due time He will set over it one that is profitable' (Sirach 10.4).

"A non-Russian would perhaps ask me now: why do I look on that which was established by God for one people (the Hebrews) and promised to one King (David) as on a general law for Kings and peoples? I would have no difficulty in replying: because the law proceeding from the goodness and wisdom of God is without doubt the perfect law; and why not suggest the perfect law for all? Or are you thinking of inventing a law which would be more perfect than the law proceeding from the goodness and wisdom of God?"

"As heaven is indisputably better than the earth, and the heavenly than the earthly, it is similarly indisputable that the best on earth must be recognized to be that which was built on it in the image of the heavenly, as was said to the God-seer Moses: 'Look thou that thou make them after their pattern, which was showed thee in the mount' (Exodus 25.40). Accordingly God established a King on earth in accordance with the image of His single rule in the heavens; He arranged for an autocratic King on earth in the image of His heavenly omnipotence; and ... He placed an hereditary King on earth in the image of His royal immutability. Let us not go into the sphere of the speculations and controversies in which certain people - who trust in their own wisdom more than others - work on the invention... of better, as they suppose, principles for the transfiguration of human societies... But so far they have not in any place or time created such a quiet and peaceful life... They can shake ancient States, but they cannot create anything firm... They languish under the fatherly and reasonable authority of the King and introduce the blind and cruel power of the mob and the interminable disputes of those who seek power. They deceive people in affirming that they will lead them to liberty; in actual fact they are drawing them from lawful freedom to self-will, so as later to subject them to oppression with full right. Rather than their self-made theorizing they should study the royal truth from the history of the peoples and kingdoms... which was written, not out of human passion, but by the holy prophets of God, that is - from the history of the people of God which was from of old chosen and ruled by God. This history shows that the best and most useful for human societies is done not by people, but by a person, not by many, but by one. Thus: What government gave the Hebrew people statehood and the law? One man - Moses. What government dealt with the conquest of the promised land and the

distribution of the tribes of the Hebrew people on it? One man - Joshua the son of Nun. During the time of the Judges one man saved the whole people from enemies and evils. But since the power was not uninterrupted, but was cut off with the death of each judge, with each cutting off of one-man rule the people descended into chaos, piety diminished, and idol-worship and immorality spread; then there followed woes and enslavement to other peoples. And in explanation of these disorders and woes in the people the sacred chronicler says that 'in those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was pleasing in his own eyes' (Judges 21.25). Again there appeared one man, Samuel, who was fully empowered by the strength of prayer and the prophetic gift; and the people was protected from enemies, the disorders ceased, and piety triumphed. Then, to establish uninterrupted one-man rule, God established a King in His people. And such kings as David, Joshaphat, Hezekiah and Josiah present images of how successfully an autocratic Majesty can and must serve for the glorification of the Heavenly King in the earthly kingdom of men, and together with that - for the strengthening and preservation of true prosperity in his people... And during the times of the new grace the All-seeing Providence of God deigned to call the one man Constantine, and in Russia the one man Vladimir, who in apostolic manner enlightened their pagan kingdoms with the light of the faith of Christ and thereby established unshakeable foundations for their might. Blessed is that people and State in which, in a single, universal, all-moving focus there stands, as the sun in the universe, a King, who freely limits his unlimited autocracy by the will of the Heavenly King, and by the wisdom that comes from God."¹²⁰

¹²⁰ St. Philaret, in S. Fomin & T. Fomina, *Rossia pered Vtorym Prishestvoiem* (Russia before the Second Coming), Moscow, 1994, vol. I, pp. 320-321.

9. THE DECLINE OF THE ISRAELITE AUTOCRACY

After King Solomon's death, the schism between Church and State that had begun to open in Saul's reign, but had then been closed by David, began to reopen. The immediate cause was his son Rehoboam's arrogant refusal to lighten the burden of heavy labour imposed upon the tribes by his father: "My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke; my father also chastized you with whips, but I will chastize you with scorpions." (I Kings 12.14) Therefore the ten northern tribes broke away and chose as their king a renegade former servant of Solomon's who had taken refuge in Egypt - Jeroboam. Thus did Rehoboam reject the Lord's warning that the king's heart should "not be lifted up above his brethren" (Deuteronomy 17.20). And thus was fulfilled Samuel's warning about the despotic nature of ordinary - that is, non-theocratic - kingship. For autocracy was beginning to descend into despotism...

The political schism immediately engendered a religious schism. For Jeroboam reasoned that if the people of his kingdom continued to go up to the Temple in Jerusalem to pray, as the Law commanded, they would soon kill him and go over to Rehoboam. So he set up two golden calves, one in Bethel and the other in Dan, and said: "behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt" (I Kings 12.28). Aaron had unwillingly submitted to the people's demand for a golden calf to worship at the foot of Mount Sinai, for which Moses had shattered the tablet of the Ten Commandments. Now Jeroboam did the same - and there was no opposition to him in his kingdom. "And this thing became a sin: for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan." Consequently, the quality of the priesthood deteriorated sharply; for "he made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi" (I Kings 12.30-31).

With astonishing speed, therefore, the glorious kingdom of Solomon, the forerunner of the Kingdom of Christ, became the apostate kingdom of Jeroboam, the forerunner of the kingdom of the Antichrist - even to the extent that Jeroboam set up his false god in territory of the tribe of Dan, which, according to the patristic interpretation of Jacob's prophecy (Genesis 49.16-17), will be the tribe of the Antichrist.

Archaeology has revealed that the northern kingdom of Jeroboam was powerful, more powerful than the southern kingdom of Rehoboam. The reason for the relative weakness of the southern kingdom was its tendency to idolatry. The pattern, which repeated itself many times before the exile to Babylon was as follows: relative peace and prosperity, followed by religious apostasy, followed by war and impoverishment. We see this pattern even in the reign of the first king, Rehoboam. Thus the Chronicler writes: "When Rehoboam had consolidated the kingdom, and become strong, he and all Israel with him abandoned the law of Yahweh. And thus it happened that in the fifth year of King Rehoboam, Shishak king of Egypt¹²¹ marched on Jerusalem - *because*

¹²¹ "According to the New Chronology," writes David Rohl, "the real historical figure behind Shishak is none other than Ramesses II, whose hypocoristicon - Sysa (Semiticised as Shysha) - was common currency both in Egypt amongst the general population and in Canaan" (*From Eden to Exile*, p. 361). (V.M.)

they had been unfaithful to Yahweh – with twelve hundred chariots and sixty thousand cavalry and countless hordes of Libyans, Sukkiim and Kushites, who came from Egypt with him. They captured the fortified towns of Judah and reached Jerusalem,” (II Chronicles 12.1-4), taking with him back to Egypt all the Temple treasures except the Ark of the Covenant, which was hidden away by the priests...

Rehoboam’s son Abijah and grandson Asa were good kings, and a short-lived recovery now took place. For, as Rohl writes, “Asa was a devout Yahweh worshipper. He dismantled all the shrines dedicated to other gods which had proliferated in Judah during Rehoboam’s reign. The Asherah poles (symbols of sacred trees), representing the female consort of Baal, were torn down. In later years Asherah would be associated with Yahweh in the popular religion of Judah. The ordinary people (as opposed to the elite priesthood) felt it only natural that their god should have a spouse just like all the other male deities in the ancient world. Asherah, however, was synonymous with Astarte/Ashtaroth and hence the Mesopotamian Ishtar – and, as such, was an abomination to the priestly hierarchy of Yahweh’s monotheistic cult.

“Baal (‘Lord’) was the most popular god in the ancient Middle East. He was both storm-god and warrior, regarded as a legendary hero-king of the past. Baal was an abomination to the Israelite priests precisely because he was a human elevated to divine status [something normal among the Greeks and Romans, as we shall see]. In my view this universal god known as ‘Lord’, son of El, was none other than the mighty hunter and warrior, Nimrod, the first potentate on Earth... the celebrated king of the 1st Dynasty of Uruk built the Tower of Babel and founded the cities of Ashur and Nineveh. To the Assyrians he was known as Ninuria; to the Babylonians, Marduk. His divine consort was Inanna, also known as Ishtar, who in Canaan took the name Astarte – the Ashtaroth and Asherah of the Bible.

“For ten years (912-903 BC) Asa enjoyed a peaceful reign with no conflicts. In this time he was able to rebuild the fortified towns destroyed by Ramesses/Shysha and build the army of Judah back up to full strength. Ramesses, now in his late fifties and in his forty-second year on the throne, was advise of the new threat. He despatched a large force of Kushite and Libyan mercenaries, under the command of General Zerah (himself a Kushite), to crush Judah’s military ambitions. However,... Judah routed its enemy -... at Mareshah – and pursued the fleeing Kushites back to the city of Gerar on the coastal plain, plundering towns under the Egyptian protectorate as they went. Ramesses the Great and mighty Egypt had been humbled. Pharaoh would not trouble Jerusalem and its kings again...”¹²²

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In the eyes of the prophets, the northern kingdom was less legitimate than the southern, for its origin was rebellion against God and the God-appointed kingship and priesthood in Jerusalem. They were political schismatics who were on the way to becoming religious apostates. But God had not abandoned them completely.

¹²² Rohl, *From Eden to Exile*, pp. 368-369.

For when the northern King Ahab's wife Jezabel began to make Baalism the official religion of the State and to persecute those who resisted her, the holy Prophet Elijah rose up in defense of the true faith, slaughtering the priests of Baal and the soldiers whom Ahab sent against him. Moreover, in the northern kingdom, as in the southern, there were many faithful worshippers left; for as the Lord said to Elijah: "Yet I have left Me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him" (I Kings 19.18). However, the believers (like the Prophet Obadiah) were forced to live in hiding; and the great miracles of Elijah, whereby he stopped the heavens from raining for three and a half years, and showed Baal to be powerless at the sacrifice on Mount Carmel, and resurrected the son of the widow of Zarephath, and sent down fire on the messengers of King Ahaziah, did not bring about a lasting religious reformation.

The three-and-a-half years of drought brought about by the prayers of Elijah - is regarded as an image of the period of the three-and-a-half years of the Antichrist's rule, when the Prophet Elijah will again come to earth to rebuke the evil ruler and "turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I [the Lord] come and smite the earth with a curse" (Malachi 4.5).

This, the last verse of the Old Testament in the Massoretic text, is simultaneously a prophecy of the conversion of the Gentiles to the faith of the Christian Jews and of the conversion of the last generation of Jews to the faith of the Christians. For as St. Jerome writes, Elijah "will turn the heart of the fathers to the sons', that is, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and all the patriarchs, that their descendants should believe in the Lord and Saviour, in Whom they also believed: 'for Abraham saw My day, and was glad' (John 8.56): or the heart of the father to the son, that is, the heart of God to everyone who receives the Spirit of adoption. 'And the heart of the sons to the fathers', so that Jews and Christians, who now disagree amongst themselves, may agree by an equal faith in Christ. Whence it is said to the apostles, who passed on the teaching of the Gospel throughout the world: 'Instead of your fathers sons were born unto you' (Psalm 44.17)."

After Elijah's ascension his disciple Elisha continued the struggle. Although, like Elijah, he lived and worked mainly in the northern kingdom, he made clear his loyalty to the right-believing King Josaphat, son Asa, of the southern kingdom of Judah, over the usurping king of Israel. Once it happened that the two kings formed an alliance and approached the prophet for his advice. He said to the king of Israel: "What have I to do with you? Go to the prophets of your father and the prophets of your mother... As the Lord of hosts lives, Whom I serve, were it not that I have regard for Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would neither look at you, nor see you." (II Kings 3.13,14)...

Josaphat was not only more legitimate than the northern king: he was more pious altogether. Like David and Solomon, he ruled over the whole life of the nation, allowing no schism between the life of the State and the religion of the Church - but without confusing the two spheres. For he carefully distinguished the secular and ecclesiastical spheres, saying: "Take notice: Amariah the chief priest is over you in all matters of the Lord, and Zebediah the son of Ismael, the ruler of the house of Judah, for all the king's matters" (II Chronicles 19.11).

In 842, Elisha sent a priest to Ramoth-Gilead to anoint Jehu, a tough general. He was ordered to destroy the House of Ahab, while his sons were "to occupy the throne of Israel down to the fourth generation" (II King [IV Kings] 10.30). And they did: Jehu's dynasty lasted another four generations in the persons of Jehoahaz, Jehoash, Jeroboam II and Zechariah, for a total of seventy years.

However, the sickness of the northern kingdom was never healed. Ruled by kings of whom the Lord said: "They have made kings for themselves, but not by Me" (Hosea 8.4), the people went from bad to worse. Finally, in 722 BC, in the reign of King Hoshea, after a vain attempt to win Egyptian support, the kingdom was conquered by the Assyrian King Shalmaneser, its people were deported and it lost its religious and national identity for ever (II Kings [IV Kings] 17).

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While the northern kingdom of Israel perished, the southern kingdom of Judah continued to exist, though it was little better from a moral point of view. Isaiah's words are typical of the exhortations of the prophets in these years: "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, My people doth not consider. Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. Why should they be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment. Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city. Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah" (Isaiah 1.2-9).

The idea of "the remnant", a faithful core in an age of apostasy, now becomes more and more important in the writings of the prophets. Just as the Lord in Abraham's time was prepared to spare Sodom and Gomorrah as long as righteous Lot remained in it, so He was prepared to spare Judah as long as a faithful remnant was preserved in it. Thus King Hezekiah, though a vassal of Assyria, reversed the syncretistic policies of Ahaz. This attracted God's protection, and in one famous incident the angel of the Lord struck down 185,000 of the warriors of Sennacherib in one night.

This showed what could be done if faith was placed, not in chariots and horses, but in the name of the Lord God (Psalms 19.7). Moreover, Judah even survived her tormentor. Assyria, having been used to punish the sins of the Jews, was cast away by God (Isaiah 10.15), and in accordance with the words of the Prophet Nahum, was conquered by the Babylonians to the south.

In this period, as the people and priesthood became weaker in faith, the kingship became stronger. The strength and piety of the kings might have compensated for the weakness of the Church, at least in part. But if the king worshipped idols, then, like Ahaz, he might reign during his lifetime, but after his death “they did not bring him into the sepulchres of the kings of Israel” (II Chronicles 28.27). And if he did not understand his role, and was not kept in his place by a good high priest, then the results could be catastrophic. Thus in the reign of King Ozias (Uzziah) the kingship began to encroach on the altar. St. Jerome explains: “As long as Zacharias the priest, surnamed the Understanding, was alive, Ozias pleased God and entered His sanctuary with all reverence. But after Zacharias died, desiring to make the religious offerings himself, he infringed upon the priestly office, not so much piously as rashly. And when the Levites and the other priests exclaimed against him: ‘Are you not Ozias, a king and not a priest?’ he would not heed them, and straightway was smitten with leprosy in his forehead, in accordance with the word of the priest, who said, ‘Lord, fill their faces with shame’ (Psalms 82.17)... Now Ozias reigned fifty-two years... After his death the prophet Isaias saw the vision [Isaiah 6.1]... While the leprous king lived, and, so far as was in his power, was destroying the priesthood, Isaias could not see the vision. As long as he reigned in Judea, the prophet did not lift his eyes to heaven; celestial matters were not revealed to him.”¹²³

The prominent role played by the kings in restoring religious purity foreshadowed the similarly prominent role that the Orthodox autocrats would play in defence of the faith in New Testament times. Thus when the Emperor Justinian pressed for the anathematization of the works of three dead heretics, his supporters pointed to the fact that King Josiah had repressed the living idolatrous priests, and burned the bones of the dead ones upon the altar (II Kings 23.16).¹²⁴

Often, however, it was the kings who led the people in apostasy. Such was King Manasseh (698-644 BC), who ordered the execution of Isaiah and many others. “He rebuilt the high places destroyed by Hezekiah, established new altars dedicated to Baal in the courtyard of Yahweh’s temple and re-erected the Asherah pole in Jerusalem. The king even sacrificed his own son as a human offering to Moloch, the god of fire.”¹²⁵ He introduced the worship of Astarte, the goddess of love and war, whose cult was accompanied by temple prostitution.

Child-sacrifice was a sin particularly abhorrent to the Lord. The Israelites learned it from the Canaanites, - “They poured out innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the graven things of Canaan” (Psalms 105.36). That is one of the main reasons why the Lord ordered the extermination of that people and the related peoples of the Phoenicians and the Carthaginians. The representations of Baal and Astarte are very often accompanied by the six-pointed hexagram, which is now, by a bitter irony, called the Star of David – although it had nothing to do with

¹²³ St. Jerome, *Letter to Pope Damasus*, in Johanna Manley (ed.), *The Bible and the Holy Fathers*, Menlo Park, Ca.: Monastery Books, 1990, p. 412.

¹²⁴ A.A. Vasiliev, *History of the Byzantine Empire*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1952, p. 152.

¹²⁵ Rohl, *From Eden to Exile*, p. 423.

King David or the true Israel.¹²⁶ After two years in Assyrian exile, Manasseh repented of his sins in a moving prayer that forms part of Great Compline in the Orthodox Church to this day. But his son Amon returned to his father's idolatrous ways, only to be assassinated by his courtiers in 642.

However, the people rose up and assassinated Amon's assassins, bringing the eight-year-old Josiah to the throne. After his priest Huldah found a lost book of the Law in the Temple, Josiah instituted a thorough reformation of the people's religious life. He "removed the idolatrous priests whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense on the high places in the cities of Judah and in the places all around Jerusalem, and those who burned incense to Baal, to the sun, to the moon, to the constellations, and to all the hosts of heaven" (II Kings 23.5) – that is, the angels. Josiah's reinstitution of the feast of Pascha on a grand scale was perhaps his most memorable achievement: "No Passover like this one had ever been celebrated in Israel since the days of the Prophet Samuel" (II Chronicles 35.18).

However, Josiah made a fatal mistake in his relations with the contemporary superpower of Egypt. When Pharaoh Necho marched north to fight the Assyrians, Josiah went out to fight him. But Pharaoh sent messengers to him, saying, "What have I to do with you, king of Judah? I have not come against you this day, but against the house with which I have war; for God commanded me to make haste. Refrain from meddling with God, Who is with me, lest He destroy you". However, continues the chronicler, "Josiah would not turn his face from him, but disguised himself so that he might fight with him, and did not heed the words of Necho from the mouth of God. So he came to fight in the Valley of Megiddo." (II Chronicles 36.21-22) And there he was killed... The mourning over the death of King Josiah was unprecedented in its length and depth of feeling.

The priests were also guilty. They "said not, Where is the Lord? and they that handle the law knew Me not: the pastors also transgressed against Me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after things that do not profit" (Jeremiah 2.8). Betrayal reached even the highpriesthood. Thus Jewish tradition relates that Somnas, the high priest and temple treasurer in the time of King Hezekiah, wished to betray the people of God and flee to the Assyrian King Sennacherib. St. Cyril of Alexandria says of him: "On receiving the dignity of the high-priesthood, he abused it, going to the extent of imprisoning everybody who contradicted him."¹²⁷

The kings refused to obey Jeremiah's warning not to enter into alliance with either Egypt or Babylon; and he was thrown into pit by other priests, who said that "the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet" (18.18). But all this took place: the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem with great slaughter, destroyed the Temple, and deported most of the remaining people and priests with the Temple treasures to pagan Babylon...

¹²⁶ See Elena Samborskaya, "Otkrovenie o zvezde. Tajna geksagrammy" (Revelation about the star. The mystery of the hexagram), *Sviashchennoe Pisanie* (Holy Scripture), October 11, 2015, http://holyscripture.ru/creative/?t=helena_samborskaya&b=hexagram.

¹²⁷ St. Cyril, *P.G.* 70, 516B.

10. THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY

As we have seen, God punished the northern kingdom of Israel for its impiety by sending the Assyrians to destroy it before Himself destroying the instrument of His wrath (Isaiah 10.15) – a pattern that we find throughout history. Thus in 612 Assyria was conquered by Babylon, never to rise again. And in 605, and again in 586, the Lord punished the southern kingdom of Judah for its apostasy by sending Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, to destroy the Temple and exile the people to Babylon. For “the Lord, the God of their fathers, constantly sent to them by His messengers, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising His words, and scoffing at His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord rose against His people, until there was no remedy. Therefore He brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or aged: He gave them all into his hand” (II Chronicles 36.15-16).

The Jews had hoped to rebel against the Babylonians by appealing to the other despotic kingdom of Egypt. But the Prophet Jeremiah rebuked them for their lack of faith. If God wills it, he said, He can deliver the people on His own, without any human helpers, as He delivered Jerusalem from the Assyrians in the time of Hezekiah. However, national independence had become a higher priority for the Jews than the true faith. The only remedy, therefore, was to humble their pride by removing even their last remaining vestige of independence. Therefore, said the Prophet, “bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him and live! Why will you die, you and your people, by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence, as the Lord has spoken against the nation that will not serve the king of Babylon... And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it; for in its peace you will have peace...” (Jeremiah 27.12-13, 29.7).

John Barton writes: “We learn from the Murashu tablets (found in what is now southern Iraq) that the Jewish community had established businesses and even a bank, following Jeremiah’s advice to settle down and acclimatize to the Babylonian environment (Jeremiah 29).”¹²⁸

Nebuchadnezzar’s conquest of Jerusalem and carrying away of the Jews to Babylon, writes L.A. Tikhomirov, “was understood by the Jews as a punishment of God for their apostasy and corruption. In Babylonia, therefore, there began a process of repentance and regeneration. But on the other hand a powerful spiritual temptation awaited the Jews. Chaldea at that time had become an advanced country of pagan culture. In respect of religion it preserved all the charms of the magic of ancient Sumeria and Akkad, adding to it the astronomical and astrological science of Assyrian star-gazing, which, as we have seen, were already practised in Judah in the reign of King Josiah. The three main branches of ‘Chaldean wisdom’ combined a considerable fund of real scientific knowledge with the higher philosophy worked out through the ages by the mind of the Assyrio-Babylonians, combined with the teaching of Zoroaster

¹²⁸ Barton, *A History of the Bible*, London: Allen Lane, 2019, p. 31.

and offshoots of Hinduism. Paganism presented itself before the captives from Jerusalem as a huge intellectual power armed with everything that men could learn and assimilate at that time.

“To this we must add that Babylon had attained the highest level of political might and represented a remarkable system of state structure which was hardly excelled by all the ancient states. A profoundly worked out law guaranteed the inhabitants’ rights, and the Babylonian citizens of other tribes here came upon such perfect civil conditions as they could not even imagine in their native countries. The agriculture, industry and trade of Babylon were at a high level of development. As captives of another tribe, crushed materially and morally, recognizing that they had betrayed their Lord, the Jews came into a country that was striking by its might, glitter, wealth, knowledge, developed philosophical thought – everything by which one nation could influence another. If they ‘sat by the waters of Babylon and wept’, dreaming of revenge on the destroyers of their fatherland, they also could not help being subjected to the influences of Chaldean wisdom.

“They had grown up in the thousand-year conviction of the loftiness of their chosen people, of which there was no equal upon the earth. They remembered amazing examples of the help of the Lord in the past, when He had crushed the enemies of Israel, including the Assyrians themselves. They were filled with determination to raise themselves to the full height of their spirit and their providential mission. On the other hand, they did not have the strength not to submit to the intellectual influence of Babylon. In general, the age of the Babylonian captivity was the source of very complex changes in Israel. In the higher sphere of the spirit prophetic inspirations finally matured to the vision of the nearness of the Messiah. In the conservative layer of teachers of the law there arose a striving to realize that ‘piety of the law’, the falling away from which, as it seemed to all, had elicited the terrible punishments of God. There began the establishment of the text of the law and the collection of tradition; an embryonic form of Talmudic scholarship was born. Beside it, the masses of the people involuntarily imbibed the local pagan beliefs, and the teachings of ‘Chaldean wisdom’ were reflected in the minds of the intelligentsia; there was born the movement that later expressed itself in the form of the Cabbala, which under the shell of supposedly Mosaic tradition developed eastern mysticism of a pantheistic character...”¹²⁹

In His parable of the good figs and the bad figs, the Lord indicated that the Babylonian captivity was for the good of those exiled but for the punishment of those who remained behind: “Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge those who are carried away captive from Judah, whom I have sent out of this place for their own good, into the land of the Chaldeans. For I will set my eyes on them for good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them and not pull them down and not pluck them up. Then I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the Lord, and they shall be My people, and I will be their God, for they shall return to Me with their whole heart.

¹²⁹ Tikhomirov, *Religio-Filosofskie Osnovy Istorii* (The Religio-Philosophical Foundations of History), Moscow, 1997, pp. 135-136.

“And as the bad figs which cannot be eaten, they are so bad – surely thus says the Lord – so will I give up Zedekiah the king of Judah, his princes, the residue of Jerusalem who remain in this land, and those who dwell in the land of Egypt.” (Jeremiah 24.5-8).

This is a vivid image of how God acts through all the great events of history, demonstrating mercy to some and justice to others. For the good, for those who love God, these events are for their good, however unpleasant they may seem to be (Romans 8.28). But for the evil, they come as wrath and punishment...

From the early chapters of Daniel, and in particular in the story of the Three Holy Youths and their refusal to worship the idol set up by Nebuchadnezzar, we see that this king was a despot who tried to renew the pagan traditions of the founder of Babylon, Nimrod. In fact, we may speculate that he tried to renew Nimrod’s project of building the Tower of Babel. Thus two Catacomb Church nuns write: “Herodotus writes in his *History* that they built small ziggurats in Babylon (evidently in memory of the first failure) consisting of towers placed on top of each other. On the top of the small ziggurat E-temen-anki was raised a statue of the idol Marduk weighing 23.5 tons. Many centuries later the notable tyrant Nebuchadnezzar said: 'I laid my hand to finishing the construction of the top of E-temen-anki, so that it might quarrel with heaven.'”¹³⁰

¹³⁰ "Taina Apokalipticheskogo Vavilona" (The Mystery of the Apocalyptic Babylon), *Pravoslavnaia Zhizn'* (Orthodox Life), 47, N 5 (545), May, 1995, pp. 14-16. Grant Jeffrey writes: “[In the nineteenth century] the French government sent Professor Oppert to report on the cuneiform inscriptions discovered in the ruins of Babylon. Oppert translated a long inscription by King Nebuchadnezzar in which the king referred to the tower in the Chaldean language as *Borzippa*, which means *Tongue-tower*. The Greeks used the word *Borsippa*, with the same meaning of *tongue-tower*, to describe the ruins of the Tower of Babel. This inscription of Nebuchadnezzar clearly identified the original tower of Borsippa with the Tower of Babel described by Moses in Genesis. King Nebuchadnezzar decided to rebuild the base of the ancient Tower of Babel, built over sixteen centuries earlier by Nimrod, the first King of Babylon. He also called it the Temple of the Spheres. During the millenium since God destroyed it, the tower was reduced from its original height and magnificence until only the huge base of the tower (four hundred and sixty feet by six hundred and ninety feet) standing some two hundred and seventy-five feet high remained within the outskirts of the city of Babylon. Today the ruins have been reduced to about one hundred and fifty feet above the plain with a circumference of 2,300 feet. Nebuchadnezzar rebuilt the city of Babylon in great magnificence with gold and silver, and then decided to rebuild the lowest platform of the Tower of Babel in honor of the Chaldean gods. King Nebuchadnezzar resurfaced the base of the Tower of Babel with gold, silver, cedar, and fir, at great cost on top of a hard surface of baked clay bricks. These bricks were engraved with the seal of Nebuchadnezzar... In this inscription found on the base of the ruins of the Tower of Babel, King Nebuchadnezzar speaks in his own words from thousands of years ago confirming one of the most interesting events of the ancient past....: ‘The tower, the eternal house, which I founded and built. I have completed its magnificence with silver, gold, other metals, stone, enamelled bricks, fir and pine. The first which is the house of the earth’s base, the most ancient monument of Babylon; I built it. I have highly exalted its head with bricks covered with copper. We say for the other, that is, this edifice, the house of the seven lights of the earth, the most ancient monument of Borsippa. A former king built it, (they reckon 42 ages) but he did not complete its head. Since a remote time, people had abandoned it, without order expressing their words...’” (*The Signature of God*, Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale Publishers, pp. 40-41)

“The Babylonian captivity,” writes Deacon Pavel Serzhantov, “was permitted as a means of punishing the people, as a penance. The time of destruction and punishment came to an end, and the time of creation and repentance began, the time of the mercy of God. The Lord leads His people through severe testing – such trials that it seems to some that God abandoned His people and forgot about them, not sympathizing with their suffering, not paying heed to the lawless invaders. Is this really how we should understand it? No. ‘For he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of His eye’ (Zechariah 2:8).”¹³¹

Zechariah was not the only prophet sent by God to comfort the suffering Jews. “There was no limit to the grief and despondency of the ancient Jews,” says St. John Maximovich. “Jerusalem was destroyed and they themselves were led away into the Babylonian captivity... ‘Where are Thine ancient mercies, O Lord, which Thou swarest to David?’ (Psalm 88:50), they cried out. ‘But now Thou, hast cast off and put us to shame... They that hated us made us spoil for themselves and Thou scatterest us among the nations’ (Psalm 43:10-12).

“But when it seemed that there was no hope for deliverance, the Prophet Ezekiel, who was likewise in captivity, was made worthy of a wondrous vision. And the hand of the Lord came upon me, he says of this. The invisible right hand of the Lord placed him in the midst of a field full of human bones. And the Lord asked him: Son of man, will these bones live? And the Prophet replied: ‘O Lord God, Thou knowest this.’ Then the voice of the Lord commanded the Prophet to say to the bones that the Lord will give to them the spirit of life, clothing them with sinews, flesh, and skin. The Prophet uttered the word of the Lord, a voice resounded, the earth shook, and the bones began to come together, bone to bone, each to its own joint; sinews appeared on them, the flesh grew and became covered with skin, so that the whole field became filled with the bodies of men; only there were no souls in them. And again the Prophet heard the Lord, and at His command he prophesied the word of the Lord, and from the four directions souls flew to them, the spirit of life entered into the bodies, they stood up, and the field was filled with an assembly of a multitude of people.

“And the Lord said, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; and they say, Our hope has been lost, we have perished... Behold, I will open your tombs and will bring you up out of your tombs, My people, and I will put My spirit within you and ye shall live, and I will place you upon your own land (Ezekiel 37:1-14).

“Thus the Lord God revealed to Ezekiel that His promises are steadfast, and that what seems impossible to the human mind is performed by the power of God.

¹³¹ Serzhantov, “The Apple of the Almighty’s Eye”, *Orthodox Christianity*, February 21, 2017, <http://orthochristian.com/101230.html>.

“This vision signified that Israel, after being delivered from captivity, would return to its own land. In a higher sense, it indicated the settlement of the spiritual Israel in the eternal heavenly Kingdom of Christ. At the same time there is prefigured also the future General Resurrection of all the dead.”¹³²

Jeremiah prophesied that the Jews would serve the king of Babylon for seventy years, but that then the Lord would punish the king of Babylon and his people for their iniquity (Jeremiah 25.11-12). Everything took place as the prophet had foretold... Thus one night in 539 BC, Belshazzar (Nabonidus) the son of Nebuchadnezzar, was feasting with his lords, wives and concubines, drinking in the very same holy cups that had been taken by his father from the Temple in Jerusalem. At that point a mysterious hand appeared, writing on the wall. The Prophet Daniel was summoned and said: “This is the interpretation of each word. MENE: God has numbered your kingdom and finish it; TEKEL: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting. PERES: Your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and Persians.” (Daniel 5.26-29)

That very night Babylon was conquered, and Belshazzar killed, by Cyrus II, “the Great”, King of the Medes and Persians, one of the greatest rulers of history, whom the Lord even called “My anointed” (Isaiah 45.1), although he was a pagan.

What does this anointing signify? Saul, David and Solomon had been given a visible anointing that bestowed on them the Holy Spirit. But Cyrus was neither a king of Israel (although he was its overlord), nor did he receive a visible anointing. His case shows that in addition to the visible anointing given in the sacrament of coronation, there is also an invisible anointing.

Thus St. Philaret of Moscow writes: “The name ‘anointed’ is often given by the word of God to kings in relation to the sacred and triumphant anointing which they receive, in accordance with the Divine establishment, on their entering into possession of their kingdom... But it is worthy of especial note that the word of God also calls *anointed* some earthly masters who were never sanctified with a *visible* anointing. Thus Isaiah, announcing the will of God concerning the king of the Persians, says: ‘Thus says the Lord to His anointed one, Cyrus’ (Isaiah 45.1); whereas this pagan king had not yet been born, and, on being born, did not know the God of Israel, for which he was previously rebuked by God: ‘I girded thee, though thou hast not known Me’ (Isaiah 45.5). But how then could this same Cyrus at the same time be called *the anointed of God*? God Himself explains this, when He prophesies about him through the same prophet: ‘I have raised him up...: he shall build My city, and He shall let go My captives’ (Isaiah 45.13). Penetrate, O Christian, into the deep mystery of the powers that be! Cyrus is a pagan king; Cyrus does not know the true God; however Cyrus is the *anointed* of the true God. Why? Because God, Who ‘creates the future’ (Isaiah 45.11), has appointed him to carry out His destiny concerning the re-establishment of the chosen people of Israel; *by this Divine thought*, so to speak, *the Spirit anointed him before bringing him into the world*: and Cyrus, although he does not know by whom and for what he has been anointed, is moved by a *hidden anointing*,

¹³² Maximovich, “Will these Human Bones Come to Life?” *The Orthodox Word*, No. 50, May-June, 1973.

and carries out the work of the Kingdom of God in a pagan kingdom. How powerful is the anointing of God! How majestic is the anointed one of God! He is the living weapon of God, the power of God proceeds through him into the inhabited world and moves a greater or lesser part of the human race to the great end of its general completion."¹³³

Cyrus extended the Persian empire to the east and the west¹³⁴, and practised a remarkable degree of national and religious toleration for his time.¹³⁵

"Within twenty years," writes Simon Sebag Montefiore, he "had assembled the greatest empire the world had ever seen. He realized that keeping his vast new domain together would require peaceful diplomacy, rather than oppression and violence. So instead of forcing Persian customs and laws on the newly conquered peoples, he set about creating a new concept of world empire, selecting the best elements from different areas to create a better whole. He employed Median advisers, mimicked the dress and cultural influence of the Edamites, and tolerated religious freedom everywhere in return for total political submission. He governed from three capitals: Ecbatana, the Persian capital Pasargadae, and Babylon.

"His reputation was further enhanced by the discovery in the 19th century of the 'Cyrus Cylinder', an artefact inscribed with details of Cyrus' conquests and his overthrow of tyranny, and declaring his belief in religious toleration and his opposition to slavery."¹³⁶

And yet, as we read in both Jeremiah and Ezekiel, even among the exiles, many did not repent and did not return to Jerusalem, staying among the pagans and learning their ways. At the same time, the books of Daniel, Esther and Tobit show how many pious people remained among the Jews in exiled.

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¹³³ St. Philaret, *Iz Slova v den' koronatsia Imperatora Aleksandra Pavlovicha. Sbornik propovednicheskikh obratsov* (From the Sermon on the Day of the Coronation of the Emperor Alexander Pavlovich. A Collection of Model Sermons). Quoted in "O Meste i Znachenii Tainstva Pomazania na Tsarstvo" ("On the Place and Significance of the Mystery of Anointing to the Kingdom"), *Svecha Pokaiania* (Candle of Repentance) (Tsaritsyn), N 4, February, 2000, p. 15.

¹³⁴ Cyrus was one of the great conquerors in history. He began as king of Anshan in southern Iran, ruling over the house of the Achaemenians. "By 550 Cyrus had seized Ecbatana, dethroned Astyages, and taken over the vast Median empire. Scarcely had he done this when he launched upon a series of brilliant campaigns which struck terror far and wide...In 547/6 Cyrus marched against Lydia. Apparently he swept across Upper Mesopotamia en route, removing that area, and probably northern Syria and Cilicia, from Babylonian control. Then, hurdling the Halys in the dead of winter, he attacked the Lydian capital, Sardis by surprise, took it, and incorporated Lydia into his realm. With most of Asia Minor to the Aegean Sea in Cyrus' control", he campaigned "across Hyrcania and Parthia into what is today Afghanistan, and across the steppes beyond the Oxus as far as the Jaxartes. With a few rapid strokes he had created a gigantic empire, far larger than [any] known before" (John Bright, *A History of Israel*, London: SCM Press, 1980, p. 354).

¹³⁵ Jaime Alvar Ezquerro, "Dawn of Persia", *National Geographic Magazine*, September/October, 2016, 34.

¹³⁶ Montefiore, *Titans of History*, London: Quercus, 2012, p. 17.

Cyrus immediately freed the Jews and allowed them to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple, declaring: "Thus saith Cyrus, king of Persia, the Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build Him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all His people? His God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel (he is the God) which is in Jerusalem" (Ezra 1.1-3).

A pious remnant of Jews in Babylon, stirred up by the Prophets Haggai and Zechariah and in accordance with the prophecy of Jeremiah (24.6), returned to Jerusalem under the Davidic Prince Zerubbabel to rebuild the Temple. Work began in 536 BC, with financial help from Cyrus. So the Lord saved the religion and worship of Israel through His anointed king, Cyrus...

Cyrus had such respect for the God of Israel, and in particular for the holy Prophet Daniel, that the Babylonians accused him of "becoming a Jew" (Daniel 12.28 (LXX)), and on witnessing Daniel's deliverance from the lions' den, he cried out: "Great art Thou, O Lord God of Daniel, and there is no other beside Thee" (Daniel 12.41).

According to Yuval Noah Harari, it was Cyrus who introduced one of the most important political ideas in history: the idea that an empire can exist for the benefit of *all* its subject peoples, not just the dominant nation. "For the kings of Assyria always remained the kings of Assyria. Even when they claimed to rule the entire world, it was obvious that they were doing it for the greater glory of Assyria, and they were not apologetic about it. Cyrus, on the other hand, claimed not merely to rule the whole world, but to do so for the sake of all people. 'We are conquering you for your own benefit,' said the Persians. Cyrus wanted the peoples he subjected to love him and to count themselves lucky to be Persian vassals. The most famous example of Cyrus' innovative efforts to gain the approbation of a nation living under the thumb of his empire was his command that the Jewish exiles in Babylonia be allowed to return to their Judaeian homeland and rebuild their temple. He even offered them financial assistance. Cyrus did not see himself as a Persian king ruling over Jews - he was also the king of the Jews, and thus responsible for their welfare..."

"In contrast with ethnic exclusiveness, imperial ideology from Cyrus onward has tended to be inclusive and all-encompassing. Even though it has often emphasized racial and cultural differences between rulers and ruled, it has still recognized the basic unity of the entire world, the existence of a single set of principles governing all places and times, and the mutual responsibilities of all human beings. Humankind is seen as a large family: the privileges of the parents go hand in hand with responsibility for the children."¹³⁷

For all their bad reputation in modern times, multi-national empires have in general been more universalist in their ideology than smaller groupings centred on the power and glory of a single nation. And this remains the abiding glory of Cyrus the Great, the first non-Jewish "anointed of the Lord".

¹³⁷ Harari, *Sapiens. A Brief History of Mankind*, London: Vintage, 2011, pp. 218, 219.

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The greatest prophet of the Babylonian captivity was Daniel, who won the respect of Nebuchadnezzar by correctly divining and then interpreting the dreams he received from God, for which he was promoted to the post of "chief of magicians" of the Babylonian empire. The interpretations he gave were not flattering to Nebuchadnezzar, for they revealed that God would destroy his kingdom of gold (Babylon), which would be succeeded by the pagan empires of Media-Persia, Macedon and Rome, before Rome would be destroyed by the "stone cut from the mountain", Christ. One of Nebuchadnezzar's dreams that for his pride, and for his refusal to recognize the absolute dominion of God over all earthly kingdoms, he would go mad and live like an ox under the open air, but would eventually recover his sanity when he recognized the dominion of the one true God. As he himself confessed: "At the end of the days, I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted up my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honoured Him Who lives forever, for His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His Kingdom endures from generation to generation; all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and He does according to His will among the hosts of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay His hand, or say to Him, 'What hast Thou done?' At the same time, my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and splendour returned to me. My counselors and my lords sought me, and I was established in my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me. Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, for all His works are right and His ways are just, and those who walk in pride He is able to humble." (4.34-47).

A remarkable confession, by perhaps the purest example of despotism after Nimrod, to the fact that there is a King over all earthly kings, and that even the most powerful and evil of tyrants can repent before God, and God will have mercy on them...

11. THE ORIGINS OF DEMOCRACY

Although all the peoples of the ancient world were religious, and many of them identified their rulers with gods, they were not averse to overthrowing them and even killing them when it seemed to them that “the mandate of heaven”, to use the Chinese expression, had changed. In the sixth century BC, both the Greeks and Romans overthrew their kings. Only, unlike all the other ancient pagan peoples, they did not replace one king with another, but introduced the novel concept that the real king of the people was the people itself: democracy was born.

The introduction of democracy did not prevent them from remaining intensely religious. In Greece, as in Rome, no serious steps in public life were taken without determining the will of the gods through religious rites and sacrifices, or through consulting oracles, such as the one at Delphi.¹³⁸ In time, however, religious concepts of legitimacy became mixed up with rational, philosophical ones more consistent with democracy; and the legitimate king became not only he who is appointed by the will of the gods, but also, and indeed primarily, he who is appointed by the will of men.

A religious understanding could cope with regime change by positing that God or the gods had changed their minds. Thus King Saul, though originally legitimate and chosen by God, was rejected by Him in favour of the true king, David, “a man after Mine own heart”. Here the will of God is all: legitimacy has nothing to do with men’s choice, but only with God’s; men’s choice is involved only in accepting or rejecting the choice of God. The human element enters only in the king himself. By disobeying the will of God, he ceases to be a true king, and becomes instead a *tyrant*.

The word “tyrant” is Greek; in the original understanding of the word tyrants were not necessarily cruel despots, but “opportunistic noblemen who had taken power on behalf of sectional interests”.¹³⁹ Athenian democracy began in 593/4, when Solon was elected *archon*, or chief magistrate of the city, and was given dictatorial powers because of his wisdom. He introduced several reforms, which included removing the death penalty for all crimes except homicide – a previous ruler, Draco, had imposed the penalty on many minor offences, which was considered unacceptably harsh (hence the word “Draconian”). As Melissa Lane writes, he established “a moderate regime including rich and poor” and “was succeeded by two generations of *turannoi*. The first, Peisistratus, is described as having been a supporter of the people... Peisistratus gained and lost power several times, using every trick in the book...

“... He is described... as ruling ‘constitutionally rather than tyrannically’... This later judgement shows that even the paradigmatic tyrant of Athenian history could no longer be described as such. This is because that tyrant had at the time been seen as ruling moderately and benevolently, establishing local magistrates and even advancing money to the bankrupt. More than a few Athenians seem to have tolerated and even enjoyed his rule at the time.

¹³⁸ Hugh Bowden, “Greek Oracles and Greek Democracy”, *The Historian*, Spring, 1994; Jean-Pierre Isbouts, “Secret Societies”, *National Geographic*, pp. 13-14..

¹³⁹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solon>.

“In contrast, the excoriation of tyranny would, in the memory of later Athenians, attach indelibly to one of the sons of Peisistratus, Hippias. Hippias initially ruled jointly with his brother Hipparchus, who became embroiled in an unrequited love affair leading to a violent insult and quarrel. The erstwhile beloved, who had scorned Hipparchus’ advances, conspired with his lover and other citizens to overthrow the Peisistratids. In the midst of a civic procession they thought themselves betrayed, panicked and struck too soon, killing Hipparchus but being killed themselves (one immediately, one after torture) as a result. Hippias began to rule much more harshly, becoming a paradigm of tyranny in the modern pejorative sense, and the Spartans were induced by manipulated oracles to overthrow him and his family, allowing them safe conduct out of Athens once they had handed over the Acropolis, on which the meeting and sacred places of the city were concentrated. A further struggle between supporters of the tyrants and those of a previously powerful aristocratic family ensued, the Spartan force changing sides to expel the anti-tyrannical faction. But at that point, the people besieged the tyrannical forces on the Acropolis, recalled the exiles and gave power to one of them, Cleisthenes, who had ‘befriended the people’ (Hdt. 5.66).

“It is with this assertion of popular power and the subsequent legal innovations promoted by Cleisthenes that ‘democracy’ proper in Athens is widely acknowledged to have begun. The democracy would immortalize the two tyrannicides who had killed Hipparchus – putting up statues of them in the agora and commissioning new ones after the first lot were stolen (ironically, by the Persian Xerxes, a tyrant par excellence in many Greek imaginations). This inscribed an opposition to tyranny at the heart of the democracy, even as the *demos* (the people) began to act abroad – and perhaps at home – as a tyrant itself, taking power to act unaccountably while demanding accountability of its officers and allies.”¹⁴⁰

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Democracy received a further major stimulus when a Greek revolt against Persian rule in Asia Minor led to the Persian Emperor Darius invading Greece in 493. He was defeated in the famous battles of Thermopylae and Marathon. Then his successor Xerxes was defeated on the sea at Salamis and on land at Plataea (479). The victory over Persia gave a massive impulse to that Greek obsession with freedom as against tyranny, democracy as against despotism. This obsession with freedom and democracy had a decisive impact on Republican Rome and became the *leitmotif* of western civilization in the Renaissance and the Enlightenment up to the present day.

However, before going on to discuss the achievements of Athenian democracy, we should remind ourselves that Athens was not the whole of Greece, nor was democracy the only form of government to be observed among the Greek city-states. In Sicily and on the coast of Asia Minor monarchy still flourished. And on mainland Europe mixed constitutions including elements of all three forms of government were also to be

¹⁴⁰ Lane, *Greek and Roman Political Ideas*, London: Pelican, 2014, pp. 77, 78-79.

found, notably in Sparta, one of the earliest models of socialism in the western world.¹⁴¹

This diversity of state forms naturally led to a debate on which was the best; and we find one such debate recorded by the “Father of History”, Herodotus.

He placed it, surprisingly, in the court of the Persian King Darius. Was this merely a literary device (although Herodotus, who had already encountered this objection, insisted that he was telling the truth)? Or did this indicate that the Despotism of Persia tolerated a freer spirit of inquiry and debate than is generally supposed? We do not know.

In any case the debate – the first of its kind in western literature - is worth quoting at length:- “The first speaker was Otanes, and his theme was to recommend the establishment in Persia of popular government. ‘I think,’ he said, ‘that the time has passed for any one man amongst us to have absolute power. Monarchy is neither pleasant nor good. You know to what lengths the pride of power carried Cambyses, and you have personal experience of the effect of the same thing in the conduct of the Magus [who had rebelled against Cambyses]. How can one fit monarchy into any sound system of ethics, when it allows a man to do whatever he likes without any responsibility or control? Even the best of men raised to such a position would be bound to change for the worse – he could not possibly see things as he used to do. The typical vices of a monarch are envy and pride; envy, because it is a natural human weakness, and pride, because excessive wealth and power lead to the delusion that he is something more than a man. These two vices are the root cause of all wickedness: both lead to acts of savage and unnatural violence. Absolute power ought, by rights, to preclude envy on the principle that the man who possesses it has also at command everything he could wish for; but in fact it is not so, as the behaviour of kings to their subjects proves: they are jealous of the best of them merely for continuing to live, and take pleasure in the worst; and no one is readier than a king to listen to tale-bearers. A king, again, is the most inconsistent of men; show him reasonably respect, and he is angry because you do not abase yourself before his majesty; abase yourself, and he hates you for being a toady. But the worst of all remains to be said – he breaks up the structure of ancient tradition and law, forces women to serve his pleasure, and puts men to death without trial. Contrast this with the rule of the people: first, it has the finest of all names to describe it – equality under the law; and, secondly, the people in power do none of the things that monarchs do. Under a government of the people a magistrate is appointed by lot and is held responsible for his conduct in office, and all questions are put up for open debate. For these reasons I propose that we do away with the monarchy, and raise the people to power; for the state and the people are synonymous terms.’”

¹⁴¹ See Lev Karpinsky, “S ‘Sotsializmom’ napereves” (With “Socialism” in a Horizontal Position), *Moskovskie Novosti* (Moscow News), N 21, May 27, 1990; Vladimir Rusak, *Svidetel'stvo obvinenia* (Witness for the Prosecution), Jordanville, N.Y.: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1989, part III, p. 102; Montefiore, *Titans*, pp. 27-31.

“Otanés was followed by Megabyzus, who recommended the principle of oligarchy in the following words: ‘Insofar as Otanes spoke in favour of abolishing monarchy, I agree with him; but he is wrong in asking us to transfer political power to the people. The masses are a feckless lot – nowhere will you find more ignorance or irresponsibility or violence. It would be an intolerable thing to escape the murderous caprice of a king, only to be caught by the equally wanton brutality of the rabble. A king does at least act consciously and deliberately; but the mob does not. Indeed how should it, when it has never been taught what is right and proper, and has no knowledge of its own about such things? The masses handle affairs without thought; all they can do is to rush blindly into politics like a river in flood. As for the people, then, let them govern Persia’s enemies; but let us ourselves choose a certain number of the best men in the country, and give *them* political power. We personally shall be amongst them, and it is only natural to suppose that the best men will produce the best policy.’

“Darius was the third to speak. ‘I support,’ he said, ‘all Megabyzus’ remarks about the masses but I do not agree with what he said of oligarchy. Take the three forms of government we are considering – democracy, oligarchy, and monarchy – and suppose each of them to be the best of its kind; I maintain that the third is greatly preferable to the other two. One ruler: it is impossible to improve upon that – provided he is the best. His judgement will be in keeping with his character; his control of the people will be beyond reproach; his measures against enemies and traitors will be kept secret more easily than under other forms of government. In an oligarchy, the fact that a number of men are competing for distinction in the public service cannot but lead to violent personal feuds; each of them wants to get to the top, and to see his own proposals carried; so they quarrel. Personal quarrels lead to civil wars, and then to bloodshed; and from that state of affairs the only way out is a return to monarchy – a clear proof that monarchy is best. Again, in a democracy, malpractices are bound to occur; in this case, however, corrupt dealings in government services lead not to private feuds, but to close personal associations, the men responsible for them putting their heads together and mutually supporting one another. And so it goes on, until somebody or other comes forward as the people’s champion and breaks up the cliques which are out for their own interests. This wins him the admiration of the mob, and as a result he soon finds himself entrusted with absolute power – all of which is another proof that the best form of government is monarchy. To sum up: where did we get our freedom from, and who gave it us? Is it the result of democracy, or of oligarchy, or of monarchy? We were set free by one man, and therefore I propose that we should preserve that form of government, and, further, that we should refrain from changing ancient ways, which have served as well in the past. To do so would not profit us.’”¹⁴²

This to a western ear paradoxical argument that monarchy actually delivers freedom actually has strong historical evidence in its favour. Several of the Greek kings were summoned to power by the people in order to deliver them from oppressive aristocratic rule. Darius himself freed the Jews from their captivity in Babylon. Augustus, the first Roman emperor, freed the Romans from civil war. So did

¹⁴² Herodotus, *History*, III, 80, 81, 82.

St. Constantine, the first Christian Roman emperor, who also granted them religious freedom. Riurik, the first Russian king, was summoned from abroad to deliver the Russians from the misery and oppression that their anarchical "freedom" had subjected them to. Tsar Nicolas II died trying to save his people from the worst of all despotisms, Communism...

Of course, these men were exceptional: it is easy to find monarchs who enslaved or oppressed their subjects rather than liberating them. So the problem of finding the *good* monarch – or, at any rate, of finding a monarchical type of government which is good for the people even if the monarch himself is bad – remains. As Darius puts it, one-man rule is the best "provided he *is* the best". But the argument in favour of monarchy as put into the mouth of an oriental despot by a Greek democratic historian – that it prevents civil war – also remains valid. It should remind us that Greek historical and philosophical thought was more often critical of democracy than in favour of it.

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The victories over Persia were accomplished by the Delian League of Greek city-states, led by Athens. "In 461," writes Simon Jenkins, "the city came under the leadership of a popular orator, Pericles (461-429), who secured the ostracism of his conservative opponent, Cimon. He presided over Athens through a third of a century of its so-called Golden Age. A cultured, ascetic, innovative man, he is said to have been susceptible only to his mistress, Aspasia. He sought peace with Persia in 449, but was constantly in conflict with the cities of the Delian League.

"Pericles saw government as a web of interlocking civil and personal obligations, underpinned by an emerging rule of law. Periclean Athens blazed over the Aegean, a comet of intellectual and creative energy. The Acropolis was crowned with marble buildings. Its Parthenon temple to Athene was to become the most celebrated structure in the world, a template for (good) architects to this day. Round it were set temples to other gods, with beneath it the agora and theatre of Dionysus. These projects were financed from the Delian League, and as such were bitterly resented by its members.

"To Pericles civic life was fused with art. His friend, the sculptor Phidias, brought a new realism to the previously stylized portrayal of the human form. The playwrights Sophocles, Euripides and Aeschylus analysed the emotions of love, ambition and revenge. The historian Thucydides reminded Athenians of their greatest deeds and greatest mistakes. Hippocrates analysed disease as a natural not divine phenomenon.

"The city also found room for Socrates (469-399), prophet of the concept of deliberative reasoning. To Socrates humans were free agents with wills of their own, unbounded by Promethean myths of gods and creatures. To find wisdom they needed only to open their minds to the world around them... Socrates championed reason

against superstition, inquiry against authority. Above all, he said, humans owed it to their nature to be curious, to inquire without inhibition."¹⁴³

"Thucydides," continues Jenkins, "recorded Pericles' last three speeches as masterpieces of Greek oratory. In them (or as Thucydides recalled them) the great leader declared that the root of Athens' genius lay in tolerance. Its laws 'afford equal justice to all in their private differences... If a man can serve the state, he is not hindered by the obscurity of his condition. The freedom we enjoy in our government extends to our ordinary life...'"¹⁴⁴

Fine words, but they did not pass the test of reality. Athens' subjects in the Delian League rebelled and united with non-democratic Sparta against supposedly democratic and tolerant, but in fact tyrannical Athens in the Peloponnesian War. In 404 the Athenians finally lost that war, having disposed of the Melians with great cruelty...

The "glorious" age of fifth-century Athenian democracy came to an end in 399 with what Plato considered to be the greatest of all acts of injustice: the condemnation and execution of his teacher, Socrates. The critical charge against Socrates was a false, religious one: "They say that Socrates does wrong by corrupting the young, and not respecting the gods whom the city respects, but other, new ones." So there were limits, in Plato's eyes, to the tolerance - and justice - of Athenian democracy...

¹⁴³ Jenkins, *A Short History of Europe*, London: Viking, 2018, pp. 14-15.

¹⁴⁴ Jenkins, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

12. THE CLASSICAL GREEK WORLD-VIEW AND JUSTICE

The broadening of the membership of the citizen body, and the gradual democratization of public life had profound consequences, both religious and social, for the Greek city-states. With regard to religion, it is hard to determine whether increased democratization brought a weakening of religious faith, or vice-versa. But two major differences from the religion and culture of the East can be distinguished.

The first was the *dynamism* or relative *anti-traditionalism* of Greek culture. Thus E.H. Gombrich writes: "Whereas the great empires of the East bound themselves so tightly to the traditions and teachings of their ancestors that they could scarcely move, the Greeks – and the Athenians in particular – did the opposite. Almost every year they came up with something new. Everything was always changing..."¹⁴⁵

A second distinguishing feature of Greek classical culture was its particularly *human* view of God or the gods, suggesting that, for all their power, the gods were only relatively superior to human beings. Gods and men were not equal in power, but equal – or at any rate, not radically unequal – under a higher law of cosmic justice. Thus J.M. Roberts writes: "Greek gods and goddesses, for all their supernatural standing and power, are remarkably human. They express the man-centred quality of later Greek civilization. Much as it owed to Egypt and the East, Greek mythology and art usually presents its gods as (recognizably fallen) men and women, a world away from the monsters of Assyria and Babylonia, or from Shiva the many-armed. If the implication of this religious revolution was that the gods were no better than men, its converse was that men could be like the gods. This is already apparent in Homer; perhaps he did as much as anyone to order the Greek supernatural in this way and he does not give much space to popular cults. He presents gods taking sides in the Trojan war in postures all too human. They compete with one another; while Poseidon harries the hero of *The Odyssey*, Athena takes his part. A later Greek critic grumbled that Homer 'attributed to the gods everything that is disgraceful and blameworthy among men: theft, adultery and deceit'. It was a world which operated much like the actual world."¹⁴⁶

That men could be like the gods showed the intensely competitive nature of the Greek. "This spirit, this ferocious commitment to being the best, was one in which all aspired to share. In Homer's poetry, the word for 'pray', *euchomai*, was also a word for 'boast'."¹⁴⁷ Thus the whole tendency of Classical Greek religion was to exalt men and debase the gods.

As often as not, the Greek gods were in fact deified heroes, even criminals. Thus the Ten Martyrs of Crete during their confession of the Christian Faith during the reign of the Emperor Decius (third century) said: "There is no point in speaking about Zeus or his mother Hera, O ruler. Our fathers told us everything we need to know about Zeus' ancestry, birth, and character. If you would like to see his grave, we will

¹⁴⁵ Gombrich, *A Little History of the World*, London: Yale University Press, 2008, pp. 42-43.

¹⁴⁶ Roberts, *History of the World*, Oxford: Helicon Publishing, 1992, p. 139.

¹⁴⁷ Tom Holland, *Dominion*, London: Abacus, 2019, p. 14.

gladly show it to you. He was born here in Crete, and brought much unhappiness to the people of our island. Such a fornicator was he, that he corrupted both men and women. By sorcery he frequently changed his appearance, so that he might work vile deeds more readily. Because evil easily makes a captive of those into whom it sinks its talons, he became a hero to certain knaves whom he introduced to a life of depravity, and they made him their god, building him temples and offering him oblations. Such was the depth of perversion they reached, that they wanted a deity as degenerate as themselves, who would bestow approbation upon vice..."¹⁴⁸

If the gods were such uninspiring figures, against whom men could compete in virtue, it was hardly surprising that the *kings* should cease to inspire awe. Hence the trend, apparent from Homeric times, to *desacralise* kingship. For if in religion the universe was seen as "one great City of gods and men", differing from each other not in nature but in power, why should there be any greater differences in the city of man? Just as gods can be punished by other gods, and men like Heracles can become gods themselves, so in the politics of the city-state rulers can be removed from power. There is no "divine right" of kings because even the gods do not have such unambiguous rights over men.

As we pass from Homer to the fifth-century poets and dramatists, the same religious humanism, tending to place men on a par with the gods, is evident. Thus the conservative poet Pindar writes:

*Single is the race, single
Of men and gods:
From a single mother we both draw breath.
But a difference of power in everything
Keeps us apart.*

Over all, however, is cosmic justice, the real ruler of both gods and men. Thus for Aeschylus the whole of history is shaped by the divine hand of Justice. Cosmic justice must always be satisfied, and the men who defy the laws of the gods are always punished for their pride (*hubris*).

Nevertheless, in the plays of Aeschylus, for example, the men who rebel (e.g. Prometheus), are sometimes treated with greater sympathy than the gods against whom they rebel. Even the conservative Sophocles puts a man-centred view of the universe into the mouth of his characters, as in the chorus in *Antigone*:

*Many wonders there are, but none more wonderful
Than man, who rules the ocean...
He is master of the ageless earth, to his own will bending
The immortal mother of gods.*

¹⁴⁸ St. Demetrius of Rostov, *Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints*, House Springs, Mo.: Chrysostom Press, 2000, vol. 4: December, p. 435.

In about 415 BC the Sicilian writer Euhemerus developed the theory that the gods originated from the elaboration of actual historical persons.¹⁴⁹

This humanist tendency led, in Euripides, to open scepticism about the gods. Thus Queen Hecabe in *The Trojan Women* expresses scepticism about Zeus in very modern, almost Freudian tones:

*O Zeus, be thou Natural Necessity
Or the Mind of Man, to thee do I pray.*

Euripides' gods and goddesses, writes Michael Grant, "emerge as demonic psychological forces – which the application of human reason cannot possibly overcome – or as nasty seducers, or as figures of fun. Not surprisingly, the playwright was denounced as impious and atheistic, and it was true that under his scrutiny the plain man's religion crumbled to pieces."¹⁵⁰

If the dramatists could take such liberties, in spite of their dramas being staged in the context of a religious festival, it is not to be wondered at that the philosophers went still further. Thus Protagoras, the earliest of the so-called sophists, – travelling teachers or professional rhetors - wrote: "I know nothing about the gods, whether they are or are not, or what their shapes are. For many things make certain knowledge impossible – the obscurity of the theme and the shortness of human life." And again: "*Man is the measure of all things, of things that are, that they are; and of things that are not, that they are not.*"

Protagoras did not question the moral foundations of society in a thorough-going way, preferring to think that men should obey the institutions of society, which had been given them by the gods.¹⁵¹ Thus he did not cut the bond connecting human institutions (νομος) with the Divine order of things (φυσικς), – a step that was not taken unequivocally until the French revolution. Nevertheless, his thought shows that Athenian democratism tended to go hand in hand with religious scepticism or humanism.

The distinction between human institutions (νομος) and the Divine order of things (φυσικς) is a very important one for the history of western civilization. "Man-made *nomoi*," writes Lane, "were human conventions. 'Law' in that sense, born of the happenstance of human contrivance, whether a tyrant's whim or an assembly's close-run vote, was presented as contrasting with the real nature of things – a nature that

¹⁴⁹ C.S. Lewis, "Religion without Dogma?" in *Faith, Christianity and the Church*, London: HarperCollins, 1902, p. 165, footnote.

¹⁵⁰ Grant, *The Classical Greeks*, London: Phoenix, 1989, p. 130.

¹⁵¹ J.S. McClelland writes: "The Greeks did understand that one of the ways of getting round the problem of the vulnerability of a constitution on account of its age and its political bias was to pretend that it was very ancient indeed. That meant mystifying the origins of a constitution to the point where it had no origins at all. The way to do that was to make the constitution immortal by the simple expedient of making it the product of an immortal mind, and the only immortal minds were possessed by gods, or, as second-best, by supremely god-like men" (*A History of Western Political Thought*, London and New York: Routledge, 1996, p. 11).

might be governed by a justice or law that is altogether different from the laws passed by humans. To contrast *nomos* and *physis* was to call attention to the conventions of human contrivance, in comparison with the unalterable nature of reality – and, for the most part, *nomos* came off worse.”¹⁵²

The Divine order of things (φύσις) was manifested above all, as we have said, in a certain *cosmic justice*. As the pre-Socratic philosopher Anaximander put it: “All things pay retribution to each other for their injustice according to the judgement of Time”.¹⁵³ Cosmic justice was a major theme of Greek philosophy from Anaximander to Plato. It was also the principal obsession of the great fifth-century Greek tragedians Aeschylus, Euripides and Sophocles. Most of their plots concern crime and punishment, *hubris* and *nemesis*. Tragedy was born as an inquiry into the nature of justice.

Thus at the dawn of tragedy, we find Aeschylus’ archetypal tragic hero, Prometheus, “bound in adamantine chains unbreakable” and defiantly challenging the power of Zeus, the king of the gods:

*Let him hurl at me the curlèd lightning’s prongs;
Let him rouse the air with spasms of saddened winds
And thunder; let hurricane convulse the earth
To her very roots; let the seas’ savage roar
Confound the courses of the heavenly stars;
Let him lift me high and hurl to Tartarus’ gloom
On whirling floods of inescapable doom -
He cannot kill me.¹⁵⁴*

Zeus cannot kill Prometheus, because Prometheus is a god and immortal. But he is also the son of Earth, so he feels a bond with the mortal race of man. He belongs, therefore, to both the kingdom of heaven and the society of men, which involves him in a conflict of obligations. In bringing fire from heaven to earth, Prometheus fulfilled his obligations to men but broke his obligations to heaven. Zeus therefore bound him in chains to a rock.

Prometheus protests that this is *unjust* –

*O sky divine, and swift-winged winds,
And river springs, and ocean waves’
Multitudinous laughter – see!
See, O Earth, mother of all!
And you, all-seeing circle
Of the sun, on you I call!
See what on me, a god, the gods let fall!¹⁵⁵*

¹⁵² Lane, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-51, 52.

¹⁵³ Anaximander, in Simplicius, *Physics*, 24, 17.

¹⁵⁴ Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, 1043.

¹⁵⁵ Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, 88.

For according to the justice of equality a god should not be coerced by another god. On the other hand, Zeus can invoke the justice of hierarchy – Prometheus has usurped a higher place than is his by right in the hierarchy of the gods.

In Aeschylus the conflict between different criteria of justice can only be resolved by the goddess Justice herself:

*Justice lights up smoke-dimmed
Halls of the righteous, and honours
Those who walk with God.
She passes by, with eyes
Averted, gilded splendours
Stained by filthy hands.
For she disdains the power
Of avarice falsely stamped
With praise. And all things are steered
To their appointed end.¹⁵⁶*

For Justice is in league with Fate:

*Justice plants the anvil:
The sword is forged by Fate.¹⁵⁷*

However, Sir Roger Scruton sees both in Aeschylus and his successor-tragedian Sophocles a distinction between Divine and human justice, which is the embryo of the characteristically western distinction between religion and politics. “The action of Sophocles’ *Antigone* hinges on the conflict between political order, represented and upheld by Creon, and religious duty, represented in the person of Antigone. The first is public, involving the whole community; the second is private, involving Antigone alone. Hence the conflict cannot be resolved. Public interest has no bearing on Antigone’s decision to bury her dead brother, while the duty laid by divine command on Antigone cannot possibly be a reason for Creon to jeopardize the state.

“A similar conflict informs the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus, in which a succession of religious murders, beginning with Agamemnon’s ritual sacrifice of his daughter, lead at last to the terrifying persecution of Orestes by the furies. The gods demand the murders; the gods also punish them. Religion binds the house of Atreus, but in dilemmas that it does not resolve. Resolution comes at last when judgement is handed over to the city, personified in Athena. In the political order, we are led to understand, justice replaces vengeance, and negotiated solutions abolish absolute commands. The message of the *Oresteia* resounds down the centuries of Western civilization: it is through politics, not religion, that peace is secured. Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, but justice, says the city, is mine.”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 773.

¹⁵⁷ Aeschylus, *The Libation-Bearers*, 646.

¹⁵⁸ Scruton, *The West and the Rest*, London: Continuum, 2002, pp. 2-3.

This is an interesting thesis, but it makes too strong a contrast between religion and politics at this stage of Greek thought. After all, the court of the Areopagus, as Lane writes, “served religious as well as judicial functions”, so its decisions, like all decisions in the Age of Faith, are not *purely* secular. Moreover, Athena is a *goddess*, and although “she sets up the court and serves in the first case as one of the twelve jurors, sitting alongside eleven Athenian mortals,” she remains a goddess who is higher than the human jurors she sits with. It is she who casts the deciding vote to acquit Orestes and thereby break the cycle of vengeful justice, which makes it in the end a decision of the gods, not of men. And so “the image of a goddess deliberating as one member of an otherwise human jury underscored the divine nimbus attached to the idea of justice, the awe with which it had to be surrounded if social ties were to withstand the many breakdowns and violations of justice that everyday life inevitably entailed.”¹⁵⁹

The same is true in Sophocles’ *Antigone*, in which Creon, while upholding the justice of the state in refusing to bury the traitor Polyneides, is clearly wrong in upholding the justice of the state against the higher justice of the gods by condemning Antigone to death. Human justice is clearly subordinate to Divine justice here.

What is new in Sophocles’ play is the psychological analysis, the idea that religious motives can be polluted by all-too-human passions. Thus when Antigone decides to defy Creon’s edict by performing this service for her brother’s unsettled ghost:

*I will bury him –
What glory to die for that! I will lie with him
Loving and beloved; for piety
Condemned. For I have more time to serve those below
Than those up here; there I shall lie forever.*¹⁶⁰

we detect a hint of a certain Pharisaism, even sensuality, corrupting the purity of her undoubtedly correct championship of a higher justice and morality.

Antigone dies for her brother; but death to her is what chastity is to Shakespeare’s Isabella.

*Nothing can rob me of my honourable death,*¹⁶¹

She says to her sister Ismene; and

*Take heart – you live: my heart is long since dead
To serve the dead.*¹⁶²

Creon’s hints that her religious passion is a kind of Manichaeian love of death:

¹⁵⁹ Lane, *op. cit.*, pp. 44-45.

¹⁶⁰ *Antigone*, 71.

¹⁶¹ *Antigone*, 96.

¹⁶² *Antigone*, 559.

*There let her pray to Death – of all the gods
She worships him alone – to spare her death.
Then at length she will learn what pain unimag-
inable is it to worship Death when dead.¹⁶³*

There follows an ode to “unconquerable Eros”. But what kind of Eros is meant? If it is Antigone’s almost Isoldean passion for death, then it may be unconquerable, but it is also destructive. Her betrothed Haimon (*haima* is the Greek for “blood”) kills himself when he finds her dead – his eros has been crushed to death. The tragic irony is that she who said:

To join in love, not hatred, was I born,¹⁶⁴

has left in her heroic wake only hatred and suffering. She championed the justice of the gods against the justice of the state, and in this the gods supported her – Creon loses not only his son Haimon, but also his wife Eurydice in punishment for his “self-will”. But the chorus describes Antigone, too, as self-willed. Self-will infects both Creon and Antigone.

This psychologism is imitated in later western drama – for example, in the very similar dynamic between Angelo and Isabella in Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure*, and also in *Hamlet*, where the hero’s quest for justice leads to a pile of dead bodies, including those of several innocents.

The moral is that to fight for Divine justice is great and commendable, but that even the greatest feats of heroism can be corrupted by pride and therefore lead to the suffering of the innocent.

Sophocles’ last play, *Oedipus at Colonus*, performed in 406 as Athens faced defeat by Sparta, takes the analysis of justice one step further. In this work, Time is, as in Anaximander, the ultimate judge of all things. But there is no joy in the triumph of this Divine justice, which destroys even the best that is human:

*Only the gods escape old age and death:
The rest are victims all of ruinous Time.
Earth’s strength decays, and health departs; faith dies,
And falsehood blooms; the breath of friendship fails
‘Twixt man and man, and state and state. Whether soon
Or late, sweet turns to sour, and fair to foul.
If now ‘twixt you and Thebes the day is fine,
Time will bring forth a thousand days and nights
In which the most harmonious, close-bound friends
Will part at spear’s point for the merest nothing.¹⁶⁵*

¹⁶³ *Antigone*, 777.

¹⁶⁴ *Antigone*, 523.

¹⁶⁵ *Oedipus at Colonus*, 607.

Oedipus' son Polyneices enters, and appeals to his father in the name of "Mercy, who sits beside the throne of God", to help him against his brother Eteocles. This is a new note in tragedy: mercy also has its claims, for it, too, is divine. However, it is not given to Sophocles to develop this new theme. For Oedipus, in the name of "old, eternal Justice", brings curses on both his sons. Then he is borne away through the midst of thunder and lightning to "unseen fields of night". He could say, as did Shakespeare's Timon of Athens,

*My long sickness
Of health and living now begins to mend,
And nothing brings me all things...(V, 1)*

The third of the great Athenian dramatists, Euripides, did not share his older colleagues' faith in justice. It wasn't only that the justice of the state was often unjust, and the justice of the gods brought only suffering. The more fundamental question was: did justice really exist? Thus when Medea is betrayed by Jason and murders their children in revenge, the gods aid and abet her to the last. When Hippolytus ignores Aphrodite, he is destroyed together with Phaedra, the instrument of the goddess' revenge. And when Pentheus persecutes the followers of Dionysius, he is torn apart limb from limb. Euripides did not try to justify the ways of God to men; "justice strain'd with mercy" is to be found neither in heaven nor on earth.

The historian Herodotus believed in justice. For Herodotus, writes Simon Sebag Montefiore, "pride always comes before a fall, but he emphasizes that such failures are not the punishment of the gods, but rather result from human mistakes. This rational approach, in which the gods did not intervene in the affairs of men, was a major innovation and formed the basis for the tradition of Western history."¹⁶⁶ But a harmful innovation. For if God does intervene in the affairs of men, denying it can only distort our understanding of the reality...

Justice is also an important theme in the greatest of the Greek philosophers, Plato. The whole of his best-known dialogue, *The Republic*, is devoted to the nature of justice. Moreover, in *Timaeus* and *Critias* he uses the story of the Fall of Atlantis, a mythical mercantile empire that was overwhelmed by volcanoes and floods, as an allegorical illustration of how the gods visit nemesis on the pride of nations - with a possible reference to the contemporary mercantile empire of Athens.¹⁶⁷

The early Christian writer Origen believed that the source of the wisdom of the Greeks lay in the wisdom that God gave to the Hebrew King Solomon: of moral philosophy - in Solomon's *Proverbs*, of natural philosophy - in *Ecclesiastes*, and of Divine contemplation - in *The Song of Songs*.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Montefiore, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

¹⁶⁷ In recent years, many historians, geologists and archaeologists have come to believe that Plato's account is based on real historical memories of the Minoan civilization of the second millennium BC, and on the great volcanic eruption that took place on the Minoan trading outpost of Thera (modern Santorini) in 1620 BC, which created a vast tsunami that destroyed the centre of Minoan civilization on Crete and whose effects were felt as far east as Egypt and as far west as Ireland.

¹⁶⁸ Origen, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, Prologue, 3.

Even if we do not accept that the wisdom of the Greeks derived from the Hebrews, it is instructive to contrast the great advance made by the Greeks in probing the nature of justice, with the great prophets of Israel, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, who were praising the justice of God and denouncing the injustices of men at about the same time.

“The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom”: this is from the Old Testament, but it could also serve as the motto of the great Greek tragedians. The Hebrew and the Greco-Roman worlds agreed that the world is governed in accordance with Divine justice. Wisdom therefore begins in acknowledging this ineluctable fact, and managing one’s life in accordance with it. To do otherwise is foolish – and will bring down upon oneself the wrath of Cosmic Justice.

Beyond that acknowledgement, of course, the Jews and the Greeks diverged in their thinking. The Jewish prophets, having a direct knowledge of the One True God, and a deeper and more accurate knowledge of His laws, entertained no Euripidean doubts about His justice. And, having a much higher estimate of the God of Abraham than the Greeks had of Zeus and his often wayward family, they were much less patient with the idea that God was in any way unjust. Thus “The house of Israel saith, ‘The way of the Lord is not equal.’ ‘O house of Israel, are not My ways equal? Are not your ways unequal? Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways’” (Ezekiel 18.29-30.). Again, the last of the Prophets, Malachi (fifth-century BC), says: “Ye have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet ye say, ‘Wherein have we wearied Him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and He delighteth in them.’ Or, ‘Where is the God of judgement?’” (Malachi 2.17). But God, for the Jewish prophets, is never unequal – that is, unjust – in His ways; He is always the God of judgement.

The Jewish prophets are no less stern than the Greek tragedians in seeing an inexorable link between crime and punishment, *hubris* and *nemesis*. But they have none of the black pessimism of Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus*. The God of justice does not only punish: He also comes to save His people from their oppressors, “to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable years of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our Go; to comfort all who mourn, to console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be alled trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified” (Isaiah 61.1-3).

Of course, this joyful outcome for the just and the justified would come only with the Saviour, Jesus Christ, of whom the Greeks had no conception and the Jews only a dim one as yet. However, in this obsession with justice in both the Jewish and the Greco-Roman world we may see a preparation for Christ, and an anticipation of the time when both Jews and Greeks would be one in Christ, worshipping the God both of justice and of mercy. If the Law and the Prophets were “a schoolmaster to Christ” for the Jews (Galatians 3.24), then the great works of the Greek tragedians and philosophers provided that cultural and intellectual earth in which the new Christian

civilization could grow and prosper. For Greek philosophy, according to Clement of Alexandria, "was given to them for a time and in the first instance for the same reason as the Scriptures were given to the Jews. It was for the Greeks the same nurse towards Christ as the law was for the Jews..."

13. ATHENIAN DEMOCRACY

The unlikely victory of Sparta over Athens in the Peloponnesian war (429-404 BC) is a parable of the superiority of deeds over words; for the Athenians were renowned for their oratory and glorious literary culture, but in the end they succumbed to the determination and discipline of the laconic Spartans. "At a certain gathering of Athenians, at which envoys from Sparta were sent, one old man was going from bench to bench, trying to find somewhere to sit down. The Athenians mocked him, and no one gave him his seat. When the old man drew near to the Spartans, they all leapt to their feet and offered him their places. Seeing this, the Athenians expressed their gratitude to the Spartans in well-rounded phrases. To this the Spartans replied: 'The Athenians know what is good, but do not do it.'"¹⁶⁹

The reputation of democracy began to suffer after the defeat of Athens, and the many negative phenomena that the war threw up, which led not only to a slackening in the creative impulse that had created Periclean Athens, but also, eventually, to a questioning of the superiority of democracy over other forms of government.

The first and most obvious defect that the war revealed was that democracy tends to divide rather than unite men – at any rate so long as there are no stronger bonds uniting them than were to be found in Athens. Remembering their racial and cultural bonds, the Greeks had united to defeat Persia early in the fifth century B.C., and this had provided the stimulus for the cultural efflorescence of Periclean Athens. But this was both the first and the last instance of such unity. "Herodotus notes how the Persian empire, although made up of diverse people divided by religion, geography and language, nevertheless acts with a remarkable unity. The Greeks, by contrast, drawn from a relatively small pool of culturally homogeneous city-states, are prone to faction and infighting..."¹⁷⁰ For the next one hundred and fifty years, until Alexander the Great imposed despotism on the city-states, the Greek city-states were almost continually at war with each other.

Nor was this disunity manifest only *between* city-states: *within* them traitors were also frequent. Thus Athens' greatest general, Alcibiades, betrayed his city in the war with Sparta. And after the Athenians had been defeated by Sparta they suffered a bloody oligarchical coup in 394: the so-called Thirty Tyrants "killed, exiled and expropriated thousands until democratic loyalists succeeded in reconquering the city and re-establishing its democratic regime".¹⁷¹

Evidently, attachment to democracy does not necessarily go together with attachment to the nation, with patriotism and civic loyalty. This fact elicited Aristotle's famous distinction between behaviour that is characteristic of democracy and behaviour that is conducive to the survival of democracy. The same dilemma was to confront democracy in its struggle with communism in the twentieth century, when

¹⁶⁹ Velimirovich, *The Prologue of Ochrid*, Birmingham: Lazarica Press, 1985, part one, January 5, pp. 28-29.

¹⁷⁰ Montefiore, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

¹⁷¹ Melissa Lane, "Was Socrates a Democrat?", *History Today*, vol. 52 (01), January, 2002, p. 43.

large numbers of citizens of the western democracies were prepared to work secretly (and not so secretly) for the triumph of a foreign power and the most evil despotism yet seen in history.

This element of destructive individualism is described by Roberts: "Greek democracy... cheerfully paid a larger price in destructiveness than would be welcomed today. There was a blatant competitiveness in Greek life apparent from the Homeric poems onwards. Greeks admired men who won and thought men should strive to win. The consequent release of human power was colossal, but also dangerous. The ideal expressed in the much-used word [αρετη] which we inadequately translate as 'virtue' illustrates this. When Greeks used it, they meant that people were able, strong, quick-witted, just as much as just, principled, or virtuous in a modern sense. Homer's hero, Odysseus, frequently behaved like a rogue, but he is brave and clever and he succeeds; he is therefore admirable. To show such quality was good; it did not matter that the social cost might sometimes be high. The Greek was concerned with 'face'; his culture taught him to avoid shame rather than guilt and the fear of shame was never far from the fear of public evidence of guilt. Some of the explanation of the bitterness of faction in Greek politics lies here; it was a price willingly paid."¹⁷²

Another defect of Athenian democracy was its tendency to identify the state with the assembly of free male citizens in separation from the family¹⁷³, whereas Aristotle saw the state as an organic outgrowth from the family - the family writ large. This led to the emphasis on individualism and competitiveness we have already noted, and undermined the relations of hierarchy and obedience within society. Perhaps, therefore, it is not by chance that the first feminist work of literature was Aristophanes' comedy, *Lysistrata*.

"Those who most benefited from the 'empire' were, Aristotle said, the Athenian poor. Why? Because Athens was a direct democracy: the poor dominated the Assembly and made sure that it worked in their interest. So it was they who were granted the land that Athens confiscated from rebellious states or took over in their 'colonies' in the Aegean; they who were paid for public service, for example, on juries (a radical innovation); they who held down the jobs working in Athens' navy and dockyards, which kept the 'empire' going."¹⁷⁴

Athenian democracy was not notably humane... Athenian democracy could be as cruel as any despotism. Thus they slaughtered the inhabitants of the little island of Melos simply because they did not want to become part of the Athenian empire. The Athenians said: "You know as well as we do that when these matters are discussed by practical people, the standard of justice depends on the equality of power to compel and that in fact the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept... It is a general and necessary law of nature to rule wherever one can. This is not a law made by ourselves, nor were we the first to act upon it when

¹⁷² Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

¹⁷³ Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty: God, State, and Self*, New York: Basic Books, 2008, p. 8.

¹⁷⁴ Peter Jones, *BBC World Histories*, N 3, April/May, 2017, p. 34.

it was made. We found it already in existence, and we shall leave it to exist forever among those who come after us. We are merely acting in accordance with it, and we know that you or anybody else with the same power as ours would be acting in precisely the same way..."¹⁷⁵

All the Melian males of military age were slaughtered, and all the women and children were driven into slavery. Thus in the end the ideal of freedom that had given birth to Athenian Democracy proved weaker than *Realpolitik* and the concrete examples provided by the Olympian gods and the Dionysian frenzies. The Melian episode demonstrates that even the most just and democratic of constitutions are powerless to prevent their citizens from descending to the depths of barbarism unless the egoism of human nature itself is overcome, which in turn depends on the truth of the religion that the citizens profess...

And there was another event that famously illustrated this point: the trial and execution of Socrates in 399. According to Socrates' most famous pupil, Plato, democracy had destroyed justice and truth when it executed the finest flower of Greek civilization. Indeed, the words that Plato puts into the mouth of Socrates during his trial make it clear that, for him, the democracy that condemned him was not only unjust but also *impious*, that is, opposed to God and the search for the truth to which he devoted his life: "If you say to me, 'Socrates, we let you go on condition that you no longer spend your life in this search, and that you give up philosophy, but if you are caught at it again you must die' – my reply is: 'Men of Athens, I honour and love you, but I shall obey God rather than men, and while I breathe, and have the strength, I shall never turn from philosophy, nor from warning and admonishing any of you I come across not to disgrace your citizenship of a great city renowned for its wisdom and strength, by giving your thought to reaping the largest possible harvest of wealth and honour and glory, and giving neither thought nor care that you may reach the best in judgement, truth, and the soul...'"¹⁷⁶

Socrates himself was not an enemy of Athenian democracy, but he did reject two of its basic assumptions: that every citizen was equally capable of ruling, and that dissent should be repressed.¹⁷⁷ On the contrary, he believed in the free expression of opinion, and in this respect he may be called the world's first liberal. Moreover, on the basis of his method of rationally dissecting arguments, and his implicit placing of human reason above received authority, he may be called the world's first rationalist. His trial demonstrates, among other things, that the disinterested and free pursuit of truth is not always compatible with democracy, in which the opinion of the majority can become a tyranny, as Alexis de Tocqueville was to argue in his famous *Democracy in America*.

¹⁷⁵ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, London: Penguin books, V, 89, 91-97. Paradoxically, the Spartans were more merciful to fallen enemies, as Thucydides writes: "[The Spartans] fought long and stubbornly until the rout of their enemy, but, that achieved, pursuing them only for a short time, and not far" (in Antonio Penades, "Sparta's Military Machine", *National Geographic History*, November/December, 2016, p. 37).

¹⁷⁶ Brian Macarthur, *The Penguin Book of Historic Speeches*, London: Penguin, 1995, p. 9. See also Melissa Lane, "Was Socrates a Democrat?" *History Today*, vol. 52 (01), January, 2002, pp. 42-47.

¹⁷⁷ Lane, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

The nobility of Socrates' character, and his determination to put the truth above all things, was a clear premonition of the Christianity of the Apostles. It is no wonder that Church writers such as St. Justin the Philosopher saw in him a "seed" of the Divine Word. The tragedy of Socrates' death, combined with the fact of the defeat of democratic Athens at the hands of Sparta in the Peloponnesian war, decisively influenced Plato against democracy and in favour of that ideal state which would place the most just of its citizens, not in the place of execution and dishonour, but at the head of the corner of the whole state system.

14. PLATO AND ARISTOTLE ON THE STATE

Karl Popper contrasted the world-view of Socrates, “a modest, rational individualist” with that of Plato, “a totalitarian demi-god”¹⁷⁸... Plato was a religious man who sought to build the first systematic theory of the relationship of politics to religion. In *The Republic* he asserts that the end of the state is happiness, which is achieved if it produces justice, since justice is the condition of happiness. Democracy was not only not the ideal form of government according to this criterion: it was a long way from the ideal, being the penultimate stage in the degeneration of the state from the ideal to a meritocracy to an oligarchy to a democracy, and finally to a tyranny.

The process of degradation is approximately as follows. A meritocracy – the highest form of government yet found in Greece, and located, if anywhere, in Sparta - tends to be corrupted, not so much by power, as by money (Spartan discipline collapsed when exposed to luxury).

This leads to a sharp division between the rich and the poor, as a result of which the poor rise up against the rich and bring in democracy, which is “feeble in every respect, and unable to do either any great good or any great evil.”¹⁷⁹ For democracy’s great weakness is its lack of discipline: “You are not obliged to be in authority, however competent you may be, or to submit to authority, if you do not like it; you need not fight when your fellow-citizens are at war, nor remain at peace when they do, unless you want peace... A wonderfully pleasant life, surely – for the moment.”¹⁸⁰ “For the moment” only, because a State founded on such indiscipline is inherently unstable. Indiscipline leads to excess, which in turn leads to the need to reimpose discipline through despotism, the worst of all evils.

For Plato, in short, democracy is bad because it is unstable, and paves the way for the worst, which is despotism or tyranny. He compares democracy to a ship in which: “The captain is larger and stronger than any of the crew, but a bit deaf and short-sighted, and similarly limited in seamanship. The crew are all quarrelling with each other about how to navigate the ship, each thinking he ought to be at the helm; they have never learned the art of navigation and cannot say that anyone ever taught it them, or that they spent any time studying it; indeed they say it can’t be taught and are ready to murder anyone who says it can [i.e. Socrates, who recommended the study of wisdom]. They spend all their time milling round the captain and doing all they can to get him to give them the helm. If one faction is more successful than another, their rivals may kill them and throw them overboard, lay out the honest captain with drugs or drink or in some other way, take control of the ship, help themselves to what’s on board, and turn the voyage into the sort of drunken pleasure-cruise you would expect. Finally, they reserve their admiration for the man who knows how to lend a hand in controlling the captain by force or fraud; they praise his seamanship and navigation and knowledge of the sea and condemn everyone else as useless. They have no idea that the true navigator must study the seasons of the year,

¹⁷⁸ Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, part I, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966.

¹⁷⁹ Plato, *The Republic*, London: Penguin books, 1974, 488.

¹⁸⁰ Plato, *The Republic*, 557.

the sky, the stars, the winds and all the other subjects appropriate to his profession if he is to be really fit to control a ship; and they think that it's quite impossible to acquire the professional skill needed for such control (whether or not they want it exercised) and that there's no such thing as an art of navigation. With all this going on aboard aren't the sailors on any such ship bound to regard the true navigator as a word-spinner and a star-gazer, of no use to them at all?"¹⁸¹

David Held comments on this metaphor, and summarises Plato's views on democracy, as follows: "The 'true navigator' denotes the minority who, equipped with the necessary skill and expertise, has the strongest claim to rule legitimately. For the people... conduct their affairs on impulse, sentiment and prejudice. They have neither the experience nor the knowledge for sound navigation, that is, political judgement. In addition, the only leaders they are capable of admiring are sycophants: 'politicians... are duly honoured.. [if] they profess themselves the people's friends' (*The Republic*, p. 376). All who 'mix with the crowd and want to be popular with it' can be directly 'compared... to the sailors' (p. 283). There can be no proper leadership in a democracy; leaders depend on popular favour and they will, accordingly, act to sustain their own popularity and their own positions. Political leadership is enfeebled by acquiescence to popular demands and by the basing of political strategy on what can be 'sold'. Careful judgements, difficult decisions, uncomfortable options, unpleasant truths will of necessity be generally avoided. Democracy marginalises the wise.

"The claims of liberty and political equality are, furthermore, inconsistent with the maintenance of authority, order and stability. When individuals are free to do as they like and demand equal rights irrespective of their capacities and contributions, the result in the short run will be the creation of an attractively diverse society. However, in the long run the effect is an indulgence of desire and a permissiveness that erodes respect for political and moral authority. The younger no longer fear and respect their teachers; they constantly challenge their elders and the latter 'ape the young' (*The Republic*, p. 383). In short, 'the minds of citizens become so sensitive that the least vestige of restraint is resented as intolerable, till finally... in their determination to have no master they disregard all laws...' (p. 384). 'Insolence' is called 'good breeding, licence liberty, extravagance generosity, and shamelessness courage' (p. 380). A false 'equality of pleasures' leads 'democratic man' to live from day to day. Accordingly, social cohesion is threatened, political life becomes more and more fragmented and politics becomes riddled with factional disputes. Intensive conflict between sectional interests inevitably follows as each faction presses for its own advantage rather than that of the state as a whole. A comprehensive commitment to the good of the community and social justice becomes impossible.

"This state of affairs inevitably leads to endless intrigue, manoeuvring and political instability: a politics of unbridled desire and ambition. All involved claim to represent the interests of the community, but all in fact represent themselves and a selfish lust for power. Those with resources, whether from wealth or a position of authority, will, Plato thought, inevitably find themselves under attack; and the conflict between rich

¹⁸¹ Plato, *The Republic*, p. 282.

and poor will become particularly acute. In these circumstances, the disintegration of democracy is, he contended, likely. 'Any extreme is likely to produce a violent reaction... so from an extreme of liberty one is likely to get an extreme of subjection' (*The Republic*, p. 385). In the struggle between factions, leaders are put forward to advance particular causes, and it is relatively easy for these popular leaders to demand 'a personal bodyguard' to preserve themselves against attack. With such assistance the popular champion is a short step from grasping 'the reins of state'. As democracy plunges into dissension and conflict, popular champions can be seen to offer clarity of vision, firm directions and the promise to quell all opposition. It becomes a tempting option to support the tyrant of one's own choice. But, of course, once possessed of state power tyrants have a habit of attending solely to themselves."¹⁸²

Plato's solution to the problem of statecraft was the elevation to leadership in the state of a philosopher-king, who would neither be dominated by personal ambitions, like the conventional tyrant, nor swayed by demagogues and short-term, factional interests, like the Athenian democracy. This king would have to be a philosopher, since he would frame the laws in accordance, not with passion or factional interest, but with the idea of the eternal Good. His "executive branch" would be highly educated and disciplined guardians, who would not make bad mistakes since they would carry out the supremely wise intentions of the king and would be carefully screened from many of the temptations of life.

Plato saw that society could be held together in justice only by aiming at a goal higher than itself, the contemplation of the Good. He saw, in other words, that the problem of *politics* is soluble only in the *religious* domain. And while he was realistic enough to understand that the majority of men could not be religious in this sense, he hoped that at any rate one man could be trained to reach that level, and, having attained a position of supreme power in the state, spread that religious ideal downwards. Thus he wrote: "Until philosophers are kings, or the kings and princes of this world have the spirit and power of philosophy, and political greatness and wisdom meet in one, and those commoner natures who pursue either to the exclusion of the other are compelled to stand aside, cities will never have rest from their evils, - no, nor the human race, as I believe, - and then only will this our State have a possibility of life and behold the light of day."¹⁸³

This represents a major advance on all previous pagan political systems or philosophies. For while all the states of pagan antiquity were religious, they located the object of their worship *within* the political system, deifying the state itself, or, more usually, its ruler. But Plato rejected every form of man-worship, since it inevitably led to despotism. Contrary to what many of his critics who see him as the godfather of totalitarianism imply, he was fully aware of the fact that, as Lord Acton put it much later, "power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely".¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² David Held, *Models of Democracy*, Oxford: Polity Press, 1987, pp. 29-31

¹⁸³ Plato, *The Republic*, 473.

¹⁸⁴ Thus he wrote in *The Laws* (691): "If one ignores the law of proportion and gives too great power to anything, too large a sail to a vessel, too much food to the body, too much authority to the mind, everything is shipwrecked. The excess breaks out in the one case in disease, and in the other in injustice, the child of pride. I mean to say, my dear friends, that no human soul, in its youth and irresponsibility,

Another related fact, which endeared Plato to later Christian thinkers, was his belief that the end of human society must *transcend* human society.

Plato's system presupposed either that existing kings could be educated in the Good (which Plato tried, but failed to do in Syracuse) or that there was a rational method of detecting the true lovers of wisdom and then promoting them to the height of power. However, as Bertrand Russell noted, this is easier said than done: "Even if we supposed that there is such a thing as 'wisdom,' is there any form of constitution which will give the government to the wise? It is clear that majorities, like general councils, may err, and in fact have erred. Aristocracies are not always wise; kings are often foolish; Popes, in spite of infallibility, have committed grievous errors. Would anybody advocate entrusting the government to university graduates, or even to doctors of divinity? Or to men who, having been born poor, have made great fortunes?... It might be suggested that men could be given political wisdom by a suitable training. But the question would arise: what is a suitable training? And this would turn out to be a party question. The problem of finding a collection of 'wise' men and leaving the government to them is thus an insoluble one..."¹⁸⁵

As Metropolitan Anastasy (Gribanovsky) writes: "Society is always more willing to run after the fanatic or decisive opportunist than after a great-souled dreamer who is unable to convert words into deeds. The philosophers to whom Plato wished to entrust the rule of his ideal state would more likely be very pitiful in this situation and would inexorably lead the ship of state to shipwreck. Political power that is firm, but at the same time enlightened, rational and conscious of its responsibility, must be the object of desire of every country, but such happiness rarely falls to the lot of peoples and states."¹⁸⁶

To be fair to Plato, he was quite aware of the difficulty of finding a man fit to be philosopher-king. He emphasised training in character as well as intellect, and acknowledged, as we have seen, that such a man, if found and elevated to power, could still be corrupted by his position. What his philosophy lacked was the idea that the Good Itself could come down to the human level and inspire Its chosen one with wisdom and justice. The problem here was that the scepticism engendered by the all-too-human antics of the Olympian gods revealed its corrosive effect on Plato, as on all subsequent Greek philosophers. Greek religion recognised that the gods could come down to men and inspire them, but the gods who did this, like Dionysius, were hardly the wise, sober and rational beings who alone could inspire wise and sober statecraft. As for the enthusiasms of the Orphic rites, these took place only in a condition that was the exact opposite of sobriety and rationality. So Wisdom could not come from the lechers and buffoons that the Greeks called gods.

will be able to sustain the temptation of arbitrary power – there is no one who will not, under such circumstances, become filled with folly, that worst of diseases, and be hated by his nearest and dearest friends."

¹⁸⁵ Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy*, London: Allen Unwin, 1946, pp. 127-128.

¹⁸⁶ Gribanovsky, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

But what if there was another divinity higher than they, a divinity that would incarnate the eternal ideas of the Good, the True and the Beautiful? Now Plato did indeed come to some such conception of the One God. But this was an impersonal God who did not interfere in the affairs of men. Man may attempt to reach the eternal ideas and God through a rigorous programme of intellectual training and ascetic endeavour. But that Divine Wisdom should Himself bow down the heavens and manifest Himself to men was an idea that had to await the coming of Christianity... So Plato turned to the most successful State known to him, Sparta, and constructed his utopia at least partly in its likeness. Thus society was to be divided into the common people, the soldiers and the guardians. All life, including personal and religious life, was to be subordinated to the needs of the State. In economics there was to be a thoroughgoing communism, with no private property, women and children were to be held in common, marriages arranged on eugenic lines with compulsory abortion and infanticide of the unfit. There was to be a rigorous censorship of literature and the arts, and the equivalent of the modern inquisition and concentration camps. Lying was to be the prerogative of the government, which would invent a religious myth according to which, as J.S. McClelland writes, "all men are children of the same mother who has produced men of gold, silver and bronze corresponding to the three different classes into which Plato divides his ideal community."¹⁸⁷ This myth would reconcile each class to its place in society.

It is here that the charge that Plato is an intellectual ancestor of the totalitarian philosophies of the twentieth century is seen to have some weight. For truly, in trying to avert the failings of democracy, he veered strongly towards the despotism that he feared above all. Plato's path to heaven – the ideal state of the philosopher-king – was paved with good intentions. Nor was this ideal just a pipedream – he tried to introduce it into Syracuse. But it led just as surely to hell in the form of the despotism that all Greeks despised.

Plato's political ideal was put forward for the sake of "justice" – that is, each man doing what he is best fitted to do, for the sake of the common good. But, being based on human reasoning and human efforts alone, it failed, like all such rationalist systems, fully to take into account the reality of *sin*, and therefore became the model for that supremely utopian and unjust system that we see in Soviet and Chinese communism. Moreover, it anticipated communism in its subordination of truth and religion to expediency, and in its approval of the lie for the sake of the survival of the State.

Justice is indeed the ideal of statecraft. But political justice must be understood in a religious context, as the nearest approximation on earth to *Divine Justice*. Thus St. Dionysius the Areopagite, who came from Athens and could be called a truly Christian Platonist, writes: "God is named Justice because He satisfies the needs of all things, dispensing due proportion, beauty and order, and defines the bounds of all orders and places each thing under its appropriate laws and orders according to that rule which is most truly just, and because he is the Cause of the independent activity of each. For the Divine Justice orders and assigns limits to all things and keeps all

¹⁸⁷ McClelland, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

things distinct from and unmixed with one another and give to all beings that which belongs to each according to the dignity of each. And, to speak truly, all who censure the Divine Justice unknowingly confess themselves to be manifestly unjust. For they say that immortality should be in mortal creatures and perfection in the imperfect and self-motivation in the alter-motivated and sameness in the changeable and perfect power in the weak, and that the temporal should be eternal, things which naturally move immutable, temporal pleasures eternal, and to sum up, they assign the properties of one thing to another. They should know, however, that the Divine justice is essentially true Justice in that it gives to all things that which befits the particular dignity of each and preserves the nature of each in its own proper order and power."¹⁸⁸

The religious flavour of Plato's political philosophy - as of his philosophy in general - reminds us that while, as we have seen, the introduction of democracy in Greece went together with a decline in religiosity, - a phenomenon that we see recurring in later periods of history, - Classical Greek democracy was still not as irreligious or individualistic as modern democracy, which, as Hugh Bowden writes, "is seen as a secular form of government and is an alternative to religious fundamentalism, taking its authority from the will of the human majority, not the word of god or gods. In Ancient Greece matters were very different... Within the city-state religious rituals entered into all areas of life... There was no emphasis in the Greek world on the freedom of the individual, if that conflicted with obligations to larger groups... Religion was bound up with the political process. High political offices carried religious as well as civic and military duties. Thus the two kings of Sparta were generals and also priests of Zeus...

"Plato was no supporter of democracy, because he thought it allowed the wrong sort of people to have access to office. However, in the *Laws* he advocates the use of the lot as a means of selecting candidates for some offices, specifically because it is a method that puts the decision in the hands of the gods. Furthermore, where there are issues which Plato considers beyond his powers to legislate for, he suggests that these should be referred to Delphi. For Plato, then, the use of apparently random selection, and the consultation of oracles was a preferable alternative to popular decision-making, because the gods were more to be trusted than the people. This view was not limited to anti-democratic philosophers...

"Greek city-states took oracles seriously, and saw them as the mouthpieces of the gods who supported order and civilisation. Although it was the citizen assemblies that made decisions, they accepted the authority of the gods, and saw the working of the divine hand where we might see the action of chance..."¹⁸⁹

Plato's disciple Aristotle avoided the extremes of his teacher, dismissing his communism on the grounds that it would lead to disputes and inefficiency. He agreed with him that the best constitution would be a monarchy ruled by the wisest of men. But since such men are rare at best, other alternatives had to be considered.

¹⁸⁸ St. Dionysius the Areopagite, *On the Divine Names*, VIII.

¹⁸⁹ Bowden, "Greek Oracles and Greek Democracy", *The Historian*, N 41, Spring, 1994, pp. 3,4,7,8.

Aristotle divided political systems into three pairs of opposites: the three “good” forms of *monarchy*, *aristocracy* and *politeia*, and the three “bad” forms of *tyranny*, *oligarchy* and *democracy* (which Polybius later called “ochlocracy”, “rule by the mob”).¹⁹⁰

Aristotle appears to have favoured aristocracy at first, but at the age of forty-two he returned from Athens to his Macedonian homeland to teach King Philip’s thirteen-year-old son, Alexander. That Aristotle became Alexander’s tutor is one of the great ironies of history, in that the flower of Greek democratic philosophy became the teacher of the destroyer of Greek democracy and the most powerful despot of the ancient world before the Roman empire. Observing Macedonian politics may have influenced him to believe that there could be a good kind of monarchy, for King Philip had taken advantage of the perennial disunity of the Greek city-states to assume a *de facto* dominion over them. So monarchy at least had the advantage of creating a certain unity out of chaos...

“Monarchy, as the word implies,” wrote Aristotle, “is the constitution in which one man has authority over all. There are two forms of monarchy: kingship, which is limited by prescribed conditions, and tyranny, which is not limited by anything.”¹⁹¹

This important distinction is similar to the later Christian distinction between *autocracy* that submits to God and His laws and *despotism* that submits to nobody and nothing...

Like Plato, Aristotle was highly critical of democracy. He defined it in terms of two basic principles.

The first of these was *liberty*. “People constantly make this statement, implying that only in this constitution do men share in liberty; for every democracy, they say, has liberty for its aim. ‘Ruling and being ruled in turn,’ is one element in liberty, and the democratic idea of justice is in fact numerical liberty, not equality based on merit; and when this idea of what is just prevails, the multitude must be sovereign, and whatever the majority decides is final and constitutes justice. For, they say, there must be equality for each of the citizens. The result is that in democracies the poor have more sovereign power than the rich; for they are more numerous, and the decisions of the majority are sovereign. So this is one mark of liberty, one which all democrats make a definitive principle of their constitution.”

The second principle was *licence*, “to live as you like. For this, they say, is a function of being free, since its opposite, living not as you like, is the function of one enslaved.”¹⁹² The basic problem here, Aristotle argued, following Plato, was that the first principle conflicted with the second. *For licence must be restrained if liberty is to survive*. Once again, history was the teacher: licence had led to Athens’ defeat at the

¹⁹⁰ McClelland, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

¹⁹¹ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1366a.

¹⁹² Aristotle, *Politics*, London: Penguin books, 1981, p. 362.

hands of the more disciplined Spartans. Not only must restraints be placed upon individual citizens so that they do not restrict each other's liberty. The people as a whole must give up some of its "rights" to a higher authority if the state is to acquire a consistent, rational direction. Not only liberty, but equality, too, must be curtailed – for the greater benefit of all. Aristotle pointed out that "the revolutionary state of mind is largely brought about by one-sided notions of justice – democrats thinking that men who are equally free should be equal in everything, oligarchs thinking that because men are unequal in wealth they should be unequal in everything."¹⁹³

Nevertheless, Aristotle did value the good kind of freedom that was to be found in *politeia*, for which the Greeks at their best were distinguished.

What is most valuable in Aristotle's politics is that "in his eyes the end of the State and the end of the individual coincide, not in the sense that the individual should be entirely absorbed in the State but in the sense that the State will prosper when the individual citizens are good, when they attain their own proper ideal. The only real guarantee of the stability and prosperity of the State is the moral goodness and integrity of the citizens, while conversely, unless the State is good, the citizens will not become good."¹⁹⁴

In this respect Aristotle was faithful to the thought of his teacher, Plato, who wrote: "Governments vary as the dispositions of men vary. Or do you suppose that political constitutions are made out of rocks or trees, and not out of the dispositions of their citizens which turn the scale and draw everything in their own direction?"¹⁹⁵

This attitude was inherited by the Romans, who attributed the rise of the Roman republic to the virtues of the Romans, and its fall to their corruption. They knew "that good laws make good men and good men make good laws. The good laws which were Rome's internal security, and the good arms which made her neighbours fear her, were the Roman character writ large. The Greeks might be very good at talking about the connection between good character and good government, but the Romans did not have to bother much about talking about it because they were its living proof."¹⁹⁶

However, the close link that Aristotle postulated to exist between the kinds of government and the character of people led him to some dubious conclusions. Thus

¹⁹³ Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, volume I, part II, p. 97.

¹⁹⁴ Copleston, *op. cit.*, pp. 98-99.

¹⁹⁵ Plato, *The Republic*, 544.

¹⁹⁶ McClelland, *op. cit.*, p. 84. Again, we find this characteristically Greek connection between good government and good character drawn by the French historian and Prime Minister, François Guizot, who wrote in his *History of France* (1822): "Instead of looking to the system or forms of government in order to understand the state of the people, it is the state of the people that must be examined first in order to know what must have been, what could have been its government... Society, its composition, the manner of life of individuals according to their social position, the relations of the different classes, the condition [*l'état*] of persons especially – that is the first question which demands attention from... the inquirer who seeks to understand how a people are governed." (quoted in Siedentop's introduction to Guizot's *History of Civilization in Europe*, London: Penguin Books, 1997).

politeia existed in Greece, according to him, because the Greeks were a superior breed of men, capable of reason. Barbarians were inferior – which is why they were ruled by despots. Similarly, women could not take part in democratic government because the directive faculty of reason, while existing in them, was “inoperative”. And slaves also could not participate because they did not have the faculty of reason.¹⁹⁷

(However, he adduces an interesting alternative, environmental argument for his compatriots’ pre-eminence: “The peoples who live in cold climates and in European areas are full of energy, but rather lacking in intelligence and skill; they therefore in general retain their freedom but lack political organization and the ability to control their neighbours. The peoples of Asia on the other hand [like the despotic Persians] are better endowed with intelligence and skill but lack energy and so remain in political subjection. But the people of Greece occupy a middle geographical position and correspondingly have a share of both characteristics, both energy and intelligence. They therefore retain their freedom and have the best of political institutions; indeed if they could achieve political unity they could control the rest of the world...”¹⁹⁸)

A more fundamental criticism of Aristotle’s politics, voiced by later Christian theorists, was his view that “the state is teleologically autonomous: the *polis* has no ends outside itself. A *polis* ought to be self-sufficiently rule-bound for it to need no law except its own.”¹⁹⁹ For Aristotle it was only in political life that man achieved the fulfilment of his potentialities – the good life was inconceivable outside the Greek city-state. Thus “he who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god; he is no part of a *polis*.”²⁰⁰ In a sense this is true: the hermit in the desert can hardly be called a citizen of the polis. But St. Anthony the Great *did* achieve the fulfilment of his potentialities, becoming a god by grace...

This highlights perhaps the fundamental difference between almost all pagan theorising on politics (with the partial exception of Plato’s) and the Christian attitude. For the pagans the life of the well-ordered state, together with the happiness of its citizens understood in a purely secular sense, was the ultimate aim; it did not exist for any higher purpose. For the Christian, on the other hand, political life is simply a means to an end that is other-worldly and transcends politics completely; the kingdoms of this world are only stepping-stones, as it were, to the Kingdom of God.

This is not to say that Aristotle’s politics was irreligious in a general sense. As M.V. Zyzykin points out, when Aristotle wrote that “the first duty of the State is concern over the gods”, he recognised that politics cannot be divorced from religion.²⁰¹ But

¹⁹⁷ McClelland, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

¹⁹⁸ Aristotle, *Politics*, VII, 7; in M.J. Cohen and John Major, *History in Quotations*, London: Cassell, 2004, p. 52.

¹⁹⁹ McClelland, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

²⁰⁰ Aristotle, *Politics*, I. “A tyrant must put on the appearance of religion,” he said. “Subjects are less apprehensive of illegal treatment from a ruler whom they consider God-fearing and pious.”

²⁰¹ Zyzykin, *Patriarkh Nikon*, Warsaw, 1931, part I, p. 7. Other ancient writers said the same, for example Lactantius in his work *On the Wrath of God*: “Only the fear of God keeps men together in society... With

Greek religion, as we have seen, was a very this-worldly affair, in which the gods were seen as simply particularly powerful players in human affairs. The gods had to be placated, otherwise humans would suffer; but the accent was always on happiness, *eudaimonia*, in this life. And Aristotle, for all his philosophical belief in an “unmoved Mover”, was a less other-worldly thinker than Plato. Which is why Christian Orthodox (as opposed to Catholic or Protestant) political thought was closer to Plato than to Aristotle...

the removal of religion and justice we descend to the level of mute cattle deprived of reason, or to the savagery of wild beasts.”

15. THE BUILDING OF THE SECOND TEMPLE

The Jews returned to Jerusalem from Babylon with King Cyrus' blessing in several waves. The first, in 538, under Shenazar, the son of King Jehoiakin, was a failure because of local opposition. The second, of 42,360 exiles under Zerubbabel, during the reign of Cyrus' son Darius in 520, laid the foundations of the Second Temple. The third wave, under Ezra, took place in 458. And the fourth, in 445 under Nehemiah, rebuilt the city walls and the city itself.

Zerubbabel was called "governor of Judah" rather than king, because he was still under the suzerainty of Persia. However, he was of the line of David, so it was through his line that the promises of God concerning the continuance of the autocracy were passed. Moreover, he carried out the functions of an autocrat on a small scale; that is, he saw as his primary task the restoration of the Temple for the true worship of God. And in his relationship with the chief priest, Joshua, he mirrored the "symphony" between Church and State that we find in all true autocracies. Thus in the prophetic vision of Zechariah chapter 4, Joshua and Zerubbabel are seen as two olive trees, the two anointed ones through whom God's grace is given to the people.

Chapter 6 provides a striking messianic prophecy. For as crowns are placed on the head of Joshua, the Lord says: "Behold the Man whose name is the Branch; and He shall grow up out of His place; and He shall build the Temple of Jehovah; even He shall build the Temple of Jehovah; and He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon His throne; and He shall be a priest upon His throne; and the counsel of peace shall be between them both." That this refers to Jesus the Messiah rather than Joshua the high priest is evident from several facts. First, the phrase "Behold the man" was later to be used by Pilate of Christ, and the name "Jesus" is in fact the same as "Joshua". Secondly, the "Branch" is a name for the Messiah in several Old Testament prophecies (cf. Isaiah 4.2, 11.1; Jeremiah 23.5, 33.15). Earlier, the Lord had said to Joshua that He would bring forth His servant, the Branch (3.8), so Joshua and the Branch are not in fact the same person. It is the Branch, not Joshua, Who will build the Temple, meaning the New Testament Church, the Body of Christ. He will "sit upon His throne", which is not a normal thing for a priest to do, because He is not only a priest but also a king. In fact, He is both the King of the Jews, and the High Priest of the Temple of His Body, offering the Sacrifice of His Body and Blood. He is the only Person (except for Melchizedek) ever rightfully to combine the two roles in one Person. Normally, the attempt to combine the two roles leads to war between God and man; but Christ, being the rightful King and Priest, brings "the counsel of peace" between them...

The rebuilding of the Second Temple under Zerubbabel was a very small-scale, inglorious affair by comparison with the building of the First Temple under Solomon (Haggai 2.3). David Baron writes that "Rabbi Samuel Bar Juni, in the Talmud (Yoma, f.21, c.2), and Rabbis Solomon and Kinchi, in their comment on Haggai 1.8, all agree that five things that were in the first Temple were wanting in the second - *i.e.*, the *ark*, wherein were the tables of the Covenant, and the cherubim that covered it; the *fire* that used to come down from heaven to devour the sacrifices; the *Shekinah Glory*; the *gift of*

prophecy, or the Holy Ghost; and the miraculous Urim and Thummim."²⁰²

But in fact its glory would be greater than that of Solomon's Temple (Haggai 2.8) because the great King and High Priest, of whom all kings and high priests were only forerunners and types, would Himself enter into it. That is perhaps why, from the time of the building of the Second Temple to the Coming of Christ over five hundred years later, there was no real restoration of the Autocracy. All eyes were now to be trained not on the shadows of the True Autocracy, but on its substance, not on the forerunners of the true Autocrat and King of the Jews, but on the Man Himself: *Ecce Homo!*...

Probably the most important Jewish leader in this transitional period was the priest Ezra. "His main task," writes L.A. Tikhomirov, "was the re-establishment of the Law of Israel. Under him there began a collecting of the Sacred Scriptures and traditions, and the people's getting to know them, and a multiplication of copies of Scripture. Around him there gathered the so-called *soferim* - the first 'scribes', the forerunners of the Pharisees. Under their leadership the regeneration of Israel progressed, but this regeneration was placed in the soil of the most narrow exclusiveness. The inhabitants of Palestine in the time of the captivity, the Samaritans and others, wanted to join the Jews and serve Jehovah together with them, but they were severely rejected. Since a very large number of mixed marriages had been entered into, and a significant number of children had been born from them, a triumphant repentance of the people was appointed, the marriages were broken, and the foreign wives and their children were sent back to their parents.

"The task of the religious conservatives, who were first of all national patriots, consisted in strongly organizing the Jewish people and concentrating it under the leadership of the intelligentsia of that time - the Pharisees. This was not a priestly party and was even hostile to the 'Sadducees', the priestly party. The Pharisees constituted the *intelligentsia*, who, inflating the cult of the law, received in it the means for holding the whole people in their hands. The interpretation of the law given by the Pharisees was in general rational and humane, being adapted to the conditions and way of life of the time. But the endless details of the law thus interpreted required a special class of scholars, since the mass of the people had no opportunity to study these details and subtleties and had to seek enlightenment and guidance from the specialists.

"It was these nationalists who at that decisive moment of history determined the destinies of Israel..."²⁰³

²⁰² Baron, *Zechariah*, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1918, 1988, p. 197.

²⁰³ Tikhomirov, *Religiozno-Filosofskie Osnovy Istorii*, Moscow, 1997, pp. 141-142.

16. FROM POLIS TO COSMOPOLIS: ALEXANDER THE GREAT

In 338 King Philip II of Macedon defeated the armies of the democratic city-states of Athens and Thebes at Kenchreae. The age of the democratic city-state was over. It was Philip's son Alexander the Great who, even more than his father, was the instrument of that change. At the age of 18 he had fought at Kenchreae. On becoming king himself, he set out to conquer the world, and duly conquered the Persian empire, finally defeating the armies of the Persian King Darius III at Issus in 333 BC. He then created an even greater empire "that included not only Greece and Macedonia but also the entire Middle East, from Egypt and Asia Minor to Mesopotamia, Persia and beyond, into Afghanistan, parts of central Asia and, on the far side of the Hindu Kush mountains, the rich valley of the Indus."²⁰⁴ Moreover, according to Arrian, "he would not have remained content with any of his conquests, not even if he had added the British Isles to Europe; he would always have reached beyond for something unknown, and if there had been no other competition, he would have competed against himself."²⁰⁵

Alexander transformed the Classical Greek world of the *polis* into the Hellenistic empire of the *cosmopolis*, a brilliant, "high and heady culture", as John Lennox puts it²⁰⁶, becoming himself the first true cosmopolitan. "*Polis* had given way to *cosmopolis*," writes McClelland. Henceforward, men were going to have to stop asking themselves what it meant to be a citizen of a city, and begin to ask what it meant to be a citizen of the world..."²⁰⁷

For Alexander, writes Paul Johnson, "had created his empire as an ideal: he wanted to fuse the races and he 'ordered all men to regard the world as their country... good men as their kin, bad men as foreigners'. Isocrates argued that 'the designation 'Hellene' is no longer a matter of descent but of attitude'; he thought Greeks by education had better titles to citizenship than 'Greek by birth'."²⁰⁸ Isocrates' attitude would not last long, and the Greeks would become among the most nationalist of races. But it became an important part of *Romanitas*, in which Roman citizenship became more important than race, and of Christian *Romanitas*, in which the binding element was Christian faith.

Alexander's career is full of ironies. Setting out, in his expedition against the Persians, to free the Greek democratic city-states on the Eastern Aegean seaboard from tyranny, and to take final revenge on the Persians for their failed invasion of Greece in the fifth century, Alexander not only replaced Persian despotism with another, hardly less cruel one, but depopulated his homeland of Macedonia and destroyed democracy in its European heartland. His pursuit of personal glory was so obsessive that one modern biographer has speculated that he was suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder resulting from extended exposure to violence and danger.²⁰⁹ If we are

²⁰⁴ Montefiore, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

²⁰⁵ Arrian, *Anabasis*, 7.1.

²⁰⁶ Lennox, *Against the Flow*, Oxford: Monarch, 2015, p. 261.

²⁰⁷ McClelland, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

²⁰⁸ Johnson, *A History of the Jews*, London, p. 101.

²⁰⁹ Richard Gabriel, *The Madness of Alexander the Great*, 2015.

seeking psychological explanations, which should perhaps also mention his diminutive size (4 feet 6 inches). Many despots, from Alexander to Pope Gregory VII to Napoleon to Benito Mussolini, have been small and may have tried to compensate for their physical smallness with their psychological lust for power.

Though one of the greatest warriors in history, Alexander was a bisexual drunkard and a paranoid megalomaniac, declaring himself a divine Pharaoh (a son of the Greek Zeus and the Egyptian Ammon) in Egypt. "Only sex and sleep," he said, "make me conscious that I am mortal". He forced his own Greek soldiers to perform an eastern-style act of *proskynesis* to their fellow man²¹⁰, and when his personal historian Callisthenes criticised him for this he was tortured and killed.²¹¹ He married the daughter of Darius, proclaimed himself heir to the Persian "King of kings" and caused the satraps of Bithynia, Cappadocia and Armenia to pay homage to him as to a typical eastern despot.²¹²

Thus Alexander, like the *deus ex machina* of a Greek tragedy, brought the curtain down on the Classical phase of ancient Greek civilization, merging it with the despotic civilizations of the East, and spreading the resultant cultural mixture throughout the East through his conquests.

Alexander's successor-kings, the Ptolemies of Egypt and the Seleucids of Syria, went still further in an orientalising direction. Thus Roberts writes: "'Soter', as Ptolemy I was called, means 'Saviour'. The Seleucids allowed themselves to be worshipped, but the Ptolemies outdid them; they took over the divine status and prestige of the Pharaohs (and practice, too, to the extent of marrying their sisters)."²¹³

Classical Greek civilisation began with the experience of liberation from Persian despotism; it ended with the admission that political liberation without *spiritual* liberation cannot last. It was born in the matrix of a religion whose gods were little more than super-powerful human beings, with all the vices and frailty of fallen humanity; it died as its philosophers sought to free themselves entirely from the bonds of the flesh and enter a heaven of eternal, incorruptible ideas, stoically doing their duty in the world of men but knowing that their true nature lay in the world of ideas. It was born in the conviction that despotism is *hubris* which is bound to be struck down by fate; it died as the result of its own *hubris*, swallowed up in the kind of despotism it had itself despised and in opposition to which it had defined itself.

And yet this death only went to demonstrate the truth of the scripture that unless a seed falls into the earth and dies it cannot bring forth good fruit (John 12.24). For, in the new political circumstances of empire, and through the new religious prism, first of Stoicism and then of Christianity, Greek political thought *did* bring forth fruit.

²¹⁰ E.E. Rice, *Alexander the Great*, Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1997, pp. 63-65. At the same time, it must be remembered that Classical Greek religion's confusion of gods and men implicitly raised the possibility of men becoming godlike.

²¹¹ Spencer Day, "Alexander the Great", *History Revealed*, 52, February, 2018, p. 38.

²¹² Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

²¹³ Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

Stoicism, with the roughly contemporary new religion of Buddhism, was the first truly universal, cosmopolitan religion (Judaism was potentially cosmopolitan, but only became actually so in its fulfilment, Christianity.) The essential idea of the Stoics, a philosophy founded by Zeno of Citium in the early third century BC, emphasized virtue over worldly happiness. Copleston summarizes their political teaching as follows: "Every man is naturally a social being, and to live in society is a dictate of reason. But reason is the common essential nature of all men: hence there is but one Law for all men and one Fatherland. The division of mankind into warring States is absurd: the wise man is a citizen, not of this or that particular State, but of the World. From this foundation it follows that all men have a claim to our goodwill, even slaves having their rights and even enemies having a right to our mercy and forgiveness."²¹⁴

Stoicism and the Hellenistic cosmopolis went well together; and Stoicism continued to be very influential well into Roman times, when the cosmopolis became Roman.

As McClelland perceptively argues: "The case for Alexander is that he made certain political ideas possible which had never had a chance within the morally confining walls of the *polis* classically conceived. Prominent among these is the idea of a multi-racial state. The idea comes down to us not from any self-conscious 'theory' but from a story about a mutiny in Alexander's army at Opis on the Tigris, and it is a story worth the re-telling. Discontent among the Macedonian veterans had come to a head for reasons we do not know, but their grievances were clear enough: non-Macedonians, that is Persians, had been let into the crack cavalry regiment, the Companions of Alexander, had been given commands which involved ordering Macedonians about, and had been granted the (Persian) favour of greeting Alexander 'with a kiss'. The Macedonians formed up and stated their grievances, whereupon Alexander lost his temper, threatened to pension them off back to Macedonia, and distributed the vacant commands among the Persians. When both sides had simmered down, the soldiers came back to their allegiance, Alexander granted the Macedonians the favour of the kiss, and he promised to forget about the mutiny. But not quite. Alexander ordered up a feast to celebrate the reconciliation, and the religious honours were done by the priests of the Macedonians and the magi of the Persians. Alexander himself prayed for *omonoia* [unanimity] and concord, and persuaded 10,000 of his Macedonian veterans to marry their Asiatic concubines...

"The plea for *omonoia* has come to be recognised as a kind of turning point in the history of the way men thought about politics in the Greek world, and, by extension, in the western world in general. The ancient Greeks were racist in theory and practice in something like the modern sense. They divided the world, as Aristotle did, between Greeks and the rest, and their fundamental category of social explanation was race. Race determined at bottom how civilised a life a man was capable of living. The civilised life was, of course, only liveable in a properly organised city-state. Only barbarians could live in a nation (*ethnos*) or in something as inchoate and meaningless as an empire. The Greeks also seem to have had the modern racist's habit of

²¹⁴ Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, volume I, part II, p. 143.

stereotyping, which simply means going from the general to the particular: barbarians are uncivilised, therefore *this* barbarian is uncivilised. The race question was inevitably tied up with slavery, though it is by no means clear that the ancient Greeks had a 'bad conscience' about slavery, as some have claimed. From time to time, they may have felt badly about enslaving fellow Greeks, and that was probably the reason why thinkers like Aristotle troubled themselves with questions about who was most suitable for slavery and who the least. Low-born barbarians born into slavery were always at the top of the list of good slave material. Most Greeks probably believed that without ever thinking about it much.

"The Macedonians may have lacked the subtlety of the Hellenes, but Alexander was no fool. Whatever the Macedonians may have thought to themselves about the races of the East, Alexander would have been asking for trouble if he had arrogantly proclaimed Macedonian racial superiority over conquered peoples, and it would have caused a snigger or two back in Hellas. What better way for the conqueror of a multi-racial empire to conduct himself than in the name of human brotherhood? Imperialism then becomes a gathering-in of the nations rather than the imposition of one nation's will upon another and this thought follows from the empire-builder's real desire: secretly, he expects to be obeyed for love. This was Alexander's way of showing that he was not a tyrant..."²¹⁵

In Alexander's empire, therefore, something like a creative fusion of the despotic and democratic principles took place. It was an empire in form like the pagan empires of old, with a god-king possessing in principle unlimited power. But the Greek idea of the godlike possibilities of ordinary men able to direct their own lives in rationality and freedom passed like a new leaven through the old despotic lump, bringing *rulers* to a more humble estimate of themselves, while exalting the idea that *the ruled* had of themselves.

Conversely, the experience gained by the Eastern despotisms of many nations living in something like equality with each other under one rule - we remember the honour granted to the Jewish Prophet Daniel by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar, and the Persian King Cyrus' command that the Jews be allowed to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple - expanded the consciousness of the Greeks beyond the narrow horizons of the individual city-state or the one civilization of the Greeks to the universal community of all mankind (or, at any rate, of the *oikoumene*, the civilized world as they knew it), and from the worship of Athene of Athens or Diana of the Ephesians to the One God Who created *all* men, gave them *all* reason and freewill and brought them *all* together under one single dominion.

Indeed, as Rolf Strootman writes, the empires of Alexander and his successors were the channel through which Cyrus the Great's idea of *universal empire* entered the Mediterranean world. "The conception of the whole (civilized) world as a single empire was continually propagated by Middle Eastern monarchies from the third millennium BCE. Undoubtedly it appealed to some common belief. People living in the Achaemenid, Seleucid, or Sasanian Middle East adhered to a certain kind of belief

²¹⁵ McClelland, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-77.

in a legitimate Great King whose existence was in some way connected with the divinely ordained order of the world. The presence of a world ruler at the center of civilization was believed to be an essential condition for peace, order, and prosperity.

“Essentially a religious concept already in pagan times, the ideal of world unity became extremely forceful when imperialism and monotheism joined hands...

“... The Macedonian rulers of the Hellenistic Age adopted and transformed the age-old traditions of empire of the Ancient Near East to create their own ideologies of empire. Alexander the Great and his principal successors, the Seleucids and Ptolemies, ‘Hellenized’ Eastern universalistic pretensions; they did so for the sake of their Greek subjects, on whose loyalty and cooperation their power for a large part rested. By converting Near Eastern royal ideology into Greek forms, adding Greek notions of belonging and unity, and actively encouraging current universalistic tendencies among the Greeks – Panhellenism, Stoic philosophy, religious syncretism – what was previously looked upon by the Greeks as oriental despotism became an intrinsic part of Hellenic polis culture. Macedonian imperialism thus shaped the ways in which the Greek and Hellenized poleis of the eastern Mediterranean later conceptualized and formalized their relationships with imperial authority under the Roman Empire. Conversely, the Hellenized variant of an empire characterized by an ideal of universal dominion provided the Roman Empire with an acceptable model for imperial unification in a world characterized by a multitude of city-states.”²¹⁶

²¹⁶ Strootman, “Hellenistic Imperialism and the Ideal of World Unity”, in Claudia Rapp and H.A. Drake (eds.), *The City in the Classical and Post-Classical World Changing Contexts of Power and Identity*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 38-39.

17. THE HASMONEAN KINGDOM

Alexander was good to Judah: after conquering Syria, Tyre and Sidon and all the lands around, and in spite of the fact that Judah refused to surrender to him, he did not destroy Jerusalem. For God had intervened...

As Simon Schama writes, "Josephus describes the Jews of Jerusalem, gratefully faithful to the end to the collapsing Persian Empire, trembling before what they imagine will be a terrible Macedonian retribution. But their high priest Jaddua is visited by a dream in which he is told 'to take courage, adorn the city and open the gates'. The people were to assemble before the Greek conqueror clad in the white of humility, while he and his Temple priests should dress themselves magnificently as befitted their sacred station. A combination of purity and majesty: how could the Greeks not be won over as Alexander's triumphal progress halts before 'a place called Sapha, meaning "prospect"? So it is with that view of the towers and walls and the Temple on its hill that the victorious general encounters the white-garbed multitude, at their head the high priest attired in 'scarlet and purple and his tiara sewn with a gold panel on which was inscribed the tetragrammaton name of God'. Greetings are exchanged..."

Then comes one of the most striking encounters between the God of Israel, His people and the rulers of the pagan world. It is the more remarkable if we remember that Alexander considered himself to be a god, the son of Zeus... Alexander says that he "'adores' this [Jewish] God, for, as he explains to a surprised aide, he too had had a vision in which the high priest, dressed exactly in this manner, would bestow divine blessing on his conquest of the Persians. Alexander then 'gives the high priest his right hand' and makes sacrifice to YHWH in the Temple 'according to the high priest's direction'. The next day, after being shown the Book of Daniel prophesying his triumph,... he repays the confidence by guaranteeing, as all good Greek rulers did, 'the laws of their forefathers'. Alexander waives Jewish tribute in the sabbatical year and promises (since the Jews were such accomplished soldiers) that those who joined his army would be undisturbed according to their traditions'."²¹⁷

Alexander even gave equal citizenship to the Jews of Alexandria. The trouble began only after Alexander's death, when "his servants [the Ptolemys and Seleucids] bore rule every one in his place. And... they all put crowns upon themselves. So did their sons after them many years: and evils were multiplied in the earth..." (I Maccabees 1.7-9).

The image of "putting crowns upon themselves" reminds us of the difference between the true, autocrat, whose crown is given him by God, and the false, despot, who takes the crown for himself in a self-willed manner. (In modern times, the equivalent would be Napoleon's taking the crown from the hands of the Pope and putting it on his own head.) So while Hellenistic civilization, as noted above, in a sense united the despotic and democratic principles, the real winner was despotism...

²¹⁷ Schama, *The Story of the Jews*, London: Vintage, 2014, pp. 94-95; Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, xi, 8, 3.

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Not only Alexander, but many of his successors were friendly to the Jews. Thus in about 270 King Ptolemy Philadelphus of Egypt invited the great high priest of Jerusalem, Eleazar, to send 72 scholars to Egypt to translate the Scriptures from Hebrew into Greek for the benefit of the Hellenized Jews (or Judaized Greeks?) of Alexandria. The resultant Septuagint (meaning "70") translation became the basis both for the transmission of the Old Testament to the Greek-speaking world; it was this translation of the Scriptures that the Evangelists and Apostles used.

The translation was made, writes St. John Chrysostom, "for pressing reasons of usefulness and necessity. You see, as long as it was addressed to one race of the Jews, it remained in the Hebrew tongue: nobody at that time was likely to be interested in it, the rest of the human race being reduced to utter savagery. But when Christ was due to appear and call the whole world to Himself, not only through the apostles but also through the Old Testament authors (they too guide us to faith in the knowledge of Christ), then it was that He caused the Old Testament works... to be opened up to all comers through translation so that all who came flooding in all directions from the nations and traveling these paths might succeed through them in coming to the kingdom of the inspired authors and adoring the Only-begotten Son of God."²¹⁸

But a later king of Egypt, Ptolemy IV Philopater, who came to the Temple towards the end of the third century, was less benevolent. He, like Alexander, offered a sacrifice and made thank offerings for his victory over the Seleucid king. However, he then conceived a desire to enter the Temple, which was forbidden to pagans.

The high priest Simon prayed that he would be prevented, and his prayer was fulfilled: "Then God, Who watches over all... heard this lawful supplication and scourged the man who raised himself up in arrogance and audacity. He shook him on one side and the other, as a reed is shaken by the wind, so that he lay powerless on the ground. Besides being paralyzed in his limbs, he was unable to cry out, since he was struck by a righteous judgement. Therefore his friends and bodyguards, seeing the severe punishment that overtook him, fearing that they would die, quickly dragged him away. Later, when he recovered, he still did not repent after being chastised, but went his way making bitter threats..." (III Maccabees 2.21-24).

In 175 BC the Seleucid King Antiochus IV came to the Seleucid throne; his deeds were by the Prophet Daniel (chapters 8-11). The blasphemous name he gave himself, "Epiphanes", meaning "Divine Manifestation", "That underscored the primary difference between the ancient Greeks and Jews: The Greeks glorified the magnificence of man, while the Jews measured man's greatness through his partnership with the Creator. For the children of Israel, man was created in the image of God; for the ancient Greeks, the gods were created in the likeness of man."²¹⁹

²¹⁸ St. Chrysostom, "Second Homily on the Obscurity of the Old Testament," in *St. John Chrysostom Old Testament Homilies*, Boston, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2003, pp. 29-30.

²¹⁹ Senator Joseph Lieberman, "Hanukkah", *Orthodox Christian Witness*, 1483, January 17/30, 2000, p. 5.

Johnson has developed this distinction, one of the most important in the history of ideas: "The Jews drew an absolute distinction between human and divine. The Greeks constantly elevated the human – they were Promethean – and lowered the divine. To them gods were not much more than revered and successful ancestors; most men sprang from gods. Hence it was not for them a great step to deify a monarch, and they began to do so as soon as they embraced the orient [where, as we have seen, kings were commonly deified]. Why should not a man of destiny undergo apotheosis? Aristotle, Alexander's tutor, argued in his *Politics*: 'If there exists in a state an individual so pre-eminent in virtue that neither the virtue nor the political capacity of all the other citizens is comparable with his... such a man should be rated as a god among men.' Needless to say, such notions were totally unacceptable to Jews of any kind. Indeed, there was never any possibility of a conflation between Judaism and Greek religion as such; what the reformers [the Hellenizing Jews] wanted was for Judaism to universalize itself by pervading Greek culture; and that meant embracing the polis."²²⁰

With the agreement of King Antiochus, the Hellenizing Jews removed the lawful high priest Onias, replacing him with his brother Jason, a Hellenist cosmopolitan. Jason then built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, at which athletes competed in the nude contrary to Jewish law. Many Jews then underwent a painful operation to hide their circumcision. In this way, as the chronicler writes, "they made themselves as the uncircumcision. So they fell away from the holy covenant..." (I Maccabees 1.15).

Antiochus was soon acting, not as "Epiphanes", "divine manifestation", but as "Epimanes", "raving madman". After conquering Egypt, he returned to Jerusalem in 168 and pillaged the Temple. St. Hippolytus of Rome writes: Then "Antiochus arose, surnamed Epiphanes, who was of the line of Alexander. And after he had reigned in Syria, and brought under him all Egypt, he went up to Jerusalem, and entered the sanctuary, and seized all the treasures in the house of the Lord, and the golden candlestick, and the table, and the altar, and made a great slaughter in the land..."

"Then the king wrote to all his kingdom, that they all were to be as one people, and that each one was to forsake his customs... Many from Israel also thought it good to serve him, so they sacrificed to idols and profaned the Sabbath" (I Maccabees 1.41-43). He led many of the people away into slavery, banned circumcision, stopped the daily sacrifice, which symbolized the Jews' worship of Yahweh alone, Sabbath observance and the reading of the law, declared that the Temple should be dedicated to the worship of Zeus (was this Daniel's "abomination of desolation"?), that pigs should be sacrificed on the altar, and that non-Jews should be permitted to worship there with Jews. Those who resisted him were killed.

However, a liberation movement led by Matityahu (Mattathias) Hasmon and his sons, known to history as the Maccabees or Hasmonaeans, succeeded in inflicting a series of crushing defeats on the better-equipped and far more numerous Greeks. "Within three years," writes Montefiore, "the Maccabees had taken Jerusalem, and in

²²⁰ Johnson, op. cit., p. 102.

164 BC the now more accommodating Antiochus died and his successor sued for peace (albeit a temporary one). Vivaly, Jewish freedom of worship was restored. The Temple was cleansed and rededicated in December 164 BC. Even though the oil for the Temple lamp had run out, the lamp remained alight for eight days, a miracle that inspired the joyful Hanukkah Festival of Lights, in which Jews still celebrate religious freedom from tyranny²²¹.

“Having won the right to practice their religion, the Maccabees fought on for the political freedom that would protect it. The result was the creation of an independent Jewish state, with Mattathias’ descendants at its head. Fighting to drive the Syrian empire out of Judaea, Judah was killed in battle. His successor, Jonathan ‘the cunning’, secured his brother’s military achievements with diplomacy. As dynastic struggle and civil war consumed the Seleucid empire, Jonathan’s astute appraisal of the political balance, and judicious offers of support, secured him substantial territorial gains. But the Seleucids tried to re-conquer Judaea: Jonathan was tricked, captured and killed. In 142 BC Simon the Great, the youngest and by now the only surviving son of Mattathias, negotiated the political independence of Judaea...”²²²

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The Hasmonaean dynasty reached its peak under the second Maccabee brother, Simon.

“The other brothers,” writes Schama, “especially Judas, “had invoked the ancient patriarchs and nation-fathers from Moses through David. Simon becomes the heir of these ancestors as priest, prince, judge and general. It is he who finally succeeds in cleaning out the Jerusalem Akra citadel of foreign troops, ending its occupation and turning the subject status of the Jewish state into a true, independent kingdom. The moment (in the year 142 BCE) becomes a jubilant climax of the epic, celebrated with thanksgiving and branches of palm trees and with harps and cymbals, viols and hymns and songs: because there was destroyed a great enemy out of Israel!

“A golden age of peace and prosperity then comes to pass under Simon’s rule. The wars between Jews and Greeks – and indeed between Jews and Jews – are brought to an end. Hellenized cities like Scythopolis, which had refrained from harbouring enemy soldiers, are spared and, renamed as Beit She’an, became home to Jews and Greeks alike. The borders of the state expand. A grand new harbor is built at Jaffa; trade opens ‘to the isles of the sea’. Romans and Spartans are impressed, but not as much as the writer of I Maccabees who paints a scene of multi-generational harmony and benevolent quasi-despotism. The last books of the biblical canon, and some of the Apocrypha were imagined to be authored by Solomon, and Simon appears in I Maccabees as his reincarnation, presiding over a Judaic paradise on earth...”²²³

²²¹ “A single jar of pure olive oil remained undefiled, which was used to illuminate and rededicate the Temple. Miraculously, the small quantity of oil lasted for eight days, leading to the eight-day festival, The Feast of Dedication.” (“The Authentic Light of Chanukah”, https://lp.israelbiblicalstudies.com/lp_iibs_biblical_hebrew_jesus_and_hanukkah.

²²³ Schama, op. cit., pp. 120-121.

“In this upsurge of nationalist sentiment,” writes Johnson, “the religious issues had been pushed into the background. But the long struggle for independence from Greek universalism left an indelible mark on the Judaic character. There were thirty-four bitter and murderous years between the attack on the Law and the final expulsion of the reformers from the Acra. The zeal and intensity of the attack on the Law aroused a corresponding zeal for the Law, narrowing the vision of the Jewish leadership and pushing them ever more deeply into a Torah-centred religion. With their failure, the reformers discredited the notion of reform itself, or even any discussion of the nature and direction of the Jewish religion. Such talk was henceforth denounced in all the official texts as nothing less than total apostasy and collaboration with the foreign oppressors, so that it became difficult for moderates of any kind, or internationally minded preachers who looked beyond the narrow enclave of Orthodox Judaism, to get a hearing. The Hasmonaeans spoke for a deeply reactionary spirit within Judaism... Henceforth, any tampering with the Temple and its sanctuaries instantly roused up a ferocious Jerusalem mob of religious extremists swollen by the excited rabble. The mob now became an important part of the Jerusalem scene, extremely difficult to govern by anyone – Greeks or Hellenizers, Romans or their tetrarchs, not least the Jews themselves.

“Against this background of intellectual terror by the religious mob, the secular spirit and intellectual freedom which flourished in the Greek gymnasia and academies was banished from Jewish centres of learning. In their battle against Greek education, pious Jews began from the end of the second century BC, to develop a traditional system of education. To the old scribal schools were gradually added a network of local schools where, in theory at least, all Jewish boys were taught the Torah. This development was of great importance in the spread and consolidation of the synagogue, in the birth of Pharisaism as a movement rooted in popular education, and eventually in the rise of the rabbinate. The education provided in these schools was entirely religious, rejecting any form of knowledge outside the Law. But at least these schools taught the Law in a relatively humane spirit. They followed ancient traditions, inspired by an obscure text in Deuteronomy, ‘put it in their mouths’, that God had given Moses, in addition to the written Law, an Oral Law, by which learned elders could interpret and supplement the sacred commands. The practice of the Oral Law made it possible for the Mosaic code to be adapted to changing conditions and administered in a realistic manner.

“By contrast, the Temple priests, dominated by the Sadducees, or descendants of Zadok, the great high-priest from Davidic times, insisted that all law must be written and unchanged. They had their own additional text, called the Book of Decrees, which laid down a system of punishment: who were to be stoned, who burned, who strangled. But this was written and sacred: they would not admit that oral teaching could subject the Law to a process of creative development. With their rigid adherence to the Mosaic inheritance, their concept of the Temple as the sole source and centre of Judaic government, and their own hereditary position in its functions, the Sadducees were naturally allies of the new Hasmonaean high-priests, even though the latter had no strict title to this position by descent. The Sadducees soon became identified with Hasmonaean rule in a rigid system of Temple administration, in which the hereditary

high-priest performed the functions of a secular ruler, and a committee of elders, the Sanhedrin, discharged his religious-legal duties. To mark the supremacy of the Temple, Simon Maccabee not only smashed the walls of the Acra into rubble but went on (according to Josephus) 'to level the very hill on which the citadel had stood, so that the Temple might be higher than it.'"²²⁴

The Lord Jesus Christ would reject both the Sadducees and the Pharisees – the former for their rejection of the resurrection, and the latter because the traditions they invoked were false and went against the true commandments of the Law – which they in any case did not fulfill themselves.

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It was in the Hasmonaean period that we see the beginning of a remarkable phenomenon that was to lay a solid foundation for the preaching of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire: Jewish proselytism.

As Alfred M. Lilienthal writes: "Judaism became a tremendous proselytizing force in the pagan world. Those who carried the religion of Yahweh to other parts of the globe were hardly more than a drop in the ocean of foreign peoples who had never possessed any racial, lingual, or cultural affinity with Israel and nevertheless became members of the Judaic monotheistic faith. These converts included such diverse peoples as Yemenites and Greeks, the Queen of Sheba, the people of Adiabene, the Hellenistic state on the Tigris. Judean traders carried their faith eastward as far as India and China. Conversions to Yahweh in Rome carried Judaism through Italy into France, the Rhone Valley, and the Rhine Basin... Whole peoples of varying ethnic strains became proselyte Judaists, especially during the two centuries before the birth of Christ. Judeans migrated to the Arabian desert and converted Semitic peoples in Yemen. Pagans as distant as those of the Kerch Strait and the Crimea accepted Yahweh, the Hebrew God.

"The Hebrews were indeed a light unto the other nations and were spreading monotheism, the task given to them by God. Many Romans, including members of the nobility, embraced the simple teachings of Judaism, won by the appeal of what Jewish historians have referred to as a 'system of morals, anchored in the veneration of the One and Holy God,' and the 'purity of Judean home life'. For the most part the proselytes accepted the idea of monotheism and the moral law without the ceremonial precepts.

"With the advent of Christianity, the parent faith ceased proselytizing. Monotheism was now carried to the pagan world by the disciples of Jesus..."²²⁵

²²⁴ Johnson, *op. cit.*, pp. 105-106.

²²⁵ Lilienthal, *The Zionist Connection*, New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1978, p. 734. "As early as 139 BC," writes Andrew Marr. "Jews were being expelled from Rome for trying to convert Roman citizens. A little later the great lawyer-politician Cicero complained about proselytizing Jews. Two emperors, Tiberius and Claudius, transported Jews from Rome for the crime of trying to convert Romans. Roman writers such as Horace, Seneca, Juvenal and Tacitus all discuss the issue" (*A History of the World*, London: Pan, 2012, p.129).

Now several of the prophets, as well as David in the Psalms, had hinted that the true faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was not destined for the Jews alone. But until the second century BC the emphasis had been on preserving the faith untainted from foreign elements rather than on spreading it to the rest of the world. Hence, for example, Ezra's insistence that the Jews divorce their foreign wives in case they be infected by their paganism.

However, elements of Hellenistic culture began to creep into Judah soon after the Maccabees' triumph over the Greek King Antiochus. One of these was the typically pagan combination of kingship and priesthood in one person. The Hasmonaeans unlawfully combined the roles of king and high priest (*I Maccabees* 13.42). Their dynasty, which lasted until it was wiped out by Herod the Great in 37 B.C., was composed exclusively of Levites, who could only be priests, not kings. Moreover, God's covenant with David had been with him and his son; the promises were only to his descendants of the tribe of Judah. This may be why five of the great signs of God's presence and favour that were in the First Temple were not in the Second.

Another pagan innovation was the adoption of Greek names. Thus the grandson of Mattathias, as Shlomo Sand writes, "added to his Hebrew name Yohanan the typical Greek name Hyrcanus. The great grandson of the rebel priest was called Judas Aristobulus, and his successor would be known as Alexander Jannaeus. The process of Greek acculturation did not stop in Judea. In fact, as the Hasmonean dynasty consolidated, it accelerated and triumphed. By the time of Aristobulus, the priestly ruler - though not of the House of David - had become a Hellenistic monarch..."²²⁶

There was a positive aspect to this Hellenizing process: the universalist elements in Judaism came more to the fore, competing with the cosmopolitanism of the Greek Stoic philosophers.²²⁷ Thus the Eastern Mediterranean became the arena for a contest for hearts and minds between Greek paganism and philosophy, on the one hand, and Jewish monotheism, on the other.

In the environs of Judaea, the contest was settled by force. Thus in 125 Yohanan Hyrcanus conquered Edom as far as Beersheba and converted the Edomites to accept circumcision. He also destroyed the Samaritans' capital of Shechem with their temple on Mount Gerizim. In 104-103 Hyrcanus' son Judas Aristobulus annexed Galilee, and forced its Iturean inhabitants to convert. His brother, Alexander Jannaeus, was less successful in getting the Hellenistic coastal cities to convert. "According to Josephus, Alexander destroyed the city of Pella in Transjordan 'because the inhabitants would not bear to change their religious rites for those peculiar to the Jews'. We know that he totally destroyed other Hellenistic cities: Samaria, Gaza, Gederah and many others..."²²⁸

²²⁶ Sand, *The Invention of the Jewish People*, London: Verso, 2009, p. 156.

²²⁷ "Isocrates argued that 'the designation 'Hellene' is no longer a matter of [ethnic] descent but of attitude'; he thought Greeks by education had better titles to citizenship than 'Greek by birth'" (Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 101).

²²⁸ Sand, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

More peaceful, and much more fruitful, was the conversion of a large part of the population of the great Hellenistic city of Alexandria. We have seen that the Old Testament was translated from Hebrew into Greek at the initiative of King Ptolemy II Philadelphus, and “we can be certain,” writes Sand, “that this translation, in its numerous copies, even in the absence of printing, was an essential vehicle for the dissemination of the Jewish religion among the cultural elites all around the Mediterranean. The impact of the translation is best attested by Philo Judaeus, the philosopher who was probably the first to merge skillfully the Stoic-Platonic logos with Judaism... The Alexandrian philosopher viewed conversion to Judaism as a reasonable and positive phenomenon that demographically enlarged his *ethnos*.

“... From this time on, the ancient association between religious boundaries and everyday cultural and language characteristics began to fail. For example, Philo himself, for all his extensive knowledge, knew neither Hebrew nor Aramaic, yet this did not diminish his devout attachment to the Mosaic religion, which he, like many of his fellow believers, knew in its famous translation. Some of his writing was probably also intended to persuade gentiles to change their ways and abandon ‘their own individual customs’.

“The Septuagint was the hesitant start of Jewish religious missionizing also realized in the form of the works known as the books of the Apocrypha. *The Letter of Aristeas* that mentions the translation was written in Greek before 200 BCE by a Jewish believer in Alexandria. Aristeas may have been the author’s real name, though perhaps he took the typical Greek name – that of a bodyguard of Ptolemy II Philadelphus – to appeal to Hellenistic readers. As well as relating the legendary history of the translation, the letter attacks idolatry and praises the Jewish faith, though it does so in an allegorical manner. For example, it says nothing about circumcision, to avoid discouraging the gentiles, but launches into an idyllic, even utopian, description of Jerusalem and its temple. It describes Jewish scholars as wiser than the pagan Greek philosophers, though paradoxically their superiority is demonstrated via the principles of Greek philosophy, giving the impression that the anonymous author was more familiar with the latter than with the Torah.

“Similar rhetoric is found in the third book of an ancient collection known as the *Sibylline Oracles*, a book that most scholars date to the second century BCE, namely the Hasmonean period. It too was translated in Alexandria and, like the *Letter of Aristeas*, denounces the Egyptian animal cults. Jewish sermonizing in the form of verses supposedly uttered by a Greek-style female prophet addresses all the children of men who were created in God’s image, and prophesies that in future the people of the great God will again serve all mortals as brave teachers. Idolatry was low and debauched, it is declared, whereas the Jewish faith was a religion of justice, fraternity and charity. The idolatrous were infected with homosexuality, whereas the Jews were far from committing any abomination. Therefore the worshippers of wood and stone should convert to the true faith or be chastised by a wrathful God.

“The obvious Jewish confidence of this work paralleled the success and rising power of the Hasmonean kingdom. The *Wisdom of Solomon*, written probably in the first century BCE, also links the proselytizing impulse in the Jewish communities in

Egypt with the Judean rulers' drive for converts. The first, visionary part of this work is in Hebrew and comes from Judea; the second, more philosophical part is in Greek and is Alexandrian in character. This work also derides the cult of animals and revolves around the disdain for the worship of images. Like the third Sibylline oracle, the *Wisdom of Solomon* associates the worship of many gods with licentiousness and immorality, dooming one to punishment. Here, too, the objects of persuasion are gentiles, chiefly rulers and kings, and the rhetoric is entirely derived from Greek heritage. The Stoic logos is put into the mouth of King Solomon, who utters well known Platonic statements...²²⁹

"Damascus was a flourishing Hellenistic center second only to Alexandria, and conversion to Judaism there was even greater than in Egypt..."

"The popularity of Judaism before and after the Common Era spread beyond the Mediterranean region. In *Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus tells the fabulous story of the conversion to Judaism in the first century CE of the rulers of Adiabene (Hadyab) [in today's Kurdistan]. As this conversion is described in other sources, there is no reason to doubt its broad outline..."²³⁰

"If Alexander's conquests created an open Hellenistic sphere," continues Sand, "Rome's expansion and her enormous empire completed the process... The littorals grew closer, and the passage from the eastern to the western end became easier and faster. This emerging world opened a fresh perspective for the spread of Judaism; at its high point there, Judaism was professed by 7 to 8 percent of all the empire's inhabitants. The word 'Jew' ceased to denote the people of Judea, and now included the masses of proselytes and their descendants."²³¹

²²⁹ For example, he says of the Divine Wisdom: "In her there is a spirit that is intelligent, holy, unique, manifold, subtle, mobile, clear, unpolluted, distinct, invulnerable, loving the good, keen, irresistible, beneficent, humane, steadfast, sure, free from anxiety, all-powerful, overseeing all, and penetrating through all spirits that are intelligent and pure and most subtle. For wisdom is more mobile than any motion; For she is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her. For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness. Though she is but one, she can do all things, and while remaining in herself, she renews all things; in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God, and prophets; for God loves nothing so much as the man who lives with wisdom. For she is more beautiful than the sun, and excels every constellation of the stars. Compared with the light she is found to be superior, for it is succeeded by the night, but against wisdom evil does not prevail." (*Wisdom of Solomon* 7:22-30) (V.M.)

²³⁰ Sand, *op. cit.*, pp. 161-163, 165.

²³¹ Sand, *op. cit.*, pp. 166-167.

18. THE ROMAN REPUBLIC

In the second century BC the shadow of a new superpower began to fall across the Middle East: *Rome*. Judas Maccabaeus had maintained friendly relations with the Romans, who were inclined to support the Jews out of distrust of the Seleucids; and Simon Maccabaeus sought an alliance with them.²³² For after conquering the Asia Minor kingdoms of Pontus and Armenia, and then taking the place of the weakened Seleucids and Ptolemys, the Romans were drawing closer to the Holy Land....

According to Larry Siedentop, following Fustel de Coulanges, the origins of religious, social and political organization in both Greece and Italy lay in the absolute power of the head of the family, the *paterfamilias*, in his own domain. Each family was centred around worship of the gods of the hearth, who were deceased males of the family. The head of the family was both the family's king and priest; it was his duty to keep the hearth fire alight at all times and to carry out the prescribed rituals and prayers in honour of the family's gods. Slaves and foreigners were not members of the family. The supreme value of the family was its own immortality - the worship of the past generations, the defence of the family's members and property in the present, and the provision for future generations. For any son of the family not to take a bride was considered dereliction of duty and impiety, for it threatened that familial immortality. As for a bride who married into the family, she was expected to abandon the worship of her former family's gods and transfer all her loyalty and worship to her husband's family and his gods.

"Other domestic practices in Greece and Rome - the subordinate role of women, the nature of marriage, property rights and inheritance rules - were also direct consequences of religious belief. Let us take the role of women first. Women could participate in the worship of the dead only through their father or husband. For descent was traced exclusively through the male line. But even then religion governed the definition of relationships so entirely that an adopted son, once he was admitted to the family worship, shared its ancestors, while a son who abandoned the family worship ceased altogether to be a relation, becoming unknown...

"... The father exercised his authority on the basis of beliefs shared by the family. His was not an arbitrary power. The overwhelming imperative was to preserve family worship, and so to prevent his ancestors, untended, being cast into oblivion. This restriction of affection to the family circle gave it an extraordinary intensity. Charity, concern for humans as such, was not deemed a virtue, and would probably have been unintelligible. But fulfilling obligations attached to a role in the family was everything. 'The sense of duty, natural affection, the religious idea - all these were confounded, were considered as one, and were expressed by the same word.' That word was piety (*pietas*)."²³³

²³² See *I Maccabees* 8, which contains a largely approbatory portrait of the Roman republic.

²³³ Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism*, London: Penguin, 2010, pp. 12, 15.

As families came together into larger units, clans, tribes and cities, the exclusive, atomistic nature of each family's worship was not destroyed. However, every new association of families required the worship of a new common divinity that was superior to the domestic divinities. Thus in Rome from the early sixth century BC the new common divinity was Jupiter, for whom a huge new temple was built on the central hill of the city, the Capitoline.

"Religious ideas expanded with the increased scale of association. Fustel does not argue that religious progress brought about social progress in any simple way, but he does emphasize the intimate connection between the two. Thus, as the scale of association increased, the gods of nature or polytheism became more important – for these were gods who could more easily be shared, gods less exclusively domestic than ancestors, gods associated with the forces of nature rather than with divine ancestors. These were gods who represented the sea, the wind, fertility, light, love, hunting, with familiar names such as Apollo, Neptune, Venus, Diana and Jupiter. The building of civic temples to these gods offered physical evidence of the enlargement of religious ideas. Still, the gods of each city remained exclusive, so that while two cities might both adore 'Jupiter', he had different attributes in each city.

"Particularism was the rule. Even after a city was founded, it was inconceivable for the city not to respect the divine ancestors, the sacred rites and magistrates of the different groups that had attended its foundation. For the souls of the dead were deemed to live under the ground of the cities they had helped to create. The statesman Solon, who in the sixth century BC endowed Athens with laws, was given the following advice by the oracle of Delphi: 'Honour with worship the chiefs of the country, the dead who live under the earth.' The city had to respect their authority in matters concerning their descendants. For the city's authority was all of a piece with theirs. Gods and groups marched hand in hand.

"This corporate, sacramental character of the ancient city dominated its formal organization. Whether it was a question of procedures for voting, military organization or religious sacrifices, care was taken to represent tribes, *curiae* and families – and to conduct civic life through them. It was deemed important that men should be associated most closely with others who sacrificed at the same altars. Altars were the bonds of human association. That emerged in the Greek and Roman conception of warfare. In one of Euripides' plays, a soldier asserts that 'the gods who fight with us are more powerful than those who fight on the side of the enemy...'

"Kingship was the highest priesthood, presiding over the cult established with the city itself. The king was hereditary high priest of that association of associations that was the ancient city. The king's other functions, as magistrate and military leader, were simply the adjuncts of his religious authority. Who better to lead the city in war than the priest whose knowledge of the sacred formulas and prayers 'saved' the city every day? And, later, when kingship gave way to republican regimes, the chief magistrate of the city – the archon in Athens, the consul in Rome – remained a priest whose first duty was to offer sacrifices to the city's gods. In fact, the circlet of leaves

worn on the head of archons when conducting such sacrifices became a universal symbol of authority: the crown..."²³⁴

Just as devotion to the family had been the supreme value in the original form of social organization, so devotion to the city - civic patriotism - now became the supreme value in the Greek and Italian city-states. Religion and politics were inextricably entangled. For "in devoting himself to the city before everything else, the citizen was serving his gods. No abstract principle of justice could give him pause. Piety and patriotism were one and the same thing. For the Greeks, to be without patriotism, to be anything less than an active citizen, was to be an 'idiot'. That, indeed, is what the word originally meant, referring to anyone who retreated from the life of the city."²³⁵

The Latin saying, *Dulce est pro patria mori*, "Sweet it is to die for one's country", illustrates how important the city, the homeland, was for the early Greeks and Romans. It encompassed much more than the modern concept of homeland. It included everything associated with the homeland, too, including moral values and religion.

Nevertheless, both Greeks and Romans understood that piety - devotion to the gods - was not always the same as patriotism, devotion to homeland. In Sophocles' *Antigone*, for example, we see a direct conflict between the two, in which patriotism had to yield ultimately to the higher claims of religious piety. And this contrast became much sharper when the Greco-Roman world became Christian...

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In spite of the absolute power of the *paterfamilias*, kingship in Greece and Rome had shallower roots than in Babylon or Egypt; it was less absolute, less divine. The Romans, like the Greeks, venerated liberty above all - that liberty which they had won from their kings, but which they proceeded to deprive their neighbours of.

"According to legend," writes Nigel Rodgers, "Rome was founded in 753 BC by Romulus and Remus, twin princes of Alba Longa, supposedly itself founded four centuries earlier by Aeneas, a Trojan prince. The twins, his distant descendants, were abandoned as babies on the orders of Amulius, who had usurped their kingdom and ordered their deaths. Miraculously, a she-wolf appeared from a wood to suckle them, and they were brought up by Faustinus, a kindly shepherd, on the Palatine Hill [where archaeologists have confirmed the existence of a settlement in the mid-eighth century]. When they grew up, they killed the usurper and together founded a new city, Rome. But they soon quarreled, Romulus killing Remus for jumping over his ploughed boundary line. Romulus then populated Rome by inviting outlaws and homeless men to join him, and by abducting the young women of his neighbours in the famous 'Rape of the Sabine Women'. When the Sabine men marched back in force

²³⁴ Siedentop, *op. cit.*, p. 21-22, 23.

²³⁵ Siedentop, *op. cit.*, p. 25. "Idiotis" in Greek literally means a man "belonging to himself", what we would now call a *private* citizen - that is, one who plays no part in *public* life.

to reclaim their women, the latter, by now used to being Roman wives, intervened to prevent a battle and the two people intermarried. Romulus later ascended into heaven in a thunderstorm, becoming divine. From such violent, mythic beginnings sprang the Eternal City, Rome."²³⁶

In about 616 Rome came under the sway of the Etruscan kings, who created an advisory council, or Senate, composed of 300 heads of extended families. The Etruscans, writes Matthew Kneale, "could hardly have been more different from the Romans. Their language, which is still little understood, was not Indo-European... It is thought that the Etruscans may, like the Basques, have an ancient aboriginal people who inhabited Europe long before the Indo-Europeans arrived. They would have a huge influence on early Rome, contributing kings, noble families and numerous cultural traditions, from the bundles of rods (*fascēs*) that symbolized a state official's power, to purple-bordered togas for high officials, to gladiator fights..."²³⁷

In 509, Rome's last king, Lucius Tarquinius Superbus, was overthrown by Brutus the Liberator. "Rome became a Republic the year after, and the Romans always remained acutely sensitive to the difference between a Kingdom (*Regnum*) and a Republic (*Res Publica*, literally 'the Public Thing')." ²³⁸ The change was marked by the consecration of the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, emphasizing that Jupiter was now the chief god of Rome, guaranteeing her success in war – first, against other cities and peoples in Italy, and then throughout the Mediterranean.

In 387 the Romans were defeated at the battle of the Allia by the Gauls, a related people who dominated much of Europe from Galicia in present-day Turkey to Galicia in present-day Ukraine to Galicia in present-day Spain. The defeat was followed by a sacking of Rome that appears to have had a powerful effect on the Romans. They built a city wall and reorganized the army, which became a formidable fighting machine that by the early second century BC had conquered the surrounding peoples – including all of Gallic northern Italy.²³⁹

Officially, sovereignty in the republic rested in the Senate and the people, *Senatus Populusque Romanorum*, or SPQR for short. *De facto*, the Senate was the real ruler, controlling the elections to the chief magistrate, or executive offices of state – the consuls, the praetors, the quaestors, the censors, the aediles, the priesthood and the tribunes. All male citizens, including the 'plebs', would vote in assemblies that passed laws and elected officials; and by 69 BC there were almost a million voters on the census.²⁴⁰ So the Roman republic was an oligarchy with democratic elements united in its veneration for tradition, especially religious rites and respect for the austere patrician virtues of self-discipline and devotion to duty, and in its revulsion against anything that smacked of one-man-rule. As such, it became a model for the aristocratic leaders of Britain and America in the eighteenth century.

²³⁶ Rodgers, *The Rise and Fall of Ancient Rome*, London: Lorenz Books, 2005. P. 18.

²³⁷ Kneale, *Rome. A History in Seven Sackings*, London: Simon Schuster, 2017, p. 11.

²³⁸ Stephen P. Kershaw, *A Brief History of the Roman Empire*, London: Robinson, 2013, p. 2.

²³⁹ Kneale, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

²⁴⁰ David Gilmour, *The Pursuit of Italy*, London: Penguin, 2011, p. 40.

“At the top of republican Roman society,” writes Andrew Marr, “were the aristocratic families who traced their influence back to the time of the kings and who formed the Senate. Relatively early this society also developed elections for key posts. In 367 BC a major change took place when it was agreed that all classes, not only patricians, could be elected as consuls, so long as they were wealthy enough. A complicated, lengthy system of elections plus experience accumulated in office resulted in the Senate evolving into a tough and effective ruling body. Serving as executives was a double act of consuls, with a kind of super magistrate elected each year. Then came the rest, the ordinary citizens organized into tribes and able, in their own assembly, to vote for new laws by simple majority.

“If this sounds remarkably democratic, it was not. A Roman form of jerrymandering, involving block voted and the intimidation of voters, kept the well-off, mostly in control. A republic meant a ruling system without king, not a representative one. But the Senate was able to draw on a constant supply of new talent and to balance factions among the other citizens. The voting system and the tension between different bodies kept absolute power, the folk memory of tyrant kings, at bay...”²⁴¹

Tyranny was averted by dividing the chief offices of state against each other. Thus the consulship both inherited the powers of kingship and divided and nullified them at the same time because each of the two consuls could veto the other. The task of each was to rule while at the same time guarding against the other’s ambition to rule alone.²⁴²

As Tom Holland writes, it was “a magistracy of literally regal scope... His authority would be sanctioned by the trappings, as well as the powers of the ancient kings. Not only would he inherit the toga bordered with royal purple and a special chair of state; he would also be accompanied by lictors, a bodyguard of twelve men, each bearing on his shoulder the *fasces*, a bundle of scourging rods, most dreaded of all the attributes of monarchy. An escort, in short, sufficient to reassure anyone that he had indeed reached the very top.

“Not that he would ever stay there for long. A consul was no tyrant. His *fasces* served as symbols not of oppression but of an authority freely bestowed by the people. Subject to the whims of the voters, limited to a single year in power, and accompanied in office by colleagues their precise equal, magistrates of the Republic had little choice but to behave in office with scrupulous propriety. No matter how tempestuous a citizen’s ambitions, they rarely broke the bounds of the Romans’ respect for tradition. What the Republic fostered it also served to trammel...”²⁴³

There were always two consuls. The idea was that they served as checks on each other, preventing tyranny. Modern western civilization inherited this idea – that of checks and balances – placing it at the head of the corner of its political philosophy.

²⁴¹ Marr, *A History of the World*, London: Pan, 2012, pp. 132-133.

²⁴² Holland, *Rubicon*, London: Abacus, 2003, pp. 2-3.

²⁴³ Holland, *Rubicon*, p. 64.

In the sixth century the aristocratic power of the heads of families and clans began to decline. First, "primogeniture came under attack and gradually gave way, with the consequence not only that younger sons inherited and became full citizens, but also that junior branches of the ancient families or *gentes* became independent. These developments greatly increased the number of citizens, and reduced the power of the ancient family heads as priests.

"A second major change followed. The clients of the family were gradually liberated, becoming free men. At the outset the clients could not own property. They did not even have any security of tenure on land they worked for the *paterfamilias*. They were little better than slaves. 'Possibly the same series of social changes took place in antiquity which Europe saw in the middle ages, when the slaves in the country became serfs of the glebe, when the latter from serfs, taxable at will, were changed to serfs with a fixed rent, and when finally they were transformed... into peasant proprietors.'

"Fundamental to these changes was a rise in expectations. That rise was, in turn, due to the comparisons that became possible once the patriarchal family was merely part of a larger association, the polis or city-state. No longer was the *paterfamilias*, the magistrate and priest, the only representative of authority in sight, the only spokesman of the gods. The *paterfamilias* gradually lost his semi-sacred status through being immersed in civic life. His inferiors now 'could see each other, could confer together, could make an exchange of their desires and griefs, compare their masters, and obtain a glimpse of a better fate.'

"Obtaining the right of property was their first and strongest desire, preceding any claim for the full privileges of citizenship. But the latter was bound to follow, for obtaining greater equality on one front only increased a sense of exclusion on the other. Citizenship, in turn, unleashed a process of abstraction which could and did threaten inherited inequalities..."²⁴⁴

The needs of the increasing numbers of the non-patricians, or plebs, required expression; and this was provided by the plebeian tribunes. "The *Tribuni Plebis*... were instituted in 494 BC, after the first secession of the plebs [who went on strike], in order to protect the interests of the plebeians against the actions of the senate and the annual magistrates, who were uniformly patrician. The ancient sources indicate the tribunes may have originally been two or five in number. If the former, the college of tribunes was expanded to five in 470 BC. Either way, the college was increased to ten in 457 BC, and remained at this number throughout Roman history. They were assisted by two *aediles plebis*, or plebeian aediles. Only plebeians were eligible for these offices, although there were at least two exceptions.

²⁴⁴ Siedentop, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-31.

“The tribunes of the plebs had the power to convene the *concilium plebis*, or plebeian assembly, and propose legislation before it. Only one of the tribunes could preside over this assembly, which had the power to pass laws affecting only the plebeians, known as *plebiscita*, or plebiscites. After 287 BC, the decrees of the *concilium plebis* had the effect of law over all Roman citizens. By the 3rd century BC, the tribunes could also convene and propose legislation before the senate.

“Although sometimes referred to as ‘plebeian magistrates,’ technically the tribunes of the plebs were not magistrates, having been elected by the plebeians alone, and not the whole Roman people. However, they were sacrosanct, and the whole body of the plebeians were pledged to protect the tribunes against any assault or interference with their persons during their terms of office. Anyone who violated the sacrosanctity of the tribunes might be killed without penalty

“This was also the source of the tribunes' power, known as *ius intercessionis*, or *intercessio*, by which any tribune could intercede on behalf of a Roman citizen to prohibit the act of a magistrate or other official. Citizens could appeal the decisions of the magistrates to the tribunes, who would then be obliged to determine the legality of the action before a magistrate could proceed. This power also allowed the tribunes to forbid, or *veto* any act of the senate or another assembly. Only a *dictator* was exempt from these powers.

“The *tribunicia potestas*, or tribunician power, was limited by the fact that it was derived from the oath of the people to defend the tribunes. This limited most of the tribunes' actions to the boundaries of the city itself, as well as a radius of one mile around. They had no power to affect the actions of provincial governors.”²⁴⁵

According to the famously pro-Roman and anti-Christian Edward Gibbon, “The temperate struggle of the patricians and plebeians had finally established the firm and equal balance of the constitution, which united the freedom of popular assemblies with the authority and wisdom of a senate and the executive power of a regal magistrate. When the consul displayed the standard of the republic, each citizen bound himself, by the obligation of an oath, to draw his sword in the cause of his country till he had discharged the sacred duty by a military service of ten years. This wise institution eventually poured into the field the rising generations of freemen and soldiers; and their numbers were reinforced by the warlike and populous states of Italy, who, after a brave resistance, had yielded to the valour and embraced the alliance of the Romans.”²⁴⁶

This complicated system of checks and balances served the Roman Republic well in the early centuries of its existence before it collapsed under the weight of the civil wars of the first century BC. Thereafter it became evident to the Romans, as it had to the Hellenistic Greeks before them, that very large, complex and multinational polities like the Roman Empire could only be governed by monarchical systems...

²⁴⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tribune>.

²⁴⁶ Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, London: The Folio Society, 1788, 1986, vol. IV, pp. 370-371.

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Republican Rome came of age during its struggle with the maritime empire of Carthage, a colony of the city of Tyre in Phoenicia, which had conquered much of the Western Mediterranean, including Spain, under Hamilcar, the father of the famous Hannibal. The Carthaginians were devotees of the Tyrian god Melqart, the Biblical god Baal (whom the Greeks called Heracles and the Romans - Hercules). The Roman historian Livy (*History XXI*, 21-23) records that Hannibal made a pilgrimage to the shrine of the god that is now the island of Sancti Petri near Cadiz. Having offered sacrifice and sworn to destroy Rome, he had a vision in which a youth of divine beauty appeared to him in the night and told him that he had been sent by the supreme deity, Melqart, to guide the son of Hamilcar to Italy. "Follow me," said the ghostly visitor, "and see that that you do not look behind you." Hannibal followed the instructions of the visitor. His curiosity, however, overcame him, and as he turned his head, he saw a serpent crashing through forest and thicket causing destruction everywhere. It moved as a black tempest with claps of thunder and flashes of lightning gathered behind the serpent. When Hannibal asked the meaning of the vision Melqart replied, "What you see is the desolation of Italy. Follow your star and inquire no farther into the dark counsels of heaven."

In obedience to the demonic vision, Hannibal crossed the Alps, invaded Italy and defeated the Romans several times, his greatest victory being at Cannae (216 BC), in which 70,000 Roman soldiers were killed in one day. But it was not God's will that Hannibal should conquer Rome. The Romans suspended their republican constitution temporarily and appointed a dictator, Quintus Fabius Maximus, whose cautious guerrilla warfare tactics, though unpopular, saved the republic... In 209 the Roman general Scipio defeated the Carthaginians in Spain at Baecula, after which the Spanish offered him to make him their king. But Scipio refused, pointing out that the Romans did not have kings..."²⁴⁷

Scipio consolidated his conquest of Spain and returned to Rome. However, the lieutenants he left in Spain were incompetent, and the army mutinied because it had not been paid... In 204 the Romans under Scipio took the fight to their enemies in their North African homeland. Hannibal was defeated at Zama in 202 BC. Pursued from land to land, Rome's greatest enemy finally committed suicide.

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There now began the first of a series of ever more serious conflicts between the Roman Senate and its leading generals, that would lead in the end to the Fall of the Roman Republic.

Scipio, now called Africanus, the victor over Hannibal, was an arrogant and ambitious man. Potter writes that he "was the most famous Roman in the world, ever, Polybius would write. He had won victories no one else would have been capable of

²⁴⁷ David Potter, *The Origin of Empire*, London: Profile, 2019, p. 73.

winning, and he had brought peace and a chance for Roman Italy to recover from the stresses of war. The Senate should do its best to tolerate him. In fact, Scipio had very limited experience of domestic politics, and his insistence that people be grateful for his achievements gave him a practically limitless capacity to alienate his peers. Consequently, he virtually disappeared from public life for the next decade while the Senate remained unwilling to confront his legacy. This legacy manifested itself largely in Spain, where warfare had become endemic. The administrators that Scipio had left there were still in post but with no plan for the future.

“Indeed, the end of the African war did nothing for Spain. Perhaps, if action had been taken after the end of Barcid Spain, a solution could have been found that would not have resulted in the peninsula being swamped in blood for the better part of two centuries. If an outside power eliminates an existing power structure, it has a responsibility to come up with an alternative. But Rome did not have either the administrative structures to take on that responsibility or the desire to create them. The victory in Spain had now become a feature of the Scipio personality cult (how many times did people really need to be told about that vision Neptune [which he received before conquering New Carthage]?), but it would be up to the Senate to acknowledge what was basically a done deal in which it had no part. That was hard to swallow.

“Spain’s leaders had made it clear what they expected after the battle of Baecula when they asked Scipio to be king. They wanted some sort of functioning replacement for the Carthaginian administration, which had been an effective referee between the different Spanish factions, some of whom were now calling on the Romans to massacre people they found uncongenial, exploiting the ‘butcher and bolt’ mentality that was the default setting for post-Scipionic administrators. Such ongoing violence required some sort of standing army. That was not something the Roman state had ever had before. The Roman armies were traditionally raised for fixed terms and for specific purposes. The support for a standing army would also require some sort of bureaucracy. Within the Roman system of government, the only way this could be done would be by contracting for the required services.

“Rome now had an empire, but it needed to learn how to run it...”²⁴⁸

And without excessive bloodshed. However, when Carthage began to recover, the senator Cato repeatedly called for its destruction: *Delenda est Carthago*. But genocide, even of one’s enemies, was contrary to Roman morality...

“Many argued,” writes Holland, “that the Republic needed a rival who was worthy of the name. Without rivalry, they demanded, how would Rome’s greatness ever be maintained? Such a question, of course could have been asked only in a state where ruthless competition was regarded as the basis of all civic virtue. Unsurprisingly, however, a majority of citizens refused to stomach its implications. For more than a century they had been demonizing the Carthaginians’ cruelty and faithlessness. Why, most citizens wondered, should the standards of Roman life be applied to the

²⁴⁸ Potter, op. cit., pp. 77-78.

protection of such a foe? This question was duly answered by a vote to push Carthage into war. By aiming at her complete annihilation, the Republic revealed what the logical consequence of its ideals of success might be. In such brutality, unmediated by any nexus of fellowship or duty, lay the extremes of the Roman desire to be the best.

“In 149 the hapless Carthaginians were given the vindictive order to abandon their city. Rather than surrender to such a demand, they prepared to defend their homes and sacred places to the death. This, of course, was precisely what the hawks back in Rome had been hoping they would do. The legions moved in for the kill. For three years the Carthaginians held out against overwhelming odds and in the final stages of the siege the generalship of Rome’s best soldier, Scipio Aemilianus. At last, in 146, the city was stormed, gutted of its treasures and set ablaze. The inferno raged for seventeen days. On the cleared and smoking ruin, the Romans then place a deadly interdiction, forbidding anyone ever to build upon the site again. Seven hundred years of history were wiped clean.

“Meanwhile, just in case anyone was missing the lesson, a Roman army spent the same spring of 146 rubbing it into the noses of the Greeks. That winter a ragbag of cities in southern Greece had presumed to disturb the balance of power that Rome had established in the area. Such lese-majesty could not be allowed to pass unpunished. In a war that was over almost before it had begun, a Greek army was swatted like a bothersome wasp, and the ancient city of Corinth reduced to a heap of smoking rubble...

“... No wonder, in the face of it, that the Sibyl imagined a curse laid on Rome, one borne upon the smoke from the twin sources of annihilation. Even the Romans themselves felt a little queasy. No longer could it be pretended that they were conquering the world in self-defence. Memories of the looting of Corinth would always be recalled by the Romans with embarrassment. Guilt over Carthage, however, provoked in them something far more. It was said that as Scipio watched the flames lap at the crumbling walls of the great city, he had wept... Lines from Homer came to him:

*The day of the destruction of sacred Troy will come,
And the slaughter of Priam and his people.*

But what he imagined might bring slaughter and destruction to the Republic, Scipio, unlike the Sibyl, did not say...²⁴⁹

The Romans killed more than half a million of Carthage’s 700,000 inhabitants.²⁵⁰ This may be seen as a long-delayed fulfilment of God’s commandment that the peoples of Canaan should be destroyed. For, as we have seen, both in their Hamite race and their Baalite religion, the Carthaginians were the direct descendants of the Biblical Canaanites and Phoenicians. God abhorred the temple prostitution and child sacrifice of the Baalite religion, and therefore ordered the Israelites to destroy the

²⁴⁹ Holland, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-36.

²⁵⁰ Terry Jones and Alan Ereira, *Barbarians*, London: BBC Books, 2006, p. 250.

Canaanites utterly. But successive leaders of Israel, notably King Saul, disobeyed the Lord, which resulted in the penetration of these abominable practices into Israel, which in turn led to Israel's punishment and exile by the pagan peoples.²⁵¹

By God's Providence, Republican Rome here carried out what Israel had failed to do. Imperial Rome was destined to do much greater service to God after its conversion to Christ...

From 205 the Romans began to spread into Asia. They conquered Macedonia and Greece, culminating, as we have seen, in the brutal sack of Corinth in 146. But they could make concessions when it suited them. Thus they permitted self-rule, "the liberty of the Greeks", to the southern cities - as long as they recognized Roman suzerainty. The subsequent penetration of Roman culture by Greek - every Roman patrician would see that his son was educated in Greek language and culture by a Greek slave tutor - was to be of great significance. Of the three foreign nations that influenced the Romans - the Etruscans, the Carthaginians and the Greeks - it was the Greeks who had the most profound and beneficial influence, especially in the arts, philosophy and religion. As a result, when the empire became Christian, the Christians would inherit all the riches of what we must now call "Greco-Roman civilization".

²⁵¹ Fr. John Whiteford, "How to Understand the Passages Related to Violence in the Old Testament?" October 9, 2017, https://blog.obitel-minsk.com/2017/10/how-to-understand-passages-related-to.html?fbclid=IwAR2OxlBbzeNoTzLLaeduyCY9Mm_tzlrkarHcT_x2H_3IMvZu6WPwarLS2F4.

19. THE FALL OF THE ROMAN REPUBLIC

In the Punic Wars that ended in 146 BC “the Romans became Romans”, acquiring that iron streak that made them the great conquerors of antiquity and the model of would-be world conquerors for all subsequent ages. But success and prosperity had the same corrupting effect on them as it has had on all the conquering nations of history. For “down to the destruction of Carthage,” wrote the historian Sallust, “the people and senate shared the government peaceably and with restraint... Fear of its enemies preserved the good morals of the state. But when the people were relieved of this fear, the favourite vices of prosperity – licence and pride – appeared as a natural consequence... The nobles started to use their position, and the people their liberty, to gratify their selfish passions, every man snatching and seizing what he could for himself... One small group of oligarchs had everything in its control alike in peace and war – the treasury, the provinces, all distinctions and triumphs. The people were burdened with military service and poverty, while the spoils of war were snatched by the generals and shared with a handful of friends... Thus the possession of power gave unlimited scope to ruthless greed, which violated and plundered everything... till finally it brought about its own downfall....”²⁵²

As Rome expanded, a major flaw in her character became more prominent: a fanatical love of honour and glory - *honestas* in Latin – that ruled the hearts of Romans both individually and collectively. We have seen this already in Scipio Africanus. The historian Livy called ambition “the ancestral curse” of Rome, going back to Romulus and Remus; and so it was. On the one hand, the individual Roman was fiercely ambitious, seeking the praise and admiration of his fellow-countrymen through the attainment of high political office or military exploits. On the other hand, at least until the end of the Punic Wars, the Romans as a whole did not tolerate these individual ambitions going too far, to the detriment of the state as a whole. The glory of Rome was the highest value, higher than the glory of any individual Roman; and the constitution was designed to preserve this balance.

However, as Adrian Galsworthy writes: “The immense profits of conquest and empire threatened delicate balances within politics, society, and the economy. Competition among the aristocracy for high office and status had always been intense, but in the past was kept within strict confines of convention and law. Now many of the props of the system came under threat as senators spent ever-increasing sums to win popularity and significant groups within the population who felt their plight was desperate and readily rallied to anyone who championed their cause. There were opportunities for a few men to rise far higher than had ever been possible in the past and their peers resented and resisted this.”²⁵³

In the second half of the second century BC, as the Republic’s conquests multiplied, and more and more people from the conquered lands poured into Rome’s crowded slums, tensions between the rich and the poor increased. The poor were led by two

²⁵² Sallust, *The Jugurthine War*, in M.J. Cohen and John Major, *History in Quotations*, London: Cassell, 2004, p. 72.

²⁵³ Galsworthy, *Augustus. From Revolutionary to Emperor*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2014, p. 25.

brother-tribunes, Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus, grandsons of Scipio Africanus. As Tom Holland writes, "First Tiberius, in 133 BC, and then Gaius, ten years later, used their tribunates to push for reform in favour of the poor. They proposed that publicly held land be divided into allotments and handed out to the masses, that corn be sold to them below the market rate; even, shockingly, that the Republic should provide the poorest soldiers with clothes. Radical measures indeed, and the aristocracy, unsurprisingly, was appalled. To most noblemen, there appeared something implacable and sinister about the devotion of the Gracchi to the people. True, Tiberius was not the first of his class to have concerned himself with land reform; but his paternalism, as far as his peers were concerned, went altogether too far and too fast. Gaius, even more alarmingly, had a consciously revolutionary vision, of a republic imbued with the values of Greek democracy, in which the balance of power between the classes would be utterly transformed, and the people, not the aristocracy, would serve as the arbiters of Rome. How, his peers wondered, could any nobleman argue for this, unless he aimed to establish himself as a tyrant? What struck them as particularly ominous was the fact that Tiberius, having finished his year of office, had immediately sought re-election, and that Gaius, in 122 BC, had actually succeeded in obtaining a second successive tribunate. Where might illegalities like these not lead? Sacred as the person of a tribune might be, it was not so sacred as the preservation of the Republic itself. Twice the cry went up to defend the constitution and twice it was answered. Twelve years after Tiberius was clubbed to death with a stool-leg in a violent brawl, Gaius, in 121, was also killed by agents of the aristocracy. His corpse was decapitated, and lead poured into his skull. In the wake of his murder three thousand of his followers were executed without trial."²⁵⁴

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This was the last time that the state was threatened by revolution, - if it was really threatened, - from below, from the plebs. However, in the first century another, still greater threat appeared in the form of rival aristocrats and war-lords who opposed the authority of the Senate, and manipulated its magistracies, in order to satisfy their own personal ambitions. Men such as Marius, Sulla, Crassus, Pompey and Julius Caesar profited from the fact that the Republic was now fast becoming an empire, with vast territories in both East and West that the senate could not control directly. So ambitious aristocrats sought to be made proconsul of, for example, Asia or Spain or Gaul, where, in addition to enhancing their reputations through military victories, they could make fortunes through looting and tax farming and recruit armies with which to intimidate the Senate when they returned to Rome.

The first to do this was Sulla, and it was Sulla's breaking of the taboo which forbade generals from bringing their troops into the city in 88 that marked the first major break with republican political tradition. After defeating Marius in the first of several civil wars, Sulla became dictator, murdered thousands of his opponents, and in 81 decreed a new, purely political path of advancement for aspiring politicians: he engineered that the major offices of state - quaestor, praetor and consul - should be kept among his supporters, and also muzzled the tribunate...

²⁵⁴ Holland, *Rubicon*, London: Abacus, 2003, pp. 28-29.

The next great warlord was Pompey the Great, who had made his reputation by defeating King Mithridates of Pontus and pursuing him as far as Georgia. Overthrowing the enfeeble Seleucids, he conquered Judaea, entering the Holy of Holies and installing the worst king the Jews ever had, Herod the Great. Through his Eastern Settlement of 62, he subdued almost the whole of the Eastern Mediterranean as far as the borders of Parthia. "Pompey had exceptional organizational skills, and his Eastern Settlement of 62 BCE laid the foundations for the later *Pax Romana* in the region by means of a three-faceted arrangement that involved: creating a virtually continuous ring of provinces from the southern shore of the Black Sea to Syria/Palestine; founding about forty new cities, and organizing and promoting independent 'client' states as a kind of firewall outside the ring of provinces. On the whole, the new cities began to flourish, bringing Rome a 70 per cent increase in revenue from the region. The client states, many of whose rulers owed their position to Pompey, were nominally independent and maintained friendly relations with Rome in an arrangement modeled on that between a high-ranking Roman *patronus* ('patron') and his *clientes* ('dependents'). Pompey's administrative talents were indisputable, but what really mattered to Rome was that he was a *conqueror*. He was now an incredibly powerful man: he received divine cult on Delos; his eye-watering wealth made him the richest man in Rome; kings were in his debt, both literally and figuratively; his client base encompassed individuals, cities, provinces and kingdoms; and he commanded vast military resources."²⁵⁵

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But it was Julius Caesar, Pompey's father-in-law and an equally formidable general, who really destroyed the Republic, turning it into a military dictatorship. In 59 he formed "the first triumvirate" with Crassus (probably the richest man in Rome) and Pompey that played fast and loose with the constitution, which was defended by such men as the senator Cato and the lawyer Cicero. However, in 53 Crassus was killed by the Parthians at Carrhae, a terrible defeat second only to the similar-sounding defeat at the hands of Hannibal, leaving only Caesar and Pompey controlling the destinies of the Republic... When Caesar's daughter and Pompey's wife Julia died in childbirth, the bonds between the two men weakened. Pompey now emerged as the champion of the constitution and the Senate. But Caesar proved stronger than all; and "Caesar" with its cognates ("Kaiser", "Tsar", etc.) was to be a byword for one-man, monarchical, especially imperial rule for many centuries to come...

Having smashed the power of the Celts of Gaul in a series of brilliant campaigns, he also subdued the Celts of Southern England. However, not getting what he wanted from the senate in Rome, Caesar led his battle-hardened veterans across the river Rubicon into Italy on January 10, 49.

²⁵⁵ Stephen P. Kershaw, *A Brief History of the Roman Empire*, London: Robinson, 2013, p. 6.

This, writes Dominic Sandbrook, “was a treasonable offence, punishable by death. Little wonder, then, that at the water’s edge he hesitated. ‘Even now we can turn back’, he said, ‘but when we pass this little bridge, it means war.’

“According to the historian Suetonius, it was now that the gods intervened. Suddenly there appeared ‘a being of wondrous stature and beauty, who sat and played upon a reed.’ As some of the soldiers stepped towards him, the apparition grabbed one of their trumpets, ‘rushed to the river, and sounding the war-note with a mighty blast, strode to the opposite bank.’ That, Suetonius wrote, was the signal that Caesar wanted. ‘Let us go where the omens of the gods and the crimes of our enemies call us!’ he shouted to his men. ‘*Alea iacta est!*’ (the die is cast). With that Caesar spurred on his horse. The Rubicon had been crossed. Peace wouldn’t return to Rome for close on two decades...”²⁵⁶

Cowed and humiliated by Caesar’s swift advance, the Senate evacuated Rome on the orders of Pompey while Pompey and his army crossed over to Greece. Caesar pursued him there, but Pompey nearly defeated him at Dyrrachium in Albania. As Caesar himself admitted, with a little more boldness Pompey could have won the war there and then. But then, at the battle of Pharsalus in Thessaly in 48, Caesar defeated Pompey, who fled to Alexandria, where he was murdered by Pharaoh Ptolemy XIII. Caesar pursued him to Egypt, where he had an affair with Cleopatra, who bore him a son, Caesarion. He then defeated the die-hard Pompeians at Thapsus in North Africa and Munda in Spain in 46. Having defeated all his opponents, Caesar returned to Rome to receive a ceremonial triumph (his fifth). In 44 he was proclaimed dictator for life. The Republic was dead: kingship – more precisely: despotism – was back in power....

As well as being a great general, Caesar was an efficient administrator and less blood-thirsty than some of his warlord predecessors, such as Sulla; he forgave defeated opponent who were prepared to join his camp, and tried to unite the different classes of Rome around himself. But his ambition was astronomical; he considered himself destined by birth to the very highest rank, being descended from kings through his aunt Julia, and from Venus (!) on his father’s side. As he said, “there is in our line the integrity of kings who had the greatest power among mortals and the sanctity of the gods, in whose power are kings.”²⁵⁷

Thus in the last year of his life he “did not end the speculation [about] the establishment of a state cult of [himself]... The granting of divine honours to mortals was common the eastern Mediterranean. It was a way of thanking civic benefactors; and in Ptolemaic lands, as it had once been in Seleucid lands, it was also a way of directing public opinion. Indeed, Caesar was already the recipient of divine honours in eastern Greek cities – also true of a number of other senators at this point – and had been honoured as a god by some individuals in Italy. He had received honours typical of a ruler cult – although without the apparatus of a cult – following his victorious return from Thapsus and Munda.

²⁵⁶ Sandbrook, “Caesar Crosses the Rubicon”, *BBC History Magazine*, January, 2017, p. 8.

²⁵⁷ Suetonius, *Life of Caesar*, 6.1.

“Caesar knew perfectly well that he was mortal – he had been discussing the best way to die the night before he was assassinated – although he does appear to have been working towards some sort of personal state cult, quite possibly based on the Ptolemaic model. In late February or early March the Senate, apparently, voted to create such a cult – perhaps in support of Caesar’s plan to invade Parthia. The campaign would give him the opportunity to put down deeper roots in the eastern provinces, where Pompey’s memory was still powerful, while a state cult would provide a mechanism of communication with provincial groups through routine celebrations that offered a chance to spread good news about the regime. Caesar has plainly decided that the way the Roman state had run its empire needed some profound changes, and reforms verging on the regal were just that – tried and trusted administrative forms adopted from other states to improve Rome’s efficiency...”²⁵⁸

“The rule of the dictator,” writes Adrian Galsworthy, “was far from harsh, his reforms practical and generally for the wider good of the state. Yet no one [in the opinion of the Romans] should have such vast powers at all, let alone in perpetuity. Sulla had been far more brutal, but at least Sulla had resigned his dictatorship after a few years and retired to private life. Julius Caesar called him ‘a political illiterate’ for doing so, and showed no sign of willingness to give up his dominance of the state. He was in his fifty-sixth year and although troubled with epilepsy, it was perfectly possible that he would live on for decades. The planned Parthian War would give him the clean glory of fighting a foreign enemy, and add even more to his prestige when he returned in three years or so.

“Julius Caesar had *regnum*, effectively royal power over the state. The honours given to him were extensions to those granted to the great men of the past – most notably Pompey – but far surpassed them all in scale. He sat on a golden chair of office, wore the triumphing general’s toga and laurel wreath on all public occasions, and was given the right to sport the high boots and long-sleeved tunic which he claimed were the garb of his distant ancestors, the kings of Alba Longa – a city near Rome and a rival in its early history. A pediment, like those on a temple, was added to his house. Other honours brought Julius Caesar very close to divine status, although it is harder to say whether or not he was actually deified in his life-time. The idea was anyway less shocking to the Romans with their polytheistic tradition than to us. Stories told of heroes who became gods through their deeds, and it was common enough to praise great achievements as ‘god like’...

“‘I am not King [*rex*], but Caesar,’ said the dictator in response to a crowd hailing him as king – *Rex* was a family name of another aristocratic line. The subject was delicate. When tribunes had coronets removed from one of his statues, Julius Caesar responded angrily, claiming that they denied him the chance to refuse himself and wanted to blacken his name by drawing attention to the whole business. The most famous incident came at the Festival of the Lupercalia, celebrated on 15 February 44 BC, with teams of priests clad only in goatskin loincloths running through the heart of the City, gently flicking passers-by with their whips. The dictator presided on a

²⁵⁸ Potter, op. cit., p. 268.

tribunal, and the leader of the priests Mark Antony concluded by running up and offering a crown to him. Julius Caesar refused, to the delight of the crowd, repeating the gesture when Anthony offered it again. The most likely interpretation of the affair is that it was a deliberate pantomime, intended to show once and for all that he did not want the title of king. If so, then it did not work. Soon people were saying that it was a test, and that Julius Caesar would have taken the crown if only the people had responded with enthusiasm. Another story circulated that the Senate would debate making him king everywhere except inside Rome itself.

“The truth scarcely mattered. Deep in their souls senators knew that this was not how things should be. King or not, god or not, and however kind and efficient personally, Julius Caesar possessed supreme power, effectively *regnum*, whatever he called himself, and that meant that there could be no *res publica* – no state. For a Roman aristocrat the true Republic only existed when the senatorial class shared control, guiding magistrates elected through open competition and changing them regularly, so that plenty of people won the chance for high command and profit. This was liberty, and even for quite a few Caesareans it was now clearly dead.”²⁵⁹

So if Rome could be called a kind of quasi-democracy until the destruction of Carthage in 146, in the century that followed it descended into anarchy, while by Caesar’s death in 44 it had become a benevolent despotism, a military dictatorship on the verge of god-man-kingship on the Hellenistic model...

Caesar was told that he should beware the Ides of March. Ignoring the warning, he went without a bodyguard to meet the Senate in Pompey’s assembly hall on the Ides of March, 44 BC. “Pompey’s statue,” writes Holland, “still dominated the Senate’s meeting-space. After Pharsalus it had been hurriedly pulled down, but Caesar, with typical generosity, had ordered it restored, along with all of Pompey’s other statues. An investment policy, Cicero had sneered, against his own being removed – but that was malicious and unfair. Caesar had no reason to fear for the future of his statue. Nor, walking into the assembly hall that morning and seeing the senators rise to greet him, for himself. Not even when a crowd of them approached him with a petition, mobbing him as he sat down on his gilded chair, pressing him down with their kisses. Then suddenly he felt his toga being pulled down from his shoulders. ‘Why,’ he cried out, startled, ‘this is violence!’ At the same moment he felt a slashing pain across his throat. Twisting around he saw a dagger, red with his own blood.

“Some sixty men stood in a press around him. All of them had drawn daggers from under their togas. All of them were well known to Caesar. Many were former enemies who had accepted his pardon – but even more were friends. Some were officers who had served with him in Gaul, among them Decius Brutus, commander of the war fleet that had wiped out the Venetians. The most grievous betrayal, however, the one that finally numbed Caesar and stopped him in his desperate efforts to fight back, came from someone closer still. Caesar glimpsed, flashing through the mêlée, a knife aimed at his groin, held by another Brutus, Marcus, his reputed son. ‘You, my boy!’ he whispered, then fell to the ground. Not wishing to be witnessed in his death agony,

²⁵⁹ Galsworthy, *op. cit.*, pp. 74-76.

he covered his head with the ribbons of his toga. The pool of his blood stained the base of Pompey's statue. Dead, he lay in his great rival's shadow..."²⁶⁰

Were the Romans now really free again? And does revolution against despotism, even in the name of "liberty" or "democracy", necessarily bring the real thing? History would prove again and again that it does not.

Caesar was right when he "predicted renewed civil war if he died suddenly or was killed, and believed others would have the sense to realise this and see that it was for the greater good for him to live... Writing over a century later, Tacitus would characterise the years of civil war and triumvirate as an era when there was 'neither law nor custom'. Basic institutions had broken down and were replaced with arbitrary power."²⁶¹ Caesar's dictatorship had restored law and order up to a point. His assassination would plunge the Roman world into civil war again...

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Until the rise of the military dictators, the real power in Rome had been the rich, landowning aristocracy of the senators, who manipulated the popular elections through a patronage system and disposed of real champions of the poor such as Tiberius Gracchus. They naturally opposed the dictators, who threatened their power. But it must be remembered that dictatorship was allowed for in the Roman constitution in emergencies – and as long as it was temporary. Moreover, the dictators were popular because they were also populists who knew how to buy the support of the lower classes. Thus Sulla gave land to his soldiers (who often found themselves displaced from their farms by neighbours on returning from military service). And Caesar not only gave land to his soldiers but also grain to the poor (many of whom had been also displaced from their land by the landowners). So when Caesar was murdered, the people rioted against the Senate and rallied around Caesar's heirs, especially Mark Antony and Caesar's great-nephew Octavian, a teenager who had been adopted by Caesar and now traded on his name.

In the first part of the civil war that followed, Mark Antony and Octavian fought against each other. But then the two joined up with Lepidus, Caesar's deputy, murdering several hundreds, if not thousands, of their enemies in the senate and elsewhere. The famous orator Cicero was one of the victims of these "proscriptions".

The last of the diehard republicans and anti-Cesareans, Brutus and Cassius, who had established themselves in the East, were defeated by Antony at the huge battle of Philippi in 42 and committed suicide. (Octavian was at Philippi, but took little direct part in the battle because of illness, although he claimed otherwise.) As Lepidus' army was subverted, forcing him into retirement, the two remaining triumvirs decided to divide the world between them, with Antony taking the East and Octavian – the West.

²⁶⁰ Holland, *op. cit.*, pp. 346-347.

²⁶¹ Galsworthy, *op. cit.*, pp. 77, 222.

But those brought up in the traditions of warlordism can rarely share power among themselves; it was inevitable that they should come to blows eventually. In the conflict that followed, it seemed that Antony, a seasoned warrior, had many advantages as against the young and inexperienced Octavian. But Octavian was intelligent, sober and calculating, while Antony was defeated both on the battlefield by the Parthians and in the bedchamber by his famous passion for Cleopatra. Under her influence he “soon embraced a Hellenistic eastern vision of kingship, encouraged by Cleopatra, which was very different from the Roman tradition of austere dignity. She was determined to use Roman backing to re-establish the Ptolemaic empire.”²⁶²

But this was something the Romans could never accept. As Holland writes, “Antony’s partnership with Cleopatra, formalised in 32 when he divorced Octavia, was instinctively recognised by most Romans for what it was – a betrayal of the Republic’s deepest principles and values. That the Republic was dead did not make it any less mourned, nor its prejudices any less savage. To surrender to what was unworthy of a citizen: this was what the Romans had always most dreaded. It was flattering, therefore, to a people who had become unfree to pillory Antony as unmanly and a slave to a foreign queen. For the last time, the Roman people could gird themselves for war and imagine that the Republic and their own virtue were not, after all, entirely dead.

“Many years later, Octavian would boast: ‘The whole of Italy, unprompted, swore allegiance to me, and demanded that I lead her into war. The provinces of Gaul, Spain, Africa, Sicily and Sardinia also swore the same oath.’ Here, in the form of a plebiscite spanning half the world, was something utterly without precedent, a display of universalism consciously designed to put that of Antony and Cleopatra in the shadow, drawn from the traditions not of the East but of the Roman Republic itself. Undisputed autocrat and champion of the city’s most ancient ideals, Octavian sailed to war as both. It was a combination that was to prove irresistible. When, for the third time in less than twenty years, two Roman forces met head to head in the Balkans, it was [Octavian] Caesar, yet again, who emerged triumphant...

“Throughout the summer of 31 BC, with his fleet rotting in the shallows and his army rotting with disease, Antony was blockaded on the eastern coast of Greece. His camp began to empty... Finally, when the stench of defeat had grown too overpowering for Antony to ignore, he decided to make a desperate throw. On 2 September he ordered his fleet to attempt a break out, past the cape of Actium, into the open sea. For much of the day the two great fleets faced each other, motionless in the silence of the crystalline bay. Then suddenly, in the afternoon, there was movement: Cleopatra’s squadron, darting forwards, smashing its way through a gap in Octavian’s line, slipping free. Antony, abandoning his giant flagship for a swifter vessel, followed, but most of the fleet was left behind, his legions too. They quickly surrendered. With this brief, inglorious battle perished all of Antony’s dreams, and all the hopes of the new Isis [Cleopatra].”²⁶³

²⁶² Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Titans of History*, London: Quercus, 2012, p. 65.

²⁶³ Holland, *op. cit.*, pp. 375-376.

Antony committed suicide; Cleopatra did the same nine days later. Octavian was now the sole master of what we must now call the Roman empire; he was to rule from 29 BC to his death in 14 AD. The western half appeared to have triumphed over the eastern, western republican virtue over eastern despotic decadence. But it was a Pyrrhic victory: the decadence and luxuriousness of the East would penetrate the Roman Empire that Octavian was about to inaugurate. Many western and republican forms remained; but the imperial power became in essence eastern and despotic. Julius Caesar had rejected the offer of a crown by Mark Antony; for kingship still remained a dirty word in the political discourse of the proud, freedom-loving Romans. But Octavian, while claiming to restore and renew the republic, in effect buried it; and after so many years of civil war, the people were prepared to submit to what was in effect a revival of the kingdom, choosing peace over freedom...

The real victor over the Roman republic was the feminine principle incarnate in Cleopatra and Egypt, which had triumphed over the masculine principle incarnate in Caesar and Rome. From now on, the emperors of Rome began to acquire the aura of profane, luxurious divinity that permeated Hellenistic culture, leading in the end to the thoroughly Eastern concept of the god-king that we find in Nero, Domitian and Diocletian. Even Octavian, on his tour of the Eastern Mediterranean after defeating Cleopatra, had given permission to provincials to offer him divine honours, "and major shrines were established at Pergamum the province of Asia and Nicomedia in Bithynia."²⁶⁴ And the conduit of this cultural transformation was Cleopatra, the goddess-queen of Egypt, the last successor of the Pharaohs, the new Isis, who in defeat conquered her conquerors. ...

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The Senate had been prepared to murder Julius Caesar for the sake of liberty and anti-monarchism. But the years of civil war seem to have persuaded them to value stability and peace over freedom. So there was no opposition when, on January 1, 27, Octavian "announced that he was resigning his powers, and returning control of the provinces, armies and laws to the Senate. In Dio's version he begins by declaring that what he is about to say will amaze them, since he is at the height of well-earned success and could not be forced to give up power. It is only if they consider his virtuous life, and understand that he had acted out of duty to avenge his father [Julius Caesar] and protect the state, that they will find his action now less surprising and more glorious... Julius Caesar is constantly invoked, for his achievements, his own refusal to accept the crown and title of king and his undeserved murder. His heir now follows in his footsteps, perhaps winning even greater glory by laying down the power he wields. He has done what needed to be done, leaving the commonwealth strong and stable, so that the task of governing it can now safely be left to others."²⁶⁵

The Senate could do little other than applaud wildly. But then they pleaded with him to remain as consul at the head of the state. Octavian reluctantly agreed, and in the days that followed he agreed to take responsibility "for some provinces, on the

²⁶⁴ Galsworthy, *Augustus*, p. 208.

²⁶⁵ Galsworthy, *Augustus*, p. 231.

basis that these were more in need of protection from foreign enemies or internal disorder. As a result he took control of all of the Spanish Peninsula, where conquest was incomplete, all of Gaul, where the occupation was still fairly recent and stability threatened by the German tribes from across the Rhine, and Syria, so often disturbed in the civil wars and with Parthia as a neighbour. He also retained control of Egypt, perhaps on the basis that it was a very new province. The entire command was voted to him for ten years, although he stressed that he hope to return some of the regions to senatorial control earlier than this, should he succeed in bringing the area under full control more quickly. The remaining provinces were placed under the supervision of the Senate.

“Caesar’s provinces contained the greater part of the Roman army. There were legions in Macedonia... Africa also contained several legions. Otherwise the senatorial provinces contained no significant military forces. The soldiers in Macedonia and Africa may well have continued to take an oath to Caesar, as was certainly the case within a few years...

“No one could have had any doubts about Caesar’s supremacy. His ten-year command mirrored earlier extraordinary commands of the likes of Pompey and Julius Caesar. It helped to create a façade of a public servant, taking on heavy responsibilities for the common good. The wider population are unlikely to have felt any qualms about this. Extraordinary commands had a proven track record of getting things done far more effectively than the traditional pattern of frequent transfer of responsibilities from one ambitious magistrate to another. Some senators may have felt the same way, and even those who did not drew solace from the chance of participating in the system. There was no other realistic alternative for as long as Caesar controlled the overwhelming bulk of the army. Dio notes cynically that one of the first things Caesar did after he was persuaded to accept a major role in the state was to get the Senate to pass a decree awarding a substantial payrise to his praetorian cohorts. The evidence is poor, but these probably received an annual salary of 375 denarii instead of the 225 denarii paid to legionaries. There were nine cohorts of praetorians, so they were kept just below the nominal strength of a ten-cohort legion, and several cohorts were routinely stationed in or near Rome itself. This was in contrast to Julius Caesar, who had dismissed his bodyguard early in 44 BC. Armed forces remained the ultimate guarantee of Caesar’s supremacy.

“Much of the senators’ time in the meetings on 13 and especially 15 and 16 January were taken up with praising Caesar, and awarding him permanent honours. This may well have been an area where members could exercise genuine independence as regards detail, although no doubt the debate was shaped both by Caesar’s selection of the order of speakers and by contributions made by men who had already been primed. Considerable momentum quickly gathered to grant Caesar an additional *cognomen* as a mark of his incredible past and future services to the state. Some speakers suggested that he be called Romulus, linking him for ever with the founder of Rome since he had renewed and effectively refounded the City.

“As well as founder, Romulus was also Rome’s first king, and one tradition maintained that instead of dying he had been raised to the heavens to become a god.

Yet some of the associations were less attractive. The foundation of Rome had begun with fratricide, Romulus' twin brother being killed with a spade, and that was an uncomfortable thought for a generation who had seen so much civil war. An alternative tradition explained the disappearance of Rome's first king less grandly, claiming that he had been torn in pieces by a mob of senators. After a while, opinion in the Senate shifted away from the idea of giving Caesar the name. Suetonius claims that he and his close advisers were keen, but if so they must have changed their minds at some point. That it was considered so openly and seriously tells us a good deal about the mood of the times. Senators were eager to vote honours to so powerful a man. Whether or not they liked him and what he had done, no one doubted the reality of his supremacy.

“Eventually a vote was taken on a proposal by Munatius Plancus, the same man who had once painted himself blue and donned a fishtail to dance for Antony and Cleopatra, and who had later defected to Caesar, bringing news of his rival's will. Plancus proposed the name Augustus, and the resolution was passed with a sweeping – perhaps unanimous – vote as senators moved to show their acquiescence by standing beside him. The presiding consul now became formally Imperator Caesar Augustus, *divi filius*. No Roman had ever had such a name, and it is easy for familiarity to make us forget just how novel it was. Augustus carried heavy religious overtones of the very Roman tradition of seeking divine guidance and approval through augury. Ennius, Rome's earliest and most revered poet, spoke of the City being founded with ‘august augury’ in a passage as familiar to Romans as the most famous Shakespearean quotes are to us today.

“Caesar Augustus – sometimes the order was reversed to Augustus Caesar for added emphasis – was special, unlike anyone else, and, unlike the ten-year provincial command, the new name was a permanent honour. It was hard, perhaps impossible, to imagine Imperator Caesar Augustus, the son of a god, ever retiring to private life, or even being approached in glory, *auctoritas*, and pre-eminence by anyone else. Earlier precedents – for instance, Pompey's extraordinary commands, and his distant supervision of the Spanish provinces from 54 BC onwards – falls far short of Caesar Augustus' position. Other men had won grand names in the past – Sulla was *Felix* (lucky) and Pompey *Magnus* (great), but none had held so grand and sacred a name as Augustus. The only person to wield comparable power and pre-eminence was Julius Caesar. The convention of referring to his heir as Augustus and not Caesar Augustus can conceal the great similarities between their places in the state...

“Caesar Augustus held a personal permanent pre-eminence in the state, matched in the past only by his father. Like Julius Caesar he continued to hold the consulship every year. The charade of handing over power to the Senate and being handed it straight back was important... This should not make us focus so much on the few differences in Caesar Augustus' self-presentation and conduct that we are blind to the overwhelming – and very public – similarities between him and his father. In a sense, he had now fulfilled his teenage announcement of his intention to win the honours and offices of his father. Julius Caesar once dismissed the *res publica* as a ‘mere name without form or substance’, although we do not know when and in what context he expressed the view. His heir was more tactful, and avoided the abolished title of

dictator, but the difference is more apparent than real. He was also *divi filius*, the 'son of a god', and both this and the name Caesar constantly paraded his connection with the murdered Julius Caesar. The monuments adorning Rome and associated with him already far surpassed the ones celebrating the dictator during his lifetime..."²⁶⁶

The real significance both of Julius Caesar's dictatorship and of Caesar Augustus' principate is that, although they were both, as everyone knew, despots wielding essentially absolute power, they both tried to justify their power democratically, by reference to the will of the people - more precisely, of the Senate and the People (SPQR). Of course, republicanism was already in the genes of the Romans since the expulsion of their kings. And that purely Roman republicanism was reinforced by the profound influence that Greek culture and political philosophy exerted on the Romans after Greece had been incorporated into the empire. All educated Romans knew Greek as well as Latin and had been tutored, often by Greek tutors, in the humanist ideals of Classical Athens and the anti-authoritarian rhetoric of Demosthenes - Cicero called his anti-Antonian speeches *Philippics* in honour of Demosthenes, and Augustus was particularly fond of citing Greek epigrams. For that cultural milieu, dictatorship might be accepted *de facto* as necessary for the preservation of the state, but it could not be accepted *de jure* - because it was against the law! The only solution was to sugar the pill of despotism with a thick layer of (pretty outrageous) constitutionalism. So the despot had to pretend to surrender his power to the people, and the people then had to pretend to give it back to him. The upshot was that everyone was (more or less) happy: the despot had preserved his power without the threat of civil war, while the Senate had placed the seal of their constitutional approval on his power. Of course, it was a charade. But it was a very important charade, and a charade with lasting and long-term consequences - nothing less than the preservation of the empire for another three hundred years (at least). Augustus' great achievement was that he played this game with great skill and supremely successfully. Thereby he created a precedent that was to be repeated right down the centuries of European history. For while despotism did not disappear, neither did democracy, and the despots had to try and provide democratic justifications for their despotism. So Napoleon was elected first consul of the French Republic by a National Assembly - but four years later crowned himself emperor. And Hitler was legally elected Chancellor of Germany by the Reichstag. And even the most powerful despot of all, Stalin, created a constitution and had himself elected by an "elected" Supreme Soviet. They were all, politically speaking, the children of Caesar Augustus, *divi filii*, "the son of a god", who first fused the despotic and democratic principles so as to create the greatest empire the world has ever known...

But the main lesson of the period is stark: even the most powerful, most firmly grounded republic in ancient history, breathing the spirit of democracy, failed, descending into anarchy, civil war and murder on a large scale, which paved the way for despotism, just as Plato and Aristotle predicted. The eighteenth-century admirers of the Roman republic thought that this fundamental defect could be corrected by more and better laws, more democracy, more education and built-in constitutional safeguards. But they were wrong: the nineteenth, and especially the twentieth

²⁶⁶ Galsworthy, *Augustus*, pp. 233-237.

century, proved that this lesson from the ancients, at any rate, was universally true in space and time...

20. PAX ROMANA

On January 16, 27 BC, as we have seen, the Roman senate gave Octavian the titles *Augustus, Princeps et Imperator, Caesar, Divi Filius*, “The illustrious one, the first head and commander, Caesar, the son of a god”. These titles, as Peter Furtado writes, “asserted the scope of his power and the benevolence of his rule, and they established him as the leading senator, the head of the army and the descendant of the now-deified Julius Caesar. The last of these titles effectively made his family name Caesar a synonym with the holder of imperial power – a meaning it retained in Russia (Czar/Tsar) and Germany (Kaiser) into the 20th century.”²⁶⁷

Although Augustus emphasized the republican nature of his rule by calling himself *princeps senatus*, first among equals among the senators, rather than *rex* or *dictator*, and making his reign technically limited in time, there is no doubt that in reality both he and all his successors until Diocletian, were *despots*, some more humane than others, and some more sane than others, but despots nevertheless.

According to Stephen Kershaw, “Historians conventionally call this new phase of Roman history the Principate, so in a sense they have swallowed Augustus’ propaganda: Augustus developed ‘new truthful narratives about the past’ and many contemporaries bought into them: ‘Thus the ancient time-honoured constitution of the Republic was revived.’ The *Fasti Praenestini* for 27 BCE tell how: ‘The Senate decreed that an oak-leaf crown be placed above the door of the house of Emperor Caesar Augustus because he restored the Republican Constitution to the People of Rome.’ Even so, Augustus wasn’t able to pull the wool over everyone’s eyes. Tacitus characterized him as a power-crazed autocrat hiding behind a veneer of Republicanism, and Dio Cassius stated that ‘all the power of the people and that of the senate reverted to Augustus, and from his time there was a genuine monarchy’.

“The overall package, known nowadays as the First Settlement of 27 BCE, was not an unqualified success, and a conspiracy against him by Fannius Caepio and A. Terentius Varro Murena, combined with a potentially life-threatening illness, made him reassess his position. In 23 BCE he vacated the consulship and only held it twice more for limited, specific purposes. But to offset this loss he received *tribunicia potestas* – the powers of a Tribune of the Plebs – which crucially included the right of veto and of putting legislation to the people. From now on, Rome’s Emperors would count their reigns from the year when they acquired *tribunicia potestas*.

“The loss of his consular powers was counterbalanced by the grant of *imperium proconsulare* (the command associated with a Proconsul). This was renewed automatically at (usually) ten-year intervals, and was valid both in Italy and inside the city of Rome itself. The icing on the cake was that his *imperium* was made *maius* – superior to that of any other Proconsul. Augustus could now legally intervene in whatever province he liked, whenever he liked...”²⁶⁸

²⁶⁷ Furtado, *History day by day*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2019, p. 20.

²⁶⁸ Stephen P. Kershaw, *A Brief History of the Roman Empire*, London: Robinson, 2013, pp. 47-49.

In 12 BC Augustus was elected chief priest, *Pontifex Maximus*. The election of the *pontifex* had been the object of political infighting since 104 BC, so its sacred, independent nature had long ago been compromised; but Julius Caesar himself had assumed the post in 63 BC, so it must have been worth having, as was only to be expected in a world and an electorate that was still very religious. As Augustus wrote in his *Res Gestae*: "So great was the multitude that flocked to my election from all over Italy that no such gathering in Rome had heretofore been recorded." So now he held the fullness of both political and religious power in his hands, making his rule, for all its republican forms, conformable to the classic definition of despotism – that is, the concentration of supreme power, both political and religious, in the hands of one man...

*

Edward Gibbon writes in his famous *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*: "Every barrier of the Roman constitution had been leveled by the vast ambition of the dictator; every fence had been leveled by the hand of the Triumvir. After the victory of Actium, the fate of the Roman world depended on the will of Octavianus, surnamed Caesar, by his uncle's adoption, and afterwards Augustus, by the flattery of the senate. The conqueror was at the head of forty-four legions, conscious of their own strength, and of the weakness of the constitution, habituated, during forty years of civil war, to every act of blood and violence, and passionately devoted to the house of Caesar, from whence alone they had received, and expected, the most lavish rewards. The provinces, long oppressed by the ministers of the republic, sighed for the government of a single person, who would be the master, not the accomplice, of those petty tyrants. The people of Rome, viewing, with a secret pleasure, the humiliation of the aristocracy, demanded only bread and public shows, and were supplied with both by the liberal hand of Augustus. The rich and polite Italians, who had almost universally embraced the [hedonistic] philosophy of Epicurus, enjoyed the present blessings of ease and tranquility, and suffered not the pleasing dream to be interrupted by the memory of their old tumultuous freedom. With its power, the senate had lost its dignity; many of the most noble families were extinct. The republicans of spirit and ability had perished in the field of battle, or in the proscription. The door of the assembly had been designedly left open, for a fixed multitude of more than a thousand persons, who reflected disgrace upon their rank, instead of deriving honour from it.

"The reformation of the senate was one of the first steps in which Augustus laid aside the tyrant, and professed himself the father of his country. He was elected censor; and, in concert with his faithful Agrippa, he examined the list of the senators, expelled a few members, whose vices or whose obstinacy required a public example, persuaded near two hundred to prevent the shame of an expulsion by a voluntary retreat, raised the qualification of a senator to about ten thousand pounds, created a sufficient number of patrician families, and accepted for himself the honourable title of Prince of the Senate, which had always been bestowed, by the censors, on the citizen most eminent for his honours and services. But whilst he thus restored the dignity, he destroyed the independence of the senate. The principles of a free constitution are irrevocably lost, when the legislative power is nominated by the executive.

“Before an assembly thus modeled and prepared, Augustus pronounced a studied oration, which displayed his patriotism, and disguised his ambition. ‘He lamented, yet excused his past conduct. Filial piety had required at his hands the revenge of his father’s murder; the humanity of his own nature had sometimes given way to the laws of stern necessity, and to a forced connection with two unworthy colleagues: as long as Antony lived, the republic forbade him to abandon her to a degenerate Roman, and a barbarian queen. He was now at liberty to satisfy his duty and his inclination. He solemnly restored the senate and people to all their ancient rights, and wished only to mingle with the crowd of his fellow-citizens, and to share the blessings which he had obtained for his country.’

“It would require the pen of Tacitus (if Tacitus had assisted at this assembly) to describe the various emotions of the senate; those that were suppressed, and those that were affected. It was dangerous to trust the sincerity of Augustus; to seem to distrust it was still more dangerous. The respective advantages of monarchy and a republic have often divided speculative inquirers, the present greatness of the Roman state, the corruption of manners, and the licence of the soldiers, supplied new arguments to the advocates of monarchy, and these general views of government were again warped by the hopes and fears of each individual. Amidst this confusion of sentiments, the answer of the senate was unanimous and decisive. They refused to accept the resignation of Augustus; they conjured not to desert the republic, which he had saved. After a decent resistance, the crafty tyrant submitted to the orders of the senate; and consented to receive the government of the provinces, and the general command of the Roman armies, under the well-known names of Proconsul and Imperator. But he would receive them only for ten years. Even before the expiration of that period, he hoped that the wounds of evil discord would be completely healed, and that the republic, restored to its pristine health and vigour, would no longer require the dangerous interposition of so extraordinary a magistrate. The memory of this comedy, repeated several times during the life of Augustus, was preserved to the last ages of the empire, by the peculiar pomp with which the perpetual monarchs of Rome always solemnized the tenth years of their reign...

“The victory over the senate was easy and inglorious. Every eye and every passion was directed to the supreme magistrate, who possessed the arms and treasure of the state, whilst the senate, neither elected by the people, not guarded by military force, not animated by public spirit, rested its declining authority on the frail and crumbling basis of ancient opinion. The fine theory of a republic insensibly vanished, and made way for the more natural and substantial feelings of monarchy. As the freedoms and honours of Rome were successively circumscribed in the provinces, in which the old government had been either unknown, or was remembered with abhorrence, the tradition of republican maxims was gradually obliterated. The Greek historians of the age of the Antonines observe with a malicious pleasure, that although the sovereign of Rome, in compliance with an obsolete prejudice, abstained from the name of a king, he possessed the full measure of legal power. In the reign of Severus, the senate was filled with polished and eloquent slaves from the eastern provinces, who justified personal flattery by speculative principles of servitude. These new advocates of prerogative were heard with pleasure by the court, and with patience by the people, when they inculcated the duty of passive obedience, and descanted on the inevitable

mischief of freedom. The lawyers and the historians concurred in teaching that the Imperial authority was held, not by the delegated commission, but by the irrevocable resignation of the senate, that the emperor was freed from the restraint of civil laws, could command by his arbitrary will the lives and fortunes of his subject, and might dispose of the empire as of his private patrimony..."²⁶⁹

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Why were the Romans so willing to exchange their vaunted republican freedom for an absolutist servitude? Partly out of exhaustion and revulsion at the bloodshed and chaos of the last century of the Republic – freedom in almost every age of human history involves giving freedom to the unrestrained passions of men, with all their destructive consequences. That is why most human beings in most ages prefer stability and peace to the excitement of freedom. Rome might produce some monster emperors, like Nero and Caligula. But their monstrosities affected only a small minority of the citizens of the empire, whereas the stable, long-lasting Roman system of laws under one-man-rule benefited all free citizens. Only one thing was lacking, “the one thing necessary”: *salvation*, the rule of the One True God, bringing peace with God into the hearts and minds of men. But they did not have long to wait for that: God the Saviour was coming. Indeed, he had already come: He was born as a man under the rule of Caesar Augustus, and His first act was to be registered in one of Augustus’ censuses ...

And so if the supreme value of the Roman Republic had been *freedom*, that of the Roman Empire under its first emperor, Augustus, was *peace*. In 13 BC the Senate erected an altar to the Roman goddess of peace to commemorate Augustus’ return to Rome after his campaigns in Spain and Gaul. The altar’s sculptures symbolized the coming of a golden age to the earth through the benevolent despotism of Augustus and his family.

The Roman Peace, *Pax Romana*, both pacified the empire and united it. Partly through technological inventions, such as the famous straight roads and the postal service (*cursus publicus*), which used the roads; and partly through limiting offensive wars and providing linguistic and cultural modes of integration. “It is thanks to them,” wrote St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons (+177) of the emperors, “that we are able to walk along well-kept roads without fear, and take ship wherever we wish.”²⁷⁰

Of course, the republic had gloried in offensive wars, and the “peace” it created was often the peace of the dead. Even Virgil, the official poet of the Augustan age, exhorted the Romans to “impose [by force] the ways of peace”.²⁷¹ Moreover, even during the imperial period offensive wars, though rarer, did not disappear. Thus “in 84, writes Simon Schama, “an enormous pan-European pitched battle took place on the slopes of an unidentified Highland mountain, certainly north of the Tay, which

²⁶⁹ Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, London: The Folio Society, 1776, 1983, vol. I, pp. 78-80, 130.

²⁷⁰ St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4.30.3.

²⁷¹ In Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Jupiter says: For the empire of these people I impose neither limits of space nor time. I have given them power without end (I, 278).

Tacitus [in *Agricola*, 30] calls Mount Grampius, where 30,000 of the Caledonians and their northern allies engaged with the Roman legions and their Dutch (Batavian) and Belgian (Tungrian) auxiliaries. The result was the slaughter of 10,000 of the natives and 360 Romans. The most remarkable pages in Tacitus's history are not the battle scenes, with their predictable gore, but the speeches he puts through the mouths of the opposing commander, especially the Caledonian general Calgacus, who delivers the first of the great back-to-the-wall, anti-imperialist speeches on Scotland's soil, a ringing appeal for his native country's freedom: 'here at the world's end, on its last inch of liberty, we have lived unmolested to this day, defended by our remoteness and obscurity. But there are no other tribes to come; nothing but sea and cliffs and these more deadly Romans whose arrogance you cannot escape by obedience and self-restraint. Robbers of the world, now that the earth falls into their all-devastating hands, they probe even the sea; if their enemy have wealth they have greed... [neither] East nor West has glutted them... To plunder, butcher, steal, these things they misname empire: they make a desolation and they call it peace...' ²⁷²

However, by Augustus' time a longing for real peace was evident among the Romans - although their belief in their right to conquer the world never left them... As Edward Gibbon wrote: "The principal conquests of the Romans were achieved under the republic; and the emperors, for the most part, were satisfied with preserving those dominions which had been acquired by the policy of the senate, the active emulation of the consuls, and the martial enthusiasm of the people. The first seven centuries were filled with a rapid succession of triumphs; but it was reserved for Augustus to relinquish the ambitious design of subduing the whole earth, and to introduce a spirit of moderation into the public counsels. It was easy for him to discover that Rome, in her present exalted situation, had much less to hope than to fear from the chance of arms; and that, in the prosecution of remote wars, the undertaking became every day more difficult, the event more doubtful, and the possession more precarious, and less beneficial. The experience of Augustus added weight to these salutary reflections, and effectually convinced him that, by the prudent vigour of his councils, it would be easy to secure every concession which the safety of the dignity of Rome might require from the most formidable Barbarians. Instead of exposing his person and his legions to the arrows of the Parthians, he obtained, by an honourable treaty, the restoration of the standards and prisoners which had been taken in the defeat of Crassus [in 53 BC]." ²⁷³

And so, with the exception of the new conquests of Britain under Claudius and of Dacia (Romania) and Nabataea under Trajan, the Roman Empire remained for centuries broadly within the limits set by Augustus. Excursions beyond those limits were made only for defensive purposes, in order to protect it against the attacks of barbarians. One of those limits was the Rhine, beyond which lay the Germanic tribes who had wiped out three Roman legions under Varus in 9 AD - a defeat that engrained itself in the psyche of the Romans more than any other until the defeat and capture of the Emperor Valerian by the Persian King Shapur in 260. (Augustus himself tore his clothes and banged his head against the doors of his house, crying: "Quinctilius Varus,

²⁷² Schama, *A History of Britain 1*, London: BBC Publications, 2003, p. p. 34.

²⁷³ Gibbon, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-12.

give me back my legions!") The Rhine became a permanent boundary of the "inhabited world" until the German tribes themselves began to breach it in the third century. The Romans even did something that they had been too proud to do before: *retreat*, as when the Antonine Wall in southern Scotland was abandoned in favour of Hadrian's Wall further south.

Thus "the terror of the Roman arms added weight and dignity to the moderation of the emperors. They preserved peace by a constant preparation for war; and while justice regulated their conduct, they announced to the nations on their confines that they were as little disposed to endure as to offer an injury. The military strength, which it has been sufficient for Hadrian and the elder Antoninus to display [in Britain], was exerted against the Parthians and the Germans by the emperor Marcus. The hostilities of the barbarians provoked the resentment of that philosophic monarch, and, in the prosecution of a just defence, Marcus and his generals obtained many signal victories, both on the Euphrates and on the Danube..."²⁷⁴

Within the multi-national empire, peace was preserved by a combination of religious ecumenism, the planting of veterans' colonies, farmers and traders all over the empire, and the state's allowing more and more colonials to partake of the advantages of Roman citizenship or limited citizenship, thereby integrating the peoples by creating a kind of Roman imperial patriotism that extended through the natives of many nations, something that the leaders of the Roman Republic had not succeeded in doing.

For, as Gibbon writes, "After the legions were rendered permanent by the emperors, the provinces were peopled by a race of soldiers; and the veterans, whether they received the reward of their service in land or in money, usually settled with their families in the country where they had honourably spent their youth. Throughout the empire, but more particularly in the western parts, the most fertile districts, and the most convenient situations, were reserved for the establishment of colonies; some of which were of a civil, and others of a military nature. In their manners and internal policy, the colonies formed a perfect representation of their great parent, and were soon endeared to the natives by the ties of friendship and alliance, they effectually diffused a reverence for the Roman name, and a desire, which was seldom disappointed, of sharing, in due time, its honours and advantages. The municipal cities insensibly equalled the rank and splendor of the colonies; and in the reign of Hadrian, it was disputed which was the preferable condition, of those societies which had issued from, or those which had been received into the bosom of Rome. The right of Latium, as it was called, conferred on the cities to which it had been granted a more partial favour. The magistrates only, at the expiration of their office, assumed the quality of Roman citizens; but as these offices were annual, in a few years they circulated round the principal families. Those of the provincials who were permitted to bear arms in the legions; those who exercised any civil employment, all, in a word, who performed any public service, or displayed any personal talents, were rewarded with a present, whose value was continually diminished by the increasing liberality of the emperors. Yet even, in the age of the Antonines, when the freedom of the city

²⁷⁴ Gibbon, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

had been bestowed on the greater number of their subjects, it was still accompanied with very solid advantages. The bulk of the people acquired, with that title, the benefit of the Roman laws, particularly in the interesting articles of marriage, testaments, and inheritance; and the road of fortune was open to those whose pretensions were seconded by favour or merit. The grandsons of the Gauls, who had besieged Julius Caesar in Alesia, commanded legions, governed provinces, and were admitted into the senate of Rome. Their ambition, instead of disturbing the tranquility of the state was intimately connected its safety and greatness.

“So sensible were the Romans of the influence of language over national manners, that it was their most serious care to extend, with the progress of their arms, the use of the Latin tongue. The ancient dialects of Italy, the Sabine, the Etruscan, and the Venetian, sunk into oblivion; but in the provinces, the east was less docile than the west, to the voice of its victorious preceptors. This obvious difference marked the two portions of the empire with a distinction of colours, which, though it was in some degree concealed during the meridian splendour of prosperity, became gradually more visible as the shades of night descended upon the Roman world. The western countries were civilized by the same hands which subdued them. As soon as the barbarians were reconciled to obedience, their minds were opened to any new impressions of knowledge and politeness. The language of Virgil and Cicero, though with some inevitable mixture of corruption, was so universally corrupted in Africa, Spain, Gaul, Britain and Pannonia, that the faint traces of the Punic or Celtic idioms were preserved only in the mountains, or among the peasants. Education and study insensibly inspired the natives of their countries with the sentiments of Romans; and Italy gave fashions as well as laws to her Latin provincials. They educated with more ardour, and obtained with more facility, the freedom and honours of the state; supported the national dignity in letters and in arms; and, at length, in the person of Trajan, produced an emperor whom the Scipios would not have disowned in their countryman. The situation of the Greeks was very different from that of the Barbarians. The former had been long since civilized and corrupted. Such was the general division of the Roman Empire into the Latin and Greek languages...

“It is a just though trite observation, that victorious Rome was herself subdued by the arts of Greece. Those immortal writers who still command the admiration of modern [eighteenth-century] Europe, soon became the favourite object of study and imitation in Italy and the western provinces. But the elegant amusements of the Romans were not suffered to interfere with their sound maxims of policy. While they acknowledged the charms of the Greek, they asserted the dignity of the Latin tongue, and the exclusive use of the latter was inflexibly maintained in the administration of civil as well as military government. The two languages exercised at the same time their separate jurisdiction throughout the empire: the former as the natural idiom of science; the latter as the legal dialect of public transactions. Those who united letters with business were equally conversant with both; and it was almost impossible, in any province, to find a Roman subject of a liberal education, who was at once a stranger to the Greek and to the Latin language.

“It was by such institutions that the nations of the empire insensibly melted away into the Roman name and people. But there still remained, in the centre of every

province and of every family, an unhappy condition of men who endured the weight, without sharing the benefits, of society. In the free states of antiquity the domestic slaves were exposed to the wanton rigour of despotism. The perfect settlement of the Roman Empire preceded by ages of violence and rapine. The slaves consisted, for the most part, of barbarian captives, taken in thousands by the chance of war, purchased at a vile price, accustomed to a life of independence, and impatient to break and avenge their fetters. Against such internal enemies, whose desperate insurrections had more than once reduced the republic to the brink of destruction, the most severe regulations, and the most cruel treatment, seemed almost justified by the great law of self-preservation. But when the principal nations of Europe, Asia and Africa, were united under the laws of one sovereign, the source of foreign supplies flowed with much less abundance, and the Romans were reduced to the milder but more tedious method of propagation. In their numerous families, and particularly in their country estates, they encouraged the marriage of their slaves. The sentiments of nature, the habits of education, and the possession of a dependent species of property, contributed to alleviate the hardships of servitude. The existence of a slave became an object of greater value, and though his happiness still depended on the temperament and circumstances of the master, the humanity of the latter, instead of being restrained by fear, was encouraged by the sense of his own interest. The progress of manners was accelerated by the virtue or policy of the emperors; and by the edicts of Hadrian and the Antonines the protection of the laws was extended to the most abject part of mankind. The jurisdiction of life and death over the slaves, a power long exercised and often abused, was taken out of private hands, and reserved to the magistrates alone. The subterranean prisons were abolished, and upon a just complaint of intolerable manners, the injured slave obtained either his deliverance, or a less cruel master."²⁷⁵

²⁷⁵ Gibbon, *op. cit.*, pp. 59-62.

21. HEROD THE GREAT

One part of the East, Judaea, continued to have no truck with the idea of the god-king or queen that was the dominant in neighbouring Syria and Egypt. Nevertheless, the corrupt habits of Hellenistic, and, later, of Roman imperialism began to penetrate there too. Thus Alexander Jannaeus was a cruel despot with heretical tendencies; his refusal to perform the libation ceremony at the Feast of Tabernacles led to a rebellion and a civil war lasting six years and costing 50,000 lives. He died in 76BC, and was succeeded by his wife Salome, who died in 67. Her two sons Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II fought each other for the kingship and high priesthood, and they both appealed to Pompey, who in 64, after defeating the Pontic King Mithridates the Great, arrived in Antioch and deposed the last of the Seleucid kings. The Pharisees also sent a delegation to Pompey; but they asked him to abolish the monarchy in Judaea, which was dominated by their rivals, the Sadducees, since they said it was contrary to their traditions. In 63 Pompey took the side of Hyrcanus, appointing him ethnarch; he captured Jerusalem after a three-month siege involving horrific bloodshed, and, to the horror of the Jews, entered the Holy of Holies.

Hyrcanus' power was then effectively usurped by his powerful chief-minister, Antipater, an Idumaeen (Edomite) from the other side of the Jordan, whom the Romans placed in charge of Judaea, with special responsibility for controlling disturbances and collecting taxes. In 47, after Julius Caesar had defeated Pompey, Antipater hastened to ingratiate himself with him. As a reward, he was given Roman citizenship and was later appointed the first Roman Procurator of Judaea. Then Antipater appointed his son Phasael as governor of Judaea and his other son, Herod, as governor of Galilee.

After the assassination of Caesar in 44, Antipater sided with Cassius in the civil war with Mark Antony. This gave an opportunity to the anti-Roman Pharisees, who were always on their guard against contamination of the faith by Greek paganism and deeply resented Roman domination of the homeland. In 43, they poisoned Antipater, and his son Herod was forced by the Sanhedrin to flee to Rome. Meanwhile, Mark Antony had won his war against Cassius, and in 41 he confirmed Antipater's sons Herod and Phasael in their positions. Civil war then broke out in Judaea. The nominal Hasmonean king of the country, Hyrcanus, was overthrown by his nephew Antigonus with the help of the Parthians.

Herod promptly fled to Rome again. Thus when the Parthians were conquering Jerusalem in 37, Herod was in Rome being fêted by Antony and Octavian. In a triumphant procession they led him to the Capitol. "And there," as A. Paryaeu writes, "amid sacrifices to Jupiter Capitolinus that were impermissible for a Jew, and which caused deep consternation among the Jews, he was formally raised onto the Jewish throne."²⁷⁶

²⁷⁶ Paryaeu, "Tsar Irod i ego Soobshchiki: Istoria i Sovremennost'" ("King Herod and his Associates: History and Modernity"), *Suzdal'skie Eparkhial'nie Vedomosti* (Suzdal Diocesan News), N 3, January-February, 1998, pp. 31-32.

After Actium in 31, Herod visited Octavian and was confirmed as king by him.

“Another visit and further gifts followed when Caesar [Octavian] left Egypt, and in return he regained territory taken from him by Antony to give to Cleopatra. The queen’s bodyguard of several hundred Gauls – another gift from Antony – was also presented by Caesar to the king of Judaea.”²⁷⁷

But Herod was not only not of the line of David: he was not even a Jew by race. As Tom Mueller writes: “His mother was an ethnic Arab [from Nabataea], and his father was an Edomite, and though Herod was raised as a Jew, he lacked the social status of the powerful old families in Jerusalem who were eligible to serve as high priest, as the Hasmonaean kings had traditionally done. Many of his subjects considered Herod an outsider – a ‘half Jew’, as his early biographer, the Jewish soldier and aristocrat Flavius Josephus later wrote – and continued to fight for a Hasmonaean theocracy.”²⁷⁸ Pious Jews inevitably wondered how the promises made by God to David about the eternity of his dynasty (Psalm 131.11-15) could be fulfilled now that the Davidic line appeared to have died out. Perhaps the time had come for the appearance of the Messiah, whose kingdom would be eternal... After all, the “seventy times seven” prophecy of Daniel (9.24-27) indicated that his coming would be in the first half of the first century AD.²⁷⁹ Moreover, had not the Patriarch Jacob, declared: “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto Him shall the gathering of the people be” (Genesis 49.10)? Now that the sceptre, in the form of the Jewish kingship, appeared to have departed from Judah, was it not time for the appearance of Shiloh?²⁸⁰

Herod tried to correct his non-Jewishness by marrying the Hasmonaean princess Mariamne. But his Jewish faith was superficial at best. Pinero writes that “If the writers of the New Testament saw him as a tyrant, Herod saw himself as the paragon of refinement. He befriended leading Roman figures, showering them with invitations to his palaces in Jerusalem and Jericho. The succession of Gentile nobles, philosophers, historians, poets, and playwrights flowing through the royal court rankled with the Pharisees and the Essenes, the principal Jewish sects concentrated in and around Jerusalem. In some ways, both groups were very different: The Pharisees represented the establishment, holding high religious office in the Temple, while the Essenes were

²⁷⁷ Adrian Galsworthy, *Augustus*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2014, p. 209.

²⁷⁸ Mueller, “Herod: The Holy Land’s Visionary Builder”, *National Geographic Magazine*, December, 2008, p. 41.

²⁷⁹ John C. Lennox, *Against the Flow: the Inspiration of Daniel in an Age of Relativism*, Oxford: Monarch, 2015, pp. 294-301. Bishop Alexander (Mileant) of Argentina (“On the Threshold”, *Orthodox America*, vol. XVIII, N 5 (161), January, 2000, p. 12) writes: “Daniel’s prophecy so explicitly and synonymously points to Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah, that the Gemaric rabbi forbids his compatriots to calculate the dates of the Daniel septenaries, saying, ‘Those who calculate the times will hear their bones rattle’ (Sanhedrin 97).”

²⁸⁰ Bishop Alexander recounts a tradition from the Midrash “that when the members of the Sanhedrin learned that they had been deprived of the right to try criminal cases (in AD 30), they put on sackcloth and, tearing their hair, gathered and began to cry out: ‘Woe to us, woe to us: it has been a great while since we had a king from Judah, and the promised Messiah is not yet come!’ This occurred at the very beginning of Jesus Christ’s ministry” (*ibid.*).

an apocalyptic sect who wanted to see Judaism purified and reformed. Even so, both believed that the king was intentionally corrupting Jewish customs within his court.

“According to the historian Nicholas of Damascus, one of Herod’s closest friends, the king neglected affairs of state and the study of Jewish law to spend his time studying philosophy, rhetoric, and the history of Greece and Rome. State affairs were delegated to those officials with a Greek education. When the king did carry out religious acts, his pious critics remained unconvinced. Herod knew that ruling Judaea was impossible without the consent of the influential Pharisees, whom he carefully courted with various concessions. He was able to keep them just about on side, but he would never win their total trust or loyalty.

“According to the historian Josephus, Herod’s new cities irked the Jewish priestly class because their pagan monuments were insultingly close to Jerusalem. Built between 22 and 10 BC, Herod named Caesarea Maritima for his patron, Caesar Augustus. It was... the base of the Herodian fleet, which he placed entirely at the disposal of Rome.

“Caesarea’s temples were dedicated to the goddess Roma, and to Augustus himself. [He also built a temple to Augustus at Sebaste, which is a Greek translation of “Augustus”.] Every five years, Herod organized gladiatorial fights, dedicated to Augustus and his wife Livia, and where foreign dancers almost outnumbered the guests. Magnificent prizes were awarded to the winners, and rumors of wild, orgiastic parties circulated. The Jewish authorities looked on the excess with deep disapproval. They saw gladiatorial fighting as fundamentally immoral, believing that all human life belonged to the Most High.

“If Caesarea – officially the Judaeian capital from 6 BC – could be written off as a city for pagans, the holy city of Jerusalem was also threatened by the Romanizing instincts of their ruler. Tension focused on the Second Temple there, a building that symbolizes Herod’s complex relationship with his faith.

“Begun in 20 BC, Herod’s restoration program refaced the structure in white stone, and doubled the courtyard around it. Herod sought to exalt the Jewish faith, yet did so using Hellenic architects. The grandiose court was soon filled with moneylenders – an affront to pious Jews, who, according to Josephus and other Jewish writers of the time, were angered at the corrupt management of the Temple, an anger felt later by one Jesus of Nazareth: ‘My house shall be called the house of prayer,’ Jesus cries in the Gospel of Matthew, ‘but ye have made it a den of thieves’.

“Perhaps the most spectacular religious scandal Herod the Great unleashed was the breaching of King David’s tomb in Bethlehem. Rumors had long circulated that the tomb believed to be David’s resting place held treasure. Having spent large sums of money on the building of Caesarea, and perhaps seeing himself as the descendant of King David, Herod, it was said, secretly accompanied workmen to rob the tomb. The historian Joseph recounts how, on entering, they found that nothing remained of

the riches. According to his account, Herod's two guards were killed by 'a flame that burst out upon those that went in', and Herod fled the scene."²⁸¹

Nevertheless, Palestine under Herod (Augustus made him procurator of Syria, too) became the most powerful Jewish kingdom since Solomon and the wonder of the East. Under Herod, the Jews, though under Roman dominion, reached the peak of their influence in the ancient world. Paul Johnson writes: "The number of Jews, both born and converts, expanded everywhere, so that, according to one medieval tradition, there were at the time of the Claudian recensus in 48 AD some 6,944,000 Jews within the confines of the empire, plus what Josephus calls the 'myriads and myriads' in Babylonia and elsewhere beyond it. One calculation is that during the Herodian period there were about eight million Jews in the world, of whom 2,350,000 to 2,500,000 lived in Palestine, the Jews thus constituting about 10 per cent of the Roman empire."²⁸²

But of course the essence of the kingdom was quite different from that of David and Solomon. Apart from the fact that the real earthly ruler was Rome, and that outside Jerusalem itself Herod showed himself to be a thorough-going pagan, the whole direction of Herod's rule was to destroy the last remnants of the Jewish Church and monarchy. Thus he killed most of the Sanhedrin and all of the Hasmonaean family, not excluding his own wife Mariamne and their sons Alexander and Aristobulus.

Herod "had no fewer than ten wives and a large number of children. Two of the most favoured were sent to Rome to be raised and educated in Augustus' household, but since these were sons of the executed Mariamne, trust was always in short supply. Years later Herod recalled them, and in 13 BC took them to Italy where father and sons appeared before the *princeps* and accused each other of treachery. Matters were temporarily resolved, but in 7 BC the king again accused them of plotting against him. This time he did not go to Rome in person, but sent ambassadors, and Augustus ordered that a special court including his legate in Syria and other Romans meet in Berytus to try the case. The sons were found guilty and swiftly executed, even though the Romans had advocated no more than imprisonment.

"Aged and in poor health, Herod's final years witnessed a spate of executions of family members, as the king saw threats and treachery in every direction. Augustus commented drily that he would 'rather be Herod's pig than his son.'"²⁸³

Herod introduced confusion into the line of the high-priesthood. Eusebius writes: "Hyrcanus, who was the last of the regular line of high priests, was very soon afterward taken prisoner by the Parthians, and Herod, the first foreigner, as I have already said, was made King of the Jewish nation by the Roman senate and by Augustus. Under him Christ appeared in bodily shape, and the expected Salvation of the nations and their calling followed in accordance with prophecy. From this time

²⁸¹ Pinero, "Herod the Great", *National Geographic History*, November/December, 2016, pp. 44-46.

²⁸² Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

²⁸³ Galsworthy, *op. cit.*, p. 391.

the princes and rulers of Judah, I mean of the Jewish nation, came to an end, and as a natural consequence the order of the high priesthood, which from ancient times had proceeded regularly in closest succession from generation to generation, was immediately thrown into confusion. Of these things Josephus is also a witness, who shows that when Herod was made King by the Romans he no longer appointed the high priests from the ancient line, but gave the honor to certain obscure persons. A course similar to that of Herod in the appointment of the priests was pursued by his son Archelaus, and after him by the Romans, who took the government into their own hands."²⁸⁴

Metropolitan Moses of Toronto writes that Herod “arranged that his brother-in-law Aristobulus be made High Priest. Aristobulus was from the Hasmonean dynasty and a legitimate choice for high priest. For this reason he was extremely popular with the Jews and fearing his popularity, the tyrant Herod had him drowned in an ‘accident.’ From this point on, the high priests were not of the legitimate lineage and were put in place by the tyrant Herod, i.e., not according to the proper order.

“Shapiro, a modern Rabbi comments, ‘As a result of Herod's interference and the ever-spreading Hellenistic influences among the Jewish upper classes, the Temple hierarchy became very corrupt. The Sadducees, a religious group of the wealthy, who collaborated with the Romans in order to keep their power base, now controlled the Temple, much to the chagrin of the mainstream Jewish majority, the Pharisees, and of the extreme religious minority, the Zealots.’

“This was the state of things ‘in the fullness of time’ when our Creator fulfilled His promises. These events were prophesied to take place when ‘a ruler failed from the house and lineage of Judah.’”²⁸⁵

The Pharisees, who had led the movement against Hellenism in the first century BC, degenerated sharply under Herod’s rule. They even once sent a delegation to Rome asking for the establishment of a *republic* in Judaea under the sovereignty of Rome. This was a clear betrayal of the Israelite autocratic tradition.²⁸⁶

Like Herod, they persecuted Christ, the True King of the Jews, leading to the abandonment of the Jewish people by God, while Herod himself became the closest forerunner of the Antichrist in the Old Testament...

“The last years of the life of Herod,” writes Paryaeu, “were simply nightmarish. Feeling that his subjects profoundly hated him, haunted at night by visions of his slaughtered wife, sons and all the Hasmonaeans, and conscious that his life, in spite of all its external successes and superficial splendour, was just a series of horrors. Herod finally lost his mental stability and was seized by some kind of furious madness.”²⁸⁷

²⁸⁴ Eusebius, *History of the Church*, Bk. I, Chapter 6, 7-9.

²⁸⁵ Metropolitan Moses, *Sermon on the Feast of the Entry of the Theotokos into the Temple*, 2013.

²⁸⁶ Paryaeu, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

²⁸⁷ Paryaeu, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

The final, most notorious product of his madness was his attempt to kill the Lord Jesus Christ and his slaughter of the 14,000 innocents of Bethlehem (it was his son, Herod Antipas, who killed John the Baptist).²⁸⁸

But the Child Jesus had fled to Egypt, where His presence was sufficient to cause the destruction of all the pagan temple idols. In this way, as in His drawing the Persian Magi from Babylon to Bethlehem, Christ demonstrated that He was the King not only of Israel, but also of the ancient pagan lands of Egypt and Babylon, the true King of both the Jews and the Gentiles. For He was, as Simeon said, “a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the Glory of thy people Israel” (Luke 2.32).

²⁸⁸ “The Cave with the Relics of the Holy Innocents in Bethlehem”, *Mystagogy Resources Center*, December 30, 2017, <http://www.johnsanidopoulos.com/2017/12/the-cave-with-relics-of-holy-innocents.html>

22. THE END OF THE STATE

The history of Israel culminating in the Coming of her true King and God, the Lord Jesus Christ, provides us with the answer to a question which neither the despots of the east nor the democrats of the west could answer - the question, namely: what is the end of the State?

This question can be divided into two further questions. First, what is the end, that is, *purpose* of the State? And second, what is the end, that is, *destroyer* of the State, that which brings the State to an end? The two questions are logically related. For that which brings the State to an end is its failure to carry out the end or purpose for which it was created by God...

It will be recalled that the origin of the State lies in its ability to save men from death - in other words, its *survival value*. Man as an individual, and even in small groups or families, cannot survive for long; he has to combine into larger groups that are self-sufficient in order to provide for his basic needs and protect himself against external enemies. That is why Aristotle defined the State as a large community that is "nearly or completely self-sufficient".²⁸⁹

However, for Aristotle, the State had a positive as well as a negative purpose. It was not distinguished from the smaller units of the family or the village simply because it was better able to guarantee survival: it was *qualitatively* as well as quantitatively distinct from them insofar as *it enabled man to fulfill his potential as a human being*. Hence his famous definition of man as "a political animal", that is, an animal who reaches his full potential only by living in cities. For city states were the dominant form of political organization in the Greece of Aristotle's time, and it was only in city-states that man, according to him, was able to develop that free spirit of rational inquiry that enabled him to know the True, the Beautiful and the Good. It was only in such states that he had the leisure and the education to pursue such uniquely human activities as art, science, organized religion and philosophy, which constitute his true happiness, *eudaemonia*.

The problem was that Greek democracy - like Roman democracy after it - did not attain its positive end, that is, *eudaemonia*, and even failed to attain its negative end, survival. First, Athenian democracy was defeated by the Spartan system of dual kingship and aristocracy, a kind of political organization that theoretically should have been much inferior to democracy. And then the Greek city-states as a whole were defeated by, and absorbed into, Alexander the Great's despotic empire, a kind of political organization which the Greek philosophers agreed was the worst and most irrational of all - although the multi-racialism of the empire, and the spread of Greek philosophical ideas, prepared the way for something new and better.

Israel was a completely different kind of state: the first and only autocracy of the ancient world. The distinguishing mark of this state was that its origin was not the

²⁸⁹ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1252 b 28.

need to survive *physically*, but *spiritually* through obedience to God. That is why the word "Israel" means "he who sees God".

The Jews achieved this in the first place by obeying the call of God to leave the existing satanocratic states and their settled way of life and enter the desert on the way to the Promised Land where God alone is King. Here *physical* survival was actually more difficult than before, but the prize was far greater - *spiritual* survival, life with God. Thus we may say that the negative end of Israelite autocracy was the avoidance of spiritual death (Babylon, Egypt, the kingdom of sin and death), and its positive end was the attainment of spiritual life (the Promised Land, Israel, the Kingdom of righteousness and life).

But since spiritual life is not a political category attainable by purely political means, the end of the Israelite autocracy was not in fact political at all as the word "political" is usually understood, but *religious*. For its aim was not happiness in this life, the peace and prosperity of its citizens in this world, but the blessedness of its citizens in the world to come, in which there will be no politics and no states, but only *Christ and the Church*, the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom that is "not of this world". Thus the end of the state lies beyond itself, and beyond space and time, in serving the Church, "the Israel of God" ([Galatians 6.16](#)), which alone can lead the people into the Promised Land, which is not simply the physical land of Israel, "flowing with milk and honey", but the spiritual and eternal Israel, flowing with the Grace of the Spirit.

The Israelite state survived so long as it placed spiritual ends above purely political ones and was faithful to the Lord God of Israel. When it faltered in this it was punished with exile and suffering. When it faltered to such a degree that it killed its true King, the Lord Jesus Christ, declaring that "we have no king but Caesar", it was finally destroyed...

However, since, as the Archangel Gabriel said to the Holy Virgin Mary, Christ "will reign over the house of Jacob *forever*, and of His Kingdom *there will be no end*" ([Luke 1.33](#)), and since the purpose of God remains unchanging, the salvation of all men for eternity, the Israelite autocracy was re-established on a still firmer and wider and spiritual base, the Church of Christ, while in its political protector became the very state that had destroyed the old Israel - *Rome*...

III. CHRIST, THE JEWS AND THE ROMAN EMPIRE

23. THE KING OF KINGS, THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

In the fullness of time, in accordance with the plan that He had indicated to Adam and Eve immediately after the Fall, and to the Old Testament righteous in the millennia that followed, the Creator took on flesh and became a man in the womb of the Holy Virgin Mary. He was born probably in 5 or 6 BC.²⁹⁰ There is no good reason to believe, with modern sceptics, that the date was not December 25, exactly nine months after the Church celebrates His conception (the Annunciation) on March 25.

The faith which justified the Old Testament righteous (Hebrews 11) was exemplified to the highest degree by the Holy Virgin Mary. For by her words of faith, "Be it unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1.38), the perfect act of obedience, she brought God Himself into the world, to live as a man among men in accordance with the prophecy: "A Virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Emmanuel [God with us]" (Isaiah7.14). "Thus let us stand in awe," writes Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow, "at the immeasurably lofty faith of the All-holy Virgin, before which the faith of Abraham, the father of the faithful, who believed in the prophecy of the birth of Isaac despite the barrenness of old age, is less than a mustard seed before the cedar of Lebanon..."

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Both Jews and Gentiles, shepherds and Magi, were waiting for Christ...

The Gentile world was seething with rumours of the coming of a Saviour. They were looking for a universal kingdom ruled by a universal king, as in the verse of Virgil that could be seen as involuntarily referring to Jesus Christ:

*Now virginal Justice and the golden age return,
Now its first-born is sent down from high heaven.
With the birth of this boy the generation of iron will pass,
And a generation of gold will inherit all this world.²⁹¹*

However, the expectations of the Jews were much more intense - and much more precise - than those of the Gentiles. The Holy Spirit, speaking through the holy prophets, had foretold a Messiah, "the Son of David", that is, a descendant of the old royal dynasty of Israel, that was destined to become eternal through Him.

Christ came to restore all men to the Kingdom of God. At the same time, He restored the old Davidic line and make it eternal in accordance with the prophecy: "Once have I sworn by My holiness that to David I will not lie: his seed for ever shall abide. And his throne shall be as the sun before Me, and as the moon that is established for ever, and is a faithful witness in the sky" (Psalms 88.34-35). That prophecy began to be fulfilled when the Archangel Gabriel said to the Holy Virgin at the Annunciation: "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will

²⁹⁰ Galsworthy, *Augustus*, p. 488.

²⁹¹ Eclogues 4.6-9.

give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His Kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1.32-33).

What kingdom was meant here? Was it the same kind of kingdom as the Jews had in mind for themselves? If not, what were (are) the consequences?

William Barclay writes: "Throughout all their existence, the Jews never forgot that they were in a very special sense God's chosen people. Because of that, they naturally looked to a very special place in the world. In the early days, they looked forward to achieving that position by what we might call natural means. They always regarded the greatest days in their history as the days of David; and they dreamed of a day when there would arise another king of David's line, a king who would make them great in righteousness and in power (Isaiah 9:7, 11:1; Jeremiah 22:4, 23:5, 30:9).

"But as time went on, it came to be pitilessly clear that this dreamed-of greatness would never be achieved by natural means. The ten tribes had been carried off to Assyria and lost forever. The Babylonians conquered Jerusalem and carried the Jews away captive. Then came the Persians as their masters; then the Greeks; then the Romans. So far from knowing anything like dominion, for centuries the Jews never even knew what it was to be completely free and independent.

"So another line of thought grew up. It is true that the idea of a great king of David's line never entirely vanished and was always intertwined in some way with their thought; but more and more they began to dream of a day when God would intervene in history and achieve by supernatural means that which natural means could never achieve. They looked for divine power to do what human power was helpless to do.

"In between the Testaments were written a whole flood of books which were dreams and forecasts of this new age and the intervention of God. As a class, they are called *Apocalypses*. The word literally means *unveilings*. These books were meant to be unveilings of the future. It is to them that we must turn to find out what the Jews believed in the time of Jesus about the Messiah and the work of the Messiah and the new age. It is against their dreams that we must set the dream of Jesus.

"In these books, certain basic ideas occur. We follow here the classification of these ideas given by Emil Schuerer, who wrote *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*.

"(1) Before the Messiah came, there would be a time of terrible tribulation. There would be a messianic travail. It would be the birth-pangs of a new world. Every conceivable terror would burst upon the world; every standard of honour and decency would be torn down; the world would become a physical and moral chaos.... The time which preceded the coming of the Messiah was to be a time when the world was torn in pieces and every bond relaxed. The physical and the moral order would collapse.

"(2) Into this chaos there would come Elijah as the forerunner and herald of the Messiah. He was to heal the breaches and bring order into the chaos to prepare the

way for the Messiah. In particular he was to mend disputes....

“(3) Then there would enter the Messiah.... Sometimes the Messiah was thought of as a king of David's line, but more often he was thought of as a great, superhuman figure crashing into history to remake the world and in the end to vindicate God's people.

“(4) The nations would ally themselves and gather themselves together against the champion of God....

“(5) The result would be the total destruction of these hostile powers. The Jewish philosopher Philo said that the Messiah would 'take the field and make war and destroy great and populous nations'.... The Messiah will be the most destructive conqueror in history, smashing his enemies into utter extinction.

“(6) There would follow the renovation of Jerusalem. Sometimes this was thought of as the purification of the existing city. More often it was thought of as the coming down of the new Jerusalem from heaven....

“(7) The Jews who were dispersed all over the world would be gathered into the city of the new Jerusalem.... It is easy to see how Jewish this new world was to be. The nationalistic element is dominant all the time.

“(8) Palestine would be the centre of the world and the rest of the world subject to it. All the nations would be subdued. Sometimes it was thought of as a peaceful subjugation.... More often, the fate of the Gentiles was utter destruction at which Israel would exult and rejoice.... It was a grim picture. Israel would rejoice to see her enemies broken and in hell. Even the dead Israelites were to be raised up to share in the new world.

“(9) Finally, there would come the new age of peace and goodness which would last forever.”²⁹²

Christ by no means rejected all of these apocalyptic ideas. After all, several of them were grounded in the Holy Scriptures. But He rejected their cruelty, their national, worldly ambition, their anti-Gentilism and their exclusive reference to this world of space and time. Though He is “the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (Matthew 16.18), He came as the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53, not the ferocious war-lord of the apocalypses. And He came to restore Israel, not as a State ruling over all the nations by the power of the sword, but as the kernel of the Universal Church ruling a spiritual realm by the power of the Holy Spirit alone. His Kingdom was not of this world; it was the inner Kingdom of Grace, for “the Kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17.21).

Moreover, there was one Pharisaic tradition disputed by the priestly party of the Sadducees (Matthew 22.8; Acts 23.8) that the Lord came to confirm in the most direct

²⁹² Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*, pp. 223-230.

possible way - in His own Person: the resurrection from the dead. In the Old Testament we find the belief in the resurrection in the twelfth chapter of Daniel and in the story of the Maccabees: "Under the tunic of each of the dead [after a certain major battle] they found sacred tokens of the idols of Jamnia, which the law forbids the Jews to wear. And it became clear to all that this was the reason these men had fallen... Judas... took a collection, man by man, to the amount of two thousand drachmas of silver, and sent it to Jerusalem to provide for a sin-offering. In doing so he acted very well and honourably, taking account of the resurrection. For if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. But if he was looking for the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought." (II Maccabees 12.40-45). Thus the making of sin-offerings for the dead is justified on the grounds that there will be a resurrection from the dead.

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The question put before the Jews in Christ's lifetime was: did they accept Him as the Messiah, "the Son of God, the King of Israel" (John 1.49)? On this would depend the salvation both of the people and of their State... Tragically, in their great majority the Jews failed this test; they both crucified their True King and God, and said to Pilate: "We have no other king but Caesar" (John 19.15).

At that moment they became no different spiritually from the other pagan peoples; for, like the pagans, they had come to recognize a mere man, the Roman emperor, as higher than God Himself. As St. John Chrysostom writes: "Here they declined the Kingdom of Christ and called to themselves that of Caesar."²⁹³ What made this apostasy worse was the fact that they were not compelled to it by any despotic decree. Pilate not only did not demand this recognition of Caesar by them, but had said of *Christ* - "Behold your king" (John 19.14), and had then ordered the sign, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews", to be nailed above the cross.

The Jews had, in effect, without the slightest external coercion, carried out a *democratic revolution* against their True King, and accepted a mere mortal - and a pagan despot to boot - as their only king, thereby undermining and betraying the whole long tradition of Jewish zealotry. Of course, Christ, too, had recognized the kingship of Caesar - but only under God: He emphasized that Pilate had received his earthly kingdom from the Heavenly King and never confused the kingship of God with the kingship of Caesar.

Thus did the City of God on earth become the City of Man - and the stronghold of Satan: "How has the faithful city become a harlot! It was full of justice, righteousness lodged in it, but now murderers" (Isaiah 1.21). Thus did the original sin committed under Saul, when the people of God sought a king who would rule them "like all the nations", reap its final wages in their voluntary submission to the pagan Emperor of

²⁹³ St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 85 on John*, P.G. 59:505, col. 461. See also Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky), "Christ the Savior and the Jewish Revolution", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 35, N 4, July-August, 1988, pp. 11-31.

Rome.

But the positive result was that the Kingdom, with all its ineffable and inestimable benefits, was passed to other peoples. As the Lord Himself had prophesied: "The Kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits thereof" (Matthew 21.43). Or as St. Paul put it: "What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect [from the Gentiles] have obtained it, and the rest were blinded" (Romans 11.7). Thus all the other peoples of the world were now given the opportunity, through the preaching of the apostles and their successors, of joining God's Kingdom in the Church, the New Testament successor of the Old Testament Israel, "the Israel of God" (Galatians 6.16).

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Having lived a life of perfect virtue, Christ offered Himself as an immaculate Sacrifice to the Holy Trinity for the sins of all mankind on the Cross. He died in His Humanity, while remaining immortal in his Divinity, and descended into hades, destroying the power of the devil and leading all the dead who believed in Him into Paradise. Then, on the third day, He rose from the dead, appearing to His disciples in His resurrected Body. On the fortieth day He ascended in glory into heaven. Ten days later, at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples, creating the New Testament Church.

The main recounters of the Gospel story were the holy Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, together with the holy Apostle Paul. However, there were other witnesses from among those who are not known to have been Christians. Foremost among them was the Jew Flavius Josephus, the eye-witness and historian of the Siege of Jerusalem in 70AD, who, on seeing the futility of his countrymen's struggle against the Romans, joined the camp of the latter.

Although, as far as we know, he never became a Christian, he wrote a valuable testimony to Christ: "Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. *He was the Christ*, and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians so named from him are not extinct at this day."²⁹⁴

The Gospels record the most important series of events in the history of the world, its hinge and turning-point. By His Resurrection from the dead, Christ proved the truth of all His claims: that He was truly "The Word of God and God" (John 1.1), "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world" (John 1.29), "the Way, the Truth and the Life" (John 14.6), the same pre-eternal God Who had created the heavens and the earth and led the Jews out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. Through His

²⁹⁴ Josephus, *Antiquities*. Italics mine (V.M.).

Incarnation as a man, His blameless life and Sacrificial Death on the Cross and Resurrection from the dead, He truly gave all men who believe in Him the possibility of remission of their sins, deliverance from hell after death, and eternal life with God in the age to come.

The Resurrection of Christ is described in great detail in the Gospels, leaving no doubt of its veracity to any seriously thinking person. For "the Lord showed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days" (Acts 1.3.). When the Apostle Thomas put his hand into the side of the Lord's resurrected body and exclaimed "My Lord and my God" (John 20.28), he became the first of many who were able to say: "What we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we looked upon and touched with our hands - we proclaim now to you" (1 John 1:1).

Thus, as St. Nikolai Velimirović (+1956) writes, "The Lord's Resurrection has indeed remained to this day the most proven fact in human history. What other fact from the distant past stands so comprehensively and carefully proven as this?"²⁹⁵

"Behold, such is the apostolic preaching! The apostles do not speak as worldly sages, nor like philosophers and even less as theoreticians who make suppositions about something in order to discover something. The apostles speak about things which they have not sought but which unexpectedly surrounded them; about the fact which they did not discover but, so to speak, unexpectedly found them and seized them.

"They did not occupy themselves with spiritual researches nor have they studied psychology, neither did they, much less, occupy themselves with spiritism.

"Their occupation was fishing - one totally experiential physical occupation. While they were fishing, the God-Man [Jesus] appeared to them and cautiously and slowly introduced them to a new vocation in the service of Himself.

"At first, they did not believe Him but they, still more cautiously and slowly with fear and hesitation and much wavering, came toward Him and recognized Him. Until the apostles saw Him many times with their own eyes and until they discussed Him many times among themselves and, until they felt Him with their own hands, their experienced fact is supernatural but their method of recognizing this fact is thoroughly sensory and positively learned.

"Not even one contemporary scholar would be able to use a more positive method to know Christ. The apostles saw not only one miracle but numerous miracles. They heard not only one lesson but many lessons which could not be contained in numerous books.

"They saw the resurrected Lord for forty days; they walked with Him, they conversed with Him, they ate with Him, and they touched Him. In a word: they personally and first handedly had thousands of wondrous facts by which they learned

²⁹⁵ Velimirović, *Homilies*, Birmingham: Lazarica Press, vol. I, 1996, Homily on Thomas Sunday, p. 224.

and confirmed one great fact, i.e., that Christ is the God-Man, the Son of the Living God, the Man-loving Savior of mankind and the All-Powerful Judge of the living and the dead."²⁹⁶

The core meaning and content of the whole of history since the Coming of Christ to this day has consisted in the self-determination of every nation and every individual in relation to this one central, supremely important fact - "the one thing necessary" to know, as Christ Himself said. Every major event in history is to be evaluated in relation to the supreme criterion: does this event bring the individual or society closer to, or further away from, Christ the Saviour?... The eternal destiny of every man in every age depends on his sincerely believing this good news and fulfilling the commandments of Christ.

²⁹⁶ Velimirović, "Homily about the Personal Experiences of All the Apostles", *Prologue from Ochrid*.

24. THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

The Jews' killing of Christ was not only regicide, but also *Deicide*, an act unparalleled in evil in the history of the world; and their punishment was consequently unparalleled. Together with their subsequent rebellion against the Romans in 66-70 AD, what we may call the Jewish revolution set the pattern for all subsequent revolutions of apostate Christian peoples up to the French revolution in 1789, the Russian revolution in 1917 and the incipient American revolution of our times. This pattern consisted of two aspects: an external rebellion against socio-political oppressors, foreign and/or domestic, and an internal, spiritual or religious revolution against God. The Jewish revolution was both a political and a religious revolution. Therefore there came upon them the punishment prophesied by Christ: "great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matthew 24.21). "That on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Assuredly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation..." (Matthew 23.35-36).

In its external aspect, the ideology of the Jewish revolution, as Neil Faulkner writes, was a message "of sectarian radicals and messiahs... addressed, above all, to the poor. Josephus was explicit about the class basis of the conflict: it was, for him, a struggle between *dunatoi* – men of rank and power, the property-owning upper classes – and *stasiastai* – subversives, revolutionaries, popular leaders whose appeal was to 'the scum of the districts'. The Dead Sea Scrolls were equally explicit, though from the other side of the barricades: whereas 'the princes of Judah... wallowed in the ways of whoredom and wicked wealth' and 'acted arrogantly for the sake of riches and gain', the Lord would in due time deliver them 'into the hands of the poor', so as to 'humble the mighty of the peoples by the hand of those bent to the dust', and bring them 'the reward of the wicked'...

"The popular movement of 66 CE amounted to a fusion of Apocalypse and Jubilee, the radical minority's vision of a revolutionary war to destroy corruption having become inextricably linked with the peasant majority's traditional aspiration for land redistribution and the removal of burdens..."²⁹⁷

It was also, of course, a war of national liberation against the Romans. A liberated Israel ruling over the Gentile nations under a warrior Messiah was the very earthly vision of the Zealots, directly contrary to the other-worldly vision of Christ, of whom Josephus wrote that "all sorts of misfortunes sprang forth from these men, and the nation was infected with this doctrine [of rebellion] to an incredible degree." Over a million Jews were killed (although this figure is disputed²⁹⁸) and the Temple and City were completely destroyed.

²⁹⁷ Faulkner, "The great Jewish revolt against Rome, 66-73 CE", *History Today*, vol. 52 (10), October, 2002, pp. 50, 51.

²⁹⁸ The revisionist case has been presented by the Israeli historian Shlomo Sand. Josephus, our only source for these events, writes Sand "estimated that 1.1 million people died in the siege of Jerusalem and the great massacre that followed, that 97,000 were taken captive, and that a few thousand more were killed in other cities". (This is confirmed by St. Caesarius of Arles who says: "The Jews as if driven

Those who survived were forced to pay a “*fiscus Iudaicus*, a new empire-wide tax on all Jews – women, children, the elderly and slaves included – that effectively diverted the half-shekel that they contributed to the Temple of Jerusalem to that of Jupiter Capitolinus in Rome”.²⁹⁹

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However, the primary cause of the catastrophe that came on the Jews was their inner, spiritual rebellion against God, first when they declared: “We have no other king but Caesar” (John 19.15), and then when they said: ‘His blood be on us and on our children’ (Matthew 27.25). As Archbishop Averky writes, this curse was fulfilled “in the whole of the subsequent history of the Jews when they were scattered from that time throughout the world, in those innumerable ‘pogroms’ to which they have been constantly subjected, in fulfilment of the prophecy of Moses in Deuteronomy (28.49-57, 64-67).”³⁰⁰ The culmination of their apostasy was their murder of Christ, followed by their persecution of the apostles who preached to them for forty years after the Resurrection of Christ. In fact, the disaster took place just after the Jews had killed St. James, the Brother of the Lord, the first Bishop of Jerusalem.

In 132 another rebellion of the zealots under Bar Kokhba broke out in response to the Emperor Hadrian’s decision to ban circumcision, to rebuild Jerusalem as a Roman city, and to build a temple to Jupiter Optimus Maximus on the site of the old Temple. It was crushed by the Emperor at the cost, according to Dio Cassius, of fifty fortresses and 985 villages razed to the ground, 580,000 Jewish soldiers killed, many Jews sold into slavery, and “as for the numbers who perished from starvation, disease or fire, that was impossible to establish”.³⁰¹ The city and its ruins were ploughed over, Aelia Capitolina was built in its place, Judaea renamed Syria Palaestina and Jews were barred from entering it. Finally, a temple to Jupiter was planned for the site of the Temple, while Golgotha was covered by a temple to Venus...

by the hand of God assembled in Jerusalem according to their custom to celebrate the Passover. We read in history that three million Jews were gathered in Jerusalem; eleven hundred thousand of them are read to have been destroyed by the sword of hunger, and one hundred thousand young men were led to Rome in triumph. For two years that city was besieged, and so great was the number of the dead who were cast out of the city that their bodies equalled the height of the walls.” (Sermon 127)). However, Sand argues that these figures were grossly exaggerated, and that “a cautious estimate suggests that Jerusalem at that time could have had a population of sixty thousand or seventy thousand inhabitants” (*The Invention of the Jewish People*, London: Verso, 2009, p. 131).

²⁹⁹ Stephen P. Kershaw, *A Brief History of the Roman Empire*, London: Robinson, 2013, p. 138.

³⁰⁰ Averky, *Rukovodstvo k izucheniu Sviashchennago Pisania Novago Zaveta* (Handbook to the Study of the Holy Scriptures of the New Testament), part 1: The Four Gospels, Jordanville, N.Y.: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1974, p. 311.

³⁰¹ Dio, in Kershaw, *op. cit.*, pp. 197-198. Again, Sand disputes these figures. He claims that the population of Palestine “in the second century CE remained predominantly Judeans and Samaritans, and it started to flourish again for one or two generations after the end of the revolt” (*op. cit.*, p. 133). He also denies that there was any significant exile from the land after the destruction of the Second Temple, arguing that it was only the conquest of Palestine by the Arabs early in the seventh century that “put an end to the presence of the Jewish people in its land” (p. 141).

The ploughing up of the Temple site took place on August 9, the day on which all the major catastrophes of Jewish history took place. Thus David Baron writes: "The fast of the fifth month, which is the month of Ab, answering to August, is still observed by the Jews on the ninth day, in commemoration of the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar; but, according to the Talmud and Jewish historians, the following list of calamities all happened on the same day, namely: (1) On that day the decree went forth from God in the wilderness that the people should not enter the land because of their unbelief; (2) on the very same day of the destruction of the First Temple by the Chaldeans [in 586 BC], the Second Temple also was destroyed by the Romans [in 70 AD]; (4) on that day, after the rising under Bar Kochba, the city of Bethar was taken, 'in which were thousands and myriads of Israel, and they had a great king whom all Israel and the greatest of the wise men thought was King Messiah'; but (4) he fell into the hands of the Gentiles, and they were all put to death, and the affliction was great, like as it was in the desolation of the Sanctuary; (5) and lastly, on that day 'the wicked Turnus Rufus, who is devoted to punishment, ploughed up the (hill of the) Sanctuary, and the parts round about it, to fulfill that which was said by Micah, "Zion shall be ploughed as a field"'."³⁰²

Paradoxically but significantly, the Jews' last stand in both their rebellions took place in the hilltop fortresses built (at Herodium and Masada) by that arch-Hellenist and pseudo-king of the Jews, Herod the Great.³⁰³ Equally significantly, their submission to pagan rulers was the result of their rejection of their mission to the pagans. Instead of serving as God's priests to the pagan world, enlightening them with the knowledge of the One True God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Who had become man in Christ, they were puffed up with dreams of national glory and dominion over the nations. And so God subjected them to those same nations whom they despised, entrusting the original mission to the New Israel, the Church.

"In this striking way," writes St. John of Kronstadt, "did the people chosen in accordance with the merits of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob stumble against the inheritance of these merits, which were being received as their own impersonal virtue; they stumbled on their preference for the earthly kingdom over the Kingdom of Heaven, on their preference for a political messiah over the Messiah Whose Kingdom is not of this world.

"Let us look at the consequences to which this mistake led. First of all, this bitter error of the chosen people was bewailed by the Messiah Himself. In His triumphant procession into Jerusalem, when Christ came close to the city, then, looking at it, He wept over it and said: 'If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground, because you did not know the time of your visitation' (Luke 19.42-44). As He ascended onto Golgotha, Christ the Saviour sorrowed, not over the torments that were facing Him, but about the torments that awaited Jerusalem. He

³⁰² Baron, *Zechariah*, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1918, 1988, pp. 213-214.

³⁰³ Mueller, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-59.

expressed this to the women who were sympathetic to His sufferings, who wept and sobbed over Him: 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For indeed the days are coming in which they will say, "Blessed are the barren, wombs that never bore, and breasts which never nursed!" Then they will begin to say to the mountains: "Fall on us!"' (Luke 23.28-30).

"Already in ancient times the prophets were pointing to the woes that would strike the Jewish people for its betrayal of God – the people that was nevertheless chosen for the salvation of the world, for the foreseen fall of Israel had to bring salvation to the Gentiles (Romans 11.11).

"1500 years before, the Prophet and God-Seer Moses foretold the siege, the scattering of the Jews across the whole face of the earth and the terrible trials that followed: 'The Lord will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flied, a nation whose language you will not understand, a nation of fierce countenance, which does not respect the elderly nor show favour to the young. And they shall eat the increase of your livestock, and the produce of your land, until you are destroyed; they shall not leave you grain or new wine or oil, or the increase of your cattle or the offspring of your flocks, until they have destroyed you. They shall besiege you at all your gates until your high and fortified walls, in which you trust, come down throughout all your land, and they shall besiege you at all your gates throughout all your land which the Lord your God has given you. You shall eat of the fruit of your own body, the flesh of your sons and your daughters whom the Lord your God has given you, in the siege and desperate straits in which your enemy shall distress you... Then the Lord will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other... And among those nations you will find no rest... Your life shall hang in doubt before you; you shall fear day and night, and have no assurance of life' (Deuteronomy 28.49-53, 64-65, 66)...

"The holy Prophet Ezekiel points to the siege of Jerusalem as the consequence of the multiplication of lawlessnesses which attained a greater development than among the neighbouring people.

"Therefore thus says the Lord God: Because you have multiplied disobedience more than the nations that are all around you, have not walked in My statutes nor kept My judgements, nor even done according to the judgements of the nations that are all around you. Therefore thus says the Lord God, Indeed I, even I, am against you and will execute judgements in your midst in the sight of the nations. And I will do among you what I have never done, and the like of which I will never do again, because of all your abominations. Therefore fathers shall eat their sons in your midst, and sons shall eat their fathers, and I will execute judgements among you, and all of you who remain I will scatter to all the winds. Therefore as I live, says the Lord God, surely, because you have defiled My sanctuary with all your detestable things and with all your abominations therefore I will also diminish you. My eye will not spare, nor will I have any pity. One third of you shall die of the pestilence, and be consumed with famine in your midst, and one third shall fall by the sword all around you, and I will scatter another third to all the winds, and I will draw out a sword after them' (5.7-12).

“In this way the prophets of God clearly announced the causes of the destruction of Jerusalem and what had once been *the chosen people*, as they were called in antiquity, according to the merits of their forefathers. What became of them with their dreams of an earthly kingdom of Israel? Their destinies serve as a vivid example for the Christian peoples, of what awaits them, too, for abandoning the ways of the commandments of God and for accepting principles that contradict the truth.”³⁰⁴

In the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersal of the Jews around the world the Scripture was fulfilled: “I will set My face against you, and you shall be defeated by your enemies. Those who hate you will reign over you, and you shall flee when no one pursues you. And after all this, if you do not obey Me, I will punish you seven times more for your sins. I will break the pride of your power... And after all this, if you do not obey Me, but walk contrary to Me, then I also will walk contrary to you in fury; and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins. You shall eat the flesh of your sons, and eat the flesh of your daughters. I will destroy your high places, cut down your incense altars, and cast your carcasses on the lifeless forms of your idols. And My soul shall abhor you. I will lay your cities waste and bring your cities to desolation, and I will not smell the fragrance of your sweet incense. I will lay your cities waste and bring your sanctuaries to desolation, and I will not smell the fragrance of your sweet aromas. I will bring the land to desolation, and your enemies who dwell in it shall be astonished at it. I will scatter you among the nations and draw out a sword after you. Your land shall be desolate and your cities waste. Then the land will enjoy its Sabbaths as long as it lies desolate, and you are in your enemies’ land. Then the land will rest and enjoy its Sabbaths. As long as it lies desolate it shall rest – for the time it did not rest on your Sabbaths when you dwelt in it... You shall perish among the nations, and the land of your enemies shall eat you up... Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away; nor shall I abhor them, to utterly destroy them and break My covenant with them...” (Leviticus 26.17-19, 27-35, 38, 44)

³⁰⁴ St. John, *Nachalo i Konets Nashego Zemnogo Mira* (The Beginning and End of our Earthly Life), Moscow, 1901, 2004, pp. 49-50, 51-52.

25. ROME, THE CHURCH AND THE SYNAGOGUE

What was left to the Jews from the catastrophe? Certain Scriptures and rites, whose meaning and significance they no longer understood. And a fierce and violent love of their own nation – but a love divorced from the great glory of their nation, the Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ, and combined with a hatred of the non-Jewish nations that was so murderous and deceitful that it elicited a counter-hatred, known as anti-Semitism, which, with the permission of God, pursued them everywhere.

There is nothing wrong with patriotism, the love of one's nation, so long as it suffused with, and subordinate to, the love of God and the love of one's neighbour, of whatever race he might be.

“On coming into the world,” writes L.A. Tikhomirov, “the Saviour Jesus Christ as a man loved his fatherland, Judaea, no less than the Pharisees. He was thinking of the great role of his fatherland in the destinies of the world and mankind no less than the Pharisees, the zealots and the other nationalists. On approaching Jerusalem (during His triumphal entry) He wept and said: ‘Oh, if only thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace!’ ..., and recalling the coming destruction of the city, He added: ‘because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation’ (Luke 19.41, 44). ‘O Jerusalem, Jerusalem... which killest... them that are sent to thee!’ He said a little earlier, ‘how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and yet would not!’ (Luke 13.34). What would have happened if the Jews at that decisive moment had accepted the true Messiah? Israel would have become the spiritual head of the whole world, the beloved guide of mankind. At that very time Philo of Alexandria wrote that ‘the Israelites have received the mission to serve as priests and prophets for the whole world, to instruct it in the truth, and in particular the pure knowledge of God’. If they had recognized this truth in full measure, then the coming of the Saviour would have confirmed forever that great mission. But ‘the spirit of the prophets’ turned out to be by no means so strong in Jewry, and its leaders repeated the role of Esau: they gave away the right of the firstborn for a mess of pottage.

“Nevertheless we must not forget that if the nationalist hatred for the Kingdom of God, manifested outside tribal conditions, was expressed in the murder of the Saviour of the world, all His disciples who brought the good news of the Kingdom, all His first followers and a multitude of the first members of the Church to all the ends of the Roman empire were Jews by nationality. The greatest interpreter of the spiritual meaning of the idea of ‘the children of Abraham’ was the pure-blooded Jew and Pharisee, the Apostle Paul. He was a Jew by blood, but through the prophetic spirit turned out to be the ideological director of the world to that place where ‘there is neither Jew nor Greek’.”³⁰⁵

The Apostles were all Jews, and in spite of persecution from the Jewish authorities they did not immediately break definitively with the Jewish community in Jerusalem, continuing to worship in the Temple and to read the Holy Scriptures of the Old

³⁰⁵ Tikhomirov, *Religiozno-Filosofskie Osnovy Istorii*, p. 142.

Testament, which they saw as fulfilled in Jesus Christ.³⁰⁶ As Protopresbyter George Florovsky writes: "The famous phrase of St. Augustine can be taken as typical of the whole Patristic attitude towards the Old Dispensation. "Novum Testamentum in Vetere latet. Vetus Testamentum in Novo patet" [the New Testament is concealed in the Old, and the Old Testament is revealed in the New]. The New Testament is an accomplishment or a consummation of the Old. Christ Jesus is the Messiah spoken of by the prophets. In Him all promises and expectations are fulfilled. The Law and the Gospel belong together. And nobody can claim to be a true follower of Moses unless he believes that Jesus is the Lord. Any one who does not recognize in Jesus the Messiah, the Anointed of the Lord, does thereby betray the Old Dispensation itself. Only the Church of Christ keeps now the right key to the Scriptures, the true key to the prophecies of old. Because all these prophecies are fulfilled in Christ.

"St. Justin rejects the suggestion that the Old Testament is a link holding together the Church and the Synagogue. For him quite the opposite is true. All Jewish claims must be formally rejected. The Old Testament no longer belongs to the Jews. It belongs to the Church alone. And the Church of Christ is therefore the only true Israel of God. The Israel of old was but an undeveloped Church. The word "Scriptures" itself in early Christian use meant first of all just the Old Testament and in this sense obviously this word is used in the Creed: "according to the Scriptures," i.e. according to the prophecies and promises of the Old Dispensation."³⁰⁷

True, the first Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) established that pagan converts to Christianity did not have to practice Mosaic rites such as circumcision: faith in Christ and baptism was all that was required to become a fully-entitled member of the Church. And there was no question that the Christians were now the people of God, "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation" (I Peter 2.9), "the Israel of God" (Galatians 6.16), taking the place of the apostate Jews, who had once been "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Deuteronomy 4.23-24), but were now enemies of God. However, the Jewish Christian community in Palestine retained its outward semblance to Judaism, in order to facilitate the conversion of the Jews.

Of course, the Christians differed fundamentally from the Jews in their worship of Christ as the Messiah and God, one of the Holy Trinity. And the specifically Christian rite of the Eucharist was restricted only to those who believed in Christ and accepted baptism. Nevertheless, for the first forty years or so after the Resurrection the Church did not hasten to break all bonds with the Synagogue, hoping that as many Jews as possible could be converted. For although it is true, according to Professor A.D.

³⁰⁶ In fact, they were as deeply believing in the inspiration of the Old Testament as the Jews. Thus St. Irenaeus of Lyons (second century) wrote: "Look carefully into the Scriptures, which are the true utterances of the Holy Spirit. Observe that nothing of an unjust or counterfeit character is written in them" (*First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 45). And St. Gregory the Theologian (fourth century): "We who extend the accuracy of the Spirit to the merest stroke and tittle will never admit the impious assertion that even the smallest matters were dealt with haphazard by those who have recorded them, and have thus been borne in mind down to the present day: on the contrary, their purpose has been to supply memorials and instructions for our consideration under similar circumstances, should such befall us, and that the examples of the past might serve as rules and models, for our warning and imitation" (*Oration II: In Defence of His Flight to Pontus, and His Return, After His Ordination to the Priesthood*, ch. 105).

³⁰⁷ Florovsky, *Aspects of Church History*, pages 31-32.

Belyaev, that “the sacrifices which the Jews continued to offer in accordance with the Old Testament rite were no longer necessary after the death of Jesus Christ and were invalid after the offering of the Golgotha sacrifice, nevertheless they were not yet the abomination of desolation after the death of Jesus Christ, they were not offerings to the devil. The book of the Acts of the Apostles records the daily presence of the believers in the temple (2.46) and the visits of the apostles during the hours of prayer (3.1). More than that: the Apostle Paul once even offered a sacrifice in the Jerusalem temple (Acts 21.21-26). Let it be that he did this out of condescension to the weakness of conscience of the Jews, fulfilling the rule: ‘I was for the Jews as a Jew, so as to win the Jews’ (I Corinthians 9.20). Nevertheless, he would not have offered a sacrifice if it has been an offering to the devil, as Eusebius puts it. For him it was an indifferent act, just as the fulfillment of the whole ritual law of Moses became a matter of indifference for the Christians.”³⁰⁸

And this approach bore fruit, in that, at least in the first two generations, there was a steady trickle of converts from the Jews into the Church of Jerusalem, which was headed by the much-revered St. James the Just, the Brother of the Lord. After his martyrdom and the destruction of Jerusalem, his brother St. Symeon became bishop of Jerusalem. But the Christians, warned by God, had already fled the city for Pella, across the Jordan...

The Jews were not deprived of signs that they were losing the Grace of God. Even the fiercely anti-Christian Talmud preserves a record of some of these signs. Thus Dr. Seraphim Steger writes, commenting on Gemara, 39b, that during the last 40 years of the Temple’s existence, from 30 to 70, “a bad omen occurred on Yom Kippur every year because:

“(1) The Lot for the LORD came up in the left hand, not the right hand of the High Priest of Israel on Yom Kippur. What happened in 30 CE that might have caused this? Could it have been the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, Yeshua Ha-Maschiach? Could it have been that the High Priest of Israel had lost his authority because now there was a new High Priest in town, Yeshua Ha-Maschiach? In his Letter to the Hebrews the Apostle Paul speaks of Yeshua Ha-Maschiach as a High Priest after the Order of Melchizedek sitting at the right hand of the Father in the Heavens.

“Because the crimson ribbon tied between the horns of the bullock did not miraculously turn white for the last 40 years the Temple stood when the scapegoat was thrown over the cliff in the wilderness, we can say that the LORD did not accept the Temple sacrifice of the scapegoat for the nation of Israel on Yom Kippur. Why? Could it be because Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, our Passover (Pesach) Sacrifice has been slain for us once and for all had been accepted by the Father on our behalf? Consequently, there was no more need for a scapegoat because Christ not only was a propitiation for our sins, but has carried our sins away from us as far as the East is from the West.

³⁰⁸ Belyaev, in Sergej and Tamara Fomin, *Rossia pered Vtorym Prishestviem* (Russia before the Second Coming), Moscow, 1994, vol. 2, p. 393.

“(2). We can say that for the last 40 years the Temple stood neither did the westernmost Menorah lamp miraculously shine longer than the others as it had once done, now indicating that the Presence of the Lord, the Shekinah glory, had deserted the Temple all those last 40 years. Was the Shekinah, the glory of the Lord, now to be found outside the Temple? Could it be that it was now to be found in the Church, having descended upon the Church at Pentecost some 50 days after the crucifixion and resurrection of Yeshua?

“(3). We can say that during those last 40 years the Temple stood, the doors to the Hekel//Hekhal, the Holy Place/sanctuary, opened repetitively during those last 40 years by themselves, when they should have been closed, showing that access to the LORD in the Holy Place was not limited to the priests in their daily service, or the Holy of Holies to the High Priest but once a year. Could it be that through the risen Yesua Ha-Mashiach, Jesus the Messiah, “the Door” as He is sometimes called in the New Testament Gospels, that worship in the “Holy Place” was now open not just to the priests but to all who wished to enter in and to draw close to the Holy God of Israel, through faith in Yeshua, in the Church?

“Now, this testimony of the last 40 years that the Temple stood, is juxtaposed to the passages about a Simeon the Righteous who ministered in the Temple for 40 years [so presumably a priest, or levite at a minimum], during whose time the Temple was blessed.

“Reading this gemara again we can see that during the 40 years Simeon ministered, the sacrifices for the Israel were blessed and the scapegoat accepted, (removing the sins of the entire nation) because the lot for the Lord would always come up in the right hand. I.e., the people of Israel were being blessed by the LORD. Interestingly, after those 40 years, sometimes the sacrifices were accepted, sometimes not. Also, the priests suffered from the curse on the omer, two loaves, and shewbread--i.e., they were not nourished by the bread of the Temple as they were before.

“Who is Simeon the Righteous?

“... There is controversy over who this “Righteous Simeon” may have been since there are four men that have born this name in traditional Jewish history and there is some question of later Rabbinical fabrication of their tradition to favor their views at that later time. Perhaps this Simeon was none of the four major candidates. Could this Simeon possibly be Simeon the Just and Pious mentioned in the Gospel of Luke 2:25-36, the Simeon the Orthodox Church remembers as “Righteous Simeon” who held in his arms infant Jesus Christ at His presentation in the temple? Let’s look into this a bit further.

“We can see that during the 40 years Simeon ministered the Lord forgave the sins of the nation of Israel because the crimson-coloured strap [tied between the bullocks’ horns] would become white after the scapegoat was sent into the wilderness. As part of the blessing of the nation of Israel the Lord was forgiving the sins of the Israelites, sanctifying and preparing them for the enfleshment of the Logos.

“We can see that during the 40 years Simeon ministered the Shekhinah Glory/Holy Spirit remained present in the Holy of Holies blessing the nation [in preparation for the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God] because throughout those forty years the westernmost light was shining, having been lighted first and burning longer than the other lights. The Lord was blessing and preparing the Temple and its priests for receiving God in the flesh.

‘Lastly, we can see that during the 40 years Simeon ministered the fire of the pile of wood kept burning strong on the altar showing that the Lord was accepting of all the animal, meal, grain, oil, and wine sacrifices commanded in the Torah, the Law of Moses, under the Old Covenant, further underscoring the sanctifying of the Temple, the priests, the nation, and all the people by the various offerings.’³⁰⁹

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The Apostles rejected the possibility of salvation through the Mosaic Law and declared that salvation was only through faith in Jesus Christ. Nor, as St. Peter, the apostle to the Jews, added, “is there salvation in any other, but there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4.12). St. Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, was particularly clear on this point, writing his Epistle to the Galatians precisely in order to refute the Judaizing Christians. Already in his earliest Epistle he wrote that the Jews “killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us and do not please God and are contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the uttermost...” (I Thessalonians 2.15-16).

God’s wrath was manifest particularly in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, after which the situation for the Christians changed – first in relation to the Jews, who saw the Christians as traitors to the national cause, and then also in relation to the Romans, who began to treat the Christians as a separate religion. However, the Christians continued to pray for the Romans and the Greeks, who intermittently tolerated them, unlike the Jews, who always persecute them.

Moreover, the Jewish religion itself was changed into what should better be called Talmudism - after the “Talmud”, or “Teaching”, which claims to be an oral tradition set down by Moses³¹⁰ - in order that the Jews should set themselves apart finally and irrevocably from Christ... Steger explains how this happened: “Just before the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple by the Roman army led by Vespasian,

³⁰⁹ Steger, “Tidbits of 1st Century Christian History Preserved in the Babylonian Talmud and their Relationship to St. Simeon the Righteous”, http://www.stseraphimstjohnsandiego.org/St_Seraphim_of_Sarov_and_St_john_of_Kronstadt_Orthodox_Church/History/Entries/2014/5/9_History__Tidbits_of_1st_Century_History_Preserved_in_the_Babylonian_Talmud.html. See also N. Federoff & T. Peterson, “Talmudic Evidence for the Messiah at 30 C.E. - Four Unique Events Point to Messiah and His Identity”, August 2, 2014, *Window View*.

³¹⁰ Rev. I.B. Pranaitis, *The Talmud Unmasked*, St. Petersburg, 1892, translated by Bloomfield Books, Sudbury.

one of the leading sages of the Pharisees in Jerusalem, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai, was captured by the Romans according to one early Palestinian tradition and taken against his will to the town of Yavne'el / Jamnia (modern Yavne on the Mediterranean coast) which served as a place of detention for those who had surrendered to the Romans. In Jamnia Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai reconstituted the Sanhedrin, proclaimed New Moons and leap-years, and proceeded to construct a new religion for the war torn nation: 'Rabbinical Judaism' which was centered around the beliefs of the Pharisees as well as the practices of the Synagogue [the priests having become superfluous since the destruction of the Temple and the discontinuance of its services and sacrifices]. He preserved the oral traditions of the schools of the Pharisees encompassing the years 536 BC to AD 70. Jamnia subsequently became the new spiritual center for those Jews who survived the war.

"Some 150 years later Rabbi Yehudah haNasi set to writing a broad and comprehensive redaction of the Oral Law known as the Mishnah. Subsequent rabbinical commentaries, the Gemara, were added to each of the individual tractates forming two authoritative collections known as the Babylonian and the Jerusalem Talmudim. These contained 700 years' worth of the oral tradition of the rabbinical schools. Their final forms were completed around AD 600."³¹¹

The Jewish Professor Norman Cantor writes: "This withdrawal of the rabbis from the political fate of the homeland was the end result of what was already clear in the first century B.C. Pharisaic Judaism was a self-subsisting culture and a kind of mobile religious and moral tabernacle that could function autonomously and perpetually almost anywhere that the Jews had a modicum of physical security and economic opportunity. This was to be the single most continuous and important theme in Jewish history until modern times, the sacred chain that binds the generations together..."³¹² Except that there was nothing sacred about it; for this false tradition of men prevented generation after generation of Jews (with a few exceptions) from learning the truth hidden in their own genuine Scriptures

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The Jews constituted a large and important part of the population of the Empire. "Jewish colonies," writes Alexander Dvorkin, "could be found in any corner of the Mediterranean world - from Cadiz to the Crimea. In all there lived up to 4 million Jews in the diaspora out of a general population of the Roman Empire of 50 million, while the Jewish population of Palestine consisted of not more than one million people.

"In the first century after Christ there were 11 or 12 synagogues in Rome. But the highest percentage of Jewish settlement was in Alexandria: throughout Egypt (including Alexandria) there lived about a million Jews. The municipal authorities had to reckon with them, although the social isolation of the Jews did not allow them to form their own kind of 'lobby' for participation in the local power structures.

³¹¹ Steger, *op. cit.*

³¹² Cantor, *The Sacred Chain*, London: Fontana, 1996, p. 50.

Everywhere that they lived they refused to be merged into the life of their pagan surroundings, but unfailingly kept to their own religion and customs. Every Saturday they gathered to chant psalms and to read the Scriptures, after which there followed a sermon on the subject of the Biblical extract read and common prayers.

“Although scattered throughout the world, the Jews preserved the feeling of unity with the land of their fathers: they carried out private pilgrimages to the holy city of Zion and every year sent contributions to the Temple. Sometimes this export of currency from the provinces with its numerous Jewish population created definite difficulties for the Roman tax authorities. However, the Romans understood that in this question – as, however, in all questions connected with the basic principles of Judaism, – it was much more peaceful not to stop the Jews from acting in their own way. The Jews were not excluded from a single sphere of public life in which they themselves wanted to take part. But, of course, not all Jews observed their native customs as strictly as their religious leaders would have liked, and many of them experienced a powerful temptation to give in to seduction and live no differently from their neighbours.

“But the Jews for their part also exerted a noticeable influence on the inhabitants of the Empire. Although both the Greeks and the Romans saw circumcision as a disgusting anti-aesthetic custom, very many of the pagans were attracted to Judaism by its strict monotheism, the purity of its moral life and the antiquity (if not the style) of its Sacred Scriptures. There was no teaching on asceticism in Judaism (if you don’t count some marginal groups), but it spoke out for chastity, constancy and faithfulness in family life. In their communities the Jews constantly practised charity, visiting the sick and giving alms to the poor.

“Around many of the synagogues in the diaspora there formed groups of pious pagans whom the Jews usually called ‘God-fearers’ (in general this term was applied to every pious member of the synagogue). A pagan could pass through circumcision and ritual washing (immersion from the head down in a basin of water, which was required for the reception of converts into Judaism), but this did not often take place. As a rule, the Hellenized Jews of the diaspora, who were much more open to the external world than their rigorist Palestinian brethren, to the chagrin of the latter accepted converts from the pagans into their circle without insisting that circumcision was necessary for their salvation.

“The net of synagogues covering the empire turned out to be providential preparatory path for the Christian preaching. Through it Christianity penetrated into the midst of those who were drawing near to Judaism. Among these groups of former pagans the Christian missionaries found their own first uncircumcised followers. One could liken them to a ripe fruit, for they had the advantage not only of a lofty morality but also a knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures. From them the first Christian communities were formed. They consisted of the most varied people, not only from the proletarians and lower levels of society who had despaired of finding justice in this life, as the Marxist historians and those with them affirmed. St. Paul in his Epistle to the Romans gives a greeting to Erastus, a city guardian of the general purse; in Athens a member of the Areopagus (the city council), Dionysius, was converted; and

in Thessalonica there were 'quite a few noble women' (Acts 17.4). The governor of Bithynia, Pliny the Younger, in his letter to the Emperor Trajan (111-113) writes about the multitude 'of Christians of various classes'. The majority of these people were educated pagans who came to Christianity from circles attached to the Jews."³¹³

Many noble women from the Gentiles converted to Judaism, such as Poppaea Sabina, the emperor Nero's second wife.

"The Jewish conception of the divine," writes Tom Holland, "was indeed well suited to an age that had seen distances shrink and frontiers melt as never before. The God of Israel was a 'great King over all the earth'. Author of the Covenant that bound him uniquely to the Jews, he was at the same time capable of promising love to 'foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord' [Isaiah 56.6]. Of these, in the great melting pot of the Roman Mediterranean, there were increasing numbers. Most, it is true, opted to lurk on the sidelines of the synagogue, and rest content there with a status not as Jews, but as *theosebeis*, 'God-fearers'. Men in particular shrank from taking the ultimate step. Admiration for Moses did not necessarily translate into a willingness to go under the knife. Many of the aspects of Jewish life that appeared most ridiculous to outsiders – circumcision, the ban on eating pork – were dismissed by admirers of Moses' teaching and priests. Jews themselves naturally disagreed; and yet there was, in the widespread enthusiasm for their prophets and their scriptures, just a hint of just how rapidly the worship of their god might come to spread, were the prescriptions of the Torah only to be rendered less demanding..."³¹⁴

However, "as the rate of conversion to Judaism intensified, so did the government's disquiet and the resentment on the part of many Latin intellectuals".³¹⁵

The first recorded expulsion of Jewish converts from Rome was in 139 BC. A second was in 19 AD, when the Emperor Tiberius exiled four thousand converts to Sardinia.

In 49-50 the Emperor Claudius expelled the Jews again. For they were constantly "making disturbances", according to Suetonius, "at the instigation of Chrestus [Christ]". But it was not Christ Who instigated the riots – it was rather the Jews who instigated riots, not only against the Romans, but also against the Christians, as we see several times in the *Acts of the Apostles*. These anti-Christian pogroms intensified after the Fall of Jerusalem. Suetonius' confusion arose because in the beginning the Romans made no clear distinction between Jews and Christians, who lived "under the cover of Judaism", as Tertullian put it. By the reign of Nero the distinction had become clear: it was the Christians, not the Jews, who were put to the torch for supposedly burning down Rome...

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³¹³ Dvorkin, *Ocherki po Istorii Vselenskoj Pravoslavnoj Tserkvi* (Sketches on the History of the Universal Orthodox Church), Nizhni-Novogorod, 2006, pp. 41-42.

³¹⁴ Holland, *Dominion*, pp. 59-60.

³¹⁵ Sand, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

As regards the attitude of the Christians to the Jews, St. Justin the Martyr wrote: "The woes that have struck you have done so justly and rightly, for you killed the Righteous One [the Lord Jesus Christ] and before Him His prophets, and even now, as far as you can, you despise and dishonor those who hope on Him and on God the Ruler and Creator of all, Who sent Him; and you curse those who believe in Christ in your synagogues. At the present time you do not have the power to kill us yourselves - in this you are hindered by the present powers that be [the Romans]; but if you could, you would do this too... The other nations are not as guilty as you in the injustice that they show towards us and to Christ; for you are to blame for their bad prejudice against the Righteous One and against us, His followers. When you crucified Him, the only immaculate and righteous man, by Whose wounds all those who come to the Father through Him are healed, and when you learned that He had risen from the dead and ascended to heaven, as was foretold in the prophecies, you not only did not repent of your evil deeds, but even sent people chosen by you from Jerusalem throughout the earth to proclaim that the supposedly godless heresy of Christianity had appeared, and to spread slanders against us, which all those who do not know us customarily repeat. Thus you are the causes not only of your own injustice, but also of all the other people's..."³¹⁶

The Jews were different from the other nations of the Roman Empire in three major ways. First, their faith was exclusive; they claimed to worship the one and only True God, and rejected the ecumenist tolerance of the other faiths practised by the other peoples of the empire. Secondly, and especially after the Romans' destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, they could never reconcile themselves with their conquered status, or delight in the achievements of the *Pax Romana* like most of the other conquered nations. And thirdly, they were unique in that, although their homeland was Palestine, most Jews lived abroad, in the diaspora, which providentially allowed them to exert an important influence on the whole of the Roman Empire.

Nevertheless, the Jewish religion, unlike Christianity, was a licit cult that was given a certain leeway by the Roman authorities. It was only when they openly rebelled against Rome - in Judea in 66-70 and 135, and again in Libya in 115-117 - that they were suppressed...

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We have seen that the Jews were successful proselytizers in the Greco-Roman world before and after the Coming of Christ. However, as Alfred Lilienthal writes, "it was in the face of growing competition from the new Christian faith that the rabbinate and other Jewish leaders ceased proselytization."³¹⁷ In reaction to this competition, they formed an inner ghetto around themselves, whose laws were their religion, whose lawmakers were the rabbis, and whose sacred text was not the Sacred Scriptures of the Old Testament, but the Talmud...

³¹⁶ St. Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*.

³¹⁷ Lilienthal, *The Zionist Connection*, New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1978, p. 10.

The Talmud, writes Seraphim McCune, was “a direct response to the razing of the Temple in AD 70. Its primary premise is how to be a Jew without the temple.”³¹⁸

And, of course, without Christ. Indeed, the Talmud is without doubt the most abhorrent and anti-Christian book ever written. It purports to record a secret oral tradition going back to Moses and representing the true interpretation of the Torah, the first five books of the Bible. In fact, it bears only the most strained and perverse relation to the Torah, often completely corrupting the true meaning of the Holy Scriptures. It even asserts its own superiority over the Scriptures. For it declares: “The Law is water, but the Mishna [the first form of the Talmud] is wine.” And again: “The words of the elders are more important than the words of the Prophets.” “According to the Babylonian Talmud, God himself is subservient to the rabbis. 'Since God already gave the Torah to the Jewish people on Mt. Sinai we no longer pay attention to heavenly voices. God must submit to the decisions of a majority vote of the rabbis'. (BT Bava Metzia 59b).”³¹⁹

Talmudic Judaism is therefore a different religion from that of the Old Testament. It does not contain a formal creed in the manner of Christianity. But it does contain 613 commandments that all Jews are expected to fulfill and which constitute the essence of their religion. It was the Pharisee-Talmudists who incited Christ’s death because He preached a spiritual, universalist Kingdom opposed to their nationalist dreams. This opposition between the God-inspired Tradition of the Holy Scriptures and the man-made traditions of the Pharisees was pointed out by Christ when He said: “Thus have ye made the commandment of no effect by your tradition...Ye blind guides, who strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel” (Matthew 15.6, 23.24).

These man-made traditions were gathered together in the Talmud, which was assembled in two editions – in Palestine in the second century, and in Babylon in about 500 (the latter is much more authoritative). Its laws, as Douglas Reed writes, “governed every imaginable action of a Jew’s life anywhere in the world: marriage, divorce, property settlements, commercial transactions, down to the pettiest details of dress and toilet. As unforeseen things frequently crop up in daily life, the question of what is legal or illegal (not what is right or wrong) in all manner of novel circumstances had incessantly to be debated, and this produced the immense records of rabbinical disputes and decisions in which the Talmud abounds.

“Was it as much a crime to crush a flea as to kill a camel on a sacred day? One learned rabbi allowed that the flea might be gently squeezed, and another thought its feet might even be cut off. How many white hairs might a sacrificial red cow have and yet remain a red cow? What sort of scabs required this or that ritual of purification? At which end of an animal should the operation of slaughter be performed? Ought the high priest to put on his shirt or his hose first? Methods of putting apostates to death were debated; they must be strangled, said the elders, until they opened their mouths, into which boiling lead must be poured. Thereon a pious rabbi urged that the

³¹⁸ McCune, *Facebook*, October 21, 2018.

³¹⁹ Michael Hoffman, “What Does Rabbinic Judaism Say About What Makes Jews and Gentiles Different?”, *Revisionist History*, no. 111, October-November, 2020, p. 2.

victim's mouth be held open with pincers so that he not suffocate before the molten lead enter and consume his soul with his body. The word 'pious' is here not sardonically used; this scholar sought to discover the precise intention of 'the Law'."³²⁰

A dominant feature of these Jewish "holy" books was their hatred of Christ and Christianity.

"The *Jewish Encyclopaedia* says: 'It is the tendency of Jewish legends in the Talmud, the Midrash... and in the Life of Jesus (*Toledoth Jeshua*) that originated in the Middle Ages to belittle the person of Jesus by ascribing to him an illegitimate birth, magic and a shameful death'. He is generally alluded to as 'that anonymous one', 'liar', 'imposter' or 'bastard' (the attribution of bastardy is intended to bring him under the Law as stated in Deuteronomy 23.3: 'A bastard shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord'). Mention of the name, Jesus, is prohibited in Jewish households.

"The work cited by the *Jewish Encyclopaedia* as having 'originated in the Middle Ages' is not merely a discreditable memory of an ancient past, as that allusion might suggest; it is used in Hebrew schools today. It was a rabbinical production of the Talmudic era and repeated all the ritual of mockery of Calvary itself in a different form. Jesus is depicted as the illegitimate son of Mary, a hairdresser's wife, and of a Roman soldier called Panthera. Jesus himself is referred to by a name which might be translated 'Joey Virgo'. He is shown as being taken by his stepfather to Egypt and there learning sorcery.

"The significant thing about this bogus life-story (the only information about Jesus which Jews were supposed to read) is that in it Jesus is not crucified by Romans. After his appearance in Jerusalem and his arrest there as an agitator and a sorcerer he is turned over to the Sanhedrin and spends forty days in the pillory before being stoned and hanged at the Feast of Passover; this form of death exactly fulfils the Law laid down in Deuteronomy 21.22 and 17.5, whereas crucifixion would not have been in compliance with that *Judaic* law. The book then states that in hell he suffers the torture of boiling mud.

"The Talmud also refers to Jesus as 'Fool', 'sorcerer', 'profane person', 'idolater', 'dog', 'child of lust' and the like more; the effect of this teaching over a period of centuries is shown by the book of the Spanish Jew Mose de Leon, republished in 1880, which speaks of Jesus as a 'dead dog' that lies 'buried in a dunghill'. The original Hebrew texts of these Talmudic allusions appear in Laible's *Jesus Christ in Talmud*. This scholar says that during the period of the Talmudists [which, of course, has not ended, but continues to this day in Orthodox Judaism] hatred of Jesus became 'the most national trait of Judaism', that 'at the approach of Christianity the Jews were seized over and over again with a fury and hatred that were akin to madness', that 'the hatred and scorn of the Jews was always directed in the first place against the person of Jesus' and that 'the Jesus-hatred of the Jews is a firmly-established fact, but they want to show it as little as possible'.

³²⁰ Reed, *The Controversy of Zion*, Durban, South Africa, 1978, p. 93.

“This wish to conceal from the outer world that which was taught behind the Talmudic hedge led to the censoring of the above-quoted passages during the seventeenth century. Knowledge of the Talmud became fairly widespread then (it was frequently denounced by remonstrant Jews) and the embarrassment thus caused to the Talmudic elders led to the following edict (quoted in the original Hebrew and in translation by P.L.B. Drach, who was brought up in a Talmudic school and later became converted to Christianity):

““This is why we enjoin you, under pain of excommunication major, to print nothing in future editions, whether of the Mishna or of the Gemara, which relates whether for good or for evil to the acts of Jesus the Nazarene, and to substitute instead a circle like this: O, which will warn the rabbis and schoolmasters to teach the young these passages only *viva voce*. By means of this precaution the savants among the Nazarenes will have no further pretext to attack us on this subject’ (decree of the Judaist Synod which sat in Poland in 1631). At the present time, when public enquiry into such matters, or objection to them, has been virtually forbidden by Gentile governments, these passages, according to report, have been restored in the Hebrew editions of the Talmud...

“The Talmud sets out to widen and heighten the barrier between the Jews and others. An example of the different language which the Torah spoke, for Jews and for Gentiles, has previously been given: the obscure and apparently harmless allusion to ‘a foolish nation’ (Deuteronomy 32.21). According to the article on *Discrimination against Gentiles* in the *Jewish Encyclopaedia* the allusion in the original Hebrew is to ‘vile and vicious Gentiles’, so that Jew and Gentile received very different meanings from the same passage in the original and in the translation. The Talmud, however, which was to reach only Jewish eyes, removed any doubt that might have been caused in Jewish minds by perusal of the milder translation; it specifically related the passage in Deuteronomy to one in Ezekiel 23.20, and by so doing defined Gentiles as those ‘whose flesh is as the flesh of asses and whose issue is like the issue of horses’! In this spirit was the ‘interpretation’ of the Law continued by the Talmudists.

“The Talmudic edicts were all to similar effect. The Law (the Talmud laid down) allowed the restoration of a lost article to its owner if ‘a brother or neighbour’, but not if a Gentile. Book-burning (of Gentile books) was recommended... The benediction, ‘Blessed be Thou... who hast not made me a *goi* [Gentile]’ was to be recited daily. Eclipses were of bad augury for Gentiles only. Rabbi Lei laid down that the injunction not to take revenge (Leviticus 19.18) did not apply to Gentiles, and apparently invoked Ecclesiastes 8.4 in support of his ruling (a discriminatory interpretation then being given to a passage in which the Gentile could not suspect any such intention).

“The Jews who sells to a Gentile landed property bordering on the land of another Jew is to be excommunicated. A Gentile cannot be trusted as witness in a criminal or civil suit because he could not be depended on to keep his word like a Jew. A Jew testifying in a petty Gentile civil court as a single witness against a Jew must be excommunicated. Adultery committed with a non-Jewish woman is not adultery ‘for the heathen have no lawfully wedded wife, they are not really their wives’. The

Gentiles are as such precluded from admission to a future world..."³²¹

Michael Hoffman writes: "That *goyim* are *nefesh* [soul]-deficient is the fixed sacred law of Orthodox Judaism. How the law that *goyim* are less than fully human is applied is indeed subject to discussion and contestation in the *Mishnah Torah*, *Kesef Mishneh* and hundreds of cognate legal texts derived from the Talmud..."

"The Babylonian Talmud states, 'Only Jews are human. Non-Jews are not human' (Bava Metzi 114b. Also: BT Kerithoth 6b and 58a).

"One of the earliest laws distinguishing between Jews and *goyim* is found in the Talmud, in Sanhedrin 57a:

"Regarding bloodshed, the following distinction applies, if a non-Jew killed another non-Jew, or a non-Jew killed a Jew, the killer is liable for execution; if a Jew killed a non-Jew, he is exempt from punishment.'

"Regarding a Jew stealing from a non-Jew, the act is permitted' (BT Sanhedrin 57a).

"It is commanded in the Talmud's Kiddushim 66c: 'The best of the gentiles: kill him; the best of snakes: smash its skull; the best of women: is filled with witchcraft.' (The uncensored version of the text appears in *Tractate Soferim* [New York, M. Higher, 1937], 15:7, p. 282).

"The Talmud decrees in Sanhedrin 81b-82a: 'All gentile women without exception are 'Niddah, Shifchah, Goyyah and Zoah' (menstrual filth, slaves, heathens and prostitutes).

"The Talmud rules that black people are cursed: 'The sages taught: Three violated that directive and engaged in intercourse in the ark, and all of them punished for doing so... Ham was afflicted in that his skin turned black' (Sanhedrin 105b)...

"The founding text of the theologically influential and, in the United States, politically powerful, Orthodox Chabad-Lubavitch Judaism, is the *Tanya*, which was written by Chabad's founder, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Lyady. This foundational Chabad volume decrees that:

"Gentile souls are of a completely different and inferior order. Their material abundance derives from supernal refuse. Indeed, they themselves derive from refuse, which is why they are more numerous than Jews."³²²

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³²¹ Reed, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-91. The Zohar also says: "Tradition tells us that the best of the Gentiles deserves death" (Section Vaiqra, folio 14b). For a more detailed exposé of the Talmud and the religion founded upon it, see Pranaitis, *op. cit.*, and Michael Hoffman, *Judaism Discovered*, Independent History and Research, 2008.

³²² Hoffman, "What does Rabbinic Judaism say about what makes Jews and Gentiles Different?" *Revisionist History*, 111, October-November, 2020, pp. 5-6.

Of particular importance for the future history of the Jews in their relations with the Christian and Gentile world were their different attitudes towards usury, lending money on interest.

Now the Old Testament forbids the lending of money for interest to brothers, but allows it to strangers (Exodus 22.25; Leviticus 25.36; Deuteronomy 23.24). The Talmud exploited the letter of this law to justify outright exploitation of the Christians.

According to Oleg Platonov, it “teaches the Jew to consider the property of all non-Jews as ‘gefker’, which means free, belonging to no one. ‘The property of all non-Jews has the same significance as if it had been found in the desert: it belongs to the first who seizes it’. In the Talmud there is a decree according to which open theft and stealing are forbidden, but anything can be acquired by deceit or cunning...”

“From this it follows that all the resources and wealth of the non-Jews must belong to representatives of the ‘chosen people’. ‘According to the Talmud,’ wrote the Russian historian S.S. Gromeka, “God gave all the peoples into the hands of the Jews” (Baba-Katta, 38); “the whole of Israel are children of kings; those who offend a Jew offend God himself” (Sikhab 67, 1) and “are subject to execution, as for lèse-majesté” (Sanhedrin 58, 2); pious people of other nations, who are counted worthy of participating in the kingdom of the Messiah, will take the role of slaves to the Jews’ (Sanhedrin 91, 21, 1051). From this point of view, ... all the property in the world belongs to the Jews, and the Christians who possess it are only temporary, ‘unlawful’ possessors, usurpers, and this property will be confiscated by the Jews from them sooner or later. When the Jews are exalted above all the other peoples, God will hand over all the nations to the Jews for final extermination.’

“The historian of Judaism I. Lyutostansky cites examples from the ancient editions of the Talmud, which teaches the Jews that it is pleasing to God that they appropriate the property of the *goyim* [Gentiles]. In particular, he expounds the teaching of Samuel that deceiving a goy is not a sin...”

“Rabbi Moses said: ‘If a *goy* makes a mistake in counting, then the Jew, noticing this, must say that he knows nothing about it.’ Rabbi Brentz says: ‘If some Jews, after exhausting themselves by running around all week to deceive Christians in various places, come together at the Sabbath and boast of their deceptions to each other, they say: “We must take the hearts out of the *goyim* and kill even the best of them.” – of course, if they succeed in doing this.’ Rabbi Moses teaches: ‘Jews sin when they return lost things to apostates and pagans, or anyone who doesn’t reverence the Sabbath.’...”

“To attain the final goal laid down in the Talmud for Jews – to become masters of the property of the *goyim* – one of the best means, in the rabbis’ opinion, is usury. According to the Talmud, ‘God ordered that money be lent to the goyim, but only on interest; so instead of helping them in this way, we must harm them, even if they can be useful for us.’ The tract Baba Metsiya insists on the necessity of lending money on interest and advises Jews to teach their children to lend money on interest, ‘so that they can from childhood taste the sweetness of usury and learn to use it in good

time.”³²³

The transformation of Judaism into Talmudism marked the last, most impenetrable barrier between the Jews and the Church. From now on, as Metropolitan Hilarion of Kiev said in the eleventh century: “Christ is glorified, and the Jews are vilified. The nations are gathered, and the Jews are scattered. As the prophet Malachi pronounced: ‘I have no pleasure in the sons of Israel, and I will not accept a sacrifice at their hands. For from the east even to the west My name is glorified among the Gentiles, and in every place incense is offered to My name, for My name is great among the Gentiles.’ And according to David: ‘All the earth shall worship Thee, and sing unto Thee’, and: ‘Lord, our Lord, how wonderful is Thy name in all the earth.’”³²⁴

³²³ Platonov, *Ternovij Venets Rossii* (Russia’s Crown of Thorns), Moscow, 1998,

³²⁴ Hilarion, *Slovo o Zakone i Blagodati* (Word on the Law and Grace), 34.6.

26. CHRISTIANITY AND THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Roman power already began fulfilling the role of protector of the Christians as early as 35, when, on the basis of a report sent to him by Pilate, the Emperor Tiberius proposed to the senate that Christ should be recognized as a god. The senate refused this request, and declared that Christianity was an “illicit superstition”; but Tiberius ignored this and forbade the bringing of any accusations against the Christians.³²⁵ Moreover, when St. Mary Magdalene complained to the emperor about the unjust sentence passed by Pontius Pilate on Christ, the emperor moved Pilate from Jerusalem to Gaul, where he died after a terrible illness.³²⁶ Again, in 36 or 37 the Roman legate to Syria, Vitellius, deposed Caiaphas for his unlawful execution of the Archdeacon and Protomartyr Stephen (in 34), and in 62 the High Priest Ananias was similarly deposed for executing St. James the Just, the first Bishop of Jerusalem. In between these dates the Apostle Paul was saved from a lynching at the hands of the Jews by the Roman authorities (Acts 21, 23.28-29, 25.19).³²⁷

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So at first the Romans, far from being persecutors of the Christians, were their protectors... For, as Edward Gibbon writes: “The various modes of worship which prevailed in the Roman world were all considered by the people as equally true, by the philosophers as equally false, and by the magistrates as equally useful. And thus toleration produced not only mutual indulgence, but even religious concord.”³²⁸

As Alexander Dvorkin writes: “The Roman government in practice was tolerant to any cult if only it did not incite to rebellion and did not undermine morality. Moreover, the Romans thought that one of the reasons for their military successes was the fact that while other peoples worshipped only their own local gods, the Romans showed marks of honour to all the gods without exception and for that were rewarded for their special piety. All cults not established by the state were allowed, but theoretically did not have the right to propagandize in Rome, although their gods also entered into the Roman pantheon. In the first century after Christ religions already known to the contemporary Roman were not, as a rule, persecuted for propagandizing. However, the law retained its prior force and theoretically the possibility of applying it remained. The permitted religions had to satisfy two criteria: place and time. Religion was always a local matter - that is, it was linked to a definite people living in a definite locality, - and also an ancient matter, linked to the history of this people. It was more complicated to assimilate the God of the Jews, Who had no representation and did not accept sacrifices in any place except Jerusalem, into their pantheon. The Jews themselves did not allow His representation to be placed anywhere and stubbornly declined to worship the Roman gods. The Jews were monotheists and theoretically understood that their faith in principle excluded all

³²⁵ Marti Sordi, *The Christians and the Roman Empire*, London: Routledge, 1994, p. 18.

³²⁶ Velimirovič, *The Prologue from Ochrid*, part III, July 22, p. 94. Annas and Caiaphas also came to bad ends.

³²⁷ Sordi, *op. cit.*, chapter 1.

³²⁸ Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, chapter 2.

other forms of religion. Nevertheless, in spite of all the complications with the Jews and the strangeness of their religion, it was still tolerated: the religion of the Jews was a national one and, besides, ancient, and it was considered sacrilege to encroach on it. Moreover, the Jews occupied an important political niche that was for the Romans a stronghold of their eastern conquests. In view of all these considerations, the Romans gritted their teeth and recognized the Jewish religion to be permitted. Privileges were given to the Jewish people also because their rites seemed strange and dirty. The Romans thought that the Jews simply could not have proselytes among other peoples and would rather repel the haughty Roman aristocrat. Therefore the Jews were given the right to confess their belief in one God. Until the rebellion of 66-70 the Roman authorities treated them with studied tolerance. Augustus gave the Jews significant privileges, which, after the crisis under Caligula, who wanted to put his statue in the Jerusalem Temple (cf. Mark 13.14 and II Thessalonians 2.3-4), were again renewed by Claudius.

“The circumstances changed when Christianity appeared. Having examined it, the Romans classified the Christians as apostates from the Jewish faith. It was precisely the traits that distinguished the Christians from the Jews that made them still lower in the eyes of the Romans even than the Judaism they had little sympathy for. Christianity did not have the right of belonging to historical antiquity – it was the ‘new religion’ so displeasing to the Roman conservatives. It was not the religion of one people, but on the contrary, lived only through proselytes from other religions. If the propagandizing of other cults by their servers was seen rather as a chance violation, for Christians missionary work was their only *modus vivendi* – a necessity of their very position in history. Christians were always reproached for a lack of historical and national character in their religion. Celsius, for example, saw in Christians a party that had separated from Judaism and inherited from it its inclination for disputes.

“The Christians could demand tolerance either in the name of the truth or in the name of freedom of conscience. But since for the Romans one of the criteria of truth was antiquity, Christianity, a new religion, automatically became a false religion. The right of freedom of conscience that is so important for contemporary man was not even mentioned at that time. Only the state, and not individuals, had the right to establish and legalize religious cults. In rising up against state religion, the Christians became guilty of a state crime – they became in principle enemies of the state. And with such a view of Christianity it was possible to interpret a series of features of their life in a particular way: their nocturnal gatherings, their waiting for a certain king that was to come, the declining of some of them from military service and above all their refusal to offer sacrifices to the emperor.

“The Christians refused to carry out this self-evident, most simple of state duties. Beginning with the Apostle Paul, they affirmed their loyalty, referring to the prayers they said for the emperor, for the authorities and for the homeland. But they refused to recognize the emperor as ‘Lord’ and to carry out even an external worship of the idols, for they knew only one Lord, Jesus Christ. The Christians accepted both the state and society, but only to the degree that they did not limit the Lordship of Christ, did not drown out the confession of the Kingdom.

“The Kingdom of God had come and been revealed in the world, and from now on became the single measure of history and human life. In essence, the Christians by their refusal showed that they – almost alone in the whole of what was then an exceptionally religious world – believed in the reality of the idols. Honouring the idols meant recognizing the power of the devil, who had torn the world away from the knowledge of the only true God and forced it to worship statues. But Christ had come to free the world from this power. Paganism came to life in its true religious significance as the kingdom of evil, as a demonic invasion, with which the Christians had entered into a duel to the death.

“Christianity came as a revolution in the history of the world: it was the appearance in it of the Lord for the struggle with that which had usurped His power. The Church had become the witness of His coming and presence. It was precisely this witness that it proclaimed to the whole world...”³²⁹

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The first persecution against the Christians was that of Nero in 64, in which the Apostles Peter and Paul were killed. It was a local persecution in Rome, and was not directly related to religion. The real reason was that Nero needed scapegoats for the fire he himself had caused, which destroyed a large part of the city. Tacitus, writing in about 115, says that the founder of the sect was named Christus; that he was executed under Pontius Pilate; and that the movement, initially checked, broke out again in Judea and even in Rome itself.³³⁰ Thus Nero’s blaming the Christians for the great fire of Rome led to his calling the faith *superstitio illicita*, which hardened the Romans’ attitude to the Church harden temporarily.

However, the first epistle of St. Peter was written during the time of Nero’s persecution, and the apostle is insistent that the Christians should remain faithful subjects of the Roman emperor (“Honour the king”, he says), suffering it patiently if they were treated unjustly. Similarly, during the Jewish rebellion of 66-70, the Christians of Jerusalem refused to join the rebels. This remained the attitude of the Church throughout the pre-Constantinian period. They were loyal to the State, which they wished to convert to Christ. But until that conversion, contradictions remained.

It was not until the persecution under Domitian in the 90s that we see the first violent *ideological* clash between Rome and the Church. Domitian proclaimed himself “lord and god”, and required people to swear “by the genius of the emperor”. Those who did not were proclaimed to be “atheists”. The Apostle John was exiled to Patmos for his refusal to obey the emperor.³³¹

A little later, the Emperor Trajan killed St. Clement, third Bishop of Rome and a disciple of St. Peter, and then St. Ignatius the God-bearer, Bishop of Antioch and a

³²⁹ Dvorkin, *Ocherki po Istorii Vselenskoj Pravoslavnoj Tserkvi* (Sketches on the History of the Universal Orthodox Church), Nizhni-Novogorod, 2006, pp. 79-81.

³³⁰ Tacitus, *Annales*, book 15, chapter 44.

³³¹ Domitian was seen in antiquity as the worst of the Roman emperors, worse even than Nero and Caligula (Peter Heather, *The Restoration of Rome*, London: Pan Books, 2013, p. 114).

disciple of St. John, in 107. "After his victory over the Scythians, Trajan was swollen with pride and decided to offer thanks to his vile gods for the aid he imagined they had given him. He ordered his subjects throughout the Empire to sacrifice to the idols, in the hope that the demons would always be inclined to assist him in governing and defending the realm. At the same time, learning that the Christians reviled his deities and refused to offer oblations to them, he initiated a persecution of the faithful in every province, ordering that whoever refused to adore the gods pay the ultimate penalty.

"Shortly afterwards, the Emperor set out to do battle with the Persians and arrived in Antioch. He was told that in the city lived a man called Ignatius the Godbearer who worshipped Jesus Christ. He Who taught his followers to live chastely and to disdain wealth and the sweet things of the present existence, and was condemned to crucifixion by Pontius Pilate. Hearing this, Trajan did not delay, but had the saint brought before him and his advisors. He asked, 'Are you the man called the Godbearer, the wretch who dares to defy our ordinances, corrupting the Antiochians and persuading them to follow Christ?'

"I am the one you seek,' answered the holy Ignatius.

"And why are you called by this name?' Trajan demanded.

"Because I carry Christ in my soul,' the saint replied.

"The Emperor laughed. 'So you say you carry your Christ within you?'

"I most certainly do,' answered the blessed one. 'The Lord Himself testifies in the Scriptures concerning His disciples, *I will dwell in them and walk in them.*'

"And what do you think?' asked Trajan. 'Are we not also ever mindful of our gods, who assist us in gaining victories?'

"It is bitter for me to hear you call the idols divine,' replied the God-bearer. 'There is only one true God, the Maker of heaven and earth and the sea, and of all things therein. Moreover, there is one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, Whose kingdom is without end. If you knew him, O Emperor, your rule would be more firmly established!...'"³³²

Ignatius was sent to be eaten the lions in Rome, which so impressed the Emperor that he ordered the end of the persecution of Christians. Moreover, he advised Pliny the Younger, a provincial governor who did not know what to do with them, not to seek them out for punishment...

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³³² St. Demetrius of Rostove, *The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints*, House Springs, Mo.: Chrysostom Press, 2000, vol. IV, pp. 393-394.

Over the next two centuries and a bit, there were periods of persecution, as, for example, under the Emperor Decius in 251. But while cruel, they were sporadic and short-lived. In fact, as often as not, the emperors, not seeing in the Church any political threat to themselves, and wishing to preserve the general peace, acted in effect to protect the Christians against the pagan mobs that sometimes turned against the Christians in times of natural disaster. It was only with the Great Persecution under Diocletian in 305 that the relationship between Church and State become one of permanent hostility, a struggle to the death. This came to an end only with the Emperor Constantine's conversion to Christianity...

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The foundation of the Church's political theology was laid by the Lord Himself, Who accepted the Roman political order as legitimate, and exhorted His disciples to obey it as long as it did not compel them to disobey the Law of God: "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22.21). Although Christians, being in essence free-born sons of the Heavenly King, were inwardly not subject to the yoke of earthly kings, nevertheless this yoke was to be accepted voluntarily "lest we should offend them" (Matthew 17.27).

For, as St. Theophan the Recluse writes, "The Lord paid the required temple tribute and kept all other practices, both temple-related and civic. He fulfilled this and taught the Apostles to do the same, and the Apostles in turn passed this same law on to all Christians. Only the spirit of life was made new; externally all remained as it had been, except what was clearly against the will of God - for instance, participating in sacrifices to idols, etc. Then Christianity gained the upper hand, displaced all the former practices, and established its own."³³³

Following the Lord's teaching, the holy Apostle Peter writes: "Be subject for the Lord's sake, to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and praise those who do right... Fear God. Honour the king." (I Peter 2.13, 17) And the holy Apostle Paul commands Christians to give thanks for the emperor "and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and honesty" (I Timothy 2.1-2). For it is precisely the emperor's ability to maintain law and order, "a quiet and peaceful life", which makes him so important for the Church. And so "let every soul be subject to the higher powers. For there is no power that is not from God; the powers that be are ordained by God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God, and those who resist shall receive for themselves damnation" (Romans 13.1-2).³³⁴

³³³ St. Theophan, *Thoughts for Each Day of the Year*, Platina, Ca.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2010, p. 167.

³³⁴ The Synod of Bishops of the Russian Church Outside Russia wrote that "the Apostles Peter and Paul required of the Christians of their time submission to the Roman authority, even though it later persecuted the followers of Christ. The Romans by nature were distinguished by their moral valor, for which, according to the words of Augustine in his book *On the City of God*, the Lord magnified and glorified them. To the genius of the Romans humanity owes the working out of a more perfect law, which was the foundation of its famous governmental structure, by which it subjected the world to

It is worth pondering on what a remarkable doctrine this was if we take into account the (at least intermittent) hostility of the Roman emperors to the Christians and their extreme wealth and moral corruption. The Apostles' secular lords were the emperors of the Julio-Flavian dynasty that began with Augustus and contained such monsters as Caligula and Nero. Rome's cruelty and corruption was symbolized above all by the gladiatorial contests and spectacles held in the Flavian Amphitheatre, later called the Colosseum because of "a colossal golden statue 35 metres high that stood just beside it. The statue had been commissioned by Emperor Nero, whom it depicted, quite naked, until his successor Vespasian had the head removed and replaced by that of the sun god Helios. The towering Flavian Amphitheatre was by far the largest of its kind in the Empire: a dazzling feat of architecture that could be emptied of its 50,000 spectators in minutes and which had water fountains at every level. It was a source of immense pride to the Romans"³³⁵ – and of immense suffering to the many Christians who were martyred there. "To this day the Colosseum remains the world's most concentrated killing ground, and it is estimated that between a quarter and half a million people had their lives abruptly ended in the arena, along with several million animals large and small, common and rare. Species became extinct in its service..."³³⁶

And yet the Christians honoured and obeyed the monsters of depravity that so many of the Roman emperors were, in obedience to the apostolic command. The only exception was when they were asked to worship idols...

The question arises: was the apostle saying that *all* political authority is established by God, whatever its attitude to God Himself? Or are some authorities not established by God, but only *allowed to exist* by Him, so that they should not be obeyed as being in fact established by Satan? The patristic consensus is that the apostle was *not* saying that everything that calls itself an authority is blessed by God, but that authority is *in principle* good and God-established and therefore should be obeyed – because, as he goes on to say, political power is *in general* wielded in order to punish evil-doers and protect public order. Roman power, he says, is established by God, and therefore is a true political authority that must be obeyed in all its commands that do not directly

itself to an even greater degree than by its renowned sword. Under the shadow of the Roman eagle many tribes and nations prospered, enjoying peace and free internal self-government. Respect and tolerance for all religion were so great in Rome that they were at first also extended to recently engendered Christianity. It is sufficient to remember that the Roman procurator Pilate tried to defend Christ the Savior from the malice of the Jews, pointing out His innocence and finding nothing blameworthy in the doctrine He preached. During his many evangelical travels, which brought him into contact with the inhabitants of foreign lands, the Apostle Paul, as a Roman citizen, appealed for the protection of Roman law for defense against both the Jews and the pagans. And, of course, he asked that his case be judged by Caesar, who, according to tradition, found him to be innocent of what he was accused of only later, after his return to Rome from Spain, did he undergo martyrdom there.

"The persecution of Christians never permeated the Roman system, and was a matter of the personal initiative of individual emperors, who saw in the wide dissemination of the new Faith a danger for the state religion, and also for the order of the State, until one of them, St. Constantine, finally understood that they really did not know what they were doing, and laid his sword and sceptre at the footstool of the Cross of Christ..." (*Encyclical Letter of the Council of Russian Bishops Abroad to the Russian Orthodox Flock*, 23 March, 1933; *Living Orthodoxy*, #131, vol. XXII, N 5, September-October, 2001, pp. 13-14)

³³⁵ Matthew Kneale, *Rome. A History in Seven Sackings*, London: Simon & Schuster, 2017, p. 42.

³³⁶ Kneale, op. cit., p. 44.

contradict the commandments of God Himself. Hence the veneration and obedience that the early Christians displayed towards it.

Thus St. John Chrysostom asks: "Is every ruler elected by God to the throne he occupies? Is every emperor, king, and prince chosen by rule? If so, is every law and decree promulgated by a ruler to be regarded as good, and thus to be obeyed without question? The answer to all these questions is, no. God has ordained that every society should have rulers, whose task it is to maintain order, so that people may live in peace. God allows rulers to employ soldiers, whose task it is to capture and imprison those who violate social order.

"Thus God will bless and guide any ruler and any soldier who acts according to these principles. But many rulers abuse their authority by amassing huge wealth for themselves at the expense of their people, by unjustly punishing those who dare to speak against their evil, and by making unjust wars against neighbours. Such rulers have not been elected by God, but rather have usurped the position which a righteous ruler should occupy. And if their laws are wrong, we should not obey them. The supreme authority in all matters is not the law of the land, but the law of God; and if one conflicts with the other, we must obey God's law."³³⁷

This "theology of politics", enjoining the veneration of, and obedience to, political authorities so long as they do not compel transgression of the Law of God, is found in the earliest Fathers. Thus St. Clement of Rome writes in the first century: "Give us, O Master, peace and concord, even as Thou didst give it to our forefathers when they called devoutly upon Thee in faith and truth. And make us obedient to Thine own almighty and all-holy name, and to all who have the rule and governance over us upon the earth. For it is Thou, O Lord, Who in Thy supreme and ineffable might hast given them their sovereign authority; to the intent that we, acknowledging the glory and honour Thou hast bestowed upon them, should show them all submission. Grant to them health and peace, that they may exercise without offence the sovereignty which Thou hast given them."³³⁸

Again, in the second century St. Justin the Martyr wrote: "We worship God only, but in other things we gladly serve you, acknowledging you as emperors and rulers of men and women, and praying that with your imperial power you may also be found to possess sound judgement..."³³⁹ Similarly, the holy Martyr Apollonius (+c. 185) expressed the classic Christian attitude towards the emperor thus: "With all Christians I offer a pure and unbloody sacrifice to almighty God, the Lord of heaven and earth and of all that breathes, a sacrifice of prayer especially on behalf of the spiritual and rational images that have been disposed by God's providence to rule over the earth. Wherefore obeying a just precept we pray daily to God, Who dwells in the heavens, on behalf of Commodus who is our ruler in this world, for we are well aware that he rules over the earth by nothing else but the will of the invincible God Who comprehends all things." Again, Athenagoras of Athens wrote to Marcus

³³⁷ St. John Chrysostom, *On Living Simply*.

³³⁸ St. Clement of Rome, *To the Corinthians*, 60.

³³⁹ St. Justin the Martyr, *First Apology*, 17.

Aurelius that Christians pray for the authorities, so that the son should inherit the kingdom from his father and that the power of the Caesars should be continually extended and confirmed, and that everyone should submit to it.³⁴⁰ And St. Theophilus of Antioch wrote: "Therefore I would rather venerate the king than your gods – venerate, not worship him, but pray for him... Praying in this way, you fulfil the will of God. For the law of God says: 'My son, fear the Lord and the king, and do not mix with rebels' (Proverbs 24.21)."³⁴¹

Tertullian (+ c. 240) "insisted that Christians rendered 'such reverential homage as is lawful for us and good for him; regarding him as the human being next to God who from God has received all his power, and is less than God alone.' Christians, Tertullian argued, were even perfectly willing to offer sacrifice on behalf of the emperor, though it had to be a Christian sacrifice: 'We therefore sacrifice for the emperor's safety, but to our God and his, and after the manner God has enjoined, in simple prayer.' Pagan sacrifices are useless, the 'food of devils'. Christians appeal to God, praying 'for the imperial well-being, as those who seek it at the hands of Him who is able to bestow it.'.. Christians do just what the imperial cult demands, though in his own way."³⁴² In other words, the only legitimate sacrifice a Christian can make to the emperor is the sacrifice of prayer on his behalf; for he rules, not as a god, but "by the will of God". So the Christians by no means refused to give to Caesar what was his. Indeed, the emperor was, in Tertullian's words, "more truly ours (than yours) because he was put into power by our God", which is why the Christians prayed that he should have "a long life, a safe empire, a quiet home, strong armies, a faithful senate, honest subjects, a world at peace".³⁴³

As for the pagan sacrifice to the emperor himself, Hieromartyr Hippolytus of Rome (+235) wrote: "Believers in God must not be hypocritical, nor fear people invested in authority, with the exception of those cases when some evil deed is committed [Romans 13.1-4]. On the contrary, if the leaders, having in mind their faith in God, force them to do something contrary to this faith, then it is better for them to die than to carry out the command of the leaders. After all, when the apostle teaches submission to 'all the powers that be' (Romans 13.1), he was not saying that we should renounce our faith and the Divine commandments, and indifferently carry out everything that people tell us to do; but that we, while fearing the authorities, should do nothing evil and that we should not deserve punishment from them as some evildoers (Romans 13.4). That is why he says: 'The servant of God is an avenger of [those who do] evil' (I Peter 2.14-20; Romans 13.4). And so? 'Do you not want to fear the authorities? Do good and you will have praise from him; but if you do evil, fear, for he does not bear the sword without reason' (Romans 13.4)."³⁴⁴

³⁴⁰ Athenagoras, *Representation for the Christians*, in *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972, p. 93.

³⁴¹ St. Theophilus, *Three Books to Autolytus*.

³⁴² Peter J. Leithart, *Defending Constantine*, Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2010, p. 281.

³⁴³ Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 33.1.

³⁴⁴ St. Hippolytus, in Fomin, S. & Fomina, T. *Rossia pered Vtorym Prishestvoiem* (Russia before the Second Coming), Moscow, 1994, vol. I, p. 56.

This attitude was well exemplified by St. Maurice and his Christian legion in Agaunum. Like many martyrs before them, they did not refuse to fight in the armies of the pagan Roman emperors against the pagans. But they refused to destroy a village composed of fellow-Christians. For “we are your soldiers, yes,” said Maurice, “but we are also the soldiers of God. To you, we owe the dues of military service – but to Him the purity of our souls.”³⁴⁵

So even the persecuting emperors were recognized as having legitimate authority: it was only when their commands contradicted the Law of God that they were defied. And even then, there is no hint of physical rebellion against the powers that be among pre-Constantinian Christians. Their attitude to Diocletian was like that of the Prophet Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar: his power is from God, even if he sometimes uses it against God. And this attitude bore good fruit: Nebuchadnezzar threw the Holy Three Children into the furnace, but he later repented and praised the God of Daniel.

However, the mention of Daniel reminds us that there was a somewhat different and darker attitude to Rome among the Christian writers. Following Daniel’s prophecy of the four beasts (Daniel 7), Rome was seen as the last of four kingdoms – the others were Babylon, Persia and Macedon - that would finally be destroyed in the last days by the Kingdom of Christ. According to this tradition, the pagan absolutist kings who persecuted the people of God were not legitimate rulers but tyrants. Nebuchadnezzar, for example, is called “tyrant” in some liturgical texts: “Caught and held fast by love for the King of all, the Children despised the impious threats of the tyrant in his boundless fury.”³⁴⁶

Now the distinction between the true monarch, *basileus*, and the unlawful usurper, rebel or tyrant, *tyrannis*, was not new. Aristotle wrote: “There is a third kind of tyranny, which is the most typical form and is the counterpart to the perfect monarchy. This tyranny is just that arbitrary power of an individual which is responsible to no-one and governs all alike, whether equals or betters, with a view to its own advantage, not to that of its subjects and therefore against their will.”³⁴⁷

King Solomon wrote: “Fear the Lord and the king, and do not mix with rebels” (Proverbs 24.21). After Solomon’s death, there was a rebellion against his legitimate successor, Rehoboam, by Jeroboam, the founder of the northern kingdom of Israel. And although the Prophets Elijah and Elisha lived and worked mainly in the northern kingdom, they always made clear their loyalty to the legitimate kings of Judah over the usurping kings of Israel. Thus when both kings, in a rare moment of alliance, approached the Prophet Elisha for his advice, he said to the king of Israel: “What have I to do with you? Go to the prophets of your father and the prophets of your mother... As the Lord of hosts lives, Whom I serve, were it not that I have regard for Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would neither look at you, nor see you.” (II Kings 3.13, 14)...

³⁴⁵ Eucherius of Lyons, *The Passion of the Martyrs*.

³⁴⁶ *Festal Menaion*, The Nativity of Christ, Mattins, Canon, Canticle Seven, second irmos.

³⁴⁷ Aristotle, *Politics*, IV, 10.

If Rehoboam and Nebuchadnezzar were tyrants, then it was logical to see tyranny also in the Roman emperors who persecuted the Church. Thus some early interpreters saw in one or other of the evil symbolic figures of the Revelation of St. John the Theologian, which was written during the persecution of Domitian (c. 92), references to Roman power.

Indeed, what contemporary Christian could not fail to think of Rome when reading about that great city, symbolically called a whore and Babylon, who sits on seven hills (Rome is situated on seven hills), who is “the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth”, that is, the multitude of pagan cults that all found refuge in Rome, “a woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus” (17.5, 6)? Thus Hieromartyr Victorinus, Bishop of Petau, wrote that the whore’s downfall was “the ruin of great Babylon, that is, of the city of Rome.”³⁴⁸ In other words, Rome, according to this tradition, was seen, not as a lawful monarchy or the blueprint of a future Christian autocracy, but as a bloody and blasphemous despotism, in the tradition of the ancient despotisms that derived from Nimrod’s Babylon.³⁴⁹

This tradition became more popular as the history of pagan Rome reached its bloody climax in the early fourth century. For the Church was now threatened, not with a merely local persecution by local madmen, but with a determined attempt to destroy it completely at the hands of men who considered themselves gods and whose personal lives were often extraordinarily corrupt. The empire concentrated in itself, and especially in its capital city, all the demons of all the pagan cults together with all the moral depravity and cruelty and rabid antichristianity which those cults encouraged. How could such a kingdom be established by God? Was it not that tyrannical beast of which Scripture said that it was established by the devil (Revelation 13.2)? And so the image of the Empire was ambiguous for the early Christians: it was both a true kingdom, an anti-type of God’s Kingdom, and a tyranny, a forerunner of the kingdom of the Antichrist that would be wiped out at the Second Coming of Christ Himself...

Nevertheless, it was the more optimistic view of Rome that prevailed. And even during the persecution of Diocletian, when the Church was threatened with extinction, the Christians never rebelled against the empire, but only against its unlawful demands. And in reward for this patience, the Lord finally broke the crust of ancient pagan despotism, bringing to birth a new creature designed specifically for the spreading of the Faith throughout the world – Christian, or New Rome...³⁵⁰

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³⁴⁸ Hieromartyr Victorinus, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*.

³⁴⁹ Some saw in I Peter 5.13 a similar identification of Rome with Babylon, but this is doubtful. The Babylon referred to there is probably Babylon in Egypt, from where St. Peter was writing his epistle. However, there can be no doubt that for John’s first readers the image of Babylon would have reminded them in the first place of Rome under Nero and Domitian.

³⁵⁰ Fr. Michael Azkoul, *The Teachings of the Orthodox Church*, Buena Vista, Co.: Dormition Skete publications, 1986, part I, p. 110.

“The first millennium BC,” writes Harari, “witnessed the appearance of three potential universal orders, whose devotees could for the first time imagine the entire world and the entire human race as a single unit governed by a single set of laws. Everyone was ‘us’, at least potentially. There was no longer ‘them’. The first universal order to appear was economic: the monetary order. The second universal order to appear was political: the imperial order. The third universal order was religious: the order of universal religions such as Buddhism, Christianity and Islam.

“Merchants, conquerors and prophets were the first people who managed to transcend the binary division, ‘us vs. them’, and foresee the potential unity of mankind. For the merchants, the entire world was a single market and all humans were potential customers. They tried to establish an economic order that would apply to all, everywhere. For the conquerors, the entire world was a single empire and all humans were potential subjects, and for prophets, the entire world held a single truth and all humans were potential believers. They too tried to establish an order that would be applicable for everyone everywhere.

“During the last three millennia, people made more and more ambitious attempts to realize that global vision...”³⁵¹

The first state that realized this vision – that is, provided a potentially *global* economic, political and religious order – was the Roman empire in the time of Augustus. By the time of St. Constantine the vast empire was united economically by the Roman *denarius*, politically by the Roman emperor, culturally by Hellenism and religiously by Christianity. The fact that this empire did not in fact rule over the whole world is less important than the fact that it aspired to that, thereby containing within itself the potential for a *godly globalization*, the only possible *real* unity of the human race.

When the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of heaven, was born as a man on earth, He was immediately enrolled as a citizen of a state of the new-born Roman empire. For “in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed” (Luke 2.1), and Christ, too, went to Bethlehem, the city of David, to be registered for taxation in the universal empire ruled by Augustus. As Bishop Nikolai Velimirovič writes: “In those days, Caesar Augustus was ruling the land. His supreme rule over the whole earth is an image of God’s supreme rule over both worlds: the spiritual and the material. The many-headed dragon of power, that had, from the beginning of sin, brought decay to the peoples of the earth, was left with only one head. All known nations and tribes on earth were subject to Augustus’ power, directly or indirectly, whether only by sending him their tribute or by acknowledging Roman gods and Roman officials. The struggle for power had died down for a time, and the sole power over the whole world was entirely in the hands of Caesar Augustus. There was neither man nor god over him; he himself was proclaimed a god, and men made sacrifices to his image: slaughtered animals and unclean things. From the foundation of the world, no mortal man had risen to greater power than Caesar Augustus, who ruled without rival over the whole world; and indeed, from the foundation of the

³⁵¹ Harari, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

world, man, created by the living God, had never fallen to such a depth of nothingness and despair as then, when the Roman Emperor began to be deified – and he a man with all man’s frailties and weaknesses, with the life-span of a willow tree, with a stomach, intestines, liver and kidneys that were, after a few decades, to turn into a worm-infested stench and lifeless dust; a man, the statues of whom, raised during his reign, were to outlast his life, his power and his reign.

“In this time of external peace and internal despair, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the human race and Renewer of all creation, was born...”³⁵²

This coincidence of the birth of the King of kings with the birth of the Roman Empire pointed, for many of the Holy Fathers and Church writers, to a certain special mission of the Roman empire, as if the Empire, being born at the same time as Christ, was Divinely established to be a vehicle for the spreading of the Gospel to all nations, coming into existence precisely for the sake of the Christian Church, and creating a political unity that would help and protect the spiritual unity created by the Church.

Thus Melitus, Bishop of Sardis wrote to the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, a philosopher-king who was no friend of the Christians or their philosophy: “Our philosophy flourished first among barbarians; but after it had appeared among your peoples during the mighty principate of your ancestor Augustus, it became an auspicious benefit, especially to your empire. From that time on the power of the Romans increased in a great and splendid way: you became the successor to this whom the people desired and will continue to do so, along with your son, if you protect the philosophy which was nursed in the cradle of the empire and saw the light along with Augustus, which also your ancestors honoured, as they did other religions. And this is the greatest proof of its excellence, that our doctrine has flourished at the same time as the happy beginnings of the empire and that from the time of the principate of Augustus no evil has befallen it, but, on the contrary, all things have been splendid and glorious in accordance with the prayers of all...”³⁵³

Gibbon said that the century or so of the reigns of the Emperors Nerva, Hadrian, Trajan, Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius were probably the most peaceful and prosperous in the history of the world. But this was also the period in which the Peace of Christ was preached throughout the inhabited world, to the furthest bounds of the empire and beyond. Thus a hymn to the Mother of God on an Egyptian papyrus and dating to the mid-second century has even been found as far north as Manchester...

Again, in the third century Origen wrote: “Jesus was born during the reign of Augustus, the one who reduced to uniformity, so to speak, the many kingdoms on earth so that He had a single empire. It would have hindered Jesus’ teaching from being spread throughout the world if there had been many kingdoms... Everyone would have been forced to fight in defence of their own country.”³⁵⁴

³⁵² Velimirovič, “The Nativity of Christ. 2”, *Homilies*, volume 1, Birmingham: Lazarica Press, 1996, pp. 25-26.

³⁵³ St. Melito, in Eusebius, *Church History*, IV, 26, 7-8.

³⁵⁴ Origen, *Against Celsus* II, 30.

Origen considered that the peace of Augustus was prophesied in Holy Scripture: "He shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the rivers even unto the ends of the inhabited earth" (Psalm 71.7), and that it prefigured the spiritual peace of Christ. Moreover, under the reigns of Augustus' successors, the differences between the peoples had been reduced, so that by the time of Christ's Second Coming they would all call on the name of the Lord with one voice and serve Him under one yoke.³⁵⁵

Again, in the fourth century St. Gregory the Theologian said: "The state of the Christians and that of the Romans grew up simultaneously and Roman supremacy arose with Christ's sojourn upon earth, previous to which it had not reached monarchical perfection."³⁵⁶

And in the fifth century the Spanish priest Orosius, claimed that the Emperor Augustus had paid a kind of compliment to Christ by refusing to call himself Lord at a time when the true Lord of all was becoming man. Christ returned the compliment by having Himself enrolled in Augustus' census. In this way He foreshadowed Rome's historical mission.³⁵⁷

Also in the fifth century, St. Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, wrote: "Divine Providence fashioned the Roman Empire, the growth of which was extended to boundaries so wide that all races everywhere became next-door neighbours. For it was particularly germane to the Divine scheme that many kingdoms should be bound together under a single government, and that the world-wide preaching should have a swift means of access to all people, over whom the rule of a single state held sway."³⁵⁸

As Blessed Theodoret of Cyrus wrote, "through the *pax Romana*" God "facilitated the work of the preachers of truth. You see, once a single empire was formed, the uprisings of the nations against one another ceased and peace took hold throughout the whole world; the apostles, entrusted with the preaching of true religion, travelled about safely, and by traversing the world they snared humankind and brought them to life"³⁵⁹

"When Augustus reigned alone upon earth, the many kingdoms of men came to an end: and when Thou wast made man of the pure Virgin, the many gods of idolatry were destroyed. The cities of the world passed under one single rule; and the nations came to believe in one sovereign Godhead. The peoples were enrolled by the decree of Caesar; and we, the faithful, were enrolled in the Name of the Godhead, when Thou, our God, wast made man. Great is Thy mercy: glory to Thee."³⁶⁰

³⁵⁵ Charles Davis, "The Middle Ages", in Richard Jenkyns (ed.), *The Legacy of Rome*, Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 67.

³⁵⁶ St. Gregory, *Sermon 4*, P.G. 47, col. 564B.

³⁵⁷ Orosius, *Seven Books of History against the Pagans*; in Jenkyns, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-74.

³⁵⁸ St. Leo, *Sermon 32*, P.L. 54, col. 423.

³⁵⁹ Blessed Theodoret, *Commentary on Zechariah*, 9. Again, E. Kholmogorov writes: "Rome set herself an unprecedentedly bold task - to establish peace throughout the inhabited world and root out barbarism" ("*Vybor Imperii*" (The Choice of Empire), *Epokha*, N 11, 2001, pp. 15-16).

³⁶⁰ *Festal Menaion*, Vespers, the Nativity of Christ, "Lord, I have cried", Glory... Both now...

Christian kingdoms and autocracies could and did facilitate the acquisition of the inner Kingdom of Grace; indeed, that was their main function. But they could not replace it: the kingdom of men, however exalted, is no substitute for the Kingdom of God. Moreover, the resurrection of kingdoms is as nothing compared to the resurrection of souls and bodies... The degeneration of truly Christian kingdoms into anti-Christian or pseudo-Christian despotisms or democracies that hinder rather than facilitate the acquisition of the Kingdom of God, which resides *within* the redeemed and deified human soul (for, as the Lord said: "The Kingdom of God is *within* you" (Luke 17.21)), constitutes the main tragedy of history in its social, political, collective dimension.

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That the Roman Empire came into existence for the sake of the Church was a very bold and paradoxical teaching. After all, the people of God at the beginning of the Christian era were the Jews, not the Romans, while the Romans were pagans who worshipped demons, not the True God Who had revealed Himself to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In 63 BC they had actually conquered the people of God; their general, Pompey, had blasphemously entered the Holy of holies (this was considered by some to be "the abomination of desolation"), and their rule was bitterly resented. In 70 AD they destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple in a campaign of appalling cruelty and scattered the Jews over the face of the earth. How could pagan Rome, the Rome of such fearsome tyrants as Nero and Titus and Caligula and Decius and Domitian and Diocletian, possibly be construed as working with God rather than against Him?

The solution to this paradox is to be found in two encounters between Christ and two "rulers of this world" - Satan and Pontius Pilate. In the first, Satan takes Christ onto a high mountain and shows him all the kingdoms of this world in a moment of time. "And the devil said to Him, 'All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if You will worship before Me, all will be Yours.' And Jesus answered and said to him: 'Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only will you serve.'" (Luke 4.6-8). Thus Satan has control over all the kingdoms of the world - but by might, the might given him by the sins of men, - not by right. Thus St. Cyril of Alexandria exclaims: "How dost thou promise that which is not thine? Who made thee heir of God's kingdom? Who made thee lord of all under heaven? Thou hast seized these things by fraud. Restore them, therefore, to the incarnate Son, the Lord of all..."³⁶¹ And indeed, the Lord accepted neither Satan's lordship over the world, nor the satanism so closely associated with the pagan states of the ancient world. He came to restore true Statehood, which recognises the ultimate supremacy only of the one true God, and which demands veneration of the earthly ruler, but worship only of the Heavenly King. And since, by the time of the Nativity of Christ, all the major pagan kingdoms had been swallowed up in Rome, it was to the transformation of Roman Statehood that the Lord came.

³⁶¹ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of Saint Luke*, Homily 12, New York: Studion Publishers, 1983, p. 89.

For “the good news announced by the Lord Jesus Christ could not leave untransfigured a single one of the spheres of man’s life. One of the acts of our Lord Jesus Christ consisted in bringing the heavenly truths to the earth, in instilling them into the consciousness of mankind with the aim of its spiritual regeneration, in restructuring the laws of communal life on new principles announced by Christ the Saviour, in the creation of a Christian order of this communal life, and, consequently, in a radical change of pagan statehood. Proceeding from here it becomes clear what place the Church must occupy in relation to the state. It is not the place of an opponent from a hostile camp, not the place of a warring party, but the place of a pastor in relation to his flock, the place of a loving father in relation to his lost children. Even in those moments when there was not and could not be any unanimity or union between the Church and the state, Christ the Saviour forbade the Church to stand on one side from the state, still less to break all links with it, saying: ‘Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s’ (Luke 20.25).³⁶²

Nevertheless, *full* integration of the Church in the Empire was impossible; for, as Fr. Georges Florovsky writes, “in ‘this world’ Christians could be but pilgrims and strangers. Their true ‘citizenship’, *politeuma*, was ‘in heaven’ (Philippians 3.20). The Church herself was peregrinating through this world (*paroikousa*). ‘The Christian fellowship was a bit of extra-territorial jurisdiction on earth of the world above’ (Frank Gavin). The Church was ‘an outpost of heaven’ on earth, or a ‘colony of heaven’. It may be true that this attitude of radical detachment had originally an ‘apocalyptic’ connotation, and was inspired by the expectation of an imminent *parousia*. For, even as an enduring historical society, the Church was bound to be detached from the world. An ethos of ‘spiritual segregation’ was inherent in the very fabric of the Christian faith, as it was inherent in the faith of Ancient Israel. The Church herself was ‘a city’, a *polis*, a new and peculiar ‘polity’. In their baptismal profession Christians had ‘to renounce’ this world, with all its vanity, and pride, and pomp, - but also with all its natural ties, even family ties, and to take a solemn oath of allegiance to Christ the King, the only true King on earth and in heaven, to Whom all ‘authority’ has been given. By this baptismal commitment Christians were radically separated from ‘this world’. In this world they had no ‘permanent city’. They were ‘citizens’ of the ‘City to come’, of which God Himself was builder and maker (Hebrews 13.14; cf. 11.10).

In His trial before Pilate, the Lord insisted: “You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given to you from above” (John 19.11). These words both limit Caesar’s power, insofar as it is subject to God’s, and strengthen it, by indicating that it has God’s seal and blessing in principle. They do not contradict His earlier words: “My Kingdom is not of this world” (John 18.36) because as Blessed Theophylact writes: “He did not say: It is not in this world and not here. He rules in this world, takes providential care for it and administers everything according to His will. But His Kingdom is ‘not of this world’, but from above and before the ages, and ‘not from here’, that is, it is not composed from the earth, although it has power here”.³⁶³

³⁶² K.V. Glazkov, “Zashchita ot Liberalizma” (“A Defence from Liberalism”), *Pravoslavnaia Rus’ (Orthodox Russia)*, N 15 (1636), August 1/14, 1999, p. 10.

³⁶³ Bl. Theophylact, *On John* 18.36.

Bishop Nikolai Velimirovič writes: "Let no-one imagine that Christ the Lord does not have imperial power over this world because He says to Pilate: 'My Kingdom is not of this world.' He who possesses the enduring has power also over the transitory. The Lord speaks of His enduring Kingdom, independent of time and of decay, unrighteousness, illusion and death. Some man might say: 'My riches are not on paper, but in gold.' But does he who has gold not have paper also? Is not gold as paper to its owner? The Lord, then, does not say to Pilate that He is not a king, but, on the contrary, says that He is a higher king than all kings, and His Kingdom is greater and stronger and more enduring than all earthly kingdoms. He refers to His pre-eminent Kingdom, on which depend all kingdoms in time and in space..."³⁶⁴

The Lord continues: "Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin" (John 19.11). The one who delivered Christ to Pilate was Caiaphas, chief priest of the Jews. For, as is well known (to all except contemporary ecumenist Christians), it was the Jews, His own people, who condemned Christ for blasphemy and demanded His execution at the hands of the Roman authorities in the person of Pontius Pilate. Since Pilate was not interested in the charge of blasphemy, the only way in which the Jews could get their way was to accuse Christ of fomenting rebellion against Rome – a hypocritical charge, since it was precisely the Jews, not Christ, who were planning revolution, and in fact rebelled in 66 A.D.³⁶⁵ Not only did Pilate not believe this accusation: as the Apostle Peter pointed out, he did everything he could to have Christ released (Acts 3.13), giving in only when he feared that the Jews were about to start a riot and denounce him to the emperor in Rome.

Consequently, insofar as Pilate could have used his God-given power to save the Lord from an unjust death, Roman state power appears in this situation as guilty, but also as the potential, if not yet the actual, protector of Christ from His fiercest enemies. In other words, already during the life of Christ, we see the future role of Rome as the guardian of the Body of Christ and "that which restrains" the Antichrist (II Thessalonians 2.7).

³⁶⁴ Velimirovič, *The Prologue from Ochrid*, Birmingham: Lazarica Press, 1986, part III, September 30, pp. 395-396.

³⁶⁵ Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky), "Christ the Savior and the Jewish Revolution", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 35, no. 4, July-August, 1988, pp. 11-31.

27. WHY ROME?

Why did God choose the Roman Empire over other States as the special instrument of His Providence and the protector of His Church, to the extent that, from the time of St. Constantine in the fourth century, *Christianitas* came to be closely linked with *Romanitas*? Professor Marta Sordi offers some speculative answers to this question.

First, “the Romans and the Christians, albeit in different ways and from different points of view, both represented a way of overcoming the Graeco-Barbarian and Graeco-Jewish antimony which the Hellenistic culture, despite all its ecumenical claims, actually contained within itself.”³⁶⁶

Christianity is a truly universal religion in which “there is neither male nor female, ...neither Greek nor Jew, neither circumcised nor uncircumcised, neither barbarian nor Scythian, neither slave nor freeman, but Christ is all, and in all” (Galatians 3.28; Colossians 3.11). The Jews were not inclined either to accept or to propagate this message; for in spite of the universalist hints contained in the prophets, the racial distinction between the Jews and Gentiles (or *goyim*) remained a fundamental divide in Jewish thought (although, as we have seen, Jewish proselytism began in the last centuries before Christ). Similarly, the Greeks, even in the persons of their greatest philosophers, Plato and Aristotle, looked on slaves, women and barbarians as unable to partake fully in the splendours of Hellenic civilization.

True, there was a universalist element in the Hellenistic philosophy of *Stoicism*, which extended the notion of *who* was entitled to equality and democracy beyond the narrow circle of free male Greeks to every human being. Fr. Frederick Copleston has summarised the Stoic idea as follows: “Every man is naturally a social being, and to live in society is a dictate of reason. But reason is the common essential nature of all men: hence there is but one Law for all men and one Fatherland. The division of mankind into warring States is absurd: the wise man is a citizen, not of this or that particular State, but of the World. From this foundation it follows that all men have a claim to our goodwill, even slaves having their rights and even enemies having a right to our mercy and forgiveness.”³⁶⁷ Clearly, the idea of the brotherhood of man, preached by the Stoics and adopted by the Romans, helped prepare the way for Christ, in Whom “is neither Greek nor Jew, neither circumcised nor uncircumcised, neither barbarian nor Scythian, neither slave nor freeman, but Christ is all, and in all” (Colossians 3.11).

Another important element in Stoicism was *fate*. Stoicism took fate for a fact, and made a virtue of it. Since men cannot control their fate, virtue lies in accepting it as the expression of the Divine Reason that underpins the whole universe. Moreover, virtue should be practised for its own sake, and not for any benefits it might bring, because fate may thwart our calculations...

³⁶⁶ Sordi, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

³⁶⁷ Copleston, *History of Philosophy*, p. 143.

However, it was not the Hellenistic Greeks that adopted this philosophy most eagerly, but the Romans, demonstrating thereby that typically Roman trait of being able, in Polybius' words, "more than any others before them have ever been to change their customs and to imitate the best".³⁶⁸ The classical Greek Stoic concepts of citizenship and equality before the law were now given a deeper connotation and wider denotation through Roman writers like Cicero and his legions of imitators.

For in 212 the Emperor Caracalla offered citizenship to all free men in the empire, so that they could both identify with the empire as their own country and rise to the highest positions within it. "Though fiscally motivated," writes Leithart, "the constitution [of 212] had a profound effect on the character of the empire. The empire was transformed from a patchwork of cities with their own local cults, customs and laws into a single *civitas*, all its residents *cives*. Around the same time (223), Ulpian's treatise *De officiis proconsulis* was distributed to provincial governors as 'the first standard collection of laws and their underlying principles that provincial governors had ever received.' By the middle of the third century, the empire was theoretically a single city, with one law and one worship uniting its citizens."³⁶⁹

Indeed, the universalism of Roman law, applying a single standard to all citizens of the Roman Empire, regardless of race or culture or creed, came to be, with Christianity, one of the two main pillars of European civilization, giving practical expression to the universalist leanings of the Roman - and Christian - soul. Indeed, it was the universalism of Roman law that constituted the essence of the Roman people, its *Romanitas*.

For, as Patrick Geary writes, in antiquity there were basically "two sorts of 'peoples'. The one was *constitutional*, based on law, allegiance, and created by a historical process. The other, standing largely outside the process of historical change, was *biological*, based on descent, custom, and geography." The Romans, in their own eyes, were the uniquely constitutional people. "Romans alone were given a sense of historical development, fluidity, and complexity. The ethnogenesis of the Roman people, as enshrined in the works of Virgil and Livy, created a *populus* out of disparate *gentes*. For Livy, Roman identity was the result of a continuous process of political amalgamation. First, Aeneas united the Trojans and the Aborigines 'under one law and one name'. Likewise, Romulus called together the 'multitude' and gave them laws by which they could coalesce into a single body of people. Thus the *populus Romanus* alone, unlike foreign 'peoples', had a history. That history was the story of how the Roman people, as a body of individuals who lived according to a single law, came into being. Here was no question of putative ancestry, geography, culture, language, or tradition. Throughout its long history, membership in the *populus Romanus* was a question of constitutional law, not natural law, and, thus theoretically accessible to all."³⁷⁰

³⁶⁸ Polybius, in Sordi, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

³⁶⁹ Leithart, *Defending Constantine*, Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2010, p. 35. The flip side of this situation, however, was that "deviation from Roman religion was by definition treason..." (*ibid.*). Hence the persecution of Decius...

³⁷⁰ Geary, *The Myth of Nations*, Princeton University Press, 2002, pp. 42, 49-50.

This explains why the Roman Republic (rather than the Empire, because of the latter's despotism) was such an attractive model for Western political philosophers from the eighteenth century onwards. For modern western thought about the state is above all *constitutional*...

Roberts writes: "The essential qualities of the structure which sustained [the Roman Empire] were already there under the republic, above all in the cosmopolitanism encouraged by Roman administration, which sought not to impose a uniform pattern of life but only to collect taxes, keep the peace and regulate the quarrels of men by a common law...."

"The empire and the civilization it carried were unashamedly cosmopolitan. The administrative framework contained an astonishing variety of contrasts and diversities. They were held together not by an impartial despotism exercised by a Roman élite or a professional bureaucracy, but by a constitutional system which took local elites and romanized them. From the first century AD the senators themselves included only a dwindling number of men of Italian descent. Roman tolerance in this was diffused among other peoples. The empire was never a racial unity whose hierarchies were closed to non-Italians. Only one of its peoples, the Jews, felt strongly about the retention of their distinction within it and that distinction rested on religion..."³⁷¹

Already in the first century we hear that "Hebrew of Hebrews", St. Paul, saying without shame or sense of contradiction: "*Civis romanus sum*", "I am a Roman citizen". And already from the beginning of the second century, we find non-Roman emperors of Rome; they came from as far afield as Spain and Arabia, Dacia and Africa.

For, as Rutilius Namatianus said of Rome: "You have made out of diverse races one *patria*".³⁷² And Claudian wrote: "we may drink of the Rhine or Orontes", but "we are all one people". For they had become one in Rome:

*She is the only one who has received
The conquered in her arms and cherished all
The human race under a common name,
Treating them as her children, not her slaves.
She called these subjects Roman citizens
And linked far worlds with ties of loyalty.*³⁷³

"The breadth of the East," wrote the Spanish priest Orosius, "the vastness of the North, the extensiveness of the South, and the very large and secure seats of the islands are of my name and law because I, as a Roman and Christian, approach Christians and Romans."³⁷⁴

³⁷¹ Roberts, *op. cit.*, pp. 189, 198.

³⁷² Charles Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

³⁷³ Michael Grant, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, London: Phoenix, 1996, p. 128.

³⁷⁴ Orosius, *Seven Books of History against the Pagans*, 5.2.

Again, Namatianus wrote in about 420:

*You created one homeland
For the differing peoples.
Those without justice
Benefited from your rule.
By allowing the vanquished
To share in your own laws,
You made a city
Out of what was once a world.*

As Bertrand Russell writes, “The long dominion of Rome accustomed men to the idea of a single civilization under a single government. We are aware that there were important parts of the world which were not subject to Rome – India and China, more especially. But to the Roman it seemed that outside the Empire there were only more or less barbarian tribes, who might be conquered whenever it should be worthwhile to make the effort. Essentially and in idea, the empire, in the minds of the Romans, was worldwide. This conception descended to the Church, which was ‘Catholic’ in spite of Buddhists, Confucians, and (later) Mohammedans. *Securus judicat orbis terrarum* is a maxim taken over by the Church from the later Stoics; it owes its appeal to the apparent universality of the Roman Empire. Throughout the Middle Ages, after the time of Charlemagne, the Church and the Holy Roman Empire were worldwide in idea, although everybody knew that they were not so in fact. The conception of one human destiny, one Catholic religion, one universal culture, and one world-wide State, has haunted men’s thought ever since its approximate realization by Rome...”³⁷⁵

Sordi points out, secondly, that “the Roman soul suffered from a perennial nostalgia for the stern moral code and the virtues on which their culture had been founded and that a religion which called for rigorous moral commitment and the practice of personal and domestic austerity would have attracted many of those who were disgusted with the corruption they saw around them. Equally attractive to those who longed for the security of the group was, probably, the Christians’ strong community feeling and their capacity for mutual assistance in times of need; and in fact this kind of solidarity would be recognizable to the Romans as their own *collegia*, enlarged and enriched with new ideas and with a deeper sense of human values...”³⁷⁶

The moralism of the Romans was closely linked to their respect for tradition, especially religious tradition. “Their state,” said Posidonius, “is founded not only upon their manpower, but upon their traditional way of doing things.”³⁷⁷ When disaster threatened, “the Romans’ time-sanctioned ways, the customs of their ancestors, were resurrected or reaffirmed. Catastrophe was staved off...”³⁷⁸ This fitted in well with the Christians’ veneration of Holy Tradition...

³⁷⁵ Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy*, London: Allen Unwin, 1946, p. 305.

³⁷⁶ Sordi, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

³⁷⁷ Posidonius, in Tom Holland, *In the Shadow of the Sword*, London: Abacus, 2013, p. 138.

³⁷⁸ Holland, *Rubicon*, London: Abacus, 2003, p. 11.

Early Rome, as we have seen, was a very religious state. And when the empire was inaugurated, religion immediately took an important part in state life. Thus in 28 BC, the first Roman emperor Augustus “responded to a request from the Senate and ordered the restoration of eight-two temples within Rome. Many were small, and in most cases the structures conformed to the simple traditional designs rather than the grander styles of the modern era. Structural restoration was accompanied by careful revival of the old rituals undertaken in each one. *Pietas* was a virtue central to Rome’s sense of identity and the neglect of proper reverence due to the old gods of the Roman people was symptomatic of the moral decline of recent generations, so evident in the decades of discord and violence. Moral explanations for upheaval came most readily to the Roman mind and so restoration must involve changes in behaviour, conduct and a reassertion of a good relationship with the gods who had guided Rome’s rise to greatness. At the same time the Egyptian cult of Isis was banned from the City itself [it was later permitted]. The spirit of religious revival was strictly traditional and was led by Caesar personally.”³⁷⁹ Of course, the religion of the Romans was false, but the *place* accorded to religion in state life could be filled by the true one, as it was during the reign of Constantine.

Thirdly, the Romans’ religious concept of history, so different from the cyclical, naturalistic ideas of the Greeks and other pagans, fitted in well with the Christian concept. For, like the Christians, the Romans saw history as moving towards a definite end in accordance with justice. The *Aeneid* of Virgil, their greatest poet, was a kind of historical epic that justified Rome’s ascent to supremacy and showed sympathy for subjugated people like Dido of Carthage. He warned the Romans not to forget the ethical justification of their empire: “to impose the ways and works of peace, to spare the vanquished, and to overthrow the mighty by means of war”. The historian Livy, although “fiercely patriotic, [was] also inclined to judge in moral terms – for him, Rome prospered when standards of morality were high and the Romans respected tradition and the gods, and behaved with virtue. Failures, outbreaks of disorder and ultimately civil war happened when all classes, and especially their senatorial leaders, failed to live up to proper standards.”³⁸⁰

The Emperor Augustus worked very much within the guidelines laid out by Virgil and Livy. His monuments and celebrations, while glorifying his own achievements first of all, did so in the context of a justification of Roman history as a whole, trying to see the best even in enemies of his, such as Pompey, trying to see the present as the culmination of the best aspects of the past. Moreover, he promoted private morality, passing laws against adultery. Perhaps the greatest failure of his life was the punishments he felt forced to pay out to the lovers of his daughter Julia, whom he exiled to a remote island.

Thus Sordi writes: “Whereas Hellenic thinking had always seen the end in terms of natural phenomena based on the concept of the corruption of the human constitution and the exhaustion of the world itself, the Romans rarely saw things in these terms. For the Romans, even before the advent of Christianity, the concept of

³⁷⁹ Galsworthy, *op. cit.*, pp. 223-224.

³⁸⁰ Galsworthy, *op. cit.*, p. 412..

decadence was closely linked to morality and religion, so that the end tended to take on apocalyptic overtones. This concept was to emerge in full force during the great crisis of the third century, at the time of Decius and Valerian, but Augustan writers had already diagnosed it in Rome's first great crisis, the Gallic catastrophe of 386 BC, and it was equally present in the first century before Christ. In all three cases, but particularly in the period preceding Augustus' accession, the crisis was felt to be a consequence of a sin which had contaminated the roots of the Roman state and had caused the gods to hate it. For example, in the first century the civil wars symbolic of the *scelus* of Romulus' fratricide, were thought to be the cause.³⁸¹ Equally in all three cases but particularly in the first century BC it seems that the Romans were convinced that the sin could be expiated, the punishment postponed and Rome renewed. With Augustus, the celebration of the return of the golden age follows punctually on the heels of the crisis, as will happen again under Gallienus.

"This religious concept of history with its sequence of sin, expiation and redemption, was part of the inheritance handed on to the Romans by the Etruscans. According to ancient Etruscan beliefs, every human being and every nation had been given a fixed period of life, divided into periods (*saecula* for nations), and marked by moments of crisis which could be postponed by means of the expiation of the sin which had originally caused them. The only exception was the supreme crisis, the last and fatal one, for which there was no remedy..."³⁸²

The real redeemer of Rome, of course, was not Augustus, but Christ, Who was born in Augustus' reign and within the bounds of his empire. He truly expiated the original sin, not only of Rome, but of all mankind, and brought the enmity between man and God to an end. And the Roman conception of history undoubtedly made the reception of Christ's Gospel easier; it was a "schoolteacher to Christ" just as the Jewish law had been...

Finally, the political system of the Roman Empire could be adapted to Christian ends. For it was, in J.S. McClelland's words, "a fortunate mixture of the three basic types of government: monarchy, aristocracy and democracy. The Greek Polybius said of the Republic: "The Romans themselves find it impossible to state for sure whether the system is an aristocracy, a democracy, or a monarchy" ³⁸³ Even the Emperor Hadrian, one of the most powerful rulers in history, could say, in a remarkably democratic spirit: "I shall manage my responsibility as prince in the knowledge that it is the affair of the people and not mine personally."³⁸⁴

"The constitution of the Roman republic served long enough to be a miracle of longevity, and the standard explanation for that longevity came to be that Roman government was a fortunate mixture of the three basic types of government:

³⁸¹ Thus the poet Horace wrote of the "original sin" of Remus' murder, that "bitter doom pursues the Romans: a crime, a murdered brother, once Remus's guiltless blood flowed on the ground, a curse upon his children." (Jorge Martinez-Pinna, "The Founding of Rome", *National Geographic History*, June-July, 2015, pp. 62-63) (V.M.)

³⁸² Sordi, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

³⁸³ Polybius, in Holland, *Rubicon*, p. 25.

³⁸⁴ Hadrian, in Christopher Clark, *Iron Kingdom: A History of Prussia*, London: Penguin, 2007, p. 41.

monarchy, aristocracy and democracy. The Roman consuls were its kings, the Senate its aristocracy, and its people and their tribunes its democracy. It was standard doctrine in the ancient world that 'pure' forms of government were not likely to last. Even the best of monarchies eventually became corrupted, self-disciplined aristocracies degenerated into oligarchies admiring only wealth, and democracies always ended up in mob rule. Rome was lucky, because in the government of the republic each part of the state tended to cancel out the vices of the other parts, leaving only their virtues. The people tempered the natural arrogance of the aristocrats, the senators tempered the natural turbulence of the people, while consulship for a year was a constant reminder to the consuls that they were only temporary kings.... The Romans stopped being the citizens of a free republic, and became the subjects of an emperor, with their fixed political ideas largely intact."³⁸⁵

Each of these elements - monarchical, aristocratic and democratic - brought something important to Rome. On the one hand, its monarchical element served to provide that strong framework of law and order over a vast area, the *Pax Romana*, which so greatly assisted the spread and establishment of the Church - and strengthened the teaching that all true authority comes from above, ultimately from God. On the other hand, its democratic and humanistic elements served to encourage the belief in the free will of the individual human being, and the value of each individual soul, which is so important in Christianity. They tempered the tendency to deify the ruler that was so pronounced in all the Near Eastern despotisms and had crept into Rome from the East.

Old Rome was the universal kingdom that summed up the old world of paganism, both pagan-despotic, pagan-aristocratic and pagan-democratic. Later, the new Rome of St. Constantine crossed these pagan traditions with the autocratic traditions of Israel.

The ultimate triumph of Christ over Roman paganism was prophesied in chapter 2 of Daniel. The Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar had a vision: he saw a metal statue in four parts: gold, silver, bronze and iron, which was crushed to pieces by a great stone. The Prophet Daniel interpreted the vision to be a summary of world history: the four parts of the statue refer to four world-empires, beginning with Nebuchadnezzar's own, which are crushed by a stone symbolizing the Kingdom of Christ, which fills the whole earth and lasts forever.

The Holy Fathers completed the prophet's interpretation by identifying the four world-empires as those of pagan Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. The iron part of the statue is said to crush all the other parts - which is precisely what Rome did in the centuries before the Coming of Christ. For Rome was cruel and very strong - truly the strongest of the ancient empires. "The image's two legs," writes St. Demetrius of Rostov, "represent the two parts of this fourth kingdom, Eastern and Western, Greek and Roman. Its feet are partly of iron and partly of clay, to portray how that kingdom will itself be scattered like a vessel and be divided into many parts. As for the stone that smote the image, this is Christ the Son of God, hewn from the mountain not cut

³⁸⁵ McClelland, op. cit., pp. 84, 85.

by the hand of man, for He shall be born of a pure virgin, innocent of wedlock. He will shatter and crush every temporal kingdom and raise up a spiritual kingdom that shall abide forever."³⁸⁶

The statue is also said to have had ten toes made of a mixture of iron and clay. This refers to the flawed nature of ten successors of Roman power, which are divided, forming a mixture of strength and weakness - firm one-man rule and anarchic democracy. "The diminishing value of metals from gold to iron represent the decreasing grandeur of the rulers of the successive empire [for their kingdoms were *inferior to yours*, said the Prophet to Nebuchadnezzar], from the absolute despotism of Nebuchadnezzar to the democratic system of checks and balances that characterized the Roman senates and assemblies."³⁸⁷

Nevertheless, as we have seen, it was the iron power of one-man rule that gained the upper hand over the democratic elements in Roman history from the time of Julius Caesar.³⁸⁸

³⁸⁶ St. Demetrius, *The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints*, House Springs, Mo.: Chrysostom Press, 2000, vol. IV: December, p. 315.

³⁸⁷ *The Lives of the Holy Prophets*, Buena Vista, CO: Holy Apostles Convent, 1998, p. 387. Charles T. Cook put it as follows: "Babylon, the Head of Gold, was governed by an Absolute Autocracy. Medo-Persia, the Breast and Arms of Silver, favoured an Aristocratic Oligarchy. This form gave place to Alexander the Great's Military Oligarchy. And in turn Rome, the Legs of Iron, represented Democratic Imperialism." ("Is the Book of Daniel Fact or Fiction?" *Watching and Waiting*, 2, May 1919, republished in vol. 28, no. 15, July-September, 2015, p. 238)

³⁸⁸ Wiseman, "The Slow Death of Democracy", *BBC History Magazine*, vol. 6, N 12, December, 2005, p. 15.

28. ROME AND CHINA

As we have seen, Rome encompassed all the major kingdoms of Europe and the Middle East except Persia, and claimed to be the one, universal empire. However, there was another contemporary kingdom that also claimed universality and would seem to have had at least an equal claim to greatness – China. Moreover, the Chinese empire lasted much longer than Old Rome, expiring at almost the same time as the Third Rome, Russia, the early twentieth century; it even eventually succumbed to the same enemy – communism. But China not only was not destined to become the cradle for the growth of Christian civilization: it remained more impervious to the True Faith than any other major nation on earth (with the possible exception of India), acquiring its first truly Christian martyrs only in 1900.

Why? By attempting to answer this question, we may gain further insights into the specific qualities of Rome that made it the object of the Lord's election as *the Guardian of the Ark*, the saving Ark of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

Chinese history begins in about 3000 BC, and the first Yellow Emperor, Huangdi, is said to have begun his reign in 2697 BC.³⁸⁹ China acquired both cultural and political unity at about the same time as Rome came of age – in the late third century BC. Just as Rome's conquest of Carthage in 202 BC finally established her as the dominant power in the Western Mediterranean, which dominance was extended to the East by Octavian's victory at Actium in 31 BC, so the victory of the Chin over their last enemy in 221 BC established that there would be only one Chinese State on the North China plain, while the early Han dynasty had extended this rule over almost the whole of modern China by its fall in 9 BC.³⁹⁰

Francis Fukuyama writes: "China succeeded in developing a centralized, uniform system of bureaucratic administration that was capable of governing a huge population and territory when compared to Mediterranean Europe. China had

³⁸⁹ Niall Ferguson, *Doom..The Politics of Catastrophe*, London: Allen Lane, 2021, p. 55.

³⁹⁰ And yet, writes Dominic Lieven, "there was nothing inevitable about the predominance of empire in East Asia over the last two millenia. Nature in many ways pulled hard in the opposite direction, not merely because of China's unmanageable size but also because of the rivers and mountains that divide so much of southern China into semi-enclosed regions with separate economies, cultures and languages. A polity whose core, Han (that is, ethnic Chinese) population even today speaks a range of first languages almost as diverse as the major languages of Europe could easily be seen as ripe for divisions into nation states. For much of China's history, separate states did in fact exist. In the long run the preservation of a single written script understood and venerated by all educated Chinese as the medium of high culture and of government was crucial to China's unity. In the centuries immediately before China's unification in 221 BC, however, this script was beginning to diverge from one polity to another. The same era witnessed a 'proliferation of local literatures'. It was the supreme achievement of the 'First Emperor', Qinshihuangdi, to reverse this process irrevocably by reimposing a standardized Chinese script. 'Without the Ch'in reform, it is conceivable that several regionally different orthographies might have come into existence. And had this happened, it is inconceivable that China's political unity could long have survived.' In his vast and scholarly history of world government, Sam Finer comments that the First Emperor, in 'his short, barbarous, but prodigiously energetic reign irrevocably shaped the entire subsequent history of the Chinese state. His reign was decisive and irreversible.' No other individual has ever 'left so great and so indelible a mark on the character of government at any time or in any place of the world.'" (*Empire*, London: John Murray, 2000, pp. 33-34).

already invented a system of impersonal, merit-based bureaucratic recruitment that was far more systematic than Roman public administration. While the total population of the Chinese empire in 1 A.D. was roughly comparable to that of the Roman empire, the Chinese put a far larger proportion of its people under a uniform set of rules than did the Romans. Rome had other important legacies, particularly in the domain of law... But although Greece and Rome were extremely important as precursors of modern accountable government, China was more important in the development of the state."³⁹¹

This last judgement is doubtful. While the Chinese State is as impressive in its own way as the Roman, it embodies what we may call the negative imperial idea as opposed to the more complex, but positive imperial idea of Rome. Chinese imperialism could only be despotic, having no way out, as it were, of the worship of the state; whereas Roman imperialism was able to develop into the God-pleasing polity of Christian Rome.

There were other similarities. Thus both universal empires of Rome and China proclaimed their exclusion of the northern barbarians who did not share in their civilization by building a wall. This was Hadrian's Wall in the Roman West, and the far longer and more massive Great Wall of China.

But there the similarities end... Let us begin with the walls. Hadrian's wall was built by Roman professional soldiers, at no significant cost in lives. But the Great Wall of China, according to legend, cost a million lives. And this was only one of the empire's vast public works, such as the system of canals linking the Yangtse River with the Yellow River to the north and Hangchow to the south. J.M. Roberts writes: "Millions of labourers were employed on this and on other great irrigation schemes. Such works are comparable in scale with the Pyramids and surpass the great cathedrals of medieval Europe. They imposed equally heavy social costs, too, and there were revolts against conscription for building and guard duties."³⁹²

In other words, China was essentially the same kind of despotism as the pagan empires of Egypt and Babylon, whereas Rome, as we have seen, had evolved a unique system composed of republican, aristocratic and despotic elements. This meant that the vitally important combination of freedom and discipline that characterized Roman statehood was lacking in China, where, as Niall Ferguson writes, "there was no religious authority superior to the emperor" and "there was no law other than laws the emperor made".³⁹³

Moreover, the ancestor-worship which was at the root of the Egyptian and Babylonian systems of king-worship was still more clearly the root of Chinese despotism.

³⁹¹ Fukuyama, *The Origins of Political Order*, London: Profile, 2012, p. 21.

³⁹² Roberts, *History of the World*, Oxford: Helicon Publishing, 1992, p. 359.

³⁹³ Ferguson, *The Square and the Tower*, London: Penguin, 2018, p. 64. So we must disagree with David Starkey's estimate that the Roman empire was "perhaps the purest, the most absolute monarchy the world has ever seen" (*Crown and Country*). That title belongs to China...

“As a rule,” writes L.A. Tikhomirov, “all the monotheistic religions are more favourable to the appearance of a monarchical form of supreme power [as opposed to aristocratic or democratic forms], while polytheistic religions, on the contrary, are not very favourable to it, unless the cult of ancestors creates the deification of the representative of a dynasty in some ascending line of kinship.

“It is understandable how the deification of ancestors, who were at the same time the founders of the royal dynasty, confers on the king the significance of being the living expression of the spirit and faith of the people. The presence of this element is more or less noticeable in all the ancient kingdoms. In Assyria the chief god was Assur, who was also worshipped as the protector of the dynasty. He is called the son of Shem [and therefore the nephew of Ham] in the Bible. In Egypt they openly declared that originally the gods ruled in the country - in other words, the ancestors of the kings were counted among the gods. As regards China, our well-known Sinologist S. Georgievsky has very convincingly explained the significance of the worship of ancestors through an analysis of Chinese hieroglyphs. As is well known, the hieroglyphs of the Chinese express, not sounds, but concepts and combinations of concepts, and therefore the analysis of hieroglyphs gives us the opportunity to determine what circumstances and facts conditioned the composition of a given hieroglyph. Thus, for example, we can clearly see from what elements ‘state’ or ‘army’ or ‘people’, etc., were constructed.

“Such an analysis of the hieroglyphs led Georgievsky to the conclusion that the ancient Chinese kings were no more than elected leaders. They were elected as leaders for their military services, since the hieroglyph ‘dai’ expresses precisely the fact that the royal person is skilled in military matters. And then this originally elected leader is later turned into a representative of Heaven itself.

“The general picture that emerges is as follows. One of the dynastic founders of the Chinese, having been elected as leader during their conquest of their present territories, was gradually turned into a supreme god, while the Chinese emperors became his ‘sons’. The son of the first leader, who had probably not been very powerful yet, offered sacrifices to him in accordance with the demands of ancestor-worship. Consequently he became a necessary mediator between the people and the dead leader, whose spirit was necessary to the people as a protector. In this way the authority of his descendants grew from generation to generation. All the later kings, on their death, filled up heaven with yet more spirits, who were protectors of the Chinese, and all of them lived in ‘Shan-Di’ (Heaven). But each Emperor was ‘the son of heaven’, and his very reign was called ‘the service of heaven’. In reality the ‘service of heaven’ was at the same time both a family obligation of the Emperor in accordance with ancestor-worship, and administration of the people over whom all these spirits had ruled during their lives, becoming the protectors of their former subjects after death.

“The ancestor-worship that was obligatory for each separate family had no significance for all the other families of the Chinese people, while the cult of the powerful tribe of Shan-Di touched them all. The ancestors of the other families remained domestic spirit-protectors, while Shan-Di gradually grew into the main

national Divinity. It is understandable what an aura of power the cult of Shan-Di gave to the Chinese Emperor, who was unquestionably the natural preserver of this cult by inheritance. In submitting to heaven, that is, Shan-Di, the people were thereby obliged to submit to his earthly representative, the Chinese Emperor, and could not refuse him obedience without at the same time refusing obedience to heaven itself. Thus from the original, fortunate war-leader, who was raised from the midst of the leaders of the Chinese clans equal to him, there grew, on the soil of ancestor-worship, a supreme power that no longer depended on the people's desires and choices, but on the will of 'heaven', 'Shan-Di'.³⁹⁴

"According to traditional Chinese political theory," writes Yuval Noah Harari, "Heaven (*Tian*) is the source of all legitimate authority on earth. Heaven chooses the most worthy person or family and gives them the Mandate of Heaven. This person or family then rules over All Under Heaven (*Tianxia*) for the benefit of all its inhabitants. Thus, a legitimate authority is – by definition – universal. If a ruler lacks the Mandate of Heaven, then he lacks legitimacy to rule even a single city. If a ruler enjoys the mandate, he is obliged to spread justice and harmony to the entire world. The Mandate of Heaven could not be given to several candidates simultaneously, and consequently one could not legitimize the existence of more than one independent state."³⁹⁵

The concept of the will or mandate of heaven explained dynastic changes, as when the Shang dynasty was overcome by the Chou in 1027 BC. For, as Roberts writes, "the Chou displacement of the Shang was religious as well as military. The idea was introduced that there existed a god superior to the ancestral god of the dynasty and that from him there was derived a mandate to rule. Now, it was claimed, he had decreed that the mandate should pass to other hands."³⁹⁶

Already in the Shang dynasty the king, according to Gernet, was both "head of the armies and chief priest".³⁹⁷ Igor Shafarevich writes that the kings even in this very early period ruled in a despotic, quasi-socialist manner: they called their subjects "cattle", their graves were surrounded by thousands of corpses of those killed to accompany them into the next life, agriculture was controlled by the king, even the time of marriages was determined by him.³⁹⁸

These despotic tendencies culminated in the reign of the first Ch'in emperor, Qin Shi Huang. As R.W. L. Guisso and C. Pagani write: "Although Shihuang had only eleven more years to live after [uniting the Warring States and] founding his dynasty, under his rule a total transformation of the land we now call China took place. He created new administrative units for the capital city of Xianyang and the rest of the country, he abolished the feudal system of landholding and removed the aristocratic warlords. Weights, measures and currencies were standardized throughout the land,

³⁹⁴ Tikhomirov, *op. cit.*, pp. 79-80.

³⁹⁵ Harari, *Sapiens. A Brief History of Humankind*, London: Vintage, 2011, p. 220.

³⁹⁶ Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

³⁹⁷ Jacques Gernet, *A History of Chinese Civilization*, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 22.

³⁹⁸ I.R. Shafarevich, *Sotsializm kak iavlenie mirovoj istorii* (Socialism as a phenomenon of world history), Paris: YMCA Press, 1977, pp. 223-228.

and even such details as the width of chariot axles were regulated to help prevent ruts in the thousands of miles of new roads that were being constructed. The various and confusing local scripts were eliminated and one standardized script used throughout the land where a uniform and enormously detailed code of law was imposed everywhere.

“Meanwhile hundreds of thousands of labourers and convicts were conscripted into Shihuang’s great building projects – the canals and irrigation works plus the hundreds of palaces and pavilions for the nobles whom he had moved away from their own conquered territories in order to weaken their power. His most magnificent works, those which would make his name immortal, were also being carried out during this period of enormous change – the Great Wall, his fabled palace at Afang and his enormous tomb where his childless concubines were buried with him.

“And in the year 213 BC an event took place which would make the First Emperor infamous to all succeeding generations – the burning of the country’s books followed by the deaths of 460 [Confucian] scholars of the period whom he buried alive.”³⁹⁹

In many ways, Shihuang represents the archetypal despot: his rise to power as a warrior, drive for uniformity, cruelty, megalomania and paranoia, building projects, militarization of society, mass displacement of vast numbers of people, distrust of thinkers and book-learning, fear of death and search for immortality. It is not, therefore, surprising that Mao Tse-tung – who, like Shihuang, seized control over the whole of China from the north-west - should have looked to him as a role model.

“In 1958 at a meeting of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party Chairman Mao remarked that Qin Shihuang was a ruler who advocated the extermination of those who ‘used the past to criticize the present.’ Mao went on to say, ‘What does he amount to anyway? He buried only 460 scholars, while we have buried 46,000 counter revolutionary scholars alive.’”⁴⁰⁰

However, this seeming strength of Chinese civilization contained within itself one major weakness – racial pride. The Romans followed the universalist tradition first exemplified by Cyrus the Great; they were able to see the superiority of the Greek civilization which they absorbed, and to learn from it. And their adoption from the Christians of the religion of the True God under St. Constantine probably extended the life of the empire for another eleven hundred years. The Chinese, on the other hand, were so convinced of their infinite superiority over all non-Chinese that, as Lieven writes, “from the Han era until today few Chinese have ever doubted the absolute superiority of their culture to all others in the region. One contemporary expert on China’s minority peoples speaks of ‘an innate, almost visceral Han sense of superiority.’”⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁹ Guisso and Pagani, *The First Emperor of China*, London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1989, pp. 14, 16.

⁴⁰⁰ Guisso and Pagani, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁴⁰¹ Lieven, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

This conception was reinforced by the servile attitude of other eastern peoples in the “Chinese sphere of influence” to the Han Chinese. Thus in 500 one Tatar ruler imposed Chinese customs and dress on his people by decree.⁴⁰² And so when the first western embassies came to them in the eighteenth century they thought that they must be bringing tribute, and could not understand the westerners’ refusal to kow-tow to them. That arrogance (on both sides) cost the Chinese dear, and led to the final collapse of the Chinese empire in 1911 and its surrender to communism in 1949.

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But the most important element determining the fate of any empire is its religion. The Romans’ adoption of Christianity under St. Constantine gave it discipline and stability but at the same time also the freedom to think and strive beyond the earthly homeland to the Heavenly Kingdom. The Chinese adoption of Confucianism, on the other hand, while introducing discipline and order - Confucius’ definition of good government was: “May the prince be a prince, the subject a subject, the father a father, the son a son”⁴⁰³ - suppressed the striving for higher things.

It might have been different if the other Chinese religion, Taoism, with its amazing foreshadowings of Christianity, had triumphed.⁴⁰⁴ According to the modern Chinese philosopher Gi-ming Shien, as interpreted by Fr. Seraphim Rose, the distinctions between various Chinese philosophies and religions are illusory. “In fact, there is a very strong idea in the Chinese mind of orthodoxy: that there is a right teaching, and that the whole society depends on that right teaching. This orthodoxy is expressed in different forms. My teacher made it quite clear that Taoism is the esoteric side, and Confucianism is the more social side. Taoism has to do with spiritual life and Confucianism with social, public life.”⁴⁰⁵

Thus while “for his personal spiritual satisfaction, the [first] emperor turned to Taoism and the folk beliefs which had become a part of it”, “for ruling the state, he selected Legalism with its emphasis on strength, discipline and organization”, and “for ruling his Blackhaired people, he chose Confucianism.”⁴⁰⁶ And so, as Roberts writes: “Over a social ocean in which families were the fish that mattered [there] presided one Leviathan, the state. To it and to the family the Confucians looked for authority; those institutions were unchallenged by others, for in China there were no entities such as Church or communes which confused questions of right and government so fruitfully in Europe”.⁴⁰⁷

This point is reinforced by Fukuyama through his comparison between Chinese and Indian attitudes to politics and religion: “In China, there were priests and religious officials who officiated over the court’s numerous ritual observances and the

⁴⁰² Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 354.

⁴⁰³ Fernand Braudel, *A History of Civilizations*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1995, p. 178.

⁴⁰⁴ Hieromonk Damascene, *Christ the Eternal Tao*, Platina, Ca.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1999.

⁴⁰⁵ Shien, in Hieromonk Damascene (Christensen), *Father Seraphim Rose*, Platina, Ca.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2003, p. 76.

⁴⁰⁶ Guisso and Pagani, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

⁴⁰⁷ Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 355.

emperor's ancestral tombs. But they were all employees of the state and strictly subservient to royal authority. The priests had no independent corporate existence, making the Chinese state what would later be labeled 'caesaropapist'. In India, on the other hand, the Brahmins [priests] were a separate varna [social class] from the Kshatriyas [warriors] and recognized as having a higher authority than the warriors. The Brahmins did not constitute a corporate group as well organized as the Catholic church, but they nonetheless enjoyed a comparable degree of moral authority independent of the power of the state. Moreover, the Brahmin varna was regarded as the guardian of the sacred law that existed prior to and independently of political rule. Kings were thus regarded as subject to law written by others, not simply as the makers of law as in China. Thus in India, as in Europe, there was germ of something that would be called the rule of law that would limit the power of secular political authority."⁴⁰⁸

This is not to say that Confucianism never countenanced any rebellion against the state. But rebellion was rationalized in terms of a new "mandate from heaven". In this way as the foundations of society were preserved intact.

"For Confucian principles taught that, although rebellion was wrong if a true king reigned, a government which provoked rebellion and could not control it ought to be replaced for it was *ipso facto* illegitimate."⁴⁰⁹

Thus Hegel's later idea of the State as "the divine idea on earth" was in essence a reformulation of the Confucian Chinese conception of the State as the reflection of the impersonal heavenly order. For, as N.N. Alexeyev writes, "for Confucius, as for Hegel, the State is 'the highest form of objective morality', than which there is nothing higher".⁴¹⁰

This may partially explain why the Chinese accepted communism with its Hegelian philosophical roots so quickly...

There were other features making for the uniqueness of this monolithic and self-perpetuating system... Thus "Chinese government," writes Lieven, "though still ultimately dependent on local landowners' collaboration, was far more direct, centralized and bureaucratic than the Roman even in the first and second centuries, let alone subsequently under the Song and Ming dynasties. Writing on the period 27 BC to AD 235, one authority on Roman government comments that 'the Roman empire remained undergoverned, certainly by comparison with the Chinese empire, which employed, proportionately, perhaps twenty times the number of functionaries.' Even after the dramatic increase in bureaucracy and centralization under Diocletian in the next century, the late Roman empire still had only one-quarter of the Chinese level of bureaucrats."⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁸ Fukuyama, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

⁴⁰⁹ Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 360.

⁴¹⁰ Alexeyev, "Khristianstvo i Idea Monarkhii" ("Christianity and the Idea of the Monarchy), *Put'* (The Way), N 6, January, 1927, p. 660.

⁴¹¹ Lieven, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

This meant, however, that the Romans could make changes more easily than the Chinese. Thus Constantine was able to ignore the Senate and bureaucracy and introduce an entirely new official religion, Christianity. This would have been impossible in China, where the bureaucrats, having a virtual monopoly of education and power (the army had less prestige and therefore less power in China than in Rome), and being committed to the perpetuation of their caste and its ideology, would have stopped any such moves. It was this capacity of Rome to renew itself – to receive a new faith in Christianity as it had received a new culture from Greece – that made it the best political vehicle for the Gospel of Christ and its mission to the rest of the world.

“From the perspective of AD 2000 the crucial elements in Roman culture were the rationalist and logical way of arguing inherited from the Greeks, the Roman system of law, the Greek stress on the individual and on existential tragedy, and the Graeco-Roman tradition of self-government. To these one must add the impact of the Christian drama of Christ’s life and resurrection; belief in the individual soul, its sinfulness and redemption; and the importance of monotheism and the exclusionary and dogmatic mindset it fosters. Most of these elements are alien to China’s Confucian tradition, to Chinese Legalism and to later Buddhist influences on Chinese civilization.”⁴¹²

⁴¹² Lieven, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

29. THE CULT OF EMPEROR-WORSHIP

Let us look a little more closely at the cult of the worship of the emperor, that last and most serious obstacle to the whole-hearted embrace of Rome by the Church, the last barrier to the reconciliation of *Romanitas* with *Christianitas*...

It is significant that the Christian martyrs of the Roman period were officially condemned, not for their religion as such (Roman law did not punish beliefs, but acts), but mainly because they were violators of the laws of the state, and in particular the law that compelled the worship of the emperors. They were judged as *hostes Caesari* (enemies of Caesar) and *hostes rei publicae* (enemies of the republic), that is, as political prisoners and as "enemies of the people". In the trials of the Christians three main accusations were brought against them: that they were opponents of the state religion (*sacrilegium* - godless ones), as non-venerators of the cult of Caesar (*crimen laesae majestatis*) and as secret plotters (they formed secret societies).⁴¹³

Now religion in Rome had always been a department of State. As J.M. Roberts writes: "It had nothing to do with individual salvation and not much with individual behaviour; it was above all a public matter. It was a part of the *res publica*, a series of rituals whose maintenance was good for the state, whose neglect would bring retribution. There was no priestly caste set apart from other men (if we exclude one or two antiquarian survivals in the temples of a few special cults) and priestly duties were the task of the magistrates who found priesthood a useful social and political lever."⁴¹⁴

"Nor was there creed or dogma..."

⁴¹³ Zhuravsky, *Zhizneopisaniya Novykh Muchenikov Kazanskikh God 1918*, Moscow, 1996, pp. 4-5; Bolotov, V.V. *Lektsii po Istorii Drevnej Tserkvi* (Lectures on the History of the Ancient Church), Saint Petersburg, 1907, reprinted in Moscow, 1994, volume 2, pp. 14-15, Saint Petersburg, 1907, reprinted in Moscow, 1994, volume 2, pp. 14-15.

⁴¹⁴ M.V. Zyzykin writes: "In the beginning the priestly functions, being a constituent part of the imperium, had been carried out by State officials and only later were transferred to the particular duty of the priests..."

"[Religion] without the State did not have that independent life and task, distinguishing it from the task of the State, that the Christian religion has. Its task was to guard the material interests of the State. Each god was in charge of some aspect of earthly life and State life; prayers to the gods included only requests for material good things; each god was besought in accordance with his speciality, but the Roman gods did not touch the moral side of life..."

"Not one single god was concerned with questions of morality. None of the gods inspired or laid down moral rules. Care for the morality of the people lay on the family and the State; philosophical morality also appeared without the gods... It worked out that it was not the gods who ruled the will of the Romans, but the Romans - the will of the gods..."

"The priesthood among the Romans was not a special form of service established from on high. Among the Romans the right and duty to carry out sacrifices was indissolubly bound up with the imperium. In private life the priest was a representative of authority - the head of the family, of the tribe, of the college, of the brotherhood. In State life the natural priest was the head of the State... [Thus] the highest official of the State was the guardian of religion, and not only of State order..." (*Patriarkh Nikon*, Warsaw, 1931, pt. I, pp. 37, 38, 42, 43) (V.M.)

“Men genuinely felt that the peace of Augustus was the *pax deorum* [‘the peace of the gods’], a divine reward for a proper respect for the gods which Augustus had reasserted.”⁴¹⁵

The gods in question were not only the specifically Roman gods, but all the gods of the various peoples of the empire. The tolerant, ecumenist attitude of the Romans to the different religions of the empire was thought to be one of the causes of its survival. None of the pagan cults excluded the others: in the minds of some of the sophisticated intellectuals who studied Greek philosophy, they were all different expressions of a single Divinity...

It was a natural step from the empire tolerating the worship of all the gods to its worshipping itself. For if all the gods were worshipped for the sake of the stability of the empire, then the empire was the supreme value. Thus, as Alexander Dvorkin writes, “The most capable emperors tried to... attach to the ancient popular cults the character of the worship of the state and its head. This patriotic deification of the Roman state began already in the time of the republic. The cult of *Dea Roma* was practiced in Smyrna already in 195 BC. It became noticeably stronger thanks to the popularity of the Empire in the provinces, which were happy with the improvement in the level of administration under the empire’s laws...”⁴¹⁶

Emperor-worship seems to have begun with Julius Caesar, who made himself dictator for life while refusing the title of “king” in respect for Rome’s anti-monarchical traditions. On the Ides of March, 44 BC, Caesar was killed by a group of senators determined to preserve the republic from a return to one-man rule; and almost immediately a cult grew up. As Montefiore writes, “he turned down the throne but received the titles Father of the Country, *imperator*, dictator for life and consul for ten years, and he was declared to be sacred...”⁴¹⁷ Again, Jonathan Hill writes: “A number of inscriptions in the east, dating from late in his lifetime, hail him as a living god. Caesar himself clearly approved of the development, since he had a month named after himself, built a temple to himself, and appointed his friend Mark Antony as his own chief priest.

“Caesar’s nephew, Augustus, the first true Roman emperor, developed some aspects of this idea and abandoned others. He did not have temples and priests dedicated to himself, but since he was Caesar’s adopted son, he was known as ‘the divine son’ [or ‘son of a god’]. He avoided actually calling himself a god, but he did not stop other people from doing so – especially in the provinces and the eastern part of the empire. He revived the old position of *pontifex maximus* or chief priest in the city of Rome, but he took over the position himself. All of Augustus’ successors adopted the same title until AD 382. And after Augustus’ death, he was officially deified. This became standard procedure for every emperor, except for the particularly unpopular ones; a witness would swear to the Senate that he had seen the dead emperor’s soul

⁴¹⁵ Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 203. Somewhat cynically, Seneca said that “the wise man will observe all the religious rites because they are prescribed by law, and not because they are pleasing to the gods”.

⁴¹⁶ Dvorkin, *Ocherki po Istorii Vselenskoj Pravoslavnoj Tserkvi* (Sketches on the History of the Universal Orthodox Church), Nizhni-Novgorod, 2006, p. 29.

⁴¹⁷ Montefiore, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

ascend to heaven from his funeral pyre, and the Senate would agree that he was now a god. Even in their lifetimes, the emperors were held to be inspired by a divine spirit, 'Caesar's genius', and people were expected to worship this spirit..."⁴¹⁸

The most notorious of the god-kings of Rome was Nero. "Divine favour had touched him from the very moment of his nativity, when the first rays of a December dawn had bathed him in gold. Flatterers compared him to Apollo, praising him for putting the scattered stars to flight, for bringing a new age of joy, and for 'giving to silenced laws new breath'. More literally than Augustus had ever done, he pushed such propaganda to ferocious limits. When Nero brought his *evangelion* to Greece, he did so in the flashiest manner possible: by remitting the province's taxes, starting a canal across the Isthmus of Corinth, and starring in the Olympic Games. The resources of the entire world were at his service. Coins, statues, banners: all promoted Nero as being haloed with divine fire. In the streets of the capital he would pose as the charioteer of the sun. When he made his public debut on the lyre, an instrument to which he had devoted much practice, he pointedly chose to sing of the punishment of Niobe. Apollo, radiant in his cruelty, seemed to Nero's dazzled admirers manifest on earth...

"...Nero, as the son of a god and the ruler of the world, was not bound by the drab and wearisome conventions that governed the affairs of mortals. Instead, like some figure sprung from tragedy, he killed his mother; he kicked his pregnant wife to death; he was married, dressed as a woman, to a man. Such it was to live as a hero of myth. What, in a city ruled by a superhuman figure, were mere proprieties? Rome itself was rendered complicit in their repeated and spectacular subversion. In the summer of AD 64, a great street party was thrown to celebrate a new order of things. In the very heart of the city, a lake was filled with sea-monsters. Along its edge, brothels were staffed with whores ranging from the cheapest street-walkers to the most blue-blooded of aristocrats. For a single night, to the delight of the men who wanted them, and knew that the women were forbidden to refuse anyone, there was no slave or free. 'Now a minion would take his mistress in the presence of his master; now a gladiator would take a girl of noble family before the gaze of her father.'"⁴¹⁹

In 63 Nero executed the holy apostles Peter and Paul, and burned hundreds of Christians in punishment for his own crime of burning down much of old Rome. (As the saying went, he fiddled (on his lyre) while Rome burned...) So there would seem to have been good reasons for Christians to refuse to recognize this incarnation of everything that was abominable and anti-Christian. And yet, while refusing to give him divine honours, the Christians, following the instructions of their martyred apostle, both recognized him and prayed for him fervently...

Nero was creating his own new world; for emperor-worship was not part of the original constitution of the Roman Empire; such famous emperors as Tiberius, Trajan and Marcus Aurelius explicitly rejected it. "In fact," as Sordi writes, "the imperial cult had never been imposed formally, or even encouraged, by any of the emperors to

⁴¹⁸ Hill, *Christianity. The First 400 Years*, London: Lion Hudson, 2013, p. 130.

⁴¹⁹ Holland, *Dominion*, London: Abacus, 2019, p. 79-80.

whom the Christian apologists from Aristides to Quadratus, from Melito to Athenagoras, were addressing their works."⁴²⁰ In the cases of those few who tried to enforce it, such as Nero and Domitian, it was in essence an *import* from the eastern pagan theocracies, an heretical *aberration* from the true Roman tradition.

Thus the early Christians could quite clearly and sincerely distinguish the honour in which they held the institution of the empire and the emperor himself from the disgust they felt for the cult of emperor-worship during the few reigns in which it was imposed; which is why they refused to offer incense to the emperor's statue, while continuing to pay taxes and carry out military service.

Emperor-worship, as we have seen, may have been imported from Egypt. Both Caesar and Augustus had been in Egypt; and Augustus was clearly impressed, as had been Caesar and Mark Anthony, by the civilization he found there. And, of course, by its queen, Cleopatra. He brought back an obelisk to Rome and named himself, it is said, after the month in which Cleopatra died, August...

There is even a theory that Plutarch's story of Cleopatra's suicide by snake-bite was a rewriting of history ordered by Augustus, and that Cleopatra was in fact killed on Augustus' orders in order to remove a dangerous contender to the throne of Rome. For Cleopatra had made her son, Caesarion, her co-ruler, and he, being the natural son of Julius Caesar, was a more direct heir to Caesar than Augustus himself. If Caesarion had become the emperor in Rome, then not only would eastern ideas of divine kingship been introduced still more directly into Rome, but Rome itself may have become an oriental despotism...

Dio Cassius writes that Augustus "gave permission for sacred precincts to be set up in both Ephesus and Nicaea, dedicated to Rome and his father [Julius] Caesar, to whom he had given the title, the Divine Julius. These cities at that time held pre-eminent positions in Asia and Bithynia respectively. The Romans who lived there he bade pay honour to these two divinities, but he allowed the provincials, whom he styled Greeks, to consecrate precincts to himself, the Asians in Pergamum, the Bithynians in Nicomedia. From such a beginning this practice has also occurred under other emperors, and not only in the Greek provinces but also in the others that are subject to Rome. In the city of Rome itself and the rest of Italy, however, no emperor, no matter how deserving of praise, has dared to do this (i.e. style himself a god). Yet even there divine honours are accorded and shrines set up to emperors who have ruled well, after their demise."⁴²¹

It is no accident that the only martyr mentioned by name in Revelation is Antipas, Bishop of Pergamum, "where Satan's seat is" (2.13). For Pergamum was where the worship of Augustus was first instituted. The altar at Pergamum later became the model for Lenin's mausoleum in Moscow...

⁴²⁰ Marta Sorti, *The Christians and the Roman Empire*, London: Routledge, 1994, p. 176.

⁴²¹ Dio Cassius, LI, 20, in S. Ireland, *Roman Britain: A Sourcebook*, London: Routledge, 1996, p. 175.

However, the same emperor was compelled to curb excessive emperor-worship by his regard for the traditions of republican Rome, where sovereign power was deemed to belong to the Senate and the People. Julius Caesar had been murdered precisely because he made himself dictator. So Augustus, while wielding all power *de facto*, still maintained the fiction that he was merely *princeps*, “first among equals”. In this context, it is probably significant that Augustus allowed altars to be dedicated to himself only in the provinces, whose inhabitants he called “Greeks”, and not in Rome itself. The strength of this republican tradition, allied to other philosophical elements such as Stoicism, guaranteed that emperor-worship, as opposed to the worship of “ordinary” gods, remained an intermittent phenomenon. It was felt to be an essentially alien, non-Roman tradition throughout the imperial period. Thus if Augustus had a temple erected to his divinity, Tiberius rejected divine honours; if Domitian considered himself a god, Trajan emphatically did not.

“After Augustus,” writes Roberts, “emperors always held the office of chief priest (*pontifex maximus*) and political and religious primacy were thus combined in the same person. This began the increasing importance and definition of the imperial cult itself. It fitted well with the Roman’s innate conservatism, his respect for the ways and customs of his ancestors. The imperial cult linked respect for traditional patrons, the placating or invoking of familiar deities and the commemoration of great men and events, to the ideas of divine kingship that came from the East, from Asia. It was there that altars were first raised to Rome or the Senate, and there that they were soon reattributed to the emperor. The cult spread through the whole empire, though it was not until the third century AD that the practice was wholly respectable at Rome itself, so strong was the republican sentiment. But even there the strains of empire had already favoured a revival of official piety which benefited the imperial cult.”⁴²²

Sometimes the emperors deified their favourites. Thus early in the second century the Emperor Hadrian deified his favourite Antinous, of whom St. Athanasius the Great writes: “Although they knew he was a man, and not an honourable man but one filled with wantonness, yet they worshipped him through fear of the ruler... So do not be surprised or think that what we have said is improbable, for quite recently, and perhaps even up to now, the Roman senate decrees that their emperors who reigned from the beginning – either all of them or whomever they choose and decide upon – are among the gods, and prescribes that they be worshipped as gods.”⁴²³ Similarly, Arnobius wrote: “We worship one born a man. What of that? Do you worship no one born a man? Do you not worship one or another, yes, countless others? Indeed, have you not elevated from the level of mortals all those you now have in your temples and made a gift of them to heaven and the stars?”⁴²⁴

In the 150 years between Domitian and Decius, although Christianity remained technically illegal, the emperors initiated no systematic, empire-wide persecution against the Christians, convinced as they were that they did not constitute a political threat. Thus in 112, Pliny the Younger, governor of Bithynia, “wrote a famous letter to

⁴²² Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

⁴²³ St. Athanasius, *Contra Gentes*, 9.

⁴²⁴ Arnobius, *The Case against the Pagans*, I, 37:

the emperor Trajan asking him for advice about Christianity. Apparently many people had been accused of Christianity, but when Pliny interrogated them, he found that they seemed to be innocent of the crimes of which they were usually accused. He executed them anyway because he thought that their 'obstinacy and unbending perversity' should be punished, but he was unsure whether it was a crime simply to be a Christian, or whether the criminality lay in the things that Christians were said to do. Trajan replied (rather briefly, suggesting that this matter was low on his list of priorities) that Pliny was acting quite correctly. Any Christian that turned up should be executed if they refused to sacrifice to the gods, or freed if they did sacrifice, but it was not worth making a special effort to find and arrest them. In around 125 AD, the emperor Hadrian told the proconsul of Asia that Christians needed to be shown to have done something illegal before being punished, and that people making groundless accusations should themselves be punished severely. Most governors during the second and early third centuries seem to have taken this approach, and many Christian communities seem to have been quite open about their faith."⁴²⁵

The emperors were often more favourably inclined towards the Christians than either the Senate, which remained a powerful bastion of paganism, or the masses, who tended to blame the Christians' "atheism", that is, their refusal to worship the gods, for the disasters that befell the empire. The Roman authorities generally looked for ways to protect the Christians, and were only compelled to adopt stricter measures in order to appease the mob. We see this, for example, in the martyrdom of St. Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna. It was therefore in the Church's long-term interest to support the imperial power, enduring the occasional madmen, such as Nero and Domitian, and waiting for the time when the emperor would not only protect her against her enemies, but take the lead in converting the body of the empire to Christ. For the Church knew, through the Spirit dwelling within her, that God had chosen Rome to be the cradle of the Church. And we know that the countries that trace their descent from Rome have ever since taken the lead, for better or worse, in the religio-political development of mankind.

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A landmark in the history of Christianity in the Roman Empire was reached when the Emperor Philip the Arab (244-249) and his son and heir Philip were baptized by St. Fabian, Pope of Rome.⁴²⁶ Immediately the evil empire struck back: the new emperor, Decius (249-51) initiated the first systematic, empire-wide persecution of the faith. St. Fabian was among the holy martyrs...

"The rise of Christianity," writes Paul Stephenson, "coincided with a period of crisis for the empire. It was held by many to be the cause of the crisis, and for that reason one finds, for the first time in the mid-third century, a systematic persecution of Christians throughout the empire. At the same time, in response to the crisis but in fact contributing far more effectively to its perpetuation, one witnesses a dramatic rise

⁴²⁵ Hill, *op. cit.*, pp. 137-138.

⁴²⁶ Velimirović, *Prologue from Ochrid*, Birmingham: Lazarica Press, 1986, vol. 3, July 1, p. 5, August 5, pp. 157-158.

in the political power of the army. Through the third century, the army was the only instrument of state that could rise up and strike down emperors. To retain power, therefore, third-century emperors struggled with only limited success to maintain control over their errant soldiers. In the half-century between the end of the Severan dynasty (193-235) and the foundation of the Tetrarchy (in 284),... more than fifty men claimed the title emperor. Twenty-two of these were universally recognized, of which the vast majority were both acclaimed and later murdered by troops under their command. All but two of the recognized emperors who reigned from AD 251 until 284 died in this manner, the exception being Valerian (253-60), who was captured in battle with the Persians, and Claudius II Gothicus (268-70), who died of 'a most grievous pestilence', probably measles or smallpox."⁴²⁷

In 259, when he was co-emperor with his father Valerian, the Emperor Gallienus (260-68) issued the first official declaration of tolerance in relation to the Christians, restoring their places of worship and cemeteries; which was *de facto* recognition of the property of the Church. "It is not, perhaps, a coincidence," writes Sordi, "that Gallienus' change of policy towards the senate went hand in hand with the official recognition of the Christian religion which the senate had forbidden for the previous two centuries. Gallienus broke completely with the pro-senate policy of the preceding emperors, he forbade the senators military command and he cut them off from all the sources of real power. It was this break with the senate, this decision on the part of Gallienus to do without its consent, that made it possible for the Emperor to grant to the Christians the recognition which was so necessary for the well-being of the empire, but which the traditionalist thinking of the senate had always feared so much."⁴²⁸

An important change in the relationship between the Church and the Empire was signaled when, in 270, a Council of the Church of Antioch appealed to the Emperor Aurelian to remove the heretical bishop Paul of Samosata, who considered the Trinity as three *aspects* of God rather than persons.⁴²⁹ They thereby created a precedent for the intervention of emperors into Church matters.⁴³⁰ But Paul, relying on the patronage of Queen Zenobia of Palmyra, rejected this judgement. Then, in 272, Aurelian, having defeated Zenobia in battle and taken her captive to Rome, referred the case to the bishop of Rome, whose verdict he undertook to uphold.

Meanwhile, the Lord Himself had revealed the truth about Paul's heretical teaching directly, without the mediation of emperors or popes, to St. Gregory the Wonderworker, Bishop of Neocaesarea (+275). At first, "since Gregory was uncertain how regard it, he began to pray fervently to God and the Mother of God to reveal to him the truth concerning the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. One night, while he was praying ardently, the most pure Virgin Mary appeared to him, radiant as the sun, in the company of Saint John the Theologian, who was clothed in a bishop's garments. Pointing to Gregory with her hand, the most pure Virgin commanded Saint John to instruct him in the correct teaching concerning the mystery of the Holy Trinity. By the

⁴²⁷ Stephenson, *Constantine. Unconquered Emperor, Christian Victor*, London: Quercus, 2009, p. 62.

⁴²⁸ Sordi, *op. cit.*, p. 117. And yet he caused the martyrdom of the Holy Martyr Eugenia and her family, who are commemorated on December 24.

⁴²⁹ Aurelian, too, was a persecutor of Christians. See the life of St. Chariton (September 28).

⁴³⁰ Stephenson, *op. cit.*, p. 260.

command of the Mother of God, saint Gregory drew from the inexhaustible depth of wisdom, quickly learning the great mysteries of God from Saint John the Theologian. The words of revelation spoken by John were these: 'There is one God, the Father of the living Word, the hypostatic Wisdom, Power, and the Father's eternal Image: the perfect begetter of Him Who is perfect, Father of the only-begotten Son. There is one Lord, one God of one God, the Imprint and Image of the Divinity, creative Word, Wisdom which sustains everything that exists, the Power which has made all creation, true Son of the true Father, unseen God of the invisible Father, incorruptible Offspring of the incorruptible One, immortal and eternal Child of the everlasting One. There is one Holy Spirit, Who has His being from the Father and is revealed unto men through the Son. He is the perfect Image of the perfect Son, the Source of life for all things, the sacred Fountain in Whom God the Father and God the Son are revealed. He is at once above all and in all, and fills all things. This is the perfect Trinity, Which knows no division nor estrangement in respect to Its shared glory, immortality and sovereignty. There is nothing created in the Trinity or subject to another or brought from without, as though once non-existent and later introduced, for at no time did the Father exist without the Son or the Son without the Spirit; because the Trinity abides forever unchanged, without variation or mutation.'

"After seeing this vision, Saint Gregory wrote out with his own hand the words Saint John the Theologian had spoken to him. This record was preserved for many years in the Church of Neo-Caesarea."⁴³¹

It was the Emperor Aurelian who introduced the cult of the Unconquered Sun, the original faith of St. Constantine. And it would be Constantine who would make the crucial epoch-making change from this monotheistic but pagan cult to that of the Unconquerable Sun of Righteousness, Jesus Christ...

⁴³¹ St. Demetrius of Rostov, *The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints*, House Springs, Missouri: Chrysostom Press, 2001, vol. III: November 17, pp. 372-372.

30. THE DIOCLETIAN PERSECUTION

In 284 the Emperor Diocletian came to the throne. He promptly decided to divide his power into four, into a “tetrarchy” of emperors consisting of two Augusti, one for the East and the other for the West, together with their deputies, the Caesars. The four emperors were bound together through intermarriage and through the supposed descent of the Augusti from Jupiter and of the Caesars from Hercules, “gods by birth and creators of gods”. At first the reorganization worked well; peace and prosperity was restored to the empire. Moreover, Diocletian was at first tolerant towards Christianity. Thus, as Arthur Mason writes, “his own wife and daughter were reckoned Christians by a writer who lived in the imperial city and must have known. His most trusted chamberlains and court officials were all avowedly Christians. Christians were entrusted with the government of provinces and high offices of state, and were expressly dispensed, it is said, from attending religious ceremonies which were not agreeable to their consciences...”⁴³²

However, in spite of an increase in its numbers, within the Church there was a low level of morality, according to Eusebius. “He speaks of pride, sloth and hypocrisy, of factions and envy which gave rise to fierce disputes and violent abuse. The bishops themselves only added to the furious contentions. Jealousy and ambition inflamed their enmity and mutual hatred until they forgot their religious duties and, as if they had been mere atheists, ‘took not the least care to secure the good will and propitious favour of the Deity’. The persecutions that broke out at the beginning of the fourth century appear to Eusebius the just punishment of such wickedness.”⁴³³

In 299, an ominous event took place in Antioch. The priests repeatedly failed to get any responses to their questions through the entrails of their sacrificial victims. This seemed to indicate that the gods were displeased, and Diocletian was worried...

“Living in the east and moving constantly through the provinces,” writes Stephenson, “Diocletian became increasingly intolerant of religious differences. He was no longer willing to countenance claims by Christians, like Origen, that they prayed in their own way for his well-being. Their forms of worship, their ways of being Roman, clashed with his own limited conception of *romanitas*. Riding beside Diocletian on a protracted trip through Egypt and Syria in 301-2 was the military tribune Constantine, who observed the aging emperor’s consternation at the antics of adherents of various religious sects. In March, 302, a letter was despatched from Alexandria, where Diocletian had recently arrived, to Julianus, the proconsul of Africa, instructing him that: ‘Excessive leisure sometimes provokes ill-suited people to cross natural limits and encourages them to introduce false and outrageous forms of superstitious doctrine... No new belief should criticize the religion of old.’”⁴³⁴

⁴³² Mason, *The Historic Martyrs of the Primitive Church*, London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1905, p. 205. Nevertheless, there were still Christian martyrdoms in this period. See the life of St. Sebastian and his companions in Rome in the year 287.

⁴³³ Marjorie Strachey, *Saints and Sinners in the Fourth Century*, London: William Kimber, 1958, p. 14.

⁴³⁴ Diocletian, in Stephenson, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

In 302 the same disturbing silence of the pagan gods to the inquiries of their worshippers took place at Antioch. And in the autumn, in the same place, Diocletian felt compelled to order the execution of Deacon Romanus of Caesarea in Palestine... He summoned the Caesar of the East, Galerius, to his capital at Nicomedia... Galerius advised him to persecute the Christians.

Diocletian still hesitated; he hated any novelty in religion, any departure from the ancient religion of Rome, but at the same time he feared that persecution would be unpopular... As Sordi writes, "During the first two centuries it had been public opinion itself which had called for persecution and the state which had hesitate or even refused to go along with the demands of the populace. Now, the two great state persecutions – that of Valerian and that, far more serious, of Diocletian, Galerius and Maximinus – saw the progressive and increasingly determined dissociation of the pagan masses from the persecutions organised by their leaders..."⁴³⁵

Seeking guidance, Diocletian consulted the oracle of Apollo at Didyma. The oracle replied that "the just ones" had silenced the prophecy.

"The just ones" were interpreted to mean the Christians, and on February 23, 303 the feast of the *Terminalia*, the persecution designed to terminate Christianity began with the destruction of the Christian basilica in Nicomedia. Later, the tetrarchy assembled in Rome to celebrate their joint rule and to establish the old religions and their morals and "exterminate completely" the new ones.⁴³⁶ Churches were destroyed, the Holy Scriptures burned, and Christians who refused to sacrifice were tortured and killed.

"Then, then it was," writes Eusebius, "that many rulers of the churches bore up heroically under horrible torments, an object lesson in the endurance of fearful ordeals; while countless others, their souls already numbed with cowardice, promptly succumbed to the first onslaught. Of the rest, each was subjected to a series of different tortures, one flogged unmercifully with the whip, another racked and scraped beyond endurance, so that the lives of some came to a most miserble end. But different people came through the ordeal very differently: one man would be forcibly propelled by others and brought to the disgusting, unholy sacrifices, and dismissed as if he had sacrificed, even if he had done no such thing; another, who had not even approached any abomination, much less touched it, but was said by others to have sacrificed, would go away without attempting to repudiate the baseless charge. Another would be picked up half dead, and thrown away as if already a corpse; and again a man lying on the ground might be dragged a long way by his feet, though included among the willing sacrificers. One man would announce at the top of his voice his determination not to sacrifice, another would shout that he was a Christian, exulting in the confession of the Saviour's Name, while yet another insisted that he had never sacrificed and never would..."

⁴³⁵ Sordi, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

⁴³⁶ Jean-Louis Voisin, "Le Songe de l'Empereur" (The Dream of the Emperor), *Histoire* (Le Figaro), 8, June-July, 2013, p.46.

“But words cannot describe the outrageous agonies endured by the martyrs in the Thebais [Egypt]. They were torn to bits from head to foot with potsherds like claws till death released them. Women were tied by one foot and hoisted high in the air, head downwards, their bodies completely naked without a morsel of clothing, presenting the most shameful, brutal, and inhuman of all spectacles to everyone watching. Others again were tied to trees and stumps and died horribly; for with the aid of machinery they drew together the very stoutest boughs, fastened one of the martyr’s legs to each, and then let the boughs fly back to their normal position; thus they managed to tear apart the limbs of their victims in a moment. In this way they carried on, not for a few days or weeks, but year after year. Sometimes ten or more, sometimes over twenty were put to death, at other times at least thirty, and at yet others not far short of sixty; and there were occasions when on a single day a hundred men as well as women and little children were killed, condemned to a succession of every-changing punishment.

“I was in these places, and saw many of the executions for myself. Some of the victims suffered death by beheading, others punishment by fire. So many were killed on a single day that the axe, blunted and worn out by the slaughter, was broken to pieces, while the exhausted examiners had to be periodically relieved. All the time I observed a most wonderful eagerness and a truly divine power and enthusiasm in those who had put their trust in the Christ of God. No sooner had the first batch been sentenced, than others from every side would jump on to the platform in front of the judge and proclaim themselves Christians. They paid no heed to torture in all its terrifying forms, but undaunted spoke boldly of their devotion to the God of the universe and with joy, laughter, and gaiety received the final sentence of death: they sang and sent up hymns of thanksgiving to the God of the universe till their very last breath...”⁴³⁷

Several of the martyrs were high-ranking officials in the Roman hierarchy. One famous example is the holy, glorious great martyr Demetrius of Thessalonica. As Bishop Maximus (Marretta) writes: “Saint Demetrius was governor-general of Thessalonica, a position that gave him authority not only over the city, but over all of Macedonia, as well as other parts of Greece and some areas of modern Bulgaria. The emperors at that time were the brutal Diocletian and Maximian, who presided over the most ferocious persecution of the Church in history, except for the one perpetuated by the Bolsheviks in Russia during the twentieth century.

“As military governor, Demetrius was responsible for apprehending and executing the Christians of the region, but the young general was himself a secret Christian and instead used his lofty position to further the faith of Christ, becoming a new Saint Paul to the Thessalonians. Word of this of course reached Emperor Maximian, who at that time had just concluded a campaign in the northern Balkans. Learning that Maximian was on his way to deal with him, Demetrius freed all his slaves and gave his possessions to the poor. Then he prepared himself with intense prayer and fasting for the coming ordeal.

⁴³⁷ Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, VIII, 3, 9.

“Maximian imprisoned Demetrius in the lower rooms of a public bath, which have survived to this day as the crypt of the great church of the saint in Thessalonica. Meanwhile, the Emperor sought to win the people’s favour by holding violent games of the sort to which the Romans were so addicted. Among these were wrestling matches featuring Maximian’s Vandal lover Lyaeus, a huge German. A platform was set up, surrounded by spears pointing upwards, and the barbarian would hurl his opponents onto the spears. Many Christians were among the unfortunates forced to wrestle with Lyaeus. The tyrant and most of the soldiers were delighted when the brute skewered his victims, but the Thessalonians were horrified, for the better part of them had been converted to Christ by Saint Demetrius.

“One of the soldiers who had been under Demetrius’ command, a teenager called Nestor, visited the saint and asked his permission to take on Lyaeus. Although it seemed a hopeless mismatch, Demetrius blessed him to do this. Nestor miraculously prevailed over the barbarian and threw him to his death on the spears, for which Maximian had the youth beheaded. Then, having learned that Demetrius had blessed Nestor to contend with his favourite, the Emperor sent soldiers to the bath, and they ran through Saint Demetrius with their spears.”⁴³⁸

To many Christians it seemed that the world was about to end insofar as Diocletian’s persecution of the Christians, the greatest in Roman history, threatened to destroy the Roman empire in its role as “that which restraineth” the advent of the Antichrist and thereby usher in the end of the world. As St. Constantine’s tutor, Lactantius, wrote: “It is apparent that the world is destined to end immediately. The only evidence to diminish our fear is the fact that the city of Rome continues to flourish. But once this city, which is the veritable capital of the world, falls and there is nothing in its place but ruins, as the sibyls predict, who can doubt that the end will have arrived both for humanity and for the entire world?”⁴³⁹

However, at the height of the persecution, on May 1, 305, the Augusti Diocletian and Maximian abdicated and the persecution ceased – immediately in the West, but only gradually in the East (where it continued until 313). For in the East, as St. Demetrius of Rostov writes, “it seemed that even earth and sea were shaken and troubled, rising up against the Church of Christ. Yet despite every affliction, the Church grew and its strength increased: it was watered by the blood of the martyrs, which enabled it to blossom like a lily among thorns.”⁴⁴⁰

But the Old Rome was indeed passing away. For, as we read in the *Life* of Saints Cyril and Methodius that once the Jewish teachers of the Khazars asked “the Philosopher” (St. Cyril): “If we accept that He [Christ] has already come, as you claim on the basis of the Prophets and other arguments, then how is it that the Roman Empire is still in power?” The Philosopher replied: “It is no longer in power, for it has

⁴³⁸ Bishop Maximus, “An Account of the Passion of the Holy Great Martyr, and About Our Sacred Duty of Obeying the Civil Authorities”, October 26 / November 8, 2020.

⁴³⁹ Lactantius, *Divine Institutions*; quoted in Robert Garland, “Countdown to the Beginning of Time-Keeping”, *History Today*, vol. 49 (4), April, 1999, p. 42.

⁴⁴⁰ St. Demetrius, *The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints*, House Springs, Mo.: Chrysostom Press, 2000, vol. IV: December 10, p. 173.

passed away, like all empires in its likeness, for our Empire is not of Rome, but of Christ..."⁴⁴¹

For the Old, pagan Rome of Diocletian, Maximian and Galerius indeed passed away, to be succeeded by the New, Christian Rome of St. Constantine the Great...

⁴⁴¹ *Life* of SS. Cyril and Methodius, chapter 10.

III. NEW ROME

31. ST. CONSTANTINE AND THE TRIUMPH OF THE CROSS

In the past the Romans had not been too proud to learn from the Greeks whom they had conquered. In fact, it was the Greeks who conquered Rome culturally while being in subjection to her politically. Nor, centuries later, did the best of them despise the humble fishermen who preached a Jewish God Whom they themselves had crucified. The penetration of the apostles' preaching even into the emperor's own family was witnessed by St. Paul, who declared: "My bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace [of the emperor]" (Philippians 1.13), and he spoke of "the saints who are of Caesar's household" (Philippians 4.22). In fact, Nero's daughter Domnina came into contact with Photine, the Samaritan woman of John 4 in prison, and was brought by her to the Christian faith.⁴⁴² Emperor Philip the Arab was a Christian, as were the wife and daughter of the persecutor Diocletian...

This process came to fruition with the conversion of St. Constantine. "It has been estimated," writes Paul Stephenson, "that the number of Christians grew at a rate of forty percent per decade, through reproduction and conversion. From a tiny pool of believers, the number of Christians grew slowly at first, but eventually exponentially. The period of exponential growth began in the later third century, when from around one million in AD 250, there were almost six million Christians in AD 300, and almost thirty-four million in AD 350."⁴⁴³

The Protestants have often reviled St. Constantine, belittling his achievement and even hinting that his conversion was detrimental to the faith in that it made the Church subservient to the State. The opposite is the truth: it was the state that succumbed to the Church... Even when the last pagan Roman emperor, Julian the apostate, tried to reverse the Constantinian revolution, the momentum of Christianization proved unstoppable. Like all the previous persecutors of the Christians, he perished in agony, crying, "You have triumphed, Galilean!" And when the last Emperor to unite East and West, Theodosius the Great, bowed in penitence before a Christian bishop, Ambrose of Milan, it seemed as if Ambrose's dream of a Rome purged of its pagan vices and uniting its traditional virtues to the Cross of Christ - a Rome truly *invicta* and *aeterna* because united to the invincible and eternal God - had been realized. For, as St. Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, said, addressing Rome: "[The Apostles] promoted thee to such glory, that being made a holy nation, a chosen people, a priestly and royal state, and the head of the world through the blessed Peter's holy See thou didst attain a wider sway by the worship of God than by earthly government. For although thou wast increased by many victories, and didst extend thy rule on land and sea, yet what thy toils in war subdued is less than what the peace of Christ has conquered... That state, in ignorance of the Author of its aggrandizement, though it ruled almost all nations, was enthralled by the errors of them all, and seemed to itself to have fostered religion greatly, because it rejected no falsehood [an excellent definition of ecumenism]. And hence its emancipation through Christ was the more wondrous in that it had been so fast bound by Satan."⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴² St. Nikolai Velimirovič, *The Prologue from Ochrid*, Birmingham: Lazarica Press, 1986, part 1, p. 307.

⁴⁴³ Stephenson, *Constantine. Unconquered Emperor, Christian Victor*, London: Quercus, 2009, p. 38.

⁴⁴⁴ St. Leo, *Sermon LXXXII*, on the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul.

In spite of its paganism, Christ had recognized Roman power as legitimate, as established by God. However, when He brought Constantine the Great to the throne, He gave it rebirth, raised it to a new and much higher spiritual level, and enabled it to become an instrument of His will in a much broader and more direct way. Just as He renewed the Old Zion in the New Zion of the Church, so He renewed the Old Rome in the New Rome of Constantinople...

After the abdication of Diocletian and Maximian, the empire was ruled by the former Caesars, now Augusti, Galerius in the East and Constantius Chlorus in the West with Maximinus Daia and Severus as their Caesars.

The first task of Constantius, the father of Constantine, as Caesar had been "to remove the separatist Carausius from Boulogne in AD 293 and then invaded Britain in AD 296. His troops reached London in time to stop Frankish mercenaries sacking it, which so pleased Londoners that they struck a medal hailing Constantius as the 'restorer of light'. A restoration of the whole province followed, ushering in a prosperous half century. Nine years later, Constantius, now a full Augustus, returned to Britain and led a campaign to crush the Picts, before returning to York to die of illness in July AD 306. Constantius was notably tolerant in religious matters, just closing down one or two churches. He was a worshipper of the *Sol Invictus* (the Unconquered Sun), a form of solar motheism popular in the army of the time."⁴⁴⁵

After Constantius' death, on July 25, the Roman troops in York proclaimed his son Constantine emperor.⁴⁴⁶ Yet another rebellion from the empire by the Roman army in Britain? Not this time: Constantine was a legal emperor, or at any rate, Caesar. He now made his capital Trier in Gaul.

Meanwhile, in the East, "orders were given," writes Arthur Mason, "to inflict the sentence of death more sparingly; but the humanity which dictated this decree betrayed itself by prescribing that dreadful mutilations should take the place of death, and hundreds of unfortunate Christians were condemned to lose an eye or a foot, and in this miserable condition were set to work in the mines and quarries, as slaves of the imperial treasury. At last, in 311, when Galerius lay dying of a terrible disease, he published a strange edict of toleration, in which he began by explaining why the persecution had been undertaken, then confessed that it had completely failed of its object, and ended by requesting the Christians to pray for him."⁴⁴⁷

In 312, after consolidating his power in Western Europe outside Italy, Constantine defeated Maxentius' forces in northern Italy and then marched on Rome to fight Maxentius himself. Just before the fateful battle of the Milvian Bridge, outside Rome, he had a vision, which was described slightly differently by Eusebius, his religious

⁴⁴⁵ Nigel Rodgers, *The Rise and Fall of Ancient Rome*, London: Lorenz Books, 2004, p. 74.

⁴⁴⁶ The place, under York Minster, where Constantine was proclaimed emperor, and the Christian Roman Empire began, has now been excavated by archaeologists.

⁴⁴⁷ Mason, *The Historic Martyrs of the Primitive Church*, London: Longmans, Green & Co., 190. p. 323. Galerius declared his faith in Christ after witnessing a miracle of the Martyrs Cosmas and Damian (Gilbert Dagron, *Empereur et Prêtre* (Emperor and Priest), Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1996, pp. 142-143)

advisor, and Lactantius, the tutor of his sons. Although the two accounts differ, Peter Leithart has convincingly shown that they can both be accepted as true, referring as they probably did to two different events following one after the other...⁴⁴⁸

As Marta Sordi writes, while Constantine is praying, “he calls on his father’s god, begging him to reveal himself and to stretch out his right hand to help him. While he is praying, an extraordinary vision appears to him, a vision – says Eusebius – that ‘had it been told me by anyone else than Constantine himself, I would not have believed’. As the day was on the wane, he saw above the sun a trophy in the form of a cross made of light, and writing which said ‘With this, conquer’. He was utterly amazed, as was the whole army which was marching with him and which – it is still Constantine speaking – had also seen the vision. Full of doubts, he asked himself what this vision could possibly mean. Night came, and God’s Christ appeared to him in a dream with the same sign as had appeared in the sky, exhorting him to make a similar one and to use it as defence against his enemies. The next day, Constantine discussed the affair with all his friends, had the sign constructed (Chapter 31 gives a description of the famous *labarum*) and took the decision to ‘honour no other god than the One he had seen’... He then called for the ‘initiates of that doctrine’ – the Greek word here is *mystai*, and the allusion may be to Ossius of Cordoba – and asked them who this God was and what was the meaning of the words of the vision. They answered that he had seen the only begotten Son of the one and only God and that the sign was a sign of immortality and a trophy of victory over death...”⁴⁴⁹

Constantine had the pagan standards removed and the Christian one with the *chi-rho*, the so-called *Labarum*, put in their place. The result was an easy victory over the much larger army of Maxentius.

The next day, October 29, Constantine entered Rome and was hailed as Emperor of the West.⁴⁵⁰ Breaking with tradition, on entering Rome Constantine refused to offer sacrifice to the pagan gods, and in particular to Jupiter in the Capitol. By this controversial and courageous act, he demonstrated for all those with eyes of see that his conversion to Christianity was completely sincere.

“And because Constantine made no supplication to evil spirits,” wrote St. Augustine, “but worshipped only the true God, he enjoyed a life more favoured by marks of worldly prosperity than anyone would have dared imagine was possible.”⁴⁵¹

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⁴⁴⁸ Leithart, *Defending Constantine*, Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2010, chapter 4; Eusebius, *On the Life of Constantine*, I, 28; quoted in John Julius Norwich, *Byzantium: The Early Centuries*, London: Penguin, 1990, p. 39. See Jan Bremmer, “The Vision of Constantine”, <http://www.rug.nl/research/portal/files/9899550/Bremmer-CONSTANTINE.pdf>. Much later, in the reign of Julian the Apostate, the Martyrs Eusignius and Artemius confirmed the truth of this vision, having been witnesses of it themselves.

⁴⁴⁹ Sordi, *The Christians and the Roman Empire*, London: Routledge, 1994, p. 140.

⁴⁵⁰ Timothy D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, London & Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981, p. 43.

⁴⁵¹ St. Augustine, *The City of God*, 5.25.

Moreover, he was not slow to ascribe his victory to Christ and the Cross: "In the royal city he raised this sacred standard and inscribed definitely and indelibly that this saving sign is the preserver of the Roman Empire and the whole kingdom. But when in the most crowded place of Rome they raised a statue to him, he immediately ordered that a long spear in the shape of a cross be put in the hand of his representation and that the following inscription be written word for word in Latin: 'By this saving and famous sign, the true witness of courage, I saved and liberated your city from the yoke of tyranny, and on liberating it, returned to the Roman senate and people its freedom, its former glory and its celebrity.'"⁴⁵²

He continued to experience the power of the Cross. Thus "wherever the sign of the cross was shown, enemies were turned to flight, while the victors pursued them. When the Emperor heard about this, he ordered the saving sign, as being the most genuine means of victory, to be transferred to the place where he saw one of his regiments weakening. Immediately victory was restored to it, because the warriors at the sight of it were strengthened by a vigour and a power sent from on high."⁴⁵³

In 313 St. Constantine met the new emperor of the East, Licinius, at Milan, and with him proclaimed an Edict of religious toleration: "Our purpose is to grant both to the Christians and to all others full authority to follow whatever worship each man has desired; whereby whatsoever divinity dwells in heaven may be benevolent and propitious to us, and to all who are placed under our authority".⁴⁵⁴

As Fr. Alexis Nikolin writes: "The Edict of Milan decisively rejected many traditions of antiquity. St. Constantine clearly proclaimed that Christianity is not the property of any particular people, but is a universal religion, the religion of the whole of humanity. If formerly it was thought that a given religion belongs to a given people and for that reason it is sacred and untouchable, now the lawgiver affirmed a new principle: that the sacred and untouchable religion was that religion which belonged to all peoples - Christianity. It was obviously not an attempt to bring Christianity under the usual (pagan) juridical forms, but a principled change in those forms."⁴⁵⁵

As a result, as Eusebius of Caesarea wrote: "Divine joy blossomed in all hearts as we saw that every place which a little while before had been reduced to dust by the tyrants' wickedness was now, as if from a prolonged and deadly stranglehold, coming back to life; and that cathedrals were again rising from their foundations high into the air, and far surpassing in magnitude those previously destroyed by the enemy. Emperors, too, the most exalted (Constantine and Licinius) by a succession of ordinances in favour of the Christians, confirmed still further and more surely the blessings God showered upon us; and a stream of personal letters from the emperor reached the bishops, accompanied by honours and gifts of money. Old troubles were forgotten, and all irreligion passed into oblivion; good things present were enjoyed,

⁴⁵² Eusebius, *On the Life of Constantine*, I, 40.

⁴⁵³ Eusebius, *On the Life of Constantine*, II, 7.

⁴⁵⁴ Lactantius, *On the Deaths of the Persecutors*, 48. 2-12.

⁴⁵⁵ Nikolin, *Tserkov' i Gosudarstvo* (Church and State), Moscow, 1997, p. 27.

those yet to come eagerly awaited. In every city the victorious emperor published decrees full of humanity and laws that gave proof of munificence and true piety. Thus all tyranny had been purged away, and the kingdom that was theirs was preserved securely and without question for Constantine and his sons alone."⁴⁵⁶

However, persecution of Christians did not immediately cease in the East. After Galerius' death in 311, persecution continued under Maximinus Daia; and Licinius, in spite of signing the Edict of Milan, was still a pagan devoted to Jupiter. So when Licinius turned from toleration to persecution of Christians, beheading St. Basil, Bishop of Amasea, in 322, Constantine declared war and defeated him at Chrysopolis, opposite Byzantium, in 324. Now the whole of the East as far as the borders of Persia came within Constantine's dominion, and all persecution of the faith came to an end...

And yet the Triumph of the Cross under St. Constantine proved, paradoxically, that God does not need Christian kings in order to save the world. They help - they help greatly. But for almost three centuries from the Resurrection of Christ the Church had survived and grown in the teeth of everything that Jewish and pagan fury could hurl against her, and without the help of any earthly forces.

For, as Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow wrote: "there is benefit in the union of the altar and the throne, but it is not mutual benefit that is the first foundation of their union, but independent truth, which supports both the one and the other. May the king, the protector of the altar, be blessed; but the altar does not fear the fall of this protection. The priest is right who preaches that the king should be honoured, but not by right of mutuality, but by pure obligation, even if this took place without the hope of mutuality... Constantine the Great came to the altar of Christ when it already stood on the expanses of Asia, Europe and Africa: he came, not in order to support it with his strength, but in order to submit himself with his majesty before its Holiness. He Who dwells in the heavens laughed at those who later thought of lowering His Divine religion to dependence on human assistance. In order to make their sophistry laughable, He waited for three centuries before calling the wise king to the altar of Christ. Meanwhile, from day to day king, peoples, wise men, power, art, cupidity, cunning and rage rose up to destroy this altar. And what happened in the end? All this has disappeared, while the Church of Christ stands - but not because it is supported by human power..."⁴⁵⁷

Tertullian had said in the third century, "The world may need its Caesars. But the Emperor can never be a Christian, nor a Christian ever be an Emperor."⁴⁵⁸ How wrong he was! In response to the patience and prayer and martyric sacrifices of the Christians, the most powerful, secular and pagan element in Old Roman society, the very apex of its antichristian system, was transfigured into an instrument of the Grace of God. "The kingdom of this world", it seemed, had become "the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ" (Revelation 11.15).

⁴⁵⁶ Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, X, 2, 10.

⁴⁵⁷ Metropolitan Philaret, in Lev Regelson, *Tragedia Russkoj Tserkvi, 1917-1945* (The Tragedy of the Russian Church, 1917-1945), Paris: YMCA Press, 1977, p. 23.

⁴⁵⁸ Tertullian, in Peter de Rosa, *Vicars of Christ*, London: Bantam Press, 1988, p. 155.

“It would be no exaggeration,” writes Protopresbyter James Thornton, “to call the reign of Saint Constantine a genuine revolution, particularly from the standpoint of religion. The *Synaxarion* for May 21, the day of his commemoration, states that the Church was ‘able to inspire governors and profoundly transform the lives of men and states with the inbreathing of evangelical principles’. However, the Christian revolution was a peaceful revolution, a revolution from above, one that retained all that was wholesome from pagan antiquity – for example art, architecture, literature, and law –, while slowly extinguishing that which was spiritually noxious, unworthy, or morally debilitating. It wisely left essentially untouched the Roman societal structure and the economic system, anticipating their gradual evolution towards the good, under the influence of Christian teaching. Yet, it was a revolution that imbued the Empire with renewed life...”⁴⁵⁹

It was indeed a renewal, a *Renovatio Imperii*. In this respect, it can be compared with the reign of the first Roman emperor, Augustus. Both Augustus and Constantine aimed at a renewal of the empire through *a reformation of faith, morals and politics*. However, Constantine’s renewal was more radical, more long-lasting and less hypocritical. From a purely political and administrative point of view, their aims were very similar: both wanted to restore *one-man rule* and consolidate the boundaries of the empire rather than expand them; but Constantine was much more open about the nature of his autocracy, with less reverence for the senate and the established elites, and without any of the pretence of democracy that Augustus employed. In morals, both emperors came down hard on family members who violated their strict rules of sexual morality. Both emphasized that they were peace-makers, but Constantine, after destroying the enemies of peace within the empire, brought not only peace on earth, but peace (for Christians) with heaven. Augustus boasted that he had found Rome a city built of brick, and left it built of marble, but Constantine built a completely new capital while adorning Old Rome with beautiful churches instead of pagan temples. Augustus revived paganism, being ignorant of the True God Who was born in his realm in his time, while Constantine, condemned pagan sacrifices to the demons, protected Christianity through many laws and the convening of church councils, and placed the True God at the head of the corner of the whole of political life.

Fr. George Florovsky writes: “The Age of Constantine is commonly regarded as a turning point of Christian history. After a protracted struggle with the Church, the Roman Empire at last capitulated. The Caesar himself was converted, and humbly applied for admission into the Church. Religious freedom was formally promulgated, and was emphatically extended to Christians. The confiscated property was returned to Christian communities. Those Christians who suffered disability and deportation in the years of persecution were now ordered back, and were received with honors. In fact, Constantine was offering to the Church not only peace and freedom, but also protection and close cooperation. Indeed, he was urging the Church and her leaders

⁴⁵⁹ Thornton, *Pious Kings and Right-Believing Queens*, Belmont, Mass.: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 2013, p. 97.

to join with him in the 'Renovation' of the Empire... Constantine was firmly convinced that, by Divine Providence, he was entrusted with a high and holy mission, that he was chosen to re-establish the Empire, and to re-establish it on a Christian foundation. This conviction, more than any particular theory, was the decisive factor in his policy, and in his actual mode of ruling."⁴⁶⁰

Justly, then, did Fr. John Meyendorff say of St. Constantine that "no single human being in history has contributed, directly or indirectly, to the conversion of so many to the Christian faith..."⁴⁶¹ It is paradoxical, therefore, that in spite of his vast - indeed, unprecedented - achievements, St. Constantine has received a remarkably bad press. He has been accused of being the originator of "Caesaropapism", of causing the fall of the very Church that he saved from destruction, even of a supposed "heresy of Constantinianism" ...⁴⁶²

Constantine not only renewed the empire from within through the power of the Cross: he transformed the very ideology of empire, and the relationship of Rome to other kingdoms and empires. He presented a new ideal of kingship which, even if rarely realized in later centuries, nevertheless changed the nature and language of politics forever. Some Christian kings would still act like pagans, but they could no longer appeal to pagan ideals.

The pagan Roman empire was founded on the familiar fallen passions of love of glory and love of power. Excuses were neither given nor sought for invading neighbouring territories, killing thousands of innocent "barbarians", and seizing their lands and property. Nations that resisted Roman power, such as the Carthaginians and the Jews and the Britons, were treated with vengeful cruelty. Julius Caesar's extraordinarily bloody conquest of Gaul is a typical example of how the Roman empire was enlarged. Glory was the aim; that needed no justification. A British chieftain had summed up the Romans' "achievement" at least until Augustus tried to civilize them: "They are the robbers of the world... If their enemy is opulent, they are greedy for wealth; if he is poverty-stricken, they are eager for glory... They alone out of everyone lust for wealth and war with equal passion. They call plunder, murder and rape by the spurious names of 'empire', and where they make a desert they call it 'peace'."⁴⁶³

Constantine tried to change this bloody tradition, which was, of course, dominant throughout the pagan world. Although an experienced and highly successful soldier himself, who did not flinch from extreme measures when he considered them necessary, he glorified true peace rather than war, the glory of Christ rather than his own or Rome's, and while defending the boundaries of the empire, undertook no offensive campaigns beyond them. The one apparent exception to this rule proved it; it only went to prove that the imperial ideology really had changed.

⁴⁶⁰ Florovsky, "Antinomies of Christian History: Empire and Desert", *Christianity and Culture*, Belmont, Mass.: Nordland, 1974, pp. 72, 74.

⁴⁶¹ Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions*, Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1989, p. 7.

⁴⁶² Peter Leithart, *op. cit.* p. 250, note 61.

⁴⁶³ Tacitus, *Agricola*, 30.4, in Kershaw, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

The one apparent exception was *Persia*, the age-old rival of Rome in the East, which had deeply humiliated Rome by defeating, capturing and humiliating the Emperor Valerian before killing him in 260. Constantine had been preparing an expedition against Persia just before he died in 337. At first sight, writes Leithart, "Constantine's abortive Persian conquest looks like another Roman adventure driven by sacrificial frenzy, vengeance and a desire to keep enemies in their subordinate place. Yet there are hints that between 306 and the 330s something had changed. Sometime before, Constantine had written a 'tactful, allusive, and indirect' letter in his own hand to Shapur. Addressing the Persian king as a 'brother', he summarized the 'most holy religion' that had given him 'deeper acquaintance with the most holy God'. Finding common ground with nonsacrificial Persian Zoroastrian practice, Constantine emphasized that the 'God I invoke with bended knees' is horrified by 'the blood of sacrifices' and recoils from 'their foul and detestable odors.' The sacrifice he craves is 'purity of mind and an undefiled spirit' that manifests itself in 'works of moderation and gentleness'. 'He loves the meek,' Constantine continued, 'and hates the turbulent spirit.... While the arrogant and haughty are utterly overthrown, he requites the humble and forgiving with deserved rewards.'

"The purpose of the letter was to advise Shapur about how to deal with the sizable Christian community in his own realm. [He exhorted him to "cherish them with your customary humanity and kindness; for by this proof of faith you will secure an immeasurable benefit both to yourself and us".] Constantine was an eyewitness of 'the end of those who lately harassed the worshippers of God by their impious edicts,' and he warned Shapur not to follow their example. Everything is 'best and safest' when men follow God's laws and recognize that God is at work through the church, endeavouring to 'gather all men to himself'. He expressed his joy at hearing that Persia was full of Christians, and he closed the letter with a prayer that 'you and they may enjoy abundant prosperity, and that your blessings and theirs may be in equal measure,' so that 'you will experience the mercy and favor of that God who is the Lord and Father of all.'

"Constantine's letter has been called a 'veiled warning' and has been interpreted as a provocation, a threat and a sign of his belief that as Roman emperor he had responsibility for all Christians. Constantine's Persian policies certainly backfired. He initiated his final campaign when a delegation from Armenia visited Constantinople in 336 to ask him for assistance against a Persian coup. Since the conversion of the Armenian king Trdat (Tiridates) in 314, Armenia had been officially Christian, more explicitly so than was the Roman Empire under Constantine. In the 330s, Persians under Shapur II had invaded, captured and blinded the Armenian King Tirhan, and placed Shapur's brother Narseh on the Armenian throne. Constantine responded swiftly. He designated his nephew Hannibalianus as 'king of kings' and gave him authority over Armenia and Pontus. Like his letter, his preparations for war with Persia were intended, among other things, to defend a Christian people. When Constantine died before the campaign could be launched, Shapur, apparently suspicious that the Christians of Persia were allied with Rome, initiated a violent

persecution. Persian Christians, in response, kept themselves aloof from the dominant orthodoxy of the West.

“Yet I cannot agree that the letter to Shapur was intended as a provocation. Constantine warned Shapur, but he warned him of divine judgement, not that he would personally take vengeance if Shapur were to attack Christians. In the closing section Constantine issued an altar call, inviting Shapur to protect Christians and to join him in worship of the high God, the God of the Christians. Hermann Dorries summarizes the message of the letter as an invitation to share in the blessing of Christianization: ‘what the true faith had done for the Roman Empire,’ Constantine urged, ‘it would do also for the Persian.’ It was an unprecedented diplomatic move – a Roman emperor who ‘attributed his success to heavenly assistance... invited his only formidable enemy to share in this aid.’ More broadly, the letter reveals how far Constantine had moved from tetrarchic political theology. For Diocletian ‘religion and nation meant the same thing,’ but for Constantine there was a potential unity, even between East and West, even between Persia and Rome, that transcended boundaries and national interests...”⁴⁶⁴

This is an insightful and true remark, and if anything underestimates the revolutionary character of Constantine’s new imperial ideology. Pagan religion and politics were irredeemably *particularist*. The pagan gods protected particular men and cities or states against other men, cities and states that were protected by other gods. And if pagan Rome had a policy of including as many local gods as possible into its “pantheon” (which means “all gods”), this did not alter the fundamentally particularist nature of Roman paganism. Christianity was difficult to absorb within this structure not only because the Christians refused to sacrifice to the pagan gods, but also because their God was of a totally different kind – universal, completely all-encompassing, and infinitely above everything that can be called “god”, “far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come” (Ephesians 1.21). Moreover, this God claimed dominion not only over Rome but also over all the kingdoms of men...

When Constantine came to power, being a sincere, determined and deeply thoughtful Christian, he sought to adapt the Roman political theology to its new God, making it truly *universalist*. Scornfully rejecting all divine honours for himself, he sought to subdue himself and all his subjects to the true King of kings. But this also transformed his relationship with other kings, such as Shapur of Persia. For Shapur, too, had been given his dominion by God, making him and Constantine no longer rivals, but “brothers”, as Constantine himself put it – if not in Christ, at any rate in kingship, as political rulers established by God. But this had the further consequence that extension of the empire by the former bloody and rapacious methods was no longer acceptable. Only if Shapur maltreated his Christian subjects or other Christians, such as the Armenians, could Constantine intervene on the assumption that Shapur had now ceased to be his brother in kingship, having “disestablished” himself from God. Now Christian love compelled Constantine to go to war to defend his brothers in Christ. The Gospel, not glory or *realpolitik*, would now govern his actions.

⁴⁶⁴ Leithart, op. cit., pp. 246-247.

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But where did this leave the Roman Empire? No longer unique, but just one kingdom among many? Not quite. If all legitimate political authorities have been established as such by God, and there is no genuine authority that has not been thus established (Romans 13.1), this would appear to place all authorities essentially on the same level. But the Roman Empire remained unique in that Christ had been born in it and God had chosen the empire also to be the birthplace and seed-plot of His Church. This gave it a certain uniqueness, seniority and prestige in the eyes of all Christians, even those who lived in other polities and therefore owed obedience to other authorities. In this sense, therefore, it became *the universal empire*. But this did not mean that the empire was destined to become, in Constantine's eyes, *the ruler of all nations* (this was where he differed from the Chinese emperors), as some later Byzantines tended to think: it meant that the Roman Empire would be, as long as it lasted, the "first among equals" among Christian states, and therefore the object of *universal veneration* by the Christians of all nations.

Another consequence was that the Roman Empire now had a special obligation to spread the Gospel to other kingdoms. And Constantine was fully alive to his missionary calling. As Leithart writes, he "had a deep sense of historical destiny, and as a result his foreign policy was guided in part by the desire to extend the church's reach. He envisioned a universal empire united in confession of the Nicene Creed, an empire that would have a symbolic center in the Church on Golgotha in Jerusalem and that would stretch to India and Ethiopia and someday include even Persia. But Constantine did not necessarily regard annexation into the Roman empire as an essential element of that vision. He seems instead to have envisioned a Christian commonwealth. Perhaps the empire would have remained dominant, but in Constantine's cosmopolitan mind it would not have been coextensive with 'Christ's dominion'.

"Though he probably did not impose Christianity on conquered Goths, his triumphs among the Goths assisted the spread of Christianity. After his victory in 332, Bishop Ulfila was consecrated and sent as a missionary in Gothic territory. Churches were also established in the 'Mountain Arena', the Arab territories that served as a buffer between the empire and Persia. Eusebius mentions Arab Christian communities, and there was an Arab bishop at the council of Nicaea. Further east in Iberia (Georgia) there were Christians, and to the south Ethiopia (Aksum) also became Christian under Ezana... Armenia became officially Christian shortly after Constantine defeated Maxentius. By the time he died, Constantine had left behind a 'universal Christian commonwealth embracing Armenians, Iberians, Arabs, and Aksumites that continued to take form under his Byzantine successors. This was *not*, it should be noted, an extension of Roman governance; it is rather that Roman imperial order had been reshaped, to some degree, by the demands of Christian mission..."⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶⁵ Leithart, op. cit., p. 288.

The demands of Christian mission in the East, and the need to protect Eastern Christians from pagan Persia, necessitated moving the capital of the empire further east. Thus “Colchis [Western Georgia].” Writes Bettany Hughes, “only returned to the Hellenic world when Emperor Constantine moved his capital to Byzantium-Constantinople.”⁴⁶⁶ Let us look briefly at this missionary land.

“The Christian history of Georgia begins at the time of our Lord’s Crucifixion. The Jewish community in the old capital of Mtskheta – which had taken refuge in Georgia during the time of Nebuchadnezzar – sent two of its rabbis, Elioze and Longinos, to pass judgement on the Savior. When the Jewish leaders returned, they brought back the Lord’s robe, one of the most sacred relics of the Church. Today it rests beneath the Svetitskhoveli Cathedral in Mtskheta.

“In the decades that followed, the Apostles Andrew, Simon the Zealot and Matthias proclaimed the Gospel in Georgia. Although the seeds of Christianity were planted in the 1st century, it was not until the 4th century that the conversion of Georgia occurred. In 323 the virgin Nino (Nina) arrived from Jerusalem, having been sent by the Mother of God to evangelize the country. Through her labors King Mirian (265-342) and Queen Nana accepted baptism and proclaimed Christianity as the state religion in 326. The Byzantine held dominion in the region, and Emperor Constantine the Great (306-337) sent a bishop and priests to baptize Georgia along with architects to construct churches. Shortly thereafter the first bishop of Georgia was consecrated at Antioch, signaling the birth of the Georgian Church under the See of Antioch.”⁴⁶⁷

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Let us now look at Constantine’s most ambitious project, his transfer of his capital from Old Rome in Italy to the New Rome of Constantinople... While his *renovatio imperii* had some precedent in Augustus’ reign, the *translatio imperii* that Constantine effected in 324 was absolutely unprecedented – and elicited predictable hostility from the old capital of the world. For “as an open patron of the Christians,” writes St. Demetrius of Rostov, “Constantine was little loved in Rome, where many pagan rituals and customs were still entrenched. Nor did he himself love Rome, with its pantheon of gods, where almost automatically the heathen gods of all subject peoples were gathered, and he rarely visited the old capital. The Romans, though grateful to the one who had delivered them from the tyranny of Maxentius, did not understand and were not able properly to appreciate the accomplishments of the Emperor; in him they saw a destroyer of their old national order, an enemy of their religion, which was closely bound up with the political majesty of Rome.

“Their displeasure and complaints, their plots and even at times open revolts, were the reason why Constantine conceived the idea of founding a new capital for himself, a Christian city which would in no wise be bound up with paganism.”⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁶ Donald Rayfield, *Edge of Empires: A History of Georgia*, London: Reaktion, 2012, p. 36.

⁴⁶⁷ Riassophor Monk Adrian, in Archpriest Zakaria Machitadze, *Lives of the Georgian Saints*, Platina, Ca.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2006, p. 18.

⁴⁶⁸ *The Menology of St. Demetrius of Rostov*, 1908, vol. 10, May 21.

The site he chose (after a Divine revelation) was the old Greek colony of Byzantium on the European side of the Bosphorus, opposite the site of his victory over Licinius at Chrysopolis in 324. He called the new city Constantinople. The future glory of Constantinople had been foreshadowed already in the reign of Septimius Severus, who, while beautifying the city, had constructed a monument in it called the Milion, from which all distances in the Roman Empire were measured.⁴⁶⁹

Now, as Hughes writes, Constantine built “a new palace tumbling down the hillside to the sea, he extended the hippodrome, introduced a grid-system of streets, a circular forum, a Senate house [with 300 senators], at least two churches, a new mint, a series of splendid private houses, inviting in high-ranking Romans from across the empire to occupy them... And protecting all this he reinforced the city walls. St. John might have described Old Rome as ‘Babylon’, but the New Rome was a vigorous start for a new kind of Christian metropolis...

“This city that Constantine had called Constantinopolis was, simply, God-given – or, as the Emperor put it, ‘given to him by the command of God’.”⁴⁷⁰

Constantinople was perfectly situated to unite East and West, embracing both like the arms of the Cross. Protected in the west by huge fortifications, and in the east by the Bosphorus, it also protected all the wealthy and populous eastern provinces of the empire from invaders coming across the Danube from the north. Constantinople, then, was to be, as St. Gregory the Theologian said, “a bond of union between East and West to which the most distant extremes from all sides are to come together, and to which they look up as the common centre and emporium of their faith.”⁴⁷¹

At the same time, Constantine tried hard to transform the old capital into a Christian city: the two oldest and greatest churches, St. Peter’s on the Vatican Hill and St. John’s by the Lateran Palace, were his foundations. But Old Rome, in contrast to many of her individual citizens, had never been baptized. There was a pagan rottenness at her heart that even its Christian head, the Emperor, was not able to cut out.⁴⁷² By making a fresh start for the newly Christianized empire in his New Rome, St. Constantine implicitly declared that Old Rome was irredeemable.

The symbolism of his act was clear: if the state, like the individual man, was to be redeemed and enjoy a long and spiritually fruitful life, it, too, had to make a complete break with the past, renounce the demonic sacrifices and pagan gods and philosophies that it had loved, and receive a new birth by water and the Spirit. In fact, New Rome quickly filled up with pagan statues and monuments to serve the needs of its pagan citizens. But this did not change the aim and the symbol, and the blood sacrifices to the demons remained banned.⁴⁷³

⁴⁶⁹ Hughes, *Istanbul. A Tale of Three Cities*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2017, pp. 66-67.

⁴⁷⁰ Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

⁴⁷¹ St. Gregory, in Michael Grant, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, London: Phoenix, 1997, p. 198.

⁴⁷² Dirk Bennett, “Ecstasy in Late Imperial Rome”, *History Today*, vol. 48 (10), October, 1998, pp. 27-32.

⁴⁷³ Judith Herrin, *Women in Purple: Rulers of Medieval Byzantium*, London: Phoenix Press, 2001, p. 11. “Let superstition cease,” decreed Constantine’s successor Constantius. “Let the madness of the

But the crowning glory of Constantine's reign was his mother St. Helena's finding of the True Cross, which led him to build the Church of the Holy Sepulchre over both Golgotha and the site of the Resurrection of Christ. The church was dedicated with great splendour and a great concourse of bishops in 336. And a new church feast, the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, was established to commemorate the event, to celebrate the victory of the Cross that Constantine had seen in the heavens, and its triumph over the darkness of the pagan Roman empire. The date of the feast was appointed as September 14. It is one of the twelve feasts of the Orthodox Church year, and the only one that does not commemorate a major event in the life of Christ or the Mother of God...

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St. Constantine died at midday on Pentecost, 337, and was buried in the church of the Holy Apostles amidst the sepulchres of the twelve apostles. For in his person the Church had indeed found an "equal to the apostles"; he came to power when about 10% of the empire was Christian: at his death the figure was about 30%.⁴⁷⁴ In his reign the process of converting the world that began at the first Pentecost reached its first climax...

There are two accounts of when and how Constantine was baptized. According to the first, which is to be found in the *Life of St. Sylvester of Rome* written in the early 400s, the sixth-century writer Malalas, and the liturgical texts for his feast in the *Menaion*, he fell ill with leprosy in Rome. The priests and doctors advised him to bathe in the blood of slaughtered children, which he refused to do. Then the Apostles Peter and Paul appeared to him and told him to seek out St. Sylvester, Pope of Rome. The bishop instructed him in the faith and baptized him. The leprosy then disappeared.

According to the second version, by Eusebius of Caesarea, Constantine was baptized by Eusebius of Nicomedia, who was an Arian (albeit a secret one at that time). However, this has been disputed from early times. Thus the *Chronicle* of St. Theophanes dismisses the claims of Eusebius of Caesarea as Arian lies.⁴⁷⁵

Nevertheless, many modern scholars have accepted the second version. Assuming it is true, we may ask: why did he leave his baptism so late? Was it because ruling the empire involved committing so much violence that he had to put off baptism until as late as possible? This violence had included executing his own wife Fausta and son Crispus for adultery...

Or perhaps he had to repent of still more serious sins – sins against the faith that his position as Roman emperor had made almost inevitable?

sacrifices be exterminated, for if anyone should dare to celebrate sacrifices in violation of our father, the deified Emperor [i.e., Constantine], and of this decree of Our Clemency, let an appropriate punishment and sentence immediately be inflicted on him" (in Kershaw, *op. cit.*, p. 320).

⁴⁷⁴ Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

⁴⁷⁵ Information supplied by Bishop Enoch.

Thus Florovsky writes that one of the reasons why he delayed his baptism “was precisely his dim feeling that it was inconvenient to be ‘Christian’ and ‘Caesar’ at the same time. Constantine’s personal conversion constituted no problem. But as Emperor he was committed. He had to carry the burden of his exalted position in the Empire. He was still a ‘Divine Caesar’. As Emperor, he was heavily involved in the traditions of the Empire, as much as he actually endeavoured to disentangle himself. The transfer of the Imperial residence to a new City, away from the memories of the old pagan Rome, was a spectacular symbol of this noble effort.”⁴⁷⁶...

Constantine’s actions at the very end can also be seen as a kind of final sermon and testament in symbolical language. After his baptism he put off the imperial purple, never to put it on again – for the kingdoms of this world pass away, never to return. But then he put on the shining white baptismal robe, never to take it off again – for the Kingdom of God, which is not of this world, abides forever...

⁴⁷⁶ Florovsky, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

32. THE CONSTANTINIAN REVOLUTION: (1) THE HIERARCHICAL PRINCIPLE

The Constantinian revolution was multifaceted and gradual, continuing for centuries after Constantine's death. But it changed by no means everything. The hierarchical principle that was so characteristic of Old Rome, both republican and imperial, according to which "individuals might rise to greatness, ancient families might decline, yet through it all the faith in hierarchy endured unchanging"⁴⁷⁷, remained unchanged in the New Rome. Constantine was no democrat, and by abolishing the tetrarchy he reasserted one-man-rule, while society as a whole remained patriarchal. The real change was in the idea that the State and its prosperity were no longer the highest values. For above the State was the Church, and the State existed in order to serve the Church, not vice-versa.

The hierarchical principle remained unchanged because it was fully in accordance with Christian teaching. For the Apostles did not only preach obedience to the emperor: they extended the hierarchical principle to every level of society. Thus "be subject for the Lord's sake," says St. Peter, "to *every* human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and praise those who do right..." (I Peter 2.13).

This included even the institution of slavery: "Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the forward" (I Peter 2.18). St. Paul told his disciple, Onesimus, a slave, to return to his master, and said: "Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and His doctrine be not blasphemed. And those who have believing masters must not despise them because they are brethren, but rather do them service" (I Timothy 6.1-2). True, the freeing of slaves was considered a good deed, and St. Gregory of Nyssa said to his flock, several of whom were slave-owners: "If God does not enslave what is free, then who is he that sets his own power above God's?"⁴⁷⁸ But Christians never aimed at social revolution, but rather the gradual and peaceful renewal of the social fabric from within.

Following the Apostles, the Holy Fathers asserted that the hierarchical principle is natural, God-given and superior to any other principle of government. In developing this thought, they adopted the originally pagan idea that the earthly king is the image of the Heavenly King, purifying it of the tendency, so natural to pagan thought, of *identifying* the earthly and the Heavenly, the image and its archetype. Earthly kings could and should be icons of the Heavenly King, and were to be venerated as such; but they were not god-kings, not objects of worship.

Thus Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea wrote of St. Constantine: "The kingdom with which he is invested is an image of the heavenly one. He looks up to see the archetypal pattern and guides those whom he rules below in accordance with that pattern."

⁴⁷⁷ Holland, *Rubicon*, London: Abacus, 2003, p. 25.

⁴⁷⁸ St. Gregory, *Fourth Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, in Tom Holland, *In the Shadow of the Sword*, London: Abacus, 2012, p. 436.

“The ruler of the whole world is the Word of God, Who is in everything visible and invisible. From this all-embracing Reason the Emperor is rational, from this Wisdom he is wise, from participation in this Divinity he is good, from communion with this Righteousness he is righteous, in accordance with the idea of this Moderation he is moderate, from the reception of this highest Power he is courageous. In all justice one must call a true Emperor him who has formed his soul with royal virtues, according to the image of the Highest Kingdom”.⁴⁷⁹ “Bearing the image of the heavenly empire, with his eyes fixed on high, he rules the lives of mortals after that original pattern with the strength draw from an imitation of God’s monarchy. The example of monarchical rule there is a source of strength to him. This is something granted to man alone of the creatures of the earth by the universal King. The basic principle of kingly authority is the establishment of a single source of authority to which everything is subject. Monarchy is superior to every other constitution and form of government. For polyarchy, where everyone competes on equal terms, is really anarchy and discord. This is why there is one God, not two or three or even more. Polytheism is strictly atheism. There is one King, and His Word and royal law are one.”⁴⁸⁰

This idea was supported by the fourth-century Fathers. Thus St. Basil the Great wrote: “Even the king of the birds is not elected by the majority because the temerity of the people often nominates for leader the worst one; nor does it receive its power by lot, because the unwise chance of the lot frequently hands over power to the last; nor in accordance with hereditary succession⁴⁸¹, because those living in luxury and flattery are also less competent and untaught in any virtue; but according to nature one holds the first place over all, both in its size and appearance and meek disposition.”⁴⁸² And St. Gregory the Theologian wrote: “The three most ancient opinions about God are atheism (or anarchy), polytheism (or polyarchy), and monotheism (or monarchy). The children of Greece played with the first two; let us leave them to their games. For anarchy is disorder: and polyarchy implies factious division, and therefore anarchy and disorder. Both these lead in the same direction – to disorder; and disorder leads to disintegration; for disorder is the prelude to disintegration. *What we honour is monarchy...*”⁴⁸³

Again, St. John Chrysostom wrote: “Equality is known to produce strife. Therefore God allowed the human race to be a monarchy, not a democracy. But the family is constructed in a similar way to an army, with the husband holding the rank of monarch, the wife as general and the children also given stations of command.”⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁷⁹ Eusebius, *Oration in Honour of Constantine*.

⁴⁸⁰ Eusebius, *Oration in Honour of Constantine*.

⁴⁸¹ Still, the hereditary principle was popular. Before becoming emperor, St. Constantine was kept under surveillance “in order to prevent a dynastic principle replacing the meritocracy of the Tetrarchs’ government” (Aaron P. Johnson, *Eusebius*, London: Tauris, 2014, p. 7).

⁴⁸² St. Basil the Great, *Hexaemeron* 8. In accordance with Roman conceptions, St. Basil did not believe that monarchical power had to be hereditary. The concept of the virtue of hereditary succession was developed later.

⁴⁸³ St. Gregory, *Sermon* 29, 2. Cf. *Sermon* 3, 2.

⁴⁸⁴ St. John Chrysostom, *Homily* 34 on I Corinthians, 7.

And St. Isidore of Pelusium wrote: "After pointing to the order of submission of some to others established everywhere by God in the lives of rational and irrational creatures, concludes therefrom: 'Therefore we are entitled to say that... power, that is, royal leadership and authority, is established by God.'"⁴⁸⁵

Over four centuries later St. Theodore the Studite generalized the principle as follows: "There is one Lord and Giver of the Law, as it is written: one authority and one Divine principle over all. This single principle is the source of all wisdom, goodness and good order. It extends over every creature that has received its beginning from the goodness of God... It is given to one man only... to construct rules of life in accordance with the likeness of God. For the divine Moses in his description of the origin of the world that comes from the mouth of God, cites the word: 'Let us create man in accordance with Our image and likeness' (Genesis 1.26). Hence the establishment among men of every dominion and every authority, especially in the Churches of God: one patriarch in a patriarchate, one metropolitan in a metropolia, one bishop in a bishopric, one abbot in a monastery, and in secular life, if you want to listen, one king, one regimental commander, one captain on a ship. And if one will did not rule in all this, there would be no law and order in anything, and it would not be for the best, for a multiplicity of wills destroys everything."⁴⁸⁶

The principle of one-man rule was greatly strengthened by the idea that the fount of all secular law in the empire was *the emperor himself*. This did not mean, however, that the emperor's rule was completely arbitrary. He had to obey both the Church and his own laws. Thus St. Ambrose of Milan told the Emperor Theodosius the Great that he had to respect and bind himself by the laws he himself promulgated, or he risked great dangers in the civil sphere: "And how, O Emperor, are we to settle a matter on which you have already declared your judgment, and have even promulgated laws, so that it is not open to any one to judge otherwise? But when you laid down this law for others, you laid it down for yourself as well. For the Emperor is the first to keep the laws which he passes..."⁴⁸⁷

From the time of Justinian in the sixth century we come across the idea that the emperor is "the living law", *the law personified*. This, as we shall see, did *not* mean that the emperor was also to govern the Church. But it did mean that in Greco-Roman antiquity and the Middle Ages, right down to the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the idea was firmly established that all true power, whether in Church or State, came from above, from God, being mediated through either the one-man ruler of the Empire or the collegial leadership of the Church (in each diocese of which, however, the bishop was king). And this idea was passed down without distortion to the Third Rome, Russia.

⁴⁸⁵ St. Isidore, in Archbishop Theophan of Poltava, in Richard Betts and Vyacheslav Marchenko, *Dukhovnik Tsarskoj Sem'i: Soyatitel' Feofan Poltavskij* (The Spiritual Father of the Royal Family: Holy Hierarch Theophan of Poltava), Moscow: Balaam Society of America, 1994, p. 213.

⁴⁸⁶ St. Theodore, *The Philokalia*, volume IV, p. 93; in Archbishop Seraphim (Sobolev), *Russkaia Ideologia* (The Russian Ideology), St. Petersburg, 1992, pp. 46-47.

⁴⁸⁷ St. Ambrose, *Epistle* 21, 9.

Thus Professor I.M. Andreyev has characterized the three forms of statehood as follows: "Of the three forms of state power – monarchy, democracy and despotism – strictly speaking, only the first (monarchy) is based on a religious-ethical principle, the second (democracy) is based on an a-religious-ethical principle, and the third (despotism) is based on an anti-religious (satanic) principle."⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁸ Andreyev, "Pomazannik Bozhij" ("The Anointed of God"), *Pravoslavnij Put'* (The Orthodox Way), 1951, p. 129.

33. THE CONSTANTINIAN REVOLUTION: (2) THE EMPEROR IN THE CHURCH

Rome was now, not the persecutor, but the protector, of the Christian people. So Constantine tried to conform his legislation to Christian principles, introducing several decrees protecting Christian piety, such as: “on the abolition of pagan games (314), on the liberation of the Christian clergy from civil obligations and church lands from additional taxes (313-315), on the abolition of crucifixion as a means of capital punishment (315), on the abolition of the branding of criminals (315), against the Jews who rose up against the Church (315), on the liberation of slaves at church gatherings without special formalities (316), on forbidding private persons from offering sacrifices to idols and divining at home (319), on the annulment of laws against celibacy (320), on the celebration of Sunday throughout the Empire (321), on the right of bishops to be appeal judges (321), on banning the forcible compulsion of Christians to take part in pagan festivals (322), on the banning of gladiatorial games (325), on allowing Christians to take up senior government posts (325), on the building of Christian churches and the banning in them of statues and images of the emperor (325).”⁴⁸⁹

The decree on absolving the clergy from holding civic office is particularly interesting: “[The clergy] shall not be drawn away by any deviation and sacrifice from the worship that is due to the Divinity, but shall devote themselves without interference to their own law... for it seems that rendering the greatest possible service to the Deity, they most benefit the state.”⁴⁹⁰ Some would see in this a cynical attempt to exploit the Deity in the interests of the emperor. But a more reasonable interpretation is that Constantine was already feeling his way to a doctrine of the symphony of powers, in which the emperor helps the Church as her defender and “the bishop of those outside the Church”, while the Church helps the emperor through her prayers and advice.

“What must have really shocked traditional Romans,” writes Peter Salway, “was Constantine’s transfer to the Church of certain powers that had always been the prerogative of Roman magistrates. Even Constantine’s own praetorian prefect, himself a Christian, was not sure that he had understood the emperor correctly when Constantine decided that either party in a legal action could have the case transferred out of the ordinary courts to the local bishop - and that, if necessary, the secular authorities were required to enforce the judgement. This extraordinary ecclesiastical privilege did not, admittedly, last, but it sheds an interesting light on how revolutionary Constantine was prepared to be.”⁴⁹¹

Apart from legislation, Constantine helped to standardize certain important aspects of Christian life.

⁴⁸⁹ Nikolin, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-28.

⁴⁹⁰ Quoted in Charles Freeman, “The Emperor’s State of Grace”, *History Today*, vol. 51 (1), January, 2001, p. 11.

⁴⁹¹ Salway, *A History of Roman Britain*, Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 249-250.

Thus at the First Ecumenical Council in 325 the principles of the calculation of the date of Pascha were agreed, an issue that had caused much controversy in the past and would continue to do so in the future.

Again, Daniel F. Lieuwen writes: "Emperor Constantine's order for fifty copies of the Scripture may have been important in the process of finalizing the form of the New Testament canon. While their exact content is not certain, some surmise that these copies may have contained the 27 books of the final New Testament canon. The canons of the council of Laodicea (c. 363) accepted all the books of the final canon except the Apocalypse. The final list of canonical books of the New Testament that exactly matches our own, having neither more nor fewer books, was contained in St. Athanasius' Paschal Epistle of 367."⁴⁹²

Constantine gave to the Church the full honour due her as an institution founded by the One True God and the Body of the God-Man Himself. The Church was understood to be higher than any human institution, not excluding the Empire itself. Constantine understood that the Christian faith was not to be honoured for the sake of the empire, or in submission to the empire, but that the empire existed for the sake of the faith and was to be submitted to it. One of the most powerful rulers in history, who exercised absolute political control over the whole of the ancient Roman empire, and did not shrink from waging war against, and executing, his political opponents, Constantine nevertheless deferred to the Church in all things spiritual. That deferral, that recognition that there were limits to his power laid down by God and His Holy Church, made Constantine a true autocrat rather than a despot or tyrant.

As Edward Cutts writes: "The merit of Constantine's relations with the Church lies in what he abstained from doing, as much as in what he did. It was a proof of the highest genius in the Emperor... to realize as he did the position of the Church as an *imperium in imperio*; to appreciate as he did the true relations of the Emperor to the Church; and to take his line as he did, not shrinking from initiative and intervention, yet so rarely overstepping the due limits of his prerogative. It is not pretended, indeed, that Constantine's history is free from infringements of these right relations, but such exceptions are very few; and it is, on the whole, very remarkable that the true relations which ought to regulate the co-ordinate action of Church and State were so immediately and fully established, and on the whole so scrupulously observed, as they were by the first Christian Emperor."⁴⁹³

This was most clearly illustrated at the First Ecumenical Council in 325, when the emperor took part in the proceedings only at the request of the bishops (318 in number, the same number as the servants of Abraham in his battle against the Babylonian kings), and did not sit on a royal throne, but on a little stool somewhat apart from the bishops.⁴⁹⁴ He did not vote with the bishops, let alone impose his will on them. As Leithart writes, "Constantine did not dominate the council. He did not

⁴⁹² Lieuwen, "The Holy Bible: Its Birth and Growth in the Church of Christ" *Living Orthodoxy*, May-June, 2003, p. 14.

⁴⁹³ Cutts, *Constantine the Great*, London: SPCA, 1881, pp. 160-161.

⁴⁹⁴ Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky, "The First Ecumenical Council", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 34, N 6, November-December, 1984, p. 9.

formulate the final creed, nor did he sign off on it – being, again, an unbaptized non-bishop. It is difficult, however, to believe that the bishops could have come to such a thoroughgoing conclusion [the defeat of Arianism, with only two bishops rejecting the agreement] without his political skill and strength of personality...⁴⁹⁵

When he addressed the Council Constantine demonstrated his sincere belief that the internal peace and prosperity of the Church was even more important than the external peace and prosperity of the Empire: “Now that we, with the help of God the Saviour, have destroyed the tyranny of the atheists who entered into open war with us, may the evil spirit not dare to attack our holy Faith with his cunning devices. I say to you from the depths of my heart: the internal differences in the Church of God that I see before my eyes have plunged me into profound sorrow... Servants of the God of peace, regenerate amidst us that spirit of love which it is your duty to instil in others, destroy the seeds of all quarrels.”⁴⁹⁶ Again, to the Fathers who did not attend the Council he wrote: “That which has been established in accordance with the God-inspired decision of so many and such holy Bishops we shall accept with joy as the command of God; for everything that is established at the Holy Councils of Bishops must be ascribed to the Divine will.”

Indeed, so obedient was he to the Church that, as I.I. Sokolov writes, “at the First Ecumenical Council, according to the witness of the historian Rufinus, the Emperor Constantine said: ‘God has made you priests and given you the power to judge my peoples and me myself. Therefore it is just that I should submit to your verdict. The thought has never entered my mind to be judge over you.’”⁴⁹⁷

Constantine saw himself as the instrument whereby God replaced the false religions with the true: “With such impiety pervading the human race, and the State threatened with destruction, what relief did God devise?... I myself was the instrument He chose... Thus, beginning at the remote Ocean of Britain, where the sun sinks beneath the horizon in obedience to the law of nature, with God’s help I banished and eliminated every form of evil then prevailing, in the hope that the human race, enlightened through me, might be recalled to a proper observance of God’s holy laws.”⁴⁹⁸

It is necessary to emphasize that whatever Constantine did for the Church he did, not as arbitrary expressions of his imperial will, but *in obedience to the commission of the Church*. Thus the Fathers of the First Council welcomed the Emperor as follows: “Blessed is God, Who has chosen you as king of the earth, having by your hand destroyed the worship of idols and through you bestowed peace upon the hearts of the faithful... On this teaching of the Trinity, your Majesty, is established the greatness of your piety. Preserve it for us whole and unshaken, so that none of the heretics, having penetrated into the Church, might subject our faith to mockery... Your Majesty,

⁴⁹⁵ Leithart, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

⁴⁹⁶ St. Constantine, in Archbishop Seraphim (Sobolev), *Russkaia Ideologia* (The Russian Ideology), St. Petersburg, 1992, p. 71.

⁴⁹⁷ Sokolov, *Lektsii po Istorii Greko-Vostochnoj tserkvi* (Lectures on the History of the Greek-Eastern Church), St. Petersburg, 1914, p. 15.

⁴⁹⁸ Eusebius, *On the Life of Constantine*, II, 28.

command that Arius should depart from his error and rise no longer against the apostolic teaching. Or if he remains obstinate in his impiety, drive him out of the Orthodox Church."

As Bishop Dionysius (Alferov) writes, "this is a clear recognition of the divine election of Constantine as the external defender of the Church, who is obliged to work with her in preserving the right faith, and in correspondence with the conciliar sentence is empowered to drive heretics out of the Church."⁴⁹⁹

This very hands-on approach to religion of St. Constantine was inherited by his successors. It was not always helpful, as during the reigns of the Arian and Iconoclast emperors; but the Orthodox Emperors played a vital role in helping the Church to uphold the true faith and eliminate heresy by convening the Ecumenical Councils and enforcing their decrees. They accepted the principle, most clearly expounded by the Gallic saint Vincent of Lerins, that the truth is "that which has always, everywhere and by all [Christians] been believed" since apostolic times; in other words, all *innovations* in faith or morality must be false and must be rejected in council.

The Orthodox Emperors, being sons of the Church, accepted this principle, and in general upheld it in their relations with the Church. In 381 the Second Ecumenical Council was convened at Constantinople during the reign of St. Theodosius the Great. The Creed drawn up at Nicaea was completed by the addition of articles on the Divinity of the Holy Spirit and the Church, becoming the official statement of faith of the True Church from henceforth. The Third Ecumenical Council at Ephesus in 431 forbade any addition to, or subtraction from, its wording. The later Councils did not change the Creed, but made further definitions to combat further heretical interpretations of its articles. Thus the Third Ecumenical Council anathematized Nestorianism, which alleged that the Divine and Human natures of Christ were united only by a moral, and not by a personal, bond, so that the Virgin Mary could be called the Mother of Christ only, and not the Mother of God as the Church maintains. Again, the Fourth and Fifth Ecumenical Councils of 451 and 553 condemned various varieties of Monophysitism, which alleged that Christ was not fully man (the opposite error to Arianism). Thus the Fourth Council, held at Chalcedon, declared that "our Lord Jesus Christ is one single and same Son, Who is perfect according to Divinity and perfect according to humanity, truly God and truly man, composed of a reasonable soul and a body, consubstantial with the Father according to divinity and consubstantial with us according to humanity, completely like us except for sin. He was begotten by the Father before all ages according to His divinity and, in these latter days, He was born for us and for our salvation of Mary the Virgin, the Mother of God, according to His humanity; one single and same Christ, Lord, only begotten, known in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the division of natures is in no way suppressed by their union, but rather the properties of each are retained and united in one single person and single hypostasis. He is neither separated nor divided in two persons, but He is a single and same only-begotten Son, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ."

⁴⁹⁹ A. Tuskarev, *Tserkov' o Gosudarstve* (The Church on the State), Staritsa, 1992, p. 75.

The Sixth Ecumenical Council of 680-81 condemned Monothelitism, which alleged that Christ had only one will. And the Seventh Ecumenical Council of 787 condemned Iconoclasm, which forbade the veneration of icons as if they were idols. The Seventh Council forms a fitting conclusion to the series of Councils concerned with Christological and Trinitarian heresies insofar as Iconoclasm attacked the Incarnation of Christ by denying the ability of Spirit to penetrate and sanctify matter (specifically, the matter of icons, but by inference also the matter of Christ's Body).

The Seven Ecumenical Councils (325-787) are the seven pillars upon which the Church is built (cf. Proverbs 9.1), and every Orthodox Christian is obliged to accept their Divine authority. In them, and in the Local Councils held until the fall of the Empire, all the main dogmas of the Church – on the Holy Trinity, on the two Natures and Wills of Christ, on the Holy Spirit, and on the Divine Energies – were elaborated. Their significance was indicated by the Encyclical of the Eastern Patriarchs in 1848: "Our faith received its beginning not from men or through a man, but through the revelation of Jesus Christ (Galatians 1.12), which the divine Apostles preached, which the Ecumenical Councils confirmed, which great and wise teachers passed on by succession to the whole inhabited world, and which the martyrs sealed with their own blood. We will hold to this confession, which we have received in purity from so many men, and will reject every innovation as an inspiration of the devil."

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The most famous definition of the relationship between Constantine and the Church is to be found in two passages from Eusebius' *Life*, which speak of him as "like a common bishop" and "like a bishop of those outside".

The first passage is as follows: "Like a common bishop established by God, he reunited the ministers of God in synods. He did not disdain to be present at their activities and to sit with them, participating in their episcopal deliberations, and arbitrating for everyone the peace of God... Then, he did not fail to give his support to those whom he saw were bending to the better opinion and leaning towards equilibrium and consensus, showing how much joy the common accord of all gave him, while he turned away from the indocile..."

In the second passage the emperor receives the bishops and says that he, too, is a bishop: "But you, you are bishops whose jurisdiction is within the Church: I also am a bishop, ordained by God to oversee those outside the Church." Eusebius immediately explains that Constantine's "bishopric" here consisted, not in liturgical priestly acts, but in "overseeing all the subjects of the empire" and leading them towards piety.⁵⁰⁰

The word translated "overseeing" [επισκοπει] here has the same root as the word for "bishop" [επισκοπος], thereby underlining the commonality of functions. So the emperor was not *really* a bishop, but only *like* a bishop - in both his missionary and in his supervisory roles. And he excelled in both. Thus, on the one hand, he responded

⁵⁰⁰ Eusebius, *The Life of Constantine*, I, 44; IV, 24.

vigorously to St. Nina's request that he send bishops and priests to help her missionary work in Georgia. Again, on hearing that the Christians were being persecuted in Persia he threatened to go to war with that state. On the other hand, he convened numerous councils of bishops to settle doctrinal disputes throughout the empire – in particular, those caused by the Donatists in Africa and the Meletians in Egypt and, above all, the empire-wide contagion caused by Arius.

The emperor's quasi-episcopal role can perhaps be best described as that of *the focus of unity* for the Church on earth. Not that having this role *within* the Church meant that he thought himself to have power *over* the Church. When the Donatists appealed to him against the judgement of the bishops, he said: "What mad presumption! They turn heavenly things into earthly, appealing to me as if the matter was of a civic nature." And on the decision of the Council of Arles (314) he said: "The bishops' decision should be looked upon as though the Lord Himself had been sitting in judgement."

Constantine cared desperately that the bishops should achieve unity, and was deeply frustrated at every sign of disunity. Thus on hearing of the Donatist heresy he said: "Until now I cannot be completely calm until all my subjects are united in brotherly unity and offer to the All-holy God the true worship that is prescribed by the Catholic Church". And at the opening of the First Ecumenical Council, convened to judge the heresy of Arius, he said: "I hold any sedition within the Church of Christ to be as formidable as any war or battle, and even more difficult to bring to an end. I am consequently more opposed to it than to anything else..."

The bishops understood Constantine's sincere veneration for the Church; so when St. Athanasius was condemned by a council at Tyre, and appealed to the emperor, he was not asking the secular power to overthrow the decision of the ecclesiastical power, as the Donatists thought earlier in the reign, but was rather calling on a son of the Church (albeit not yet baptized) to defend the decision of the Holy Fathers against heretics. Even his most important and valuable contribution to the Council of Nicaea, his suggestion of the term *homoousios*, "consubstantial", to describe the relationship between the Father and the Son was probably made in collaboration with Bishops Ossius and Alexander.⁵⁰¹

The emperor as focus of unity was especially needed when the Church was afflicted by problems affecting the whole Church. Such, for example, were the problems of Arianism and the Church calendar, both of which were resolved at the First Ecumenical Council, but which continued to be contested. Since the Church herself, contrary to the assertions of the Roman Catholics, lacks a "bishop of bishops" with ecumenical jurisdiction, only the emperor can carry out this coordinating function. He alone can compel bishops from all parts of the empire to meet in Synods, and remain there until decisions are agreed upon. And he alone can then see that these decisions are put into practice...

⁵⁰¹ Leithart, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

As Meyendorff writes, “unity, universality and order, these essential elements of the *pax romana*, were now inseparable from the interests and responsibilities of the universal Christian Church. The Roman emperor could not care any longer for the Empire without also being concerned with the unity, universality and good order of the Church as well: a divided Church would also mean a divided Empire. Of course, the internal affairs of the Church were cared for by the bishop... but each bishop was in charge of his local community only: the early Church did not have a central administration preoccupied, in a permanent and institutional way, with universal unity. The emperor’s responsibility was recognized immediately, precisely on this universal level. This implied, in particular, his competence in organizing provincial groupings of bishops, granting them facilities to gather in synods and to resolve issues of common concern.”⁵⁰²

The pagan absolutist system of government had concentrated all power, both political and religious, in the hands of one man. Thus in Rome the emperor was also the first priest, the *pontifex maximus*. Constantine did not renounce this title (the Emperor Gratian later did.) As we have seen, however, he renounced any claims to lord it over the Church, as did the Emperor Theodosius the Great, who decreed that bishops should be tried only in ecclesiastical courts. And the fourth-century Fathers vigorously opposed any such attempt on the part of his successors.

And yet this did not mean that they wished the emperor to play no part at all in Church affairs. On the contrary: they expected him to pass laws that would benefit the Church, convene Church Councils to resolve disputes and condemn heretics, and give the force of secular law to the decisions of those Councils. Such a role was clearly incompatible with the complete separation of Church and State as that is understood today; in fact, it inevitably gave the emperor a considerable importance and influence in Church affairs.

The question, then, arises: did the emperor exercise any priestly functions? He was certainly set above the rest of the laity. As Paul Stephenson writes, he “was permitted to pass between the realms of the secular and the sacred. In later centuries, when the Byzantine emperor entered the cathedral church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople on the major feasts of the Christian calendar, he removed his crown, signifying his earthly dominion. Once and briefly during the liturgical entrance, unlike any other layman, the emperor was permitted to enter the sanctuary, led by the patriarch, to kiss the altar cloth. Afterwards, this area was off limits to him...”⁵⁰³

Nevertheless, the emperor was set above other laymen in the sacrament of royal anointing. Now the visible sacrament of anointing did not exist in Constantine’s time. However, the Church has always believed that he received the invisible anointing of the Holy Spirit: “Thou wast the image of a new David, receiving the horn of royal anointing over thy head; for with the oil of the Spirit hath the transcendent Word and Lord anointed thee, O glorious one.”⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰² Meyendorff, *op cit.*, p. 33.

⁵⁰³ Stephenson, *Constantine. Unconquered Emperor, Christian Victor*, London: Quercus, 2009, p. 255.

⁵⁰⁴ *Menaion*, May 21, Mattins for the feast of St. Constantine, sedalen.

In time, the emperor came to exercise a more than purely administrative role in the Church. This was necessitated, in the fifth century, by the decline in quality of the Church hierarchy, and the increasing influence of heretical teachings such as Nestorianism and Monophysitism. As the century wore on, and the chaos caused by the heretics increased, the emperors were called upon to take a more active role in Church affairs. Nor did the Church have any objection to this – so long as the Emperor was Orthodox. Some “interference” by them was even sanctioned by Canon 93 (96) of the Council of Carthage in the year 419: “It behoves the gracious clemency of their Majesties to take measures that the Catholic Church, which has begotten them as worshippers of Christ in her womb, and has nourished them with the strong meat of the faith, should by their forethought be defended, lest violent men, taking advantage of the times of religious excitement, should by fear overcome a weak people, whom by arguments they were not able to pervert”.

As an ancient epitome of this canon puts it: “The Emperors who were born in the true religion and were educated in the faith, ought to stretch forth a helping hand to the Churches. For the military band overthrew the dire conspiracy which was threatening Paul.”⁵⁰⁵

That the Emperor, as well as the hierarchs, was required to defend the faith can be seen in the life of St. Hypatius of Rufinianus: “When Nestorius had left for Ephesus, and the [Third Ecumenical] Council had assembled, on the day when he should be deposed, Saint Hypatius saw in a vision that an angel of the Lord took hold of Saint John the Apostle, and led him to the most pious Emperor [Theodosius II] and said to him, ‘Say to the Emperor: “Pronounce your sentence against Nestorius”.’ And he, having heard this, pronounced it. Saint Hypatius made note of this day, and it was verified that Nestorius was deposed on that very day...”⁵⁰⁶

Emperors had to intervene when heretics became violent – as when the heretic Dioscuros murdered St. Flavian, Patriarch of Constantinople. Thus the officials of Emperor Theodosius II played a major role in the Third Ecumenical Council. And it was the decisive intervention of the Emperors Marcian and Pulcheria that made possible the convening of the Fourth Ecumenical Council in 451 that anathematized the Monophysite heresy. For, as Marcian said at the Council: “When by the decree of God we were elected to the kingdom, then amidst the very many needs of the State, there was no matter that occupied us more than that the true and Orthodox faith, which is holy and pure, should remain in the souls of all without doubts”.⁵⁰⁷

St. Isidore of Pelusium believed that some interference by the emperors was needed in view of the sorry state of the priesthood: “The present hierarchs, by not acting in the same way as their predecessors, do not receive the same as they; but undertaking the opposite to them, they themselves experience the opposite. It would be surprising

⁵⁰⁵ *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, Eerdmans edition, pp. 488, 489.

⁵⁰⁶ Holy Transfiguration Monastery, “The Seat of Moses”, quoted in *The Life of our Holy Father Maximus the Confessor*, Boston, 1982, p. 65.

⁵⁰⁷ St. Marcian, quoted in Archbishop Seraphim, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

if, while doing nothing similar to their ancestors, they enjoyed the same honour as they. In those days, when the kings fell into sin they became chaste again, but now this does not happen even with laymen. In ancient times the priesthood corrected the royal power when it sinned, but now it awaits instructions from it; not because it has lost its own dignity, but because that dignity has been entrusted to those who are not similar to those who lived in the time of our ancestors. Formerly, when those who had lived an evangelical and apostolic life were crowned with the priesthood, the priesthood was fearful by right for the royal power; but now the royal power is fearful to the priesthood. However, it is better to say, not 'priesthood', but those who have the appearance of doing the priestly work, while by their actions they insult the priesthood. That is why it seems to me that the royal power is acting justly."⁵⁰⁸ It was acting justly, in Isidore's view, because "although there is a very great difference between the priesthood and the kingdom (the former is the soul, the latter - the body), nevertheless they strive for one and the same goal, that is, the salvation of citizens".⁵⁰⁹

St. Leo, Pope of Rome, welcomed the interference of the emperors. Thus to the Emperor Theodosius II he wrote that he had "not only the soul of an Emperor, but also the soul of a priest". And to the Emperor Marcian he wished "the palm of the priesthood as well as the emperor's crown".⁵¹⁰ Again he wrote to Emperor Leo I: "You must unceasingly remember that Royal power has been entrusted to you, not only for administering the world, but also and in particular to rule the Church".⁵¹¹

However, St. Leo, one of the most powerful hierarchs in the Church's history, could not have meant this "rule" over the Church to be understood literally, but rather in the sense of active intervention when necessary and with the blessing of the Church. (When the emperors fell into heresy, the popes reverted to a more assertive posture in relation to them, as we shall see.) At such times, when the majority of bishops were betraying the truth, the pious emperors stood out as the representatives of the laity, which, as the Eastern Patriarchs were to declare in their encyclical of the year 1848, is the guardian of the truth of the Church. At such times they were indeed higher than the clergy, if not by the grace they had received, at any rate in view of the fact that the clergy had forsaken their vocation and trampled on the grace they had received. At such times, they were images of the Heavenly King, their vocation being, like His, to witness to the truth. For as the King of kings said to Pilate: "You say that I am a king. For that I was born, and for that I came into the world, to witness to the truth" (John 18.37).

For, as Gilbert Dagron points out, "the emperor could not remain neutral. He was the guarantor and often the principal architect of the unity of the Church. Thus the Orthodox or heretical council unanimously celebrated the sovereign 'guarded by God' by giving him without niggardliness the title of 'teacher of the faith', 'new Paul', 'equal to the apostles, illumined like the bishops by the Holy Spirit'. At the end of the fourth session of the council held in Constantinople in 536, the bishops expressed the

⁵⁰⁸ St. Isidore, *Tvorenia (Works)*, Moscow, 1860, vol. 3, pp. 400, 410.

⁵⁰⁹ St. Isidore, quoted in M.V. Zyzykin, *Patriarkh Nikon*, Warsaw, 1931, vol. I, p. 244.

⁵¹⁰ J. Meyendorff, *Rome, Constantinople, Moscow*, Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996, p. 11.

⁵¹¹ St. Leo, in Fomin and Fomina, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

conviction of all in declaring that, ‘under an Orthodox emperor’, the Empire had nothing and nobody to fear; and Patriarch Menas concluded: ‘It is fitting that nothing of that which is debated in the holy Church should be decided against the advice and order [of the emperor]’.⁵¹²

It is in this context that one has to understand the highly rhetorical expressions applied to the rulers. “The distinction between the two powers was never as clearly formulated as when there was a disagreement between them. When there was concord or the hope of harmony, the celebration or hope of unity carried the day. Nobody found anything wrong when the synod that condemned the heretic Eutyches in Constantinople in 448 acclaimed Theodosius II with the words: ‘Great is the faith of the emperors! Many years to the guardians of the faith! Many years to the pious emperor, the emperor-bishop (τω αρχιερει βασιλει).’ The whole world is equally agreed, a little later at the Council of Chalcedon, in acclaiming Marcian as ‘priest and emperor’, at the same time as ‘restorer of the Church, teacher of the faith, New Constantine, New Paul and New David’. At the same time Pope Leo congratulated Theodosius II, and then Marcian, on the *sacerdotalis industria*, on the *sacerdotalis anima*, and on the *sacerdotalis palma* with which God had rewarded them, and he declared to Leo I that he was inspired by the Holy Spirit in matters of the faith. Except during periods of tension, the adjective *sacerdotalis* was part of the formula of the pontifical chancellery for letters addressed to the emperors of Constantinople. The composers of elegies were not behindhand, in the West as in the East. Procopius of Gaza underlined that Anastasius had been elected to be a bishop before being named emperor, and that he reunited in himself ‘that which is most precious among men, the apparatus of an emperor and the thought of a priest’; Ennodius of Pavia (473-521) proclaimed Theodoric to be ‘prince and priest’; Venantius Fortunatus, in the second half of the 6th century, called Childebert I ‘*Melchisedech noster, merito rex atque sacerdos*’; towards 645 an anonymous panegyric characterised Clotaire I as *quasi sacerdos*; Paulinus, bishop of Aquileia, in 794 encouraged Charlemagne to be ‘*Dominus et pater, rex et sacerdos*’. To justify the canonisation of a king, they said that he had been led during his reign *acsi bonus sacerdos*. We are in the domain of rhetoric, but that does not mean that they could say anything and break the taboos. Even if the words have a metaphorical and incantatory meaning, even if their association distilled a small dose of provocation, there was nothing abnormal in affirming that the ideal emperor was also a priest.”⁵¹³

The coronation ceremony made the emperor into a quasi-priest. Thus Sir Steven Runciman writes: “When Diocletian instituted a coronation ceremony it was performed by the senior lay minister; and the first Christian Emperors continued the practice. Theodosius II, for example, was crowned by the prefect of the City of Constantinople. But at his successor Marcian’s coronation the Patriarch was present⁵¹⁴; and Marcian’s successor Leo I was certainly crowned by the Patriarch. The Patriarch was by now the official with the highest precedence after the Emperor; but

⁵¹² Dagron, *Empereur et Prêtre* (Emperor and Priest), Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1996.

⁵¹³ Dagron, *op. cit.*, pp. 314-315.

⁵¹⁴ According to Alexander Dvorkin, the crowning of Marcian and Pulcheria “was the first in history to be carried out in church” (*Ocherki po Istorii Vselenskoj Pravoslavnoj Tserkvi* (Sketches on the History of the Universal Orthodox Church), Nizhni-Novgorod, 2006, p. 292).

his intervention turned the coronation into a religious ceremony. In the course of it the Emperor underwent a sort of ordination; he received charismatic powers. Henceforward the Imperial Palace was known as the Sacred Palace. Its ceremonies were liturgical ceremonies, in which he placed the double role of God's representative on earth and representative of the People before God, a symbol both of God and of the Divine Incarnation. The acclamations to which he was entitled stressed his position. On Christmas Eve he was addressed in a prayer that begged Christ would 'move all nations throughout the universe to offer tribute to Your Majesty, as the Magi offered presents to Christ'. The Whitsun [Pentecost] hymns declare that the Holy Ghost descends in fiery tongues on to the Imperial head. At the same time the Emperor paid homage to God in the name of the Christian commonwealth. In the words of the Emperor Constantine Porphyrogennitus it was through the Palace ceremonies that 'the Imperial power can be exercised with due rhythm and order and the Empire can thus represent the harmony and movement of the universe as it stems from the Creator'. The Byzantines fervently believed in this interpretation of the Emperor's position. It did not prevent them from seeking to depose an Emperor whom they thought unworthy or ungodly. His sanctity then might not preserve him from a violent death. It was the symbol, not necessarily the person, that they revered..."⁵¹⁵

Nevertheless, the Empire and the Priesthood remained separate principles in the Byzantine understanding; they were both from God, and were meant to work in "symphony" to the glory of God, as the Emperor Justinian proclaimed in his famous *Novella 6*. But the autonomy of the two realms continued. Moreover, so important was the independence of the Church seen that its violation was regarded as a sure sign of the coming of the Antichrist. For if the Orthodox Emperor is "he who restrains the coming" of the Antichrist, then the combining of the two principles in one person is the surest sign that he or his forerunner has already come....

In the last analysis, however, it is not the Church that depends on the Empire, but the Empire on the Church. For it is the Church that blesses the State, not the State the Church; for "without all contradiction, the less is blessed of the better" (Hebrews 7.7). And the Church depends on her hierarchs' preserving the correct confession of faith through the prayers of all the faithful in both the Heavenly and the Earthly Church.

We see an instructive illustration of this in the *Life* of St. Leo the Great, Pope of Rome: "In the course of the debates with the heretics [at the Council of Chalcedon in 451], doubts concerning the truth arose in the hearts of many; whereupon the holy fathers commanded that the Tome of Leo be read. This letter originally was sent by the Pope to Saint Flavian, the martyred Patriarch of Constantinople, when the latter convened a synod in the eastern capital to anathematize the unbelievers. It is said that the holy chief Apostle Peter himself edited the document. Thus, we read in *The Spiritual Meadow*, written by Saint Sophronius of Jerusalem: 'Abba Menas, superior of Salam, a coenobium near Alexandria, related that he heard this from Eulogius, Patriarch of Alexandria: "While staying in Constantinople, I was a guest in the house of my lord Gregory, archdeacon of the Church of Rome, a truly illustrious and

⁵¹⁵ Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity*, Cambridge University Press, 1968, pp. 58-59.

virtuous man [St. Gregory the Great, Pope of Rome]. He told me a story recorded in the archives of the Roman Church about the most blessed and Most Holy Pope Leo. He said that Leo wrote a letter to Saint Flavian, Bishop of Constantinople, condemning the impious Eutyches and Nestorius, and put it on the tomb of Peter, the chief Apostle. Then he fasted, prayed, and kept vigils, begging the preeminent Apostle, "If I, as a man, have in this letter erred in any way or failed to explain the truth fully, do thou, to whom this Church and episcopal throne were entrusted, set it right." Forty days later the Apostle appeared while Leo was praying. He said, "I have read your letter and corrected it." The Pope took the epistle from the blessed Peter's tomb, opened it, and found that it had been amended by the Apostle's hand."...

"While I was synkellos of Eulogius, the holy Patriarch of Alexandria, I saw in a dream a radiant man of venerable appearance. He commanded, "Announce me to Patriarch Eulogius." "Who are you, my lord?" I asked. He replied, "I am Leo, Pope of Rome." I told Eulogius, "The most blessed and Most Holy Leo, Primate of the Roman Church, wishes to pay his respects." Patriarch Eulogius rushed to meet the saint. The two men prayed, then exchanged a kiss and sat. The divine Leo asked Eulogius, "Do you know why I am here?" "No," answered the holy Patriarch. "I have come to thank you," said Leo, "because you have stoutly defended the letter I wrote my brother, Patriarch Flavian of Constantinople, refuting the impious Nestorian and Eutychian heresies. You have understood my teaching well and proclaimed it fearlessly, thereby silencing the misbelievers. Know, brother, that you have gratified not me alone by your godly zeal and labor, but the chief Apostle Peter as well, for he read my epistle and corrected it. Above all you have pleased Christ our God, Who is Truth Itself, preached by us." I had the dream not once or twice, but three times. Convinced by this, I related it to Saint Eulogius. He wept, stretched out his hands to heaven, and said, "I thank Thee, O Master Christ our God, that Thou hast vouchsafed me, the unworthy, to proclaim Thy truth. In Thy great and ineffable compassion and by the intercessions of Thy servants Peter and Leo, Thou has deigned to accept my feeble efforts as Thou didst the widow's mites.""⁵¹⁶

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An important issue in Church-State relations was the question whether, and in what circumstances, the Church could disobey the State. In general, obedience was considered not obligatory if the king was a tyrant; but even a true king could be defied if he tried to enforce the transgression of God's law. Thus St. Basil the Great wrote: "If 'the heart of the king is in the hands of God' (Proverbs 21.1), then he is saved, not by force of arms, but by the guidance of God. But not everyone is in the hands of God, but only he who is worthy of the name of king. Some have defined kingly power as lawful dominion or sovereignty over all, without being subject to sin." And again: "The difference between a tyrant and a king is that the tyrant strives in every way to carry out his own will. But the king does good to those whom he rules."⁵¹⁷

⁵¹⁶ St. Demetrius of Rostov, *The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints*, volume VI: February, House Springs, Mo.: Chrysostom Press, 2003, pp. 207, 208.

⁵¹⁷ St. Basil, quoted in Fomin, S. & Fomina, T. *Rossia pered Vtorym Prishestvoiem* (Russia before the Second Coming), Moscow, 1998, pp. 66, 102.

This definition seems very strict. For what Roman emperor always did good to those whom he ruled? By this definition almost all the emperors were in fact tyrants... However, we can bring St. Basil's definition more into line with how the Christians actually regarded the emperors if we make two important distinctions. The first is between the personal evil of many of the emperors, on the one hand, and the goodness of the institution that they maintained and incarnated, on the other. And the second is between the status of the pagan emperors before Constantine, on the one hand, and the status of the pagan or heretical emperors after Constantine, on the other.

As St. John Chrysostom said, commenting on Romans 13.1: "Is every ruler, then, elected by God? This I do not say, he [Paul] answers. Nor am I now speaking about individual rulers, but about the thing in itself. For that there should be rulers, and some rule and others be ruled, and that all things should not just be carried on in one confusion, the people swaying like waves in this direction and that; this, I say, is the work of God's wisdom. Hence he does not say, 'for there is no ruler but of God', but it is the thing [monarchical power as such] he speaks of, and says, 'there is no power but of God'."⁵¹⁸

And again he writes: "Is every ruler elected by God to the throne he occupies? Is every emperor, king, and prince chosen by rule? If so, is every law and decree promulgated by a ruler to be regarded as good, and thus to be obeyed without question? The answer to all these questions is, no. God has ordained that every society should have rulers, whose task it is to maintain order, so that people may live in peace. God allows rulers to employ soldiers, whose task it is to capture and imprison those who violate social order. Thus God will bless and guide any ruler and any soldier who acts according to these principles. But many rulers abuse their authority by amassing huge wealth for themselves at the expense of their people, by unjustly punishing those who dare to speak against their evil, and by making unjust wars against neighbors. Such rulers have not been elected by God, but rather have usurped the position that a righteous ruler should occupy. And if their laws are wrong, we should not obey them. The supreme authority in all matters is not the law of the land, but the law of God; and if one conflicts with the other, we must obey God's law."⁵¹⁹

Rulers like Julian the Apostate, according to the Fathers, were not established by God, but were allowed to ascend the throne by Him in order to punish the people. As St. Isidore of Pelusium wrote: "If some evildoer unlawfully seizes power, we do not say that he is established by God, but we say that he is *permitted*, either in order to spit out all his craftiness, or in order to chasten those for whom cruelty is necessary, as the king of Babylon chastened the Jews."⁵²⁰ Again, St. Jerome said: "He often permits wicked kings to arise in order that they may in their wickedness punish the wicked."⁵²¹

⁵¹⁸ St. Chrysostom, *Homily 23 on Romans*, 1.

⁵¹⁹ St. John Chrysostom, *On Living Simply*.

⁵²⁰ St. Isidore, *Letter 6 to Dionysius*.

⁵²¹ St. Jerome, *Commentary on Daniel*, 2.21.

As for obedience to true rulers, the principle was the same in the post-Constantinian and post-Julian era as in the pre-Constantinian era. As St. Basil the Great put it: "It is right to submit to higher authority whenever a command of God is not violated thereby."⁵²² Again, Blessed Theodoret of Cyr wrote: "Paul does not incite us to obey even if we are being constrained to impiety..."⁵²³

Perhaps the most famous example of the Church refusing to obey the State was provided by St. John Chrysostom in his relations with the Empress Eudoxia. In 403 a silver statue of the empress was erected in Constantinople, before which the public games were performed. "These," writes Socrates Scholasticus, "John regarded as an insult offered to the Church, and having regained his ordinary freedom and keenness of tongue [after his first exile], he employed his tongue against those who did these things... The empress once more applied his expression to herself as indicating marked contempt towards her own person: she therefore endeavoured to procure the convocation of another council of bishops against him. When John became aware of this, he delivered in the church that celebrated oration beginning with: 'Again Herodias raves, again she is troubled, again she dances, and again she desires to receive John's head on a platter'."⁵²⁴

The Fathers opposed any emperor all imperial transgressions of the Law of God. For, as St. Basil wrote: "The Emperors must defend the decrees of God"⁵²⁵ And St. Gregory the Theologian wrote: "The law of Christ submits you to our power and our judgement. For we also rule, and our power is higher than yours. In fact, must the spirit bow before matter, the heavenly before the earthly?"⁵²⁶ And St. John Chrysostom wrote: "The priesthood is as far above the kingdom as the spirit is above the body. The king rules the body, but the priest - the king, which is why the king bows his head before the finger of the priest."⁵²⁷ "The Church is not the sphere of Caesar, but of God. The decrees of the State authorities in matters of religion cannot have ecclesiastical significance. Only the will of God can be the source of Church law. He who bears the diadem is no better than the last citizen when he must be reproached and punished. Ecclesiastical authority must stand firmly for its rights if the State authorities interfere in its sphere. It must know that the boundaries of royal power do not coincide with those of the priesthood, and the latter is greater than the former."⁵²⁸ This teaching came to be embodied in the 30th Apostolic Canon, which defrocked any cleric who had obtained his post with the help of the secular authorities. Again, in the *Apostolic Constitutions* we read: "The king occupies himself only with military matters, worrying about war and peace, so as to preserve the body, while the bishop covers the priesthood of God, protecting both body and soul from danger. Thus the priesthood surpasses the kingdom as much as the soul surpasses the body, for it binds and looses those worthy of punishment and forgiveness."⁵²⁹

⁵²² St. Basil, *The Morals*, Rule 79 (Cap. 1).

⁵²³ Blessed Theodoret, *P.G.* 66, col. 864, commenting on Romans 13.5.

⁵²⁴ Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*, VI, 18.

⁵²⁵ St. Basil, *The Morals*, Rule 79.

⁵²⁶ St. Gregory, *Sermon* 17.

⁵²⁷ St. Chrysostom, *On the Priesthood*.

⁵²⁸ St. John Chrysostom, quoted in M.V. Zyzykin, *Patriarkh Nikon*, Warsaw, 1931, p. 68.

⁵²⁹ *Apostolic Constitutions*, XI, 34.

Perhaps the most striking and instructive example of the boldness of the fourth-century Christian hierarchs even against Orthodox emperors was provided by St. Ambrose of Milan. His views on Church-State relations were squarely in the tradition of the Eastern Fathers: "The Emperor is not above the Church, but *in* the Church," he wrote. "If one reads the Scriptures, one sees that it is bishops who judge Emperors."⁵³⁰ And again: "The tribute that belongs to Caesar is not to be denied. The Church, however, is God's, and it must not be pledged to Caesar, for God's temple cannot be a right of Caesar. That this is said with sentiments of respect for the emperor no man can deny. And what is there more full of respect than that the emperor be styled a son of the Church? And when he is called such, he is called such without sin, because it is a compliment to be called such. For the Emperor is in the Church, not above the Church, and far from refusing the Church's help, a good emperor seeks it."⁵³¹

Now in 390, a riot took place in Thessalonica that led to the murder of several magistrates. In his anger on hearing the news, the Emperor Theodosius ordered the execution of the perpetrators. But there was no trial, and many innocents were killed, perhaps as many as seven thousand. "News of this lamentable calamity," writes Theodoret, "reached Ambrose. The emperor on his arrival at Milan wished according to custom to enter the church. Ambrose met him outside the outer porch and forbade him to step over the sacred threshold. 'You seem, sir, not to know,' said he, 'the magnitude of the bloody deed that has been done. Your rage has subsided, but your reason has not yet recognized the character of the deed. Peradventure your Imperial power prevents your recognizing the sin, and power stands in the light of reason. We must however know how our nature passes away and is subject to death; we must know the ancestral dust from which we sprang, and to which we are swiftly returning. We must not because we are dazzled by the sheen of the purple fail to see the weakness of the body that it robes. You are a sovereign, sir; of men of like nature with your own, and who are in truth your fellow slaves; for there is one Lord and Sovereign of mankind, Creator of the universe. With what eyes then will you look on the temple of our common Lord – with what feet will you tread that holy threshold, how will you stretch forth your hands still dripping with the blood of unjust slaughter? How in such hands will you receive the all-holy Body of the Lord? How will you who in rage unrighteously poured forth so much blood lift to your lips the precious Blood? Begone. Attempt not to add another crime to that which you have committed. Submit to the restriction to which God the Lord of all agrees that you be sentenced. He will be your physician, He will give you health.'

"Educated as he had been in the sacred oracles, Theodosius knew clearly what belonged to priests and what to emperors. He therefore bowed to the rebuke of Ambrose, and retired sighing and weeping to the palace. After a considerable time, when eight months had passed, the festival of our Saviour's birth came round and the emperor sat in his palace shedding a storm of tears..."⁵³²

⁵³⁰ St. Ambrose, in Michael Grant, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, London: Phoenix, 1997, p. 156.

⁵³¹ St. Ambrose, *Sermon against Auxentius*, 35, 36.

⁵³² Theodoret, *Ecclesiastical History*, V, 17, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, pp. 143-144.

34. THE CONSTANTINIAN REVOLUTION: (3) THE STATE, CULTURE AND MONASTICISM

The early Christians ascribed to the Roman empire a vital eschatological role: that of postponing the coming of the Antichrist. The coming of the Antichrist was to take place shortly before the Second Coming of Christ, which many Christians thought would be very soon. But St. Paul wrote: "Do not be shaken or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the Day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means, for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself to be God" (II Thessalonians 2.2-4).

In other words, the Day of Christ is not just around the corner. Some important events have to take place first – specifically, the coming of the Antichrist. Moreover, the Antichrist will not come before another very important event takes place – the fall of the Roman empire, or monarchical power in general. For this is how the Holy Fathers interpreted the words: "He who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His Coming" (II Thessalonians 2.7-8). Roman, or monarchical power is that which "restrains" the coming of the Antichrist. When that is "removed", then the Antichrist will appear – and only then will Christ come in glory to destroy him and judge the living and the dead.

And so "there is also another and a greater necessity," writes Tertullian, "for our offering prayer on behalf of the emperors as also for the whole state of the empire, ... since we know that by the prosperity of the Roman empire the mighty power impending on the whole world and threatening the very close of the age with frightful calamities shall be delayed. And as we are loath to suffer these things, while we pray for their postponement we favour the stability of Rome - nay, we pray for the complete stability of the empire and for Roman interests in general. For we know that the mighty shock impending over the whole earth – in fact, the very end of all things threatening dreadful woes – is only retarded by the continued existence of the Roman empire."⁵³³

"The subject here," writes Sordi, "was the interpretation given to the famous passage from the second Epistle to the Thessalonians (2.6-7) on the obstacle, whether a person or an object, which impedes the coming of the Anti-Christ. Without attempting to interpret this mysterious passage, the fact remains that all Christian writers, up to and including Lactantius, Ambrose and Augustine, identified this restraining presence with the Roman empire, either as an institution or as an ideology. Through their conviction that the Roman empire would last as long as the world (Tertullian *Ad Scapulam* 2) the early Christians actually renewed and appropriated as

⁵³³ Tertullian, *Apologeticum*, 32.1.

their own the concept of *Roma aeterna*. 'While we pray to delay the end' – it is Tertullian speaking (*Apologeticum* 32.1) – 'we are helping Rome to last forever'.⁵³⁴

St. John Chrysostom expressed the patristic consensus on "he that restraineth": "Some say that this is the grace of the Holy Spirit, but others the Roman rule, to which I much rather accede. Why? Because if he meant to say the Spirit, he would not have spoken obscurely, but plainly, that even now the grace of the Spirit, that is the gifts of grace, withhold him... If he were about come when the gifts of grace cease, he ought now to have come, for they have long ceased. But he said this of the Roman rule,... speaking covertly and darkly, not wishing to bring upon himself superfluous enmities and senseless danger.⁵³⁵ He says, 'Only there is the one who restraineth now, until he should be taken out of the midst'; that is, whenever the Roman empire is taken out of the way, then shall he come. For as long as there is fear of the empire, no one will

⁵³⁴ Sordi, *The Christians and the Roman Empire*, London: Routledge, 1994, p. 173. Tertullian also writes: "The Christian is hostile to nobody, least of all to the emperor, whom... he wishes well, with the whole Roman empire, so long as the world shall last, for so long as it shall last (*Ad Scapulum* 2). Again Lactantius writes: "It is apparent that the world is destined to end immediately. The only evidence to diminish our fear is the fact that the city of Rome continues to flourish. But once this city, which is the veritable capital of the world, falls and there is nothing in its place but ruins, as the Sibyls predict, who can doubt that the end will have arrived both for humanity and for the entire world?... The Sibyls openly speak of Rome being destined to perish. Hystaspes also, who was a very ancient king of the Medes,... predicted long before that the empire and name of Rome should be effaced from the globe... But how this shall come to pass I shall explain... In the first place, the empire shall be parceled out, and the supreme authority being dissipated and broken up shall be lessened,... until ten kings exist all together;... these... shall squander everything and impair and consume... The very fact proclaims the fall and destruction to be near, except that so long as Rome is safe it seems that nothing of this need be feared. But when indeed that head of the world shall fall and the assault begin that the Sibyls speak of coming to pass, who can doubt that the end has already come?... That is the city that has hitherto upheld all things, and we should pray and beseech the God of heaven, if indeed his decrees and mandates can be postponed, that that detested tyrant may not come sooner than we think" (*Institutes* VII, 15, 16, 25). And pseudo-Ephraim writes: "When the kingdom of the Romans shall begin to be consumed by the sword, then the advent of the evil one is at hand... And already is the kingdom of the Romans swept away, and the empire of the Christians is delivered unto God and the Father, and when the kingdom of the Romans shall begin to be consumed then shall come the consummation" (1, 5). See W. Bousset, *The Antichrist Legend*, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999, pp. 124-125. St. Ambrose of Milan also believed that the fall of Rome would bring in the Antichrist.

⁵³⁵ For he could have been accused of preparing the fall of Rome, *aeterna et invicta*, which would have given them an excuse for persecuting the Christians on the same basis as they persecuted the Jews – as political revolutionaries. (V.M.). Cf. Patriarch Nikon of Moscow: "It is necessary to investigate: who is he who restrains, and why does Paul speak about him unclearly? What hinders his appearance? Some say – the grace of the Holy Spirit, others – Roman power. I agree with the latter. For if Paul had meant the Holy Spirit, then he would have said so clearly. But he [the antichrist] was bound to come when the gifts of the Holy Spirit should become scarce, they have already become scarce a long time ago. But if he is speaking of Roman power, then he had a reason for concealment, for he did not want to draw from the Empire persecution on the Christians as if they were people living and working for the destruction of the Empire. That is why he does not speak so clearly, although he definitely indicates that he will be revealed at the fitting time. For 'the mystery of iniquity is already at work', he says. By this he understands Nero, as an image of the antichrist, for he wanted people to worship him as god. ... When he who restrains now will be taken away, that is, when Roman power will be destroyed, he will come, that is, as long as there is fear of this power nobody will introduce anarchy and will want to seize for himself all power, both human and Divine. For, just as earlier the Median power was destroyed by the Babylonian, and the Babylonian by the Persian, and the Persian by the Macedonian, and the Macedonian by the Roman, so this last will be destroyed by the antichrist, and he by Christ..." (in Zyzykin, *Patriarkh Nikon*, Warsaw, 1931, part 2, pp. 48-49).

willingly exalt himself. But when that is dissolved, he will attack the anarchy, and endeavour to seize upon the sovereignty both of man and of God."⁵³⁶

It follows that the early Christians, far from believing that political power and the fabric of Roman civilization was superfluous, were highly motivated to preserve it in being. For when that fabric collapsed, the Antichrist would come... So, while it was true that the Christians placed no ultimate, permanent value on Roman civilization, - "for here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come" (Hebrews 13.14) - they were by no means its enemies. And this attitude did not change fundamentally after the Christianization of the empire. If the Christians had been loyal to the empire when it was pagan, so much the more were they loyal to it when it became Christian.

Fr. Georges Florovsky has described this antimony well. "The Early Christians," he writes, "were often suspected and accused of civic indifference, and even of morbid 'misanthropy', *odium generis humani*, - which should probably be contrasted with the alleged 'philanthropy' of the Roman Empire. The charge was not without substance. In his famous reply to Celsus, Origen was ready to admit the charge. Yet, what else could Christians have done, he asked. In every city, he explained, 'we have another system of allegiance', *alio systema tes patridos* (*Contra Celsum*, VIII.75). Along with the civil community there was in every city another community, the local Church. And she was for Christians their true home, or their 'fatherland', and not their actual 'native city'. The anonymous writer of the admirable 'Letter to Diognetus', written probably in the early years of the second century, elaborated this point with an elegant precision. Christians do not dwell in cities of their own, nor do they differ from the rest of men in speech and customs. 'Yet, while they dwell in the cities of Greeks and Barbarians, as the lot of each is cast, the structure of their own polity is peculiar and paradoxical... Every foreign land is a fatherland to them, and every fatherland is a foreign land... Their conversation is on the earth, but their citizenship is in heaven.' There was no passion in this attitude, no hostility, and no actual retirement from daily life. But there was a strong note of spiritual estrangement: '*and every fatherland is a foreign land.*' It was coupled, however, with an acute sense of responsibility. Christians were confined in the world, 'kept' there as in a prison; but they also 'kept the world together,' just as the soul holds the body together. Moreover, this was precisely the task allotted to Christians by God, 'which it is unlawful to decline' (*Ad Diognetum*, 5, 6). Christians might stay in their native cities, and faithfully perform their daily duties. But they were unable to give their full allegiance to any polity of this world, because their true commitment was elsewhere...."⁵³⁷

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The other-worldliness of Christianity - the fact that is "in" the world without being "of" it - was especially emphasized by monasticism, which emerged as an organized institution in the fourth century that defied worldly conventions, choosing the uncultivated desert over Roman city life. The monks truly had no earthly fatherland;

⁵³⁶ St. Chrysostom, *Homily 4 on II Thessalonians*.

⁵³⁷ Florovsky, "Antinomies of Christian History: Empire and Desert", *Christianity and Culture*, Belmont, Mass.: Nordland, 1974, pp. 68- 69.

they lived wholly in anticipation of the Kingdom to come. However, though supremely unworldly, they were not revolutionaries in a political sense; they remained loyal to the Roman Empire and its Orthodox Christian emperors, and cared about its prosperity. Holy monks such as Anthony the Great or Sabbas the Sanctified would leave their deserts in order to defend the faith or give counsel to the emperors when the Empire was in spiritual or material danger.⁵³⁸

Now the basic principles of monasticism were not new, being simply the uncompromising practice of the Gospel commandments. From the beginning, during the apostolic period, as during the pagan persecutions, there had been Christian men and women living essentially monastic lives. But as a large-scale, semi-institutionalized movement involving flight from the main inhabited centres into the desert, monasticism may be said to date from the fourth century, and in particular

⁵³⁸ 'Never did Anthony associate with any schismatic sect, he was altogether wonderful in faith and religious, for he never held communion with the Meletian schismatics, knowing their wickedness and apostasy from the beginning; nor did he have any friendly dealings with the Manichaeans or any other heretics; or, if he did interact with them, it was only to offer advice to them that they should repent of their heresy and change to piety. For he thought and asserted that interactions with these heretics was harmful and destructive to the soul.

"In the same manner also he loathed the heresy of the Arians, and exhorted everyone to neither to approach them nor to hold their erroneous belief. And once, when certain Arian madmen came to him, when he had questioned them and learned their impiety, he drove them from the mountain, saying that their words were worse than the poison of serpents.

"And once also the Arians lyingly claimed that Anthony's opinions were the same as theirs, and so he became displeased and angry against them. Then being summoned by the Bishops and all the brethren to return to Alexandria, Anthony descended from the mountain, and having entered the city, he denounced the Arians, declaring that their belief was the final heresy that would herald the coming of the Antichrist.

"And he taught the people that the Son of God was not a created being, neither had He come into being from non-existence, but that He was the Eternal Word and of the same essence of the Father. And therefore it was impious to say, 'there was a time when He was not,' for the Word was always co-eternal with the Father. Therefore, we should have no fellowship with the most impious Arians. For there is no communion between light and darkness. For you are good Christians, but they, when they say that the Son of the Father, the Word of God, is a created being, are no different than the Pagans, since they worship that which is created, rather than God the Creator. But believe that the creation itself is angry with them because they number the Creator, the Lord of all, by whom all things came into being, with those things which were created.

"It is impossible to convey the degree to which this great man's words strengthened people's faith. All of the people rejoiced when they heard this anti-Christian heresy being anathematized by such a Pillar of the Church. At that time no one, of any age or of either sex, remained at home. I am not speaking just of the Christians; but the Pagans as well, and even the priests of idols came rushing to the Church, saying, 'We beg to see the man of God!' This is how everyone referred to him. They crowded around him, eager just to touch the hem of his garment, in the belief that merely touching it would benefit them greatly.

"How many people were freed from the devil's grip and from many different illnesses! How many spoils were snatched from the idols! How many people were saved from Pagan error and returned to Christ's flock! The number of those who converted from the superstition of the idols was greater than the number of converts one would normally see in a year.

"And what is more, that when his attendants turned the crowd away as it surged forward, because they thought that he would find such a large number of people to be a nuisance, he told them calmly, 'Surely this gathering is no larger than the hosts of demons? Surely this crowd of followers is no more numerous than the army of those of whom I wrestled with on the mountain?'" (*The Life of St. Anthony*, by St. Athanasius the Great, Ch. 68-70)

from the lives of the first well-known hermit, St. Anthony, and the first organizer of coenobia, St. Pachomius.⁵³⁹ A similar role was played in the West by St. Martin of Tours...

The major centre of fourth-century monasticism was Egypt, and this location in itself tells us much about the nature of the movement. First, Egypt was, with Babylon, the world-centre of pagan religions and demonic enchantment of all kinds. However, there was a tradition that when Christ as a child had entered Egypt all the idols of the nation had fallen down, and the monks saw themselves as following in Christ's footsteps. Therefore they deliberately set out for the desert and the graveyards where the demons were thought to dwell in the greatest numbers, and there, having driven out the passions from their own souls first, they exorcised the demons by mighty feats of prayer and fasting.

Secondly, the climate and ecology of the Egyptian desert was extremely severe, and life was hard even for those who had no other purpose than to earn their living. But the monks drastically limited themselves even in those material consolations that were available. In this way they practised the Gospel commandments relating to poverty, chastity, obedience and self-denial in all things, translating them into the terse philosophy of the desert: "Give your blood, and receive the Spirit."

Thirdly, with a few exceptions (such as the Roman St. Arsenius), the Egyptian monks were of Coptic peasant stock, usually illiterate, with no part in that rich Greco-Roman civilization which the conversion of St. Constantine was opening up to Christian influence. And yet so striking were their spiritual attainments that well-educated Christians from the West, such as Saints John Cassian, Jerome and Melanie, as well as from the East, such as Saints Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom, came to them as to their teachers in Christian philosophy. In this way the Egyptian monks demonstrated both the possibilities of the royal priesthood of the laity (monasticism was essentially a lay movement), and reasserted a truth which was in danger of being lost as many wise and mighty men of the world entered the Church - the truth, namely, that lack of formal education is no barrier to the attainment of Christian wisdom, and that "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty,... that no flesh should glory in His presence" (I Corinthians 1.27-29).

Fourthly, these visitors from abroad took back with them the lessons they had learned in Egypt and applied them with astonishing success in their homelands, so that monasticism spread into the deserts of Palestine, Syria and Cappadocia, Gaul, Wales and Ireland. The Egyptian monks themselves rarely left their desert, but the reports of their exploits (especially St. Athanasius' *Life of Antony*) fired the imaginations of Christians with the desire to imitate them. Thus long after Egyptian monasticism had succumbed to Monophysitism and Islam, its principles were still

⁵³⁹ Even earlier than Pachomius, St. Chariton, who came to maturity in the third century, had organized three great lavras in the Judaeian wilderness. But Pachomius was the first to provide a rule of coenobitic life, given to him by an angel.

being practised far to the west and north. Moreover, by the second half of the millenium the spiritual wisdom of the Egyptian monks had been combined in an exceedingly fruitful union with the more secular wisdom of the Greco-Roman world, so that the English monks in Germany and Scandinavia, or the Greek monks in the Balkans and Russia, brought with them not only the Faith but also the rudiments of education (in the case of Saints Cyril and Methodius' mission to the Slavs, even the alphabet). Thus monasticism became the major missionary and civilizing force throughout the rural areas of Europe and the Middle East, and even the urban households of the bishops were as often as not both monastic communities and schools of learning.

Fifthly, the Egyptian monks took a leading part in the doctrinal disputes, the most famous example being St. Anthony's journey to Alexandria to support St. Athanasius against the Arians. This demonstrated that the Faith was the concern not only of bishops and kings, but also of the humblest layman. This was a truth that towards the end of the first millennium began to be lost in the West, where the sacramental hierarchy of the clergy, led by the increasingly despotic papacy, was tending to replace completely the royal priesthood of the laity and the charismatic authority of the Spirit-bearing monks...

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How did the Church relate to the culture of the Roman Empire, both in the sense of the basic beliefs of the peoples of the empire, and in the sense of the material trappings of civilization?

As regards beliefs, the Christians made every effort to find common ground with the pagan philosophies around them while not sacrificing their own distinctive faith. The first example of this reaching out we see in St. Paul's dialogue with the Greek philosophers at the Areopagus in Athens, when he undertook to explain to them who was the "unknown god" they worshipped. The concepts of natural law and conscience (συνείδησις) that he employed especially in Romans were Stoic in origin, although there were antecedents in the Jewish Scriptures - in, for example, Jeremiah's speaking of God implanting a law in men's minds and hearts that would be the basis of a new covenant (Jeremiah 31.33). For the triumph of Constantine entailed not only a change of regime and religion, but also, in consequence of the latter, a change of culture. The new culture was a fusion of all that was best of the cultures of Greece, Rome and Israel. It would become in time the high culture of Byzantium, its art and music and architecture, the mother-culture of the whole of Christian Europe, whose imprint has not been erased even now, especially in Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

Now the Lord says nothing directly about culture. Indirectly, however, He makes it clear that high culture does not constitute part of "the one thing necessary" for salvation. For He was incarnate in one of the least cultured regions of the Roman empire, and deliberately chose uneducated fishermen to be His apostles. The Jews looked down on uncultured Galilee: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1.46). And yet it was from the fishermen of Galilee that true enlightenment came to the world...

The most educated of the apostles was St. Paul, who came from the Greek city of Tarsus and was trained in the law by great rabbinic teachers such as Gamaliel. And yet, while freely acknowledging his debt to Greek philosophy, he, too, says nothing directly about culture. Evidently, he felt that it was not essential for salvation, noting that not many highly cultured, educated or powerful people were being saved. "For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise,... that no flesh should glory in His presence" (I Corinthians 1.26-27, 29).

The fact that the treasures of faith were given to the uncultured fishermen and not to the cultured philosophers was celebrated in one of the highest works of Byzantine literary culture, the Akathist to the Mother of God:

Rejoice, thou who showest philosophers to be fools!
Rejoice, thou who exposest the learned as irrational!
Rejoice, for the clever critics have made fools of themselves!
Rejoice, for the writers of myths have withered away!
Rejoice, thou who didst rend the webs of the Athenians!
Rejoice, thou who didst fill the nets of the fisherman!

The attitude of the Byzantines to pagan Hellenistic culture was ambiguous. On the one hand, they were proud of their Greek heritage, and delighted in seeing "seeds of the Word" in pagan culture. On the other hand, insofar as the roots of culture lie in religion, - the word "culture" comes from *cultus*, "religious worship", - and insofar as the religion of the Greco-Roman world was pagan, and linked with such immoral activities as temple prostitution, the preachers of the Christian faith could not be simply indifferent to the culture around them.

As Fr. Georges Florovsky writes, we find a definitely negative attitude towards the music, painting and especially the rhetorical art of their time in such early Christian writers as Tertullian and Origen. For "the whole of the culture of that time was built, defined and penetrated by a false faith. One has to recognize that some historical forms of culture are incompatible with the Christian attitude to life, and must be avoided or cast out."⁵⁴⁰ Thus Tertullian said: "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?", and the martyrs destroyed the pagan temples because they were not "cultural monuments", but witnessed to false religion. The modern attitude of valuing them for their aesthetic beauty or "cultural value" was unknown to the early Fathers.

Indeed, insofar as the old pagan culture had a demonic influence on backsliding Christians, it was not only not encouraged but even destroyed. We see this most clearly in the oldest and most tenacious of the pagan cultures, the Egyptian, which had survived more or less intact after being conquered by Persian, Greek and Roman rulers, but did not survive the coming of Christianity. The tenacity of the old faith is clearly seen in Cleopatra, the last of the Greek rulers of Egypt, who behaved like an

⁵⁴⁰ Florovsky, "Vera i Kul'tura" (Faith and Culture) in *Vera i Kul'tura*, St. Petersburg, 2002, p. 664.

old-fashioned pharaoh, building temples in the old style dedicated to the old gods, and suffering a thoroughly Egyptian death at the bite of an asp, the old Egyptian symbol of eternity. But when the Christians came to Egypt, the statues of the old gods were defaced and the hieroglyphs – the language of the ancient pagan priesthood – were destroyed. The last known pagan temple, which is found in the far south of the country, contains the last known hieroglyph dating to 394 AD...⁵⁴¹

However, it is possible to dissociate a work of art's original religious meaning from its aesthetic value and the elements of truth it contains. Indeed, this is part of what was involved in the fusion of Christianity and Hellenism that began in the fourth century. The forms of ancient Hellenistic culture – its philosophical concepts, artistic conventions and architectural shapes – were dissociated from their original content and context in the worship of false gods and turned to the service of the true God.

Thus St. Basil the Great wrote a work entitled *How one benefits from Greek knowledge*, which showed the spiritual benefits to be gained from reading, for example, Homer from a Christian point of view. Similarly, St. Gregory the Theologian wrote: "We have upheld from pagan education whatever constitutes an investigation and theory of what is true; but whatever leads to the demons, to deceit and the abyss of destruction, we have cast aside. Nevertheless, everything, even the deceptions, is useful for our piety, because by their weakness they help us to strengthen our own teaching. Knowledge, therefore, is not something that we must oppose because there are some who like to say so."⁵⁴²

Again, the old forms could be transfigured by grace. Thus ancient Egyptian portraiture was transformed into the iconography that we see today in St. Catherine's monastery in Sinai; while the architecture of such buildings as the Pantheon in Old Rome was transfigured out of all recognition into such supremely beautiful buildings as the cathedral of Hagia Sophia in New Rome. The resulting synthesis was the glorious civilization of Byzantium, the cradle civilization and culture of the whole of Christendom, East and West, for the first millennium of Christian history. This creation of a Christian culture to replace the old pagan culture was not only *not* a matter of indifference to the Church, but a task of the greatest importance for her. For whether we understand "culture" in the narrow sense of "a position or orientation of individual people or human groups whereby we distinguish 'civilized' from 'primitive' society", or in the broader sense of "a system of values"⁵⁴³, all men living in society live in a culture of some kind, and this culture inescapably influences their thoughts and feelings for better or for worse.

Culture counts because it influences faith – just as faith influences culture. So the formation of the culture of Christian Byzantium was not, as Fr. Georges Florovsky writes, "what historians of the 19th century usually called 'the Hellenization of Christianity', but rather the conversion of Hellenism. And why should Hellenism not

⁵⁴¹ Consequently, the understanding of the hieroglyph language was lost until the discovery of the Rosetta Stone in 1799.

⁵⁴² St. Gregory, *P.G.* 36: 508-509.

⁵⁴³ Florovsky, *op. cit.*, p. 652.

be converted? After all, the acceptance of Hellenism by Christians was not simply a servile perception of an undigested pagan heritage. It was the conversion of the Hellenistic mind and heart to Christ.”

“In fact, this is what happened: Hellenism was cut through with the sword of the Christian Revelation and thereby completely polarized. We must call Origen and Augustine Hellenists. But it is completely obvious that this is another type of Hellenism than we find in Plotinus or Julian. Of all Julian’s directives the Christians hated most of all was the one that forbade their preaching of the arts and sciences. This was in reality a belated attempt to exclude Christians from the building up of civilization, to separate ancient culture from Christian influence. In the eyes of the Cappadocian Fathers this was the main question. St. Gregory the Theologian lingered on it for a long time in his sermons against Julian. St. Basil the Great considered it necessary to write an address ‘to young people about how they could draw benefit from Hellenistic literature’. Two centuries later, Justinian excluded all non-Christians from scholarly and educational activity and closed the pagan schools. There was no hostility to ‘Hellenism’ in this measure. Nor was it an interruption of tradition. The traditions were preserved, and even with love, but they were being drawn into a process of Christian reinterpretation. This is the essence of Byzantine culture. It was the acceptance of the postulates of culture and their re-evaluation. The majestic church of the Holy Wisdom, the pre-eternal Word, the great church of the Constantinopolitan Sophia, remains forever a living symbol of this cultural achievement.”⁵⁴⁴

There is no obvious correlation between culture and sanctity. Many of the early Christians and martyrs were uneducated slaves, and there was very little specifically Christian art before the fourth century. Nevertheless, it is clear that the great culture of Byzantium, which built on and incorporated and transfigured the best of the earlier pagan Hellenistic culture, greatly facilitated the survival of Christianity down the ages. As we shall see, the beauty of Byzantine culture was a major factor in the conversion of St. Vladimir, the baptizer of Russia. In this sense Christian culture was necessary in the same way that Christian statehood was: as a bulwark defending the Church from the outside. We see this most clearly in theology: the theological achievements of the Ecumenical Councils, and the refutation of the heresies that arose at that time, would have been very difficult without the sophisticated philosophical language and culture that the Greeks inherited from Plato and Aristotle. But nobody suggested that mastery of Byzantine art and philosophy was necessary to salvation. And so in a general way, we can see that a decline in piety is accompanied by a decline in culture. This is particularly clear in Western culture, which declines sharply from the Carolingian period in the late eighth century. However, this is by no means a universal rule: some of the greatest products of Byzantine culture were produced in what Sir Steven Runciman called “the Last Byzantine Renaissance” - the period from 1261 to 1453 that was in general (and in spite of the hesychast saints) a period of religious decline.

⁵⁴⁴ Florovsky, “Khristianstvo i Tsivilizatsia” (Christianity and Civilization), in *Vera i Kul'tura*, St. Petersburg, 2002, pp. 642-643.

35. THE HERETICAL AND PAGAN REACTIONS

After the great spiritual triumph of St. Constantine's conversion and the legalization of Orthodoxy, it was inevitable that Satan, the envier of all good, should strike back. "Under Emperor Constantine the Great," writes St. Nikolai Velimirovič, "the Church acquired freedom, but the struggle did not come to an end. The Emperor Constantine's edict brought joy to the whole Christian world, like a resurrection after a three-hundred-year-old crucifixion. Bishops and priests were released from prison, confessors were freed from their chains, those sentenced to death and condemned for the faith were pardoned, and the Gospel began to be preached, not in a whisper, but at full voice.

"But people met the joy of freedom in different ways. Some accepted it as a gift of God and a reason for a new glorification of God. Others understood freedom as the possibility of free thinking and lack of restraint of the tongue. And a third group - as general permissiveness in the expression of their carnal desires. And so a struggle broke out between the first and the second and third groups..."⁵⁴⁵

"When the great Constantine was killed," writes St. Demetrius of Rostov, "killed in Nicomedia through the wiles of his enemies, who secretly poisoned him, his decease was foretold by the appearance of a comet. He left three sons, the eldest of whom was named Constantine after his father; the second, Constantius, after his grandfather; and the third, Constans. The brothers inherited the throne of their father and divided the Empire into three parts. Constantine, the eldest brother, took upper Gaul beyond the Alps, Anglia and the lands of Britain, Germany, Spain, and so forth. Constans, the youngest brother, took lower Gaul, which is in Italy, Rome itself, Sicily, Illyricum, and Africa. The middle brother Constantius, ... took Constantinople, Egypt, and the lands of the East as far as Persia; but soon thereafter he came to rule his brothers' portions as well. The elder brother Constantine died in battle, and Constans, the younger brother was slain while hunting by a general in his armies, Magnentius, and his fellow conspirators. Later Magnentius was himself put to death by Constantius, the remaining brother, who became ruler over the East and the West. It was during his reign [in 351] that the sign of the holy Cross wondrously appeared in the sky above Jerusalem at the third hour of the day on the very feast of Pentecost, shining more brightly than the rays of the sun. According to Cyril, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, who wrote to the Emperor Constantius to tell him of this wonder, the cross reached from Golgotha to the Mount of Olives.

"At the very beginning of his reign, Constantius slew his father's enemies. He put to death Constantius, the brother of Constantine the Great, father of Gallus and Julian, and he also killed Annibalianus and Dalmatus, the younger brothers of his father, the great Constantine. Since he had no heir and neither of his brothers remained alive, after many years on the throne, he resolved to make one of his relatives his associate and helper. He summoned his cousin Gallus, who was twenty-five years of age, the son of his father's brother and Julian's brothers, and made him his co-ruler. To

⁵⁴⁵ Velimirovič, "Zhatva Tre't'ia" (The Third Harvest), in *Dusha Serbii* (The Soul of Serbia), Moscow, 2006, pp. 63-65.

strengthen the bonds of trust with him, he wed his sister Constantia to Gallus. He then sent him to the East to defend the Empire against the Persians, for Gallus was brave and had already proved himself a successful general, having fought Magnentius and Vetanio and utterly defeated them.

“At that time Julian began to envy his brother’s imperial rank and took up the study of sorcery and every demonic art. He secretly renounced Christ and began to sacrifice to the demons, but he hid his apostasy, for he feared the Emperor Constantius and his brother Gallus and knew that if they learned of his impiety they would punish him. Therefore he remained a Christian in name alone, for he was altogether under the power of the demons, to whom he surrendered himself in the hope that they might help him become Emperor...”⁵⁴⁶

Unfortunately, the State that had given the Church freedom now, under Constantine’s successors, began to persecute her again... Constantius became a despot and a heretic, rejecting the Divinity of Christ in favour of the Arian heresy...

As we have seen, the Church did not believe that the State should be obeyed in all circumstances. The Holy Apostles and Martyrs before Constantine believed, on the one hand, that the emperor’s power was established by God and should be obeyed whenever possible, and on the other hand, that he should be disobeyed if he commanded something contrary to God’s commandments. No authority, whether political or ecclesiastical, should be listened to if it contradicted the supreme authority, which is God. As the Apostles said to the Jewish Sanhedrin: “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge” (Acts 4.19).

According to Protestant writers, the triumph of the Cross under Constantine was not a real triumph, but a tragedy; for the Church entered into a union with the State that made her a slave of the Emperors. However, this is simply not true: the fourth-century Fathers showed a heroic independence even in relation to the most Christian of the Emperors when the purity of the faith was at stake. While entering willingly into a “symphony of powers” between Church and State for the sake of the huge benefits to the Church that that symphony afforded, they were uncompromisingly firm when the Emperors betrayed the faith.

And most of the emperors in the fifty-year period between St. Constantine the Great and St. Theodosius the Great did just that: they betrayed and persecuted the Orthodox Faith. Thus when Constantius apostasized from Orthodoxy and converted to “semi-Arianism”, St. Athanasius, who had previously addressed him as “very pious”, a “worshipper of God”, “beloved of God” and a successor of David and Solomon, now denounced him as “patron of impiety and Emperor of heresy,... godless, unholy,.. this modern Ahab, this second Belshazzar”, like Pharaoh, worse than Pilate and a forerunner of the Antichrist.⁵⁴⁷ Again, St. Hilary of Poitiers wrote to Constantius: “You

⁵⁴⁶ St. Demetrius, *The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints*, House Springs, Co.: Chrysostom Press, 2000, volume II: October, pp. 287-288.

⁵⁴⁷ St. Athanasius, in J. Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions*, Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1989, p. 36. In his *History of the Arians* (77) Athanasius also calls him “the abomination of desolation’ spoken of by Daniel”.

are fighting against God, you are raging against the Church, you are persecuting the saints, you hate the preachers of Christ, you are annulling religion; you are a tyrant no longer only in the human, but in the divine sphere... You lyingly declare yourself a Christian, but are a new enemy of Christ. You are a precursor of Antichrist."⁵⁴⁸

Constantius showed his despotism at the Council of Milan in 355, when he imposed the Arian bishop Auxentius on the Milanese, saying: "My will is law". To which St. Osius of Cordoba, replied: "Stop, I beseech you. Remember that you are a mortal man, fear the Day of Judgement, preserve yourself pure for that. Do not interfere in matters that are essentially ecclesiastical and do not give us orders about them, but rather accept teaching from us. God has entrusted you with the Empire, and to us He has entrusted the affairs of the Church. And just as one who seizes for himself your power contradicts the institution of God, so fear lest you, in taking into your own hands the affairs of the Church, do not become guilty of a serious offence. As it is written, give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. We are not permitted to exercise an earthly role; and you, Sire, are not authorised to burn incense."

At about this time, the Persian King Shapur started to kill the Christian clergy, confiscate church property and raze the churches to the ground. He told St. Simeon, Bishop of Seleucia and Ctesiphon, that if he worshipped the sun, he would receive every honour and gift. But if he refused, Christianity in Persia would be utterly destroyed. In reply, St. Simeon not only refused to worship the sun but also refused to recognize the king by bowing to him. This omission of his previous respect for the king's authority was noticed and questioned by the King. St. Simeon replied: "Before I bowed down to you, giving you honour as a king, but now I come being brought to deny my God and Faith. It is not good for me to bow before an enemy of my God!" The King then threatened to destroy the Church in his kingdom... He brought in about one hundred priests and about one thousand other Christians and killed them before the saint's eyes. The saint encouraged them to hope in eternal life. And after everyone had been killed, he himself was martyred.⁵⁴⁹

This shows that the Fathers and Martyrs of the Church recognized the authority of kings and emperors only so long as they did not persecute the Church of God. At the same time, non-recognition - that is, recognition of the power as tyrannical - did not necessarily mean rebellion. Thus the Fathers did not counsel physical rebellion against heretical emperors such as Constantius, but only spiritual resistance.

"By the end of the 4th century," writes Riassophore Monk Adrian, "Persian power held sway once again in the Caucasus. Subjugated by the fire-worshipping Zoroastrians, the Orthodox inhabitants faced their first trial as a Christian nation - to convert to the religion of the conquerors or face persecution, torture, or even death. The Georgians remained steadfast in the Faith, producing their nation's first martyrs during this period: the Protomartyr Razhden and the Royal Martyr Queen Shushanik."⁵⁵⁰

⁵⁴⁸ F.W. Farrar, *The Lives of the Fathers*, Edinburgh, 1889, vol. I, p. 617.

⁵⁴⁹ St. Demetrius of Rostov, *Lives of the Saints*, April 17.

⁵⁵⁰ Riassophore Monk Adrian, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

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When Julian the Apostate (361-363) came to the throne, the passive resistance of Christians offered to his predecessors (as to the Persian kings) turned into active, if not physical, attempts to have him removed. For he was a uniquely evil phenomenon. A baptized Christian who had studied with Saints Basil the Great and Gregory the Theologian in Athens, in 351 he secretly renounced Christ, and when he became emperor immediately tried to turn the empire back to paganism.

“Ammianus Marcellinus gives us more details: ‘[He] directed in plain and unvarnished terms that the temples should be opened, sacrifices brought to the altars, and the worship of the old gods restored. To make this ordinance more effective, he summoned to the palace the Christian bishops who were far from being of one mind, together with their flocks, who were no less divided by schism, and warned them in polite terms to lay aside their differences and allow every man to practice his belief without hindrance.’

“Requiring the bishops to espouse religious toleration was a classic example of ‘divide and conquer’: ‘His motive in insisting on this was that he knew that toleration would intensify their divisions and henceforth he would no longer have to fear unanimous public opinion.’”⁵⁵¹

Julian mocked the selfless behaviour of Christians during epidemics: He wrote that, “the recent Christian growth was caused by their ‘moral character, even if pretended’ and by their ‘benevolence toward strangers and care for the graves of the dead.’” In a letter to another idolatrous priest, he wrote, “The impious Galileans (Christians) support not only their poor, but ours as well; everyone can see that our people lack aid from us.”⁵⁵²

Another act of Julian’s that elicited particular horror was his allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem, and helping them to rebuild the Temple... By a miracle of God the rebuilding of the Temple was stopped. St. Gregory the Theologian tells how the Jews enthusiastically set about the rebuilding. But “suddenly they were driven from their work by a violent earthquake and whirlwind, and they rushed together for refuge to a neighbouring church... There are some who say that the church doors were closed against them by an invisible hand although these doors had been wide open a moment before... It is, moreover, affirmed and believed by all that as they strove to force their way in by violence, the fire, which burst from the foundation of the Temple, met and stopped them; some it burnt and destroyed, others it injured seriously... But the most wonderful thing was that a light, as of a cross within a circle, appeared in the heavens... and the mark of the cross was impressed on their garments... a mark which in art and elegance surpassed all painting and embroidery.”⁵⁵³

⁵⁵¹ Kershaw, *op. cit.*, pp. 334-335.

⁵⁵² https://asceticexperience.com/portfolio/christians-during-pandemic/?fbclid=IwAR1-7axYW0kFxFXHXeI7eKTS2RpGgJZgBWid7qK2WdeBii4_VakAwJHFPK8.

⁵⁵³ St. Gregory, in Marjorie Strachey, *Saints and Sinners of the Fourth Century*, London: William Kimber, 1958, p. 78). St. Ambrose of Milan and the fifth-century Church historians Socrates, Sozomen, Theodoret

But if Julian had succeeded, then, wondered the Christians, what would have prevented him from sitting in the Temple as God – that is, from becoming the Antichrist himself? The Lord had prophesied that not one stone would be left on another in the Temple. That had not happened yet. But suppose Julian fulfilled the prophecy by rebuilding the Temple? Would he not be the Antichrist? And so it is from this time, as Gilbert Dagron points out, “that the face of each emperor or empress is scrutinized to try and recognize in it the characteristic traits of the Antichrist or of the sovereigns, good or bad, who precede his coming...”⁵⁵⁴

It is instructive to consider how Julian died... Julian had killed the envoys of the Persian king Shapur - Manuel, Savel and Ishmael - for their refusal to worship idols. The Persian king Alamundar prepared an army against Julian to avenge their death. So Julian set off for Mesopotamia to meet him.⁵⁵⁵ On his way, he stopped in Ancyra, where St. Basil (not Basil the Great) defied him. “Basil was brought before him and the emperor tried to persuade him to abandon his faith in Christ, promising him honors and riches. Basil answered the emperor; ‘I believe in my Christ, Whom you denied and Who gave you this earthly kingdom; but, that will be taken away from you, shortly. Have you no shame of the sacred altar under which you were saved when they sought to kill you as an eight year old child? That is why this temporary kingdom will be taken from you shortly and your body will not be buried when your soul is violently wrested from you in bitter pains.’ Basil was tortured and killed for Christ.”⁵⁵⁶

Julian went on to Antioch, where he reinstated paganism and killed more Christians. Then, as we read in the *Life* of St. Julian the Hermit of Mesopotamia (October 18), the believers asked St. Julian to pray that he should be overthrown. St. Julian prayed for this for ten days, and then heard a voice from heaven: “The unclean and abominable beast has perished.” And it was true: the Apostate had perished in the war.⁵⁵⁷

and Rufinus all confirm St. Gregory’s story. St. Nikolai Velimirovič adds that St. Cyril, Archbishop of Jerusalem, was also praying against the Jews’ plans. “And there was a terrible earthquake, that destroyed not only the new building but also the old stones that were still in place beneath the earth. And so the words of the Lord came true: ‘Not one stone shall remain on another’ (*Prologue from Ochrid*, March 18, Birmingham: Lazarica Press, Part I, 1985, p. 299).

⁵⁵⁴ Dagron, *Empereur et Prêtre* (Emperor and Priest), Paris : Gallimard, 1996, p. 167.

⁵⁵⁵ St. Demetrius of Rostov, *Lives of the Saints*, June 17.

⁵⁵⁶ St. Demetrius of Rostov, *Lives of the Saints*, March 22.

⁵⁵⁷ St. Demetrius of Rostov, *Lives of the Saints*, October 18. But it was not only St. Julian’s prayers that effected it. The Mother of God, St. Basil the Great and St. Mercurius the Great Martyr were also involved in this critical moment of Church history. Thus when St. Basil heard that Julian’s army was returning from the expedition against the Persians, “he gathered together the multitude of Christians, with women and children, and commanded them that they should keep a fast of three days. Afterward, with the faithful, he ascended the summit of the mountain of Caesarea [in Cappadocia] that is named Didymon (Twin), because it has two peaks. On that mountain was also the Church of the Most Holy Theotokos. It was there that the Christians betook themselves, entreating and beseeching with a contrite heart the only compassionate God and His most pure Mother, that the will of the impious emperor [Julian the Apostate] might be changed. While the saint stood with the people in prayer, he was counted worthy of a vision. He beheld a multitude of heavenly host encircling the mountain. In the midst of them, he beheld a certain Woman enthroned with great glory. She uttered to the angels standing by,

A mysterious warrior had appeared to Julian and thrust him through; his last words were: "Galilean [Christ], you have conquered!" St. Basil's friend, St. Gregory the Theologian, rejoiced at the news of his death: "I call to spiritual rejoicing all those who constantly remained in fasting, in mourning and prayer, and by day and by night besought deliverance from the sorrows that surrounded us and found a reliable healing from the evils in unshakeable hope... What hoards of weapons, what myriads of men could have produced what our prayers and the will of God produced?"

Gregory called Julian not only an "apostate", but also "universal enemy" and "general murderer", a traitor to Romanity as well as to Christianity, explicitly denying that his was a power from God and therefore requiring obedience: "What demon instilled this thought in you? If every authority were acknowledged as sacred by the very fact of its existence, Christ the Savior would not have called Herod 'that fox'. The Church would not hitherto have denounced ungodly rulers who defended heresies and persecuted Orthodoxy. Of course, if one judges an authority on the basis of its outward power, and not on its inner, moral worthiness, one may easily bow down to the beast, i.e. the Antichrist, 'whose coming will be with all power and lying wonders' (II Thessalonians 2.9), to whom 'power was given... over all kindred, and tongues, and nations. And all that dwelt upon the earth shall worship him, whose names were not written in the book of life of the Lamb' (Revelation 13.7-8)." ⁵⁵⁸

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What made Julian the Apostate so terrible in the eyes of the Holy Fathers was precisely the fact that he was an apostate, a Christian emperor who then reverted to paganism.

Moreover, Julian was the first - and last - of the Byzantine emperors who trampled on the memory and legitimacy of St. Constantine, declaring that he "insolently usurped the throne". For, as he said to the holy Great-Martyr Artemius, Governor of Egypt, whom, before torturing to death, he accused of murdering his brother: "If you do this [sacrifice to Apollo], I will free you of all guilt for my brother's death and honor you with a higher and more honorable rank than you held before. I will make you

'Call Mercurius to me, so that he might go and slay Julian, the enemy of my Son.' It then was made manifest to Saint Basil that the Martyr Mercurius came. After he had taken up his weapons, he received his order from the Woman, who was the most holy Theotokos, and he quickly took leave...

"After he beheld the vision, straightway, the saint descended with certain of the clergy into the city, where the Church of the holy Great Martyr Mercurius is situated. Within the church were to be found the precious relics of the martyr and his weapons, which were honored by the Christians. One hundred years had passed since the reigns of Decius, Gallus, Aemilianus, and Valerian, when the martyr lived and contested for Christ by his martyrdom in Caesarea. Upon entering those sacred precincts, Saint Basil could find neither the relics nor the martyr's weapons. He questioned the skevophylax [warden and keeper of the vessels] of the church to learn what happened to them. But he, not knowing the matter, solemnly replied that he knew nothing. The saint then came to know both that the vision was true, and that during that same night, the 26th of June, in the year 363, the ungodly emperor was slain." (The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, January 1, Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista, 2003; Theodoret, Ecclesiastical History, III, 19)

⁵⁵⁸ St. Gregory, *First Word against Julian*, 35; *Second Word against Julian*, 26.

high priest of the great gods and patriarch of all the priests in the whole world. I shall call you my father, and you will be second only to me in my Empire. You know, Artemius, that it was out of jealousy that Constantius slew my brother Gallus, for my family, rather than Constantine's, ought to have inherited the throne. My father Constantius was the son of my grandfather Constantius by the daughter of Masimian, while Constantine was the son of Helena, a baseborn woman. Moreover, my grandfather was not yet Caesar when Helen bore Constantine, while my father was born after my grandfather had attained that rank. But Constantine insolently usurped the throne and shed the blood of his own relatives..."⁵⁵⁹

If, as Paul Magdalino suggests, "each emperor's accession was a conscious act of renewal of the imperial order instituted by Constantine the Great," and "the idea of each new ruler as a new Constantine was implicit in the dynastic succession established by the founder of Constantinople"⁵⁶⁰, then Julian's rejection of Constantine was clearly a rejection of the imperial order as such. In this sense Julian was an *anti-emperor* as well as an *anti-christ*.

That this is how the Byzantines looked at it is suggested by what happened at the death of Julian and the accession of the Christian Emperor Jovian in 363: "Themistus assured the people of the city that what they were getting, after Constantine's son Constantius and Constantine's nephew Julian, was nothing less than a reincarnation of Constantine himself."⁵⁶¹ Jovian's being a "new Constantine" was a guarantee that he represented a return to the old order and the true, Christian Romanity (*Romanitas*, Ρωμαιοσύνη). From this time new Byzantine emperors were often hailed as new Constantines, as were the Christian kings of the junior members of the Christian commonwealth of nations from England to Georgia.

After Julian, nobody believed that *all* emperors were established by God. The principle of monarchical power was good and from God – that was what St. Paul meant when he said that "all authority is from God" in Romans 13.1. But St. Paul had specified what he meant by "power" by saying that the king was "a servant of God for good", to reward the good and punish the evildoers. This could not apply to rulers such as Julian. They were not kings or authorities, but rebels and tyrants.

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The fifteen years after the death of the Emperor Jovian in 363 were a very difficult time for the Orthodox Church as Arian emperors persecuted the faith and suffered disastrous defeats at the hands of barbarians. Thus in 378 Valens, the Arian emperor of the East, was killed and his army overwhelmed at Adrianople, in accordance with the prophecy of St. Isaac of the Dalmatian monastery.⁵⁶²

⁵⁵⁹ St. Demetrius of Rostov, *Lives of the Saints*, October 20, p. 294.

⁵⁶⁰ Magdalino (ed.), *New Constantines: the Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th-13th Centuries*, Aldershot: Variorum, 1994, pp. 2, 3.

⁵⁶¹ Magdalino, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4.

⁵⁶² "Isaac, a hermit somewhere in the East, heard of the persecution, left the desert and went to Constantinople to encourage the faithful and denounce the heretics. Valens arrived in the north at that very time with his army, to meet the Goths who had come down from the Danube into Thrace. Isaac

There was confusion in the Church, and the emergence of different “jurisdictions” not in communion with each other, as the faithful struggled to discern which of the bishops was truly Catholic (or Orthodox, as we would say today). It became essential to cleave to the right-believing bishops and flee the heretical ones. St. Basil the Great, archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, bewailed the confusion, but himself became a standard-bearer of Orthodoxy to whom many rallied. As Fr. George Florovsky observes, “In questions concerning faith, the people must judge his teaching. The duty of obedience ceases to exert power when the bishop departs from the catholic standard and in such cases the people have the right to condemn and even depose him.”⁵⁶³

St. Basil wrote in 376: “Only one offense is now vigorously punished: an accurate observance of our fathers' traditions. For this cause, the pious are driven from their countries and transported into the deserts. The people are in lamentation... Joy and spiritual cheerfulness are no more; our feasts are turned into mourning; our houses of prayer are shut up; our altars are deprived of spiritual worship. No longer are there Christians assembling, teachers presiding, saving instructions, celebrations, hymns by night, or that blessed exultation of souls, which arises from communion and fellowship of spiritual gifts... The ears of the simple are led astray, and have become accustomed to heretical profaneness. The infants of the Church are fed on the words of impiety. For what can they do? Baptisms are in Arian hands; the care of travellers, visitation of the sick, consolation of mourners; succours of the distressed... Which all, being performed by them, become a bond to the people... so that in a little while, even though liberty be granted us, no hope will remain that they, who are encompassed by so lasting a deceit, should be brought back again to the acknowledgment of the truth.”⁵⁶⁴

Again he wrote: “I exhort you, therefore, not to faint in your afflictions, but to be revived by God’s love, and to add daily to your zeal knowing that in you ought to be preserved that remnant of true religion which the Lord will find when He cometh on the earth. Even if bishops are driven from their Churches, be not dismayed. If traitors have arisen from among the very clergy themselves, let not this undermine your confidence in God. We are saved not by names, but by mind and purpose, and genuine love toward our Creator. Bethink you how in the attack against our Lord, high priests

went out and stood before him, saying: ‘Open the churches of those of the true faith, O Emperor, and God will bless thy path.’ But the Emperor turned a deaf ear to the elder and went on his way. Isaac spoke out before the Emperor on the next day also, repeating his warning, and the Emperor almost hearkened to him, but one of his advisors, a follower of the Arian heresy, thwarted him. Isaac spoke before the Emperor again on the third day, seizing the Emperor’s horse by the bridle and pleading with him to grant freedom to the Church of God to escape divine punishment by acceding to his request. The enraged Emperor ordered that the elder be thrown into a waste place full of thorns and mud, but three angels appeared and pulled him out of the swamp. St Isaac appeared before the Emperor on the fourth day, and foretold a terrible death if he did not give the Orthodox freedom: ‘I tell thee, my Emperor, that thou shalt lead the troops out upon the barbarians, but thou shalt not be able to withstand them. Thou shalt flee before them, but shalt thyself be taken captive and burned alive.’ And so it all came to pass...” (St. Nikolai Velimirovič, *Prologue from Ochrid*, Birmingham: Lazarica Press, 1985, vol. I, May 30, p. 240).

⁵⁶³ Florovsky, *Themes in Orthodox Theology*, Athens 1989, p. 207 (in Greek)

⁵⁶⁴ St. Basil the Great, *Letter 243*, to the Bishops of Italy and Gaul

and scribes and elders devised the plot, and how few of the people were found really receiving the word. Remember that it is not the multitude who are being saved, but the elect of God. Be not then affrighted at the great multitude of the people who are carried hither and thither by winds like the waters of the sea. If but one would be saved, like Lot at Sodom, he ought to abide in right judgment, keeping his hope in Christ unshaken, for the Lord will not forsake His holy ones. Salute all the brethren in Christ from me. Pray earnestly for my miserable soul.”⁵⁶⁵

Something of the fierceness of the Church struggle of the time is conveyed by St. Hilary of Poitiers, a great champion of Orthodoxy against Arianism, who wrote: “Since the Nicene Council, we have done nothing but rewrite creeds. While we fight about words, inquire about novelties, take advantage of ambiguities, criticize authors, fight on party questions, have difficulties in agreeing, and prepare to anathematize each other, there is scarcely a man who belongs to Christ. Take, for example, last year’s creed, what alteration is there not in it already? First, we have a creed which bids us not to use the Nicene ‘consubstantial’; then comes another, which decrees and preaches it; next, the third excuses the word ‘substance’, as adopted by the Fathers in their simplicity; lastly, the fourth, which instead of excusing, condemns. We determine creeds by the year or the month, we change our own determinations, we prohibit our changes, we anathematize our prohibitions. Thus, we either condemn others in our own persons, or ourselves in the instance of others, while we bite and devour one another, and are like to be consumed one of another.”⁵⁶⁶

And yet for the Christian there was no alternative to the struggle over creeds and bishops. For, as St. Basil the Great said, “In the Church] one must get to the bottom of the problems, so as to eradicate the sickness from its very root.”⁵⁶⁷ And St. John Chrysostom said: “A want of zeal in small matters is the cause of all our calamities; and because slight errors escape fitting correction, greater ones creep in.”⁵⁶⁸

⁵⁶⁵ - St. Basil the Great, *Epistle 257, To the Monks Harassed by Arians*.

⁵⁶⁶ St. Hilary, *Ad Const.* ii, 4, 5; quoted by Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston in his “Statement on Grace, March, 2003”. St. Hilary’s younger contemporary, St. Basil the Great, spoke still more eloquently of the confusion and internecine strife of the Churches in his time (*On the Holy Spirit*, 30).

⁵⁶⁷ St. Basil the Great, *Letter 156*.

⁵⁶⁸ St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 1 on Galatians*.

36. EMPEROR THEODOSIUS THE GREAT

However, deliverance was on its way: in January, 379, the western emperor Gratian raised a Spanish general, Theodosius the Great, to the throne of the East. He restored order politically by making peace with the Persians, and signing a treaty with the Goths, giving them land in Illyricum and Thrace in exchange for military service (as a separate national contingent) in the Roman Army. This was later considered a fateful innovation in Roman policy in relation to the barbarians. But for the time being it worked...

Theodosius' most important actions related to the Faith. In February, 380 he banned overt paganism, and in 381 he convened the Second Ecumenical Council at Constantinople under the presidency, first, of St. Meletius, Archbishop of Antioch, and then, after his death, of St. Gregory the Theologian, Archbishop of Constantinople. However, St. Gregory retired, and St. Nectarius took his place as archbishop and president of the Council. When Theodosius was not yet emperor, and had not yet met St. Meletius, we read in his *Life*, "Meletius appeared to the General in a dream and invested him with the imperial mantle and crown. On awakening, Theodosius related everything to a servant and pondered on its meaning.... [When the bishops arrived at the palace for the Council], the ruler studied their faces and at once recognized Meletius. Ignoring the others, Theodosius fell prostrate before the saint. Like a devoted son long separated from his father, the Emperor kissed Meletius' hands, shoulders, eyes, lips and head. He publicly related his dream and accorded the man of God greater honour than any other hierarch."⁵⁶⁹

The Council completed the Nicene Creed (it should really be called the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed), and clearly condemned, not only Arianism, which denied the Divinity of Christ, but also Macedonianism, which denied the Divinity of the Holy Spirit. Meanwhile, Gratian, the *de facto* emperor of the West (the *de jure* emperor, Valentinian II, was his very young half-brother and under his guardianship) removed the altar to Victory from the Senate and renounced the office of *Pontifex Maximus*, thereby breaking the last link of the Orthodox Empire with the pagan religion and senatorial establishment of Old Rome.

However, the enemies of the Faith now made a last bid for power through political schism. It began, as Stephen Kershaw writes, when "the Roman army in Britain, which was manfully fighting off barbarian attacks from the north, rebelled and elevated Magnus Maximus ('Great the Greatest'), who was probably the *Dux Britanniarum*, to the purple. In later times, he entered Welsh legend⁵⁷⁰ in the story of *Mabinogion* and *The Dream of Macsen Wledig*, and prior to his departure to mainland Europe he seems to have minted coins at Londinium [London], which depicted a winged Victory hovering over the two Emperors (of which he was going to be the Western one). When he crossed over into Gaul, Gratian was deserted by his troops (led by his general

⁵⁶⁹ St. Demetrius of Rostov, *The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints*, House Springs, Mo.: Chrysostom Press, 2003, vol. 6, February 12, p. 153

⁵⁷⁰ He had a very pious Welsh wife, Helena, who is mentioned as serving St. Martin of Tours in Sulpicius Severus' *Life of Martin*, and may be the titular saint of the church on Lundy island in the Bristol Channel.

Maerobaudes) at Paris (recently named as such after the Gallic Parisii tribe) and fled to Lugdunum [Lyons]. There he was betrayed by the governor and killed on 25 August.

“Magnus Maximus and Theodosius I had some things in common: both were Spaniards, and both were highly orthodox. Magnus Maximus assumed control over Britain, Gaul and Spain from his capital at Treveri [Trier] for the next five years, and began negotiations with Theodosius I and Valentinian II, who was currently at Mediolanum [Milan], to try to get them to recognize him as their colleague. Theodosius I did not recognize Magnus Maximus as co-Augustus, but Valentinian, or more correctly Bishop Ambrose, who was acting on Valentinian II’s behalf, dug his heels in. Magnus Maximus’ terms would have relegated Valentinian II to the junior side of a father/son relationship, and the arrangement was clearly unacceptable to his advisers. The only solution would be a military one.

“In 387 Magnus Maximus invaded northern Italy. His success forced Valentinian II, accompanied by his mother Justina and sister Gallia, to head east to Thessalonica. This presented Theodosius I with a dilemma he could not shirk. Should he keep faith with Magnus Maximus, who was stronger than Valentinian II, Nicene and Spanish, or should he support his family, despite the fact that Valentinian II was very much under the thumb of Justina, who was not just an Arian, but also even prepared to court pagans and African Donatists to bolster her son’s position? To some surprise, he chose the family option. Zosimus explained why: Theodosius I had recently lost his first wife Aelia Flacilla, who had been a model of Christian piety and charity. Justina now offered him her daughter Gallia, who was extremely attractive on two counts: (1) she was stunningly beautiful; (2) she was (convolutedly) related to Constantine the Great. Her double allure was too much for Theodosius I, particularly when Justina promised that her family would become orthodox. So he marched against Magnus Maximus. His onslaught was so unexpectedly swift that he caught Magnus Maximus completely unprepared. Having won victories in the Balkans, he descended on Apuleia, where Magnus Maximus was captured and executed on 27 August 388.

“Theodosius I, who now ruled both East and West, installed himself at Mediolanum [Milan] until mid-391. Maximus’ family and close associates were duly put to the sword, but the defeated soldiers were integrated into Theodosius I’s armies. The obelisk of Theodosius I now in the Hippodrome at Istanbul partly celebrates his victory over Magnus Maximus and its base has relief carvings showing him, Valentinian II, and his two sons Arcadius and Honorius. For now, Arcadius represented him as Augustus of the East, while Valentinian II was reinstated at Treveri [Trier] under the watchful eye of the Frankish *Magister Militum* Arbogast...”⁵⁷¹

But in 392 Valentinian was found hanged in Vienne.⁵⁷² “Arbogast said it was suicide, but others suspected foul play. Certainly the swift appointment of a Christian

⁵⁷¹ Kershaw, *op. cit.*, pp. 356-358.

⁵⁷² The *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, in its entry on St. Ambrose, writes: “The murder of his youthful ward, Valentinian II, which happened in Gaul, May, 393, just as Ambrose was crossing the Alps to baptize him plunged the Saint into deep affliction. His eulogy delivered at Milan is singularly tender; he courageously described him as a martyr baptized in his own

but pagan-sympathetic rhetorician called Flavius Eugenius as his successor has a whiff of conspiracy about it, and the new Augustus had the backing of many Senators. Theodosius I knew that this was not only a threat to him, but, by association, to Christianity itself. He rejected all of Eugenius' efforts to secure his recognition, and made the situation clear by elevating his younger son Honorius to the rank of Augustus, before mobilizing a formidable army to take on the usurper in 392."⁵⁷³

Thornton writes: "The sudden appearance of Eugenius and Arbogast in Italy sparked hopes for a pagan revival. Indeed, this is what was attempted. Eugenius permitted the pagan altar of Victory to be returned to the Senate chamber and 'temples were rapidly restored and rededicated, festivals punctually celebrated, sacrifices correctly performed and the mystery cults revived... At Ostia the temple of Hercules was rebuilt. Furthermore, Arbogast boasted that he would soon stable his horses in the cathedral of the Christians.

"Saint Theodosios, at first reluctant to go to war over the elevation of Eugenius, could not ignore the implications of this direct challenge to his authority and to Christianity. Both sides prepared for war. Saint Theodosios accompanied his army on the march north-west, through Illyricum, to seize the Alpine passes. Then, at a river the Romans called 'Frigidum', now the Vipava in Slovenia, the two armies met. Prior to leaving, Saint Theodosios had consulted an Egyptian Monk, Saint John of Lycopolis, who prophesied that the Christian army would win a great victory after much bloodshed, but that Saint Theodosios would die in Italy.

"The battle commenced on September 5, 394, with a frenzied assault by the Christians. Huge numbers perished and, by the close of the day, the Christians were thrown back. Eugenius was delighted, assuming that he had won, while there was deep gloom in the Christian camp. Saint Theodosios spent the night in prayer, and had a vision of Saints John and Philip, 'who bade him take courage'. The following day, the assault was renewed. However, this time Almighty God intervened. Accompanying the Christian army was a wind of cyclone strength, blowing towards the enemy. The forces of Eugenius and Arbogast were blinded by great clouds of dust and their arrows and spears were deflected back towards themselves. It became nearly impossible for the infantry to hold on to its shields in the fierce wind, which pushed them back, while the same wind, catching the backs of the shields of the Christians, pulled them forward into the fray. The enemy line broke and Eugenius was captured, and later executed for treason and apostasy. Arbogast fled into the mountains and, after a few days, overwhelmed with despair, committed suicide. Saint Theodosios entered Italy in triumph.

blood." (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01383c.htm>) Again, he said: "I hear you lamenting because he had not received the sacrament of Baptism. Tell me, what else could we have, except the will to it, the asking for it? He too had just now this desire; and after he came into Italy it was begun, and a short time ago he signified that he wished to be baptized by me. Did he, then, not have the grace which he desired? Did he not have what he eagerly sought? Certainly, because he already sought it, he received it. What else does it mean: Whatever just man shall be overtaken by death, his soul shall be at rest (*Wisdom of Solomon* 4:7)." (*Sympathy at the Death of Valentinian*, 51)

⁵⁷³ Kershaw, *op. cit.*, pp. 359-360.

“Since the contest had been seen on both sides as a battle between the God of the Christians against the old gods of Rome, the effect on pagan opinion was devastating. Clearly the God of the Christians had decided the victor by direct intervention and many pagans, as a result, were immediately converted to the banner of Christ...”⁵⁷⁴

St. Theodosius died in Milan in 395, the last ruler of a united and Orthodox Roman empire extending from Britain to the borders of Persia... After him, the decline from this peak of piety and power would be steep... T.S. Brown writes: “Following Theodosius’ death in 395 a critical stage in the transformation of the Roman world occurred with the division of the empire between his sons Honorius (West) and Arcadius (East). While the myth of imperial unity was maintained, tension grew between the two courts. The Eastern empire remained relatively powerful as a result of its greater wealth and population and its relative immunity from barbarian pressure and the dangerous influence which German mercenaries exercised in the West. Christianity became strongly entrenched, and, despite bitter Christological controversies, served to reinforce imperial authority by treating the empire as an instrument of divine policy. In the West, however, fundamental economic and social weaknesses were aggravated by court intrigues, the self-interest of the senatorial elite and frequent revolts by usurpers. While Roman administration, society and culture remained resilient at the highest levels, the decentralization of the *pars occidentalis* was reflected in the growth of non-Roman cultures (as in Britain and North Africa) and the rise of local political allegiances (as in Gaul) even before the full effects of the barbarian migrations were felt in the fifth century.”⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁷⁴ Thornton, *op. cit.*, pp. 400-401.

⁵⁷⁵ Brown, in Angus Mackay and David Ditchburn (eds.), *Atlas of Medieval Europe*, London and New York: Routledge, 1997, p. 7.

37. THE CONSTANTINIAN REVOLUTION: (4) RELIGIOUS TOLERATION

The pagan Roman emperors had been in general tolerant of religion. This was for reasons of political expediency – a multi-ethnic and multi-faith population is more easily controlled if all its faiths are respected and legalized. Another motive was superstition. After all, calculated the ruler, the god of this people is more likely to help me if I do not persecute his people... And so in Imperial Rome before Constantine periods of persecution were intermittent and generally short-lived, and directed exclusively at Christians. As Perez Zagorin writes, Rome “was tolerant in practice in permitting the existence of many diverse religious cults, provided their votaries also complied with the worship of the divine emperor as part of the state religion. Unlike Christianity and Judaism, Roman religion had no sacred scriptures and did not depend on any creed, dogmas, or ethical principles. It consisted very largely of participation in cult acts connected with the worship of various deities and spirits that protected the Roman state and were associated with public, family, and domestic life. At nearly all stages of their history the Romans were willing to accept foreign cults and practices; this de facto religious pluralism is entirely attributable to the polytheistic character of Roman religion and had nothing to do with principles of values sanctioning religious toleration, a concept unknown to Roman society or law and never debated by Roman philosophers or political writers.”⁵⁷⁶

Christianity introduced a new complexity to the question of religious toleration. On the one hand, the Christians, like the Jews, rejected the idea of a multiplicity of gods, and insisted that there was only one name by which men could be saved – that of the One True God, Jesus Christ. This position did not logically imply that Christians wanted to persecute people of other faiths. But the “exclusivism” of Christianity, then as now, was perceived by the pagan-ecumenist majority, whether sincerely or insincerely, as a threat to themselves. On the other hand, the Christians set no value on the forcible conversion of people to the Faith: man, being in the image of God, was free, and could come to God only by his own free will. As the Christian lawyer Tertullian put it: “It does not belong to religion to force people to religion, since it must be accepted voluntarily.”⁵⁷⁷ In his *Barring of Heretics* (ca. 200) Tertullian insisted on the truth of Christianity and declared that heretics could not be called Christians. Nevertheless, he was “opposed to compulsion in religion and stated in other works that ‘to do away with freedom of religion [*libertas religionis*]’ was wrong. While Christians, he said, worship the one God and pagans worship demons, both ‘human and natural law’ ordain that ‘each person may worship whatever he wishes’.”⁵⁷⁸

However, Tertullian was writing at a time when the Church, as a persecuted minority, clearly benefited from religious toleration. What if the Church herself were to gain political power? After all, the Old Testament Kings were *required* by God to defend the faith of the people *as their first duty*, and the prophets constantly reminded them that they would be judged by God in accordance with their fulfilment or non-

⁵⁷⁶ Zagorin, *How the Idea of Religious Toleration Came to the West*, Princeton University Press, 2004, p. 4.

⁵⁷⁷ Tertullian, *Ad Scapulam*, 2.

⁵⁷⁸ Zagorin, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

fulfilment of this duty. This same duty was taken very seriously by the first Christian emperor, St. Constantine.

However, through the Edict of Milan of 312 and in accordance with the teaching of his tutor Lactantius, he professed and practiced a policy of religious toleration. For, as he declared: "It is one thing to undertake the contest for immortality voluntarily, another to compel others to do it likewise through fear of punishment."⁵⁷⁹

While not hiding his Christianity, and characterizing paganism as "superstition", he did not ban it. Thus in 324, just after defeating Licinius and taking control of the Eastern provinces, he wrote: "I wish, for the common good of the empire and of all men, that Thy people should be in peace and remain exempt from troubles. May those who are in error joyfully receive the enjoyment of the same peace and tranquillity as the believers, for the sweetness of concord will have the power to correct them also and lead them on the right path." In addition to allowing the pagans to practise their religion, Constantine never excluded them "from the administration of the State: one finds them among the praetorian prefects, the prefects of Rome, the ministers and even the entourage of the Emperor."⁵⁸⁰

In his last years, however, Constantine steadily increased the pressure on the enemies of the faith: by 324 pagan sacrifices had been banned, heresy was illegal, homosexuals were burned at the stake, and the official religion of the Empire was Orthodoxy. Constantine also defended the Christians against the Jews. He released all slaves whom the Jews had dared to circumcise, and those Jews who killed their co-religionists for converting to Christianity were executed.⁵⁸¹

Nevertheless, the bark of the earliest Christian emperors was worse than their bite, and many of their decrees were not executed by local governors. But they had a long-term effect. By the 350s pagan sacrifices were rare. "Heretics were exiled, and Arius's books were burned, just as the anti-Christian treatise of Porphyry was destroyed by imperial order. Constantine's religious policy created an 'atmosphere' of hostility to heresy as much as to paganism."⁵⁸²

⁵⁷⁹ Lactantius, in Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, London: Penguin Books, 1988, p. 637.

⁵⁸⁰ Pierre Maraval, "La Louve et la Croix" (The She-Wolf and the Cross), *Histoire* (Le Figaro), 8, June-July, 2013, p. 63. Timothy Barnes writes: "Constantine allowed pagans to retain their beliefs, even to build new sacred edifices. But he allowed them to worship their traditional gods only in the Christian sense of that word, not according to the traditional forms hallowed by antiquity. The emperor made the distinction underlying his policy explicit when he answered a petition from the Umbrian town of Hispellum requesting permission to build a temple of the Gens Flavia. Constantine granted the request but specified that the shrine dedicated to the imperial family must never be 'polluted by the deceits of any contagious superstition'. From 324 onwards Constantine constantly evinced official disapproval of the sacrifices and other cultic acts which constituted the essence of Greco-Roman paganism: Christianity was now the established religion of the Roman Empire and its ruler, and paganism should now conform to Christian patterns of religious observance." (*op. cit.*, pp. 212-213)

⁵⁸¹ L.A. Tikhomirov, *Religiozno-Filosofskie Osnovy Istorii* (The Religious-Philosophical Foundations of History), Moscow, 1997, p. 340.

⁵⁸² Leithart, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

But Leithart raises the question: “If religion was a matter of free will, why did Constantine so vigorously oppose paganism in his decrees, letters and speeches, and how could he justify any restrictions on religion at all? If Constantine thought that religion should be free, what was he doing forbidding sacrifice?”

“Elizabeth Digeser offers terminology and categories that help make sense of Constantine’s policies. She distinguishes forbearance from toleration, and tolerance from ‘concord’. Forbearance is a pragmatic policy, not guided by moral or political principle. Forbearance might change to persecution if political conditions change. The periods of [pagan] Roman acceptance of Christianity were periods of forbearance. Toleration is ‘disapproval or disagreement coupled with an unwillingness to take action against those viewed with disfavor in the interest of some moral or political principle.’ This principle could arise, as for Lactantius, from a theory concerning the nature of religion, or, alternatively, from a theory about human nature or about the limits of state power. By this definition, toleration does not involve an idea of the equality of all viewpoints but the opposite. Toleration assumes *disapproval* of certain religious expressions but refrains for principled reasons from using state power to suppress the disapproved religion. Beyond toleration, Digeser introduces the category of ‘concord’: ‘(1) its attitude of forbearance is dictated by some moral, political, or even religious principle and (2) it expects that by treating its dissenters with forbearance it is creating conditions under which they will ultimately change their behavior to conform to what the state accepts.’ These three strategies of religious policy build on one another: toleration assumes forbearance on principle, it expects that the forbearance will have the ultimate outcome of unity if not complete uniformity.”⁵⁸³

After Constantine’s death, his successor Constantius redirected the state towards hostility against Orthodoxy, and Julian the Apostate tried forcibly to turn the clock back to paganism. However, Orthodoxy returned under the Emperor Jovian in 363, and by the end of the fourth century, all paganism and heresy had been outlawed by Theodosius I, who declared: “It is our pleasure that all nations that are governed by our clemency should steadfastly adhere to the religion which was taught by St. Peter to the Romans, which faithful tradition has preserved and which is not professed by the Pontiff Damasus and by Bishop Peter of Alexandria, a man of apostolic holiness. According to the discipline of the Apostles, and the doctrine of the Gospel, let us believe in the sole Deity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, under an equal majesty and a pious Trinity. We authorize the followers of this doctrine to assume the title of Catholic Christians; and as we judge that all others are extravagant madmen, we brand them with the infamous name of heretics, and declare that their conventicles shall no longer usurp the respectable appellation of churches: these are to be visited first by divine vengeance, and secondly by the stroke of our own authority, which we have received in accordance with the will of heaven.”⁵⁸⁴

As Perez Zagorin writes, Theodosius “proscribed various heresies by name, ordered the confiscation of churches and private houses where heretics met for worship, and deprived them of the right to make wills or receive inheritances. In the

⁵⁸³ Liethart, *op. cit.*, pp. 139-140.

⁵⁸⁴ Norwich, *op. cit.*, pp. 117-118.

case of certain heretical sects [the Manichaeans] he commanded that their members be hunted down and executed. In his attempt to enforce uniformity of belief he also instituted legislation against paganism, including a comprehensive enactment in 395 forbidding anyone of whatever rank or dignity to sacrifice to or worship 'senseless images' constructed 'by human hands', on pain of heavy fines and other penalties. He was likewise the first emperor to impose penalties on Christians who profaned their baptism by reverting to paganism.

"... All subjects were expected to be worshippers in this [the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic] Church; and in addition to the spiritual and political authority its bishops wielded, it had the power of the state at its disposal to enforce its faith against heretics. The practical toleration and religious pluralism that had formerly been the Roman custom no longer existed. The change that took place is epitomised in an appeal made in 384 by Quintus Aurelius Symmachus - a Roman senator, orator, and prefect of Rome, and a defender of paganism - to the emperors Theodosius I and Valentinian II to restore the altar of the goddess victory to the Senate House (it had been removed by imperial decree after standing there for over 350 years, since the reign of the emperor Augustus at the beginning of the first century). Speaking in the name of the proscribed ancient religion of Rome, Symmachus declared that 'each nation has its own gods and peculiar rites. The Great Mystery cannot be approached by one avenue alone... Leave us the symbol on which our oaths of allegiance have been sworn for so many generations. Leave us the system which has given prosperity to the State.' His plea was of no avail, however, for the cross of Christ had conquered the Roman Empire, and the altar of Victory remained banished and abandoned."⁵⁸⁵

"In practice," writes Protopresbyter James Thornton, "the religious edicts of Theodosios were never implemented in a comprehensive fashion, since, as historian A.H.M. Jones remarks, 'there were too many pagans or sympathizers with paganism for that', and pagans continued to hold to their religious beliefs, albeit with some measure of discretion to avoid unpleasantness.

"Pagan belief, by itself, was not proscribed or persecuted, nor was the open profession of that belief. Paganism, in the cities especially, thenceforth became more a private philosophical outlook, without a public cult... [It] remained a significant force for some time, continuing 'overtly in some places for several generations, and secretly for some centuries.' Yet, it clearly was a dying movement."⁵⁸⁶

Fr. John Meyendorff agrees: "It is clear that practical considerations often dictated tolerance towards large and influential groups of heretics. This was the case of the Gothic troops, predominantly Arian, on which the emperor had frequently to rely for his security, and of the various Gothic rulers, who conquered the Western regions of the empire and were not only invested with imperial court title but also remained diplomatic partners until the reconquest of the West by Justinian. The empire was also

⁵⁸⁵ Zagorin, *op. cit.*, pp. 23, 24. However, Hill argues that it was not Theodosius' measures but Justinian's persecution in the sixth century that was "the first really thorough attempt on the part of the Roman authorities to stamp out paganism, and the first time that the various laws against paganism were seriously enforced" (*op. cit.*, p. 301).

⁵⁸⁶ Thornton, *op. cit.*, pp. 398-399.

forced to exercise moderation and use diplomacy with the opponents of the council of Chalcedon (451), who constituted at least half of the population of the East. The numerically small, but intellectually influential group of Nestorians was not as fortunate. After its condemnation by the council of 451, it began a long history of survival, and also missionary expansion throughout Asia."⁵⁸⁷

Judaism was also given some toleration. As Meyendorff writes, "If Roman imperial law eventually [under Theodosius I] prohibited paganism, it continued to offer limited protection to the Jews. Not only was their cultic freedom guaranteed, but the disaffection of synagogues was forbidden and their personnel – like the Christian clergy – were exempt of civil and personal charges. Arbitrary violence against Jews was punishable by law. However, since the very beginning of the Christian empire, drastic measures had been taken against Jewish proselytizing among Christians, and baptism of Jews was encouraged. Conversion of Christians to Judaism was prohibited, and Jews molesting a convert to Christianity were to be burnt at the stake.... They were not to own Christian slaves, and were deprived of legal protection if they showed disrespect to Christianity. They were also excluded from the army, the civil services and the legal profession. It does not seem, however, that – before the reign of Heraclius (610-641) – forcible baptisms of Jews were practiced within the Empire, as they began to occur in the barbarian Christian states of the West after the fifth century. The sect of the Samaritans enjoyed a status similar to that of orthodox Jews until the big Samaritan rebellions in Palestine under Justinian, which led to their forcible suppression."⁵⁸⁸

However, the Church remained implacably opposed to Talmudic Judaism as the religion most implacably opposed to Christianity and insofar as the Jews, being in possession of the Holy Scriptures, had less excuse than any for not believing in Christ. Thus St. John Chrysostom writes: "Since there are some who think of the synagogue as a holy place, I must say a few words to them. Why do you reverence that place? Must you not despise it, hold it in abomination, run away from it? They answer that the Law and the books of the prophets are kept there. What is this? Will any place where these books are be a holy place? By no means! This is the reason above all others why I hate the synagogue and abhor it. They have the prophets but do not believe them; they read the sacred writings but reject their witness-and this is a mark of men guilty of the greatest outrage."⁵⁸⁹

The early Christian emperors of the fourth century used the death penalty against very few categories of heretics. For example, in the late 340s the Donatist Marculus was executed, and in 384 Bishop Priscillian of Avila was executed on a charge of sorcery.⁵⁹⁰ Following St. Paul's assertion that the emperor, as God's minister, does not wield the sword in vain (Romans 13.4), the Church never condemned the death penalty in all circumstances. However, from the early fifth century, and sometimes even earlier, Church writers rejected the idea of killing people for their faith. Thus the

⁵⁸⁷ Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions*, Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1989, pp. 16-17.

⁵⁸⁸ Meyendorff, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-16.

⁵⁸⁹ St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 5*, 5.2; *Against the Jews*.

⁵⁹⁰ Jonathan Hill, *Christianity: The First 400 Years*, Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2013, pp. 233, 294.

Church historian Socrates said: "It is not the custom of the Orthodox Church to persecute".⁵⁹¹ And St. Athanasius the Great said: "It is a characteristic of [true] religion not to force but to persuade."⁵⁹² "Christians are called to freedom (Galatians 5.13), and every religious act of conscious Christians must bear on itself the mark of freedom. The ancient Christian writer Lactantius demonstrated that religion exists only where there is freedom, and disappears where freedom has disappeared, and that it is necessary to defend the truth with words and not with blows (*verbis, non verberibus*).⁵⁹³ 'The mystery of salvation,' writes St. Gregory the Theologian, 'is for those who desire it, not for those who are compelled'. The 108th canon of the Council of Carthage cites the law of Honorius that 'everyone accepts the exploit of Christianity by his free choice', and Zonaras in his interpretation of this canon writes: 'Virtue must be chosen, and not forced, not involuntary, but voluntary... for that which exists by necessity and violence is not firm and constant'."⁵⁹⁴

In practice, degrees of coercion were applied. Thus St. Amphilochius of Iconium, a close friend of St. Basil the Great and St. Gregory the Theologian, "begged the Emperor Theodosius to send impenitent Arians into exile. The Emperor refused – such an edict would be too severe. Shortly after this Theodosius raised his small son Arcadius to the imperial throne, and sat by his side to receive his court. Amphilochius was among those waiting on the Emperor. He approached the throne and saluted Theodosius, but ignored Arcadius. 'The Emperor, thinking this neglect was due to forgetfulness, commanded Arcadius to approach and salute his son. "Sir," said he, "the honour I have paid to you is enough." Theodosius was indignant at this discourtesy, and said, "Dishonour done to my son is a rudeness done to me." "You see, sir," returned Amphilochius, "that you do not allow your son to be dishonoured, and are bitterly angry with those who are rude to him. God too abominates those who blaspheme the Only begotten Son, and hates them as ungrateful to their Saviour and Benefactor." Theodosius immediately saw the point of the analogy, and issued the Edict of Banishment forthwith."⁵⁹⁵

St. John Chrysostom (+407) preached non-violence to heretics: "Christians above all men are forbidden to correct the stumblings of sinners by force... It is necessary to make a man better not by force but by persuasion. We neither have authority granted us by law to restrain sinners, nor, if it were, should we know how to use it, since God gives the crown to those who are kept from evil, not by force, but by choice."⁵⁹⁶

St. John interpreted the parable of the wheat and the tares to mean that the heretics (the tares) should not be killed. But they were to be resisted in other ways. "As we can see from the many occurrences of the phrase 'stop the mouths of the heretics' in his

⁵⁹¹ Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*, VII, 3.

⁵⁹² St. Athanasius, *Against the Arians*, 67; P.G. 25, p. 773.

⁵⁹³ Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, 19.

⁵⁹⁴ S.V. Troitsky, *Khristianskaia Filosofia Braka* (The Christian Philosophy of Marriage), Paris: YMCA Press, p. 207.

⁵⁹⁵ Margaret Strachey, *Saints and Sinners of the Fourth Century*, London: William Kimber, 1958, pp. 151=152.

⁵⁹⁶ St. John Chrysostom, quoted by Fr. Antonious Henein, orthodox-tradition@egroups.com, 8 August, 2000.

writings, St. John showed not the slightest indulgence towards false teachings; indeed, much of his life as a preacher was devoted to combating such heretics as the Eunomians, the Judaizers, and the Manichaeans. However, he was resolutely opposed to the use of violence by the authorities to subdue heretics. And it is this reservation of his that must be carefully understood, if one is to grasp what may seem to be a contradictory view of heretics. He knew from pastoral experience that heretics were far more likely to be turned aside from their errors by prayer: 'And if you pray for the Heathens, you ought of course to pray for Heretics also, for we are to pray for all men, and not to persecute. And this is good also for another reason, as we are partakers of the same nature, and God commands and accepts benevolence towards one another' (*Homilies on the First Epistle to St. Timothy*, 7). Near the end of this homily on the dangers of anathematizing others, he says that 'we must anathematize heretical doctrines and refute impious teachings, from whomsoever we have received them, but show mercy to the men who advocate them and pray for their salvation.' In other words, we must love the heretic, but hate the heresy."⁵⁹⁷

However, it may be wondered whether St. John's words should be interpreted as an absolute ban on any kind of coercion in any circumstances. For there were other prominent and holy Christians contemporary with him who did approve of some measure of coercion in some circumstances. In particular, there was the question of the rights of the Christian emperor. If the Church as an institution or individual Christians could only persuade, not coerce, was it not the task of the emperor to coerce, or at any rate limit the activity of those who refused to be persuaded?

Zeal against heretics was, of course, not the exclusive preserve of the emperors and bishops. The lay Christians of Alexandria and the monks of Egypt were famous (and, in some cases, notorious) for their zeal. In general, however, as we have seen, the Church was against the execution of heretics. And when some rare executions did take place, there was a negative reaction. Thus when St. Martin of Tours (+397) signed the decision of a Synod condemning the Spanish heretic Priscillian and handing him over to the Emperor for execution, he felt the reproaches of his conscience, and never again attended a Synod of Bishops. St. Ambrose of Milan and Pope Siricus of Rome also protested the execution.⁵⁹⁸

However, we cannot say that the execution of heretics is *absolutely* forbidden by Orthodoxy... In the *Lives of the Saints* we find a few instances of saints - even of saints who were not secular rulers - blessing the execution of heretics, even executing evildoers themselves. Thus in *The Acts of the Apostles* we read how the Apostle Peter in effect executed Ananias and Sapphira. Again, the Apostles Peter and Paul by their prayers brought about the death of Simon Magus. Again, as we have seen, St. Basil the Great prayed for, and obtained, the death of Julian the Apostate (by the sword of St. Mercurius the Great Martyr). And the holy hierarchs Patrick of Ireland and Leo of Catania in effect executed particularly stubborn perverters of the people.⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹⁷ Hieromonk Patapios, "On Caution regarding Anathematization", *Orthodox Tradition*, January, 2000, p. 22.

⁵⁹⁸ Hill, *op. cit.*, pp. 294-295.

⁵⁹⁹ See St. Leo's life in St. Demetrius of Rostov, *Lives of the Saints*, February 20.

In a very few cases, therefore, coercion was employed, not in order to convert the heretics - for conviction is not born through coercion - but in order to prevent the young and the weak-minded from losing the saving confession of the faith through their machinations; for, as the Lord Himself said, "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew 18.6).

38. ST. AUGUSTINE ON THE DONATISTS AND PELAGIANS

Probably none of the early Fathers exercised himself more over the question of religious freedom than St. Augustine, the famous bishop of Hippo, whose influence on western theology was deep and long-lasting. In recent years there has been much controversy over Augustine's views on various subjects in Orthodox circles; and his views do not always reflect "the consensus of the Fathers". But of his essential Orthodoxy - he was called "holy" at the Fifth Ecumenical Council, - there can be no doubt.

Augustine was baptized by St. Ambrose, bishop of Milan, whose rigorous attitude towards heretics and schismatics probably influenced him. Let us briefly examine his position.

In 388 some Christians burned down the synagogue in Callinicum on the Euphrates. The Emperor Theodosius the Great ordered its rebuilding at the Christians' expense. However, St. Ambrose wrote to him: "When a report was made by the military Count of the East that a synagogue had been burnt down, and that this was done at the instigation of the bishop, you gave command that the others should be punished, and the synagogue be rebuilt by the bishop himself... The bishop's account ought to have been waited for, for priests are the calmers of disturbances, and anxious for peace, except when even they are moved by some offence against God, or insult to the Church. Let us suppose that the bishop burned down the synagogue... It will evidently be necessary for him to take back his act or become a martyr. Both the one and the other are foreign to your rule: if he turns out to be a hero, then fear lest he end his life in martyrdom; but if he turns out to be unworthy, then fear lest you become the cause of his fall, for the seducer bears the greater responsibility. And what if others are cowardly and agree to construct the synagogue? Then... you can write on the front of the building: 'This temple of impiety was built on contributions taken from Christians'. You are motivated by considerations of public order. But what is the order from on high? Religion was always bound to have the main significance in the State, which is why the severity of the laws must be modified here. Remember Julian, who wanted to rebuild the temple of Jerusalem: the builders were then burned by the fire of God. Do you not take fright at what happened then?... And how many temples did the Jews not burn down under Julian at Gaza, Askalon, Beirut and other places? You did not take revenge for the churches, but now you take revenge for the synagogue!"⁶⁰⁰ "What is more important," he asked, "the parade of discipline or the cause of religion? The maintenance of civil law is secondary to religious interest."⁶⁰¹

Ambrose refused to celebrate the Liturgy until the imperial decree had been revoked. Theodosius backed down...

The "Ambrosean" position may be tentatively formulated as follows. On the one hand, in relation to those outside her the Church can herself adopt no coercive measures; she can do no more than reason, plead and threaten with *God's* justice at

⁶⁰⁰ St. Ambrose, *Letter 40*, in Fomin and Fomina, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 69.

⁶⁰¹ Paul Johnson, *A History of the Jews*, London: Phoenix, 1987, 1995, p. 164.

the Last Judgement. Her only means of “coercion”, if it can be called that, is the excommunication of unrepentant Christians from her fold. On the other hand, the Church blesses the Christian State to use other, more physical means of coercion against those over whom she has no more influence. For the emperor “wields not the sword in vain” (Romans 13.4) and is “the bishop of those outside the Church” (St. Constantine’s phrase). The purpose of this is not to *convert*; for only persuasion can convert, and as St. Basil the Great says, “by violence you can frighten me, but cannot persuade me”. But there are other legitimate and Christian purposes for coercion: justice against evildoers, the restriction of their influence, and, especially, the protection of the young and weak in mind who might lose their souls through listening to a heretic... But even St. Ambrose never advocated the *execution* of heretics or Jews simply because they believed wrongly. And, as we have seen, he opposed the execution of the Spanish bishop Priscillian.

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Perez Zagorin writes: “Augustine carried on a long theological combat with three formidable heresies, Manichaeism, Pelagianism, and Donatism. Among his writings against the last of these and its followers, the Donatists, he left an invaluable record of his reflections on the justification of coercion against heretics to enforce religious truth. At the time he became bishop of Hippo, Donatism, which took its name from one of its first leaders, Donatus, bishop of Carthage, had already existed in North Africa for more than eighty years and had undergone considerable persecution. Originating in the early fourth century in an ecclesiastical controversy over a bishop who had [allegedly] compromised with paganism during the persecution by the emperor Diocletian and was therefore considered a betrayer of the faith, the Donatists formed a schismatic and rival church with its own clergy. Rigorists who believed in a church composed exclusively of the holy, they maintained that an unworthy priest could not perform a valid sacrament. By insisting on the rebaptism of converts, the Donatist church declared its rejection of the sacramental character of Catholic baptism. To some extent Donatism represented an expression of social protest against the profane world as a domain ruled by Satan. Its more extreme advocates, a fanatical fringe of zealots and ascetics known as Circumcellions, sought a martyr’s death by any means, including suicide; they gathered as bands of marauding peasants who attacked estates and committed other acts of violence. As a self-described church of martyrs, the Donatists condemned the alliance between Catholicism and the Roman authorities as a renunciation of Christ in favour of Caesar, and their bishop Donatus was reported to have said, ‘What has the Emperor to do with the Church?’ In the course of its history Donatism became a considerable movement, although it remained largely confined to North Africa.

“In his numerous writings against this heresy, one of Augustine’s constant aims was to persuade its followers by means of reason and arguments to abandon their errors and return to the Catholic Church. He did his best to refute its doctrines in a number of treatises and at first opposed any use of coercion against these heretics. A lost work of 397 repudiated coercion, and in an undated letter to a Donatist churchman he wrote: “I do not intend that anyone should be forced into the Catholic communion against his will. On the contrary, it is my aim that the truth may be

revealed to all who are in error and that... with the help of God, it may be made manifest so as to induce all to follow and embrace it of their own accord.' To several Donatists he wrote in around 398 that those who maintain a false and perverted opinion but without 'obstinate ill will' – and especially those 'who have not originated their error by bold presumption' but received it from their parents or others, and who see truth with a readiness to be corrected when they have found it – are not to be included among heretics. The heretic himself, however, 'swollen with hateful pride and with the assertion of evil contradiction, is to be avoided like a mad man'.

"Nevertheless, Augustine eventually reversed his position and decided to endorse coercion. Looking back at this development some years later, he said that at first he had believed that no one should be forced into the unity of Christ, and that the Church should rely only on speaking, reasoning, and persuasion 'for fear of making pretended Catholics out of those whom we knew as open heretics'. But then proven facts caused him to give up this opinion when he saw Donatists in his own city 'converted to Catholic unity by the fear of imperial laws' and those in other cities recalled by the same means. Reclaimed Donatists, he contended, were now grateful that 'fear of the laws promulgated by temporal rulers who serve the Lord in fear has been so beneficial' to them.

"We first learn of Augustine's change of mind in the treatise he wrote (ca. 400) as a reply to a letter by the Donatist bishop Parmenian, a leading spokesman of the movement. In this work he justified the intervention of the imperial government against the Donatists by making Saint Paul's theology of the state, as the apostle outlined it in the thirteenth chapter of his letter to the Romans (Romans 13.1-7). There Paul instructed Christians to be obedient to the higher powers as the minister ordained by God and armed with the sword for the repression of evildoers. In the light of this apostolic teaching, Augustine insisted that the emperors and the political authorities had the God-given right and duty to crush the sacrilege and schism of the Donatists, since they were as obligated to repress a false and evil religion as to prevent the crime of pagan idolatry. He further pointed out that the Donatists were guilty of many cruelties and had themselves appealed to the emperors in the past against the dissidents in their own church. Denying that those of them condemned to death were martyrs, he described them instead as killers of souls and, because of their violence, often killers of bodies.

"One of the arguments he put forward in defense of force in this work was his interpretation of Jesus' parable of the tares in the Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 13.24-30). This famous text was destined to be cited often during subsequent centuries in discussions of toleration and persecution, and to occupy a prominent place in the tolerationist controversies of the era of the Protestant Reformation. The parable first likens the kingdom of heaven to a good seed and then relates how a man sowed good seed in the ground, whereupon his enemy came in the night and planted tares, or weeds, there as well. When the wheat appeared, so did the tares. The man's servants asked their master if they should pull up the tares, but he forbade them lest they also uproot the wheat. He ordered that both should be left to grow until the harvest, and then the reapers would remove and burn the tares and gather the wheat into the barn. The parable's point would seem to be that good people and sinners alike should be

allowed to await the Last Judgement to receive their due, when God would reward the good with the kingdom of heaven and punish the bad with the flames of hell. Augustine, however, drew from it a very different lesson: if the bad seed is known, it should be uprooted. According to his explanation, the only reason the master left the tares to grow until the harvest was the fear that uprooting them sooner would harm the grain. When this fear does not exist because it is evident which is the good seed, and when someone's crime is notorious and so execrable that it is indefensible, then it is right to use severe discipline against it, for the more perversity is corrected, the more carefully charity is safeguarded. With the help of this interpretation, which reversed the parable's meaning, Augustine was able not only to justify the Roman government's repression of the Donatists but to provide a wider reason for religious persecution by the civil authorities.

"Augustine elaborated his position in favour of coercion in religion in a number of letters. In a lengthy epistle to the Donatist Vincent, he argued for the utility of coercion in inducing fear that can bring those who are subject to it to the right way of thinking. Maintaining that people could be changed for the better through the influence of fear, he concluded that 'when the saving doctrine is added to useful fear', then 'the light of truth' can drive out 'the darkness of error'. To reinforce this view, he quoted the parable of the feast in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 14. 21-23), another of the texts that was to figure prominently in future tolerationist controversy. In this parable, a man prepared a great feast to which he invited many guests who failed to appear. After summoning from the city the poor, blind, and lame to come and eat, he found that room still remained, so he ordered his servants to 'go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in [*compelle intrare* in the Latin Vulgate], that My house may be filled'. 'Do you think,' Augustine asked in a comment on this passage, 'that no one should be forced to do right, when you read that the master of the house said to his servants, "Whomever you find, compel them to come in"' . He referred also to the example of the conversion of the apostle Paul, who 'was forced by the great violence of Christ's compulsion to acknowledge and hold the truth' (Acts 9.3-18). The main point, he claimed, was not whether anyone was forced to do something, but whether the purpose of doing so was right or wrong. While no one could be made good against his will, the fear of punishment could persuade a person to repudiate a false doctrine and embrace the truth he had previously denied, as had happened to many Donatists who had thankfully become Catholics and now detested their diabolical separation.

"In dealing with heresy, Augustine thus laid great stress on what might be called the pedagogy of fear to effect a change of heart. He did not see coercion and free will as opposites in religious choice but claimed that fear plays a part in spontaneous acts of the will and may serve a good end. In one of his most important statements on the subject, contained in a letter of 417 to Boniface, the Roman governor of Africa, he propounded a distinction between two kinds of persecution. '[T]here is an unjust persecution,' he said, 'which the wicked inflict on the Church of Christ, and ... a just persecution which the Church of Christ inflicts on the wicked.' The Church persecutes from love, the Donatists from hatred; the Church in order to correct error, the Donatists to hurl men into error. While the Church strives to save the Donatists from perdition, the latter in their fury kill Catholics to feed their passion for cruelty.

Augustine was convinced that the coercion of heretics was therefore a great mercy because it rescued them from lying demons so that they could be healed in the Catholic fold. He rejected the objection of those who said that the apostles had never called upon the kings of the earth to enforce religion, since in the apostles' time there had been no Christian emperor to whom they could appeal. It was necessary and right, however, for kings to forbid and restrain with religious severity actions contrary to God's commandments, and to serve God by sanctioning laws that commanded goodness and prohibited its opposite.

"While admitting that it was better to lead people to the worship of God by teaching than to force them through fear of suffering, Augustine nevertheless averred that the latter way could not be neglected. Experience proved, he claimed, that for many heretics it had been a blessing to be driven out by fear of bodily pain to undergo instruction in the truth and then follow up with actions what they had learned in words. Schismatics, he noted, protested that men have freedom to believe or not to believe, and that Christ never used force on anyone. To this objection he countered with his previous argument that Christ had first compelled Paul to cease his persecution of the Christian Church by striking him blind at his conversion and only then taught him. 'It is a wonderful thing,' he said, 'how he [Paul] who came to the gospel under the compulsion of bodily suffering labored more in the gospel than all the others who were called by words alone.' Once again he drew on the injunction *compelle intrare* in the Gospel of Luke to affirm that the Catholic Church was in accord with God when it compelled heretics and schismatics to come in. In other letters he denied that the 'evil will' should be left to its freedom, and cited not only this same parable and the example of Christ's compulsion of Paul, but also God's restraint of the Israelites from doing evil and compelling them to enter the land of promise (Exodus 15.22-27), as proof of the Church's justice in using coercion.

"Although after his change of mind Augustine consistently approved the policy of subjecting heretics to coercion, he never desired that they should be killed. In writing to Donatists, he often stated that he and his brethren loved them and acted for their good, and that if they hated the Catholic Church, it was because 'we do not allow you to go astray and be lost'. Donatists had been subject to previous imperial legislation against heresy, but between 405 and 410 the emperor Honorius decreed a number of heavy penalties against them that put them outside the protection of the law for their seditious actions; he ordered their heresy to be put down in 'blood and proscription'.⁶⁰² Augustine frequently interceded with the Roman authorities to spare their lives. In 408 he wrote to the proconsul of Africa urging Christian clemency and praying that though heretics [should] be made to feel the effect of the laws against them, they should not be put to death, despite deserving the extreme punishment, in the hope that they might be converted. To another high official he pleaded in behalf

⁶⁰² "In January 412 Emperor Honorius officially banned Donatism. The members of the sect had to pay fines, whose amount was determined by their social and property status, and the clergy were exiled, while their church property was confiscated. The Berber Donatists organized a series of final bloody attacks on Catholic churches, and Augustine recognized that the problem of insincere conversions was not as serious as he previously thought" (Dvorkin, *Ocherki po Istorii Vselenskoj Pravoslavnoj Tserkvi*, p. 262) (V.M.).

of some Donatists tried for murder and other violent acts that they should be deprived of their freedom but not executed that they might have the chance to repent.

“Although repression weakened Donatism, it failed to eliminate this deeply rooted heresy, which survived until the later seventh century when the Islamic conquest of North Africa destroyed every form of Christianity in this region. In the course of his career, Augustine, who was not only an outstanding thinker but a man of keen and sensitive conscience, wrestled strenuously with the problem of heresy and the achievement of Catholic unity by the use of coercion... ‘Pride’, he once wrote, ‘is the mother of all heretics,’ and fear could break down this pride and thus act as an auxiliary in the process of conversion. Whether the heretic was really sincere in professing a change of mind under the threat of bodily pain was a question that could best be left to God. Augustine certainly did not recommend the death penalty for heretics but strove tirelessly to save their souls from eternal perdition. He supported their repression by the Roman imperial government in the hope of restoring them to the Catholic Church, and because, as he said in a letter to some Donatists, ‘nothing can cause more complete death to the soul than freedom to disseminate error’.”⁶⁰³

But if freedom to disseminate error should be restricted, this did not mean that the truth could be known in any other mode than in freedom. For, as St. Maximus the Confessor said, “the mystery of salvation is for those who desire it, not for those who are being coerced”.⁶⁰⁴ And again he said: "I do not want heretics to be tortured, and I do not rejoice in their misfortunes, God forbid! I counsel you to do good attentively and fervently to all men and that all believers should be everything for those in need. But at the same time I say: one must not help heretics and confirm them in their mad beliefs. Here it is necessary to be sharp and irreconcilable. For I do not call it love, but hatred, and a falling away from Divine love, when someone confirms heretics in their error to the inescapable destruction of these people."

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It is in the fifth century that the beginning of the schism between Eastern and Western Christianity, which had such huge consequences for the history of the world, are discernible. We see it in the pretensions to universal leadership that the Roman see begins to have. We also see it in certain doctrinal controversies in which East and West may not have diverged fundamentally, but which betray different approaches to dogma that were to become more significant over time. The most important of these controversies was over the teaching on free will and grace by the British monk Pelagius, who arrived in Rome in about 380 and in 416 published his main heretical work, "On Free Will". He was opposed particularly by St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, and his teaching was condemned by several local councils in East and West, as also by the Third Ecumenical Council in 431.

“In about 411,” writes Alexander Dvorkin, “when Augustine was absent from his city, there arrived there a prominent refugee from Rome. He set off for Palestine and

⁶⁰³ Zagorin, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-32, 33.

⁶⁰⁴ St. Maximus, *P.G.* 90.880.

wanted to pay a respectful visit to the noted African bishop. This was the British monk Pelagius, who lived for several years in Rome and acquired there significant popularity as a moralist and spiritual director. He did not succeed in meeting Augustine and departed. After visiting many countries Pelagius settled in Jerusalem, where, unlike Blessed Jerome, he had the most heartfelt good relations with the local clergy: soon a significant group of his spiritual children and followers was gathered. However, his friend, the lawyer Celestine, remained in Carthage; his eloquent defence of the views of Pelagius and criticism of the teaching of Augustine soon created a veritable storm in Africa.

“Pelagius, who was distinguished by the strictness of his life and demanded the same of his disciples, had many followers who set off after him to Palestine. They had to live in accordance with the commandments of God, study the Scriptures, give away their property and strive for holiness. Pelagius sincerely sorrowed over the morals of high Roman society, which took a very light-minded attitude to the challenge of the Gospel. He was profoundly disgusted by the Manichaeic-pessimistic view of human nature, which, as it seemed to him, was penetrating more and more into the Church. At that time a commentary on the epistles of St. Paul by an unknown author were widespread in Rome. From the words of St. Paul in the fifth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans (verse 12): ‘Therefore, as by one man sin came into the world, and through sin death, so death has passed to all men because in him all have sinned’ – the author of the commentary concluded that we have all sinned together in Adam, and not that the passing of sin to Adam’s descendants meant that the souls of men come from their parents, just as do their bodies...

“All this was exceptionally distasteful to Pelagius, who wrote his own commentary on the epistles of St. Paul in which he affirmed that we sin voluntarily by imitating the fall of Adam, being corrupted by our external environment and the consequent mistakes that weaken our will. In trying to express his point of view, Pelagius went so far as to deny that original sin is inherited, and affirmed that death is a natural property of man, and that the sin of Adam changed nothing in the nature of man and that man can be saved without the help of God. Grace is necessary only to point out the way. Human nature is neutral; neither good nor evil is intrinsic to it. Sin is rooted only in our own will. New-born babies are not bearers of evil and sin – we can call them only potentially sinful. From here it is easy to draw the conclusion that the baptism of children is senseless. For justice’s sake we must say that Pelagius himself never drew this conclusion, but replied to direct questions that Christ’s words that nobody who is not born from on high (i.e. who is unbaptized) can enter the Kingdom of Heaven, apply to children. But, continued Pelagius, it would be absurd to suppose that the merciful Lord could sentence innocent children to hell: probably there must be a third place that they go to.

“Blessed Augustine replied that flesh begets flesh. The reason for this is lust, of which we are all guilty. Sexual relations, said Augustine, are in principle sin, which can only in part be softened by the intention of begetting a child in a lawful marriage.

“In the beginning Augustine wrote very polite letters to Pelagius, refuting his theories, but gradually the polemic became heated. Oil was added to the fire by

Jerome, when Pelagius was careless enough to make critical remarks about Jerome's very Origenist interpretations of the Epistle of St. Paul to the Ephesians. It was then that Jerome called Pelagius 'a fat dog, whose belly is stuffed with Scottish [or Irish] porridge'.

"In 415 Augustine sent Pelagius his young friend from Spain, Orosius. He, on the advice of Jerome, publicly declared in Jerusalem that the doctrines of Pelagius had been condemned as heretical at an African council: in them, he said, original sin and man's need of grace were denied. This stirred up a veritable storm in Palestine, where Pelagius enjoyed great popularity and authority. A council was convened in Jerusalem that justified Pelagius. But in the same year another council was convened in Lydda, at which Pelagius, after elucidating his position, was forced to make significant concessions.

"However, after studying a stenogram of the council, Augustine found Pelagius' repentance incomplete and insincere. He convened his own council in Carthage, at which Pelagianism, in spite of all the concessions made by its founder, was again condemned.

"Then Pelagius appealed to Rome to Pope Zosimas (417-419), and he, deeply impressed by the lofty moral standards of the Pelagians and their unfeigned reverence for the apostolic see, wrote to the Africans that they had apparently paid heed to a distorted exposition of Pelagius' teaching, and that in fact he was completely Orthodox. Africa literally exploded. The Pope was frightened by this reaction and wavered in his decision, while Augustine, using his authority at the [Western]emperor's court in Ravenna, obtained, on 30 April 418, an imperial edict on the expulsion of the Pelagians from Rome as presenting a threat to public peace. Under this pressure the Pope gave in and published an official condemnation of Pelagius and Celestine."⁶⁰⁵

In 419 a Council at Carthage condemned the heresy, reaffirming Augustine's teaching on original sin; its canons have passed into the Canon Law of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Pope Celestine also condemned it; and in 431 he urged the bishops of Gaul to remain loyal to the teaching of St. Augustine.⁶⁰⁶ Such an exhortation was deemed necessary because Marseille in Gaul was the home of an influential disciple of St. John Chrysostom, St. John Cassian. In his balanced and insightful criticism of St. Augustine's attack on Pelagianism, in which he quoted abundantly from the Holy Scriptures but without mentioning Augustine or Pelagius by name, St. John insisted on the *synergetic* cooperation of God's grace and man's free will. For "these things are mixed together and fused so indistinguishably that which is dependent on which is a great question as far as many people are concerned - that is, whether God has mercy on us because we manifest the beginnings of a good will, or we acquire the beginnings of a good will because God is merciful. For many who hold to one of these alternatives

⁶⁰⁵ Dvorkin, *op. cit.*, pp. 264-266.

⁶⁰⁶ St. Photius the Great writes: "In the letter of Celestine, bishop of Rome, to Nestorius the same heretics are condemned. Celestine also wrote to the bishops of Gaul in defence of the teaching of St. Augustine and against those who were emboldened to speak rashly by the licence allowed to the heresy." (*Biblioteca*, 53)

and assert it more freely than is right have fallen into different self-contradictory errors.... These two things – that is, the grace of God and free will – certainly seem mutually opposed to one another, but both are in accord, and we understand that we must accept them both in like manner because of our religion, lest by removing one of them from the human being we seem to contravene the rule of the Church's faith. For when God sees us turning in order to will what is good, He comes to us, directs us, and strengthens us... On the other hand, if He sees us unwilling or growing lukewarm, He brings to our hearts salutary exhortations by which a good will may be either repaired or formed in us."⁶⁰⁷

Other critics of Augustine's approach included Abbot Valentinus of Hadrumetium, a daughter-foundation of Hippo, who wrote to Augustine warning him "against going to the opposite extreme and thus wholly denying the freedom of the will".⁶⁰⁸ Now Augustine did not deny the existence of free will.⁶⁰⁹ But there is no doubt that some of his expressions, taken out of context, could suggest such an extreme.

Later Orthodox Western councils such as the Council of Orange (529) confirmed Augustine's position while not condemning St. John Cassian's. Moreover, they confirmed his teaching on the inheritance of original sin.

Thus Canons One and Two of the Council of Orange declare: "1. If anyone denies that it is the whole man, that is, both body and soul, that was "changed for the worse" through the offense of Adam's sin, but believes that the freedom of the soul remains unimpaired and that only the body is subject to corruption, he is deceived by the error of Pelagius and contradicts the scripture which says, "The soul that sins shall die" (Ezekiel 18:20); and, "Do you not know that if you yield yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are the slaves of the one whom you obey?" (Romans 6.26); and, "For whatever overcomes a man, to that he is enslaved" (II Peter 2:19).

"2. If anyone asserts that Adam's sin affected him alone and not his descendants also, or at least if he declares that it is only the death of the body which is the punishment for sin, and not also that sin, which is the death of the soul, passed through one man to the whole human race, he does injustice to God and contradicts the Apostle, who says, "Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned" (Romans 5:12).

⁶⁰⁷ St. John Cassian, *Conference XIII*, New York: Newman Press, 1997, pp. 476, 477-478.

⁶⁰⁸ F. Van Der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop*, London: Sheed and Ward, 1961, p. 125.

⁶⁰⁹ Thus: "Who commits sin by an act which he could by no means avoid? If sin had been committed, it could have been avoided" (*On Free Will*, III, xviii, 50). Again, Fr. Seraphim Rose writes: "When it was objected to him that 'it is by his own fault that anyone deserts the faith, when he yields and consents to the temptation which is the cause of his desertion of the faith' (as against the teaching that God determines a man to desert the faith), Augustine found it necessary to make no reply except: 'Who denies it?' (*On the Gift of Perseverance*, ch. 46)." Again, he writes: "It is our part to believe and to will and His part to give to those who believe and will the ability to do good works through the Holy Spirit". A perfect statement of the Orthodox doctrine of synergy!

The Council concludes: "...we must, under the blessing of God, preach and believe as follows. The sin of the first man has so impaired and weakened free will that no one thereafter can either love God as he ought or believe in God or do good for God's sake, unless the grace of divine mercy has preceded him. We therefore believe that the glorious faith which was given to Abel the righteous, and Noah, and Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and to all the saints of old, and which the Apostle Paul commends in extolling them (Hebrews 11), was not given through natural goodness as it was before to Adam, but was bestowed by the grace of God.

"And we know and also believe that even after the coming of our Lord this grace is not to be found in the free will of all who desire to be baptized, but is bestowed by the kindness of Christ, as has already been frequently stated and as the Apostle Paul declares, "For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake" (Philippians 1:29). And again, "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6). And again, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and it is not your own doing, it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). And as the Apostle says of himself, "I have obtained mercy to be faithful" (1 Corinthians 7:25, cf. 1 Timothy 1:13). He did not say, "because I was faithful," but "to be faithful." And again, "What have you that you did not receive?" (1 Corinthians 4:7). And again, "Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17). And again, "No one can receive anything except what is given him from heaven" (John 3:27). There are innumerable passages of Holy Scripture which can be quoted to prove the case for grace, but they have been omitted for the sake of brevity, because further examples will not really be of use where few are deemed sufficient.

"According to the catholic faith we also believe that after grace has been received through baptism, all baptized persons have the ability and responsibility, if they desire to labor faithfully, to perform with the aid and cooperation of Christ what is of essential importance in regard to the salvation of their soul. We not only do not believe that any are foreordained to evil by the power of God, but even state with utter abhorrence that if there are those who want to believe so evil a thing, they are anathema. We also believe and confess to our benefit that in every good work it is not we who take the initiative and are then assisted through the mercy of God, but God himself first inspires in us both faith in him and love for him without any previous good works of our own that deserve reward, so that we may both faithfully seek the sacrament of baptism, and after baptism be able by his help to do what is pleasing to him. We must therefore most evidently believe that the praiseworthy faith of the thief whom the Lord called to his home in paradise, and of Cornelius the centurion, to whom the angel of the Lord was sent, and of Zacchaeus, who was worthy to receive the Lord himself, was not a natural endowment but a gift of God's kindness."

However, while defeated on the continent, the heresy of Pelagius continued to thrive in Pelagius' homeland of Britain, and in 429 the Gallic bishop, St. Germanus of Auxerre, who was the trainer and instructor of a whole generation of British monks and hierarchs, was invited by the British Orthodox to come to England and help them combat the heresy. He defeated the heresy in council, and even helped the British

soldiers to organize a victory over the pagan Saxon invaders by teaching them to shout "Alleluia" at a critical moment (he had been a Roman general before accepting the tonsure).⁶¹⁰ In 447 he came again, accompanied by St. Lupus of Troyes, and perhaps also by St. Patrick, the British-born apostle of Ireland.⁶¹¹

But the heresy lingered on, especially, probably, in the upper classes of British society⁶¹², and at some time between 545 and 569 the British Church convened a Council at Llandewi Brefi in Wales to refute the heretics, as told by Rhigyfarch in the eleventh century: "Since even after St. Germanus's second visit of help the Pelagian heresy was recovering its vigour and obstinacy, implanting the poison of a deadly serpent in the innermost regions of our country, a general synod is assembled of all the bishops of Britain. In addition to a gathering of 118 bishops, there was present an innumerable multitude of priests, abbots, clergy of other ranks, kings, princes, lay men and women, so that the very great host covered all the places round about. The bishops confer amongst themselves, saying: 'The multitude present is too great to enable, not only a voice, but even the sound of a trumpet to reach the ears of them all. Almost the entire throng will be untouched by our preaching, and will return home, taking with them the infection of the heresy.' Consequently, it is arranged to preach to the people in the following manner. A mound of garments was to be erected on some rising ground, and one at a time was to preach, standing upon it. Whoever should be endowed with such a gift of preaching that his discourse reached the ears of all that were furthest, he, by common consent, should be made metropolitan and archbishop. Thereupon, a place called Brevi is selected, a lofty mound of garments is erected, and they preach with all their might. But their words scarcely reach those that are nearest, it is as though their throats seem constricted; the people await the Word, but the largest portion does not hear it. One after another endeavours to expound, but they fail utterly. A great crisis arises; and they fear that the people will return home with the heresy uncrushed. 'We have preached,' said they, 'but we do not convince; consequently our labour is rendered useless.' Then arose one of the bishops, named Paulinus, with whom aforesaid, holy Dewi the bishop had studied; 'There is one,' said he, 'who has been made a bishop by the patriarch⁶¹³, who has not attended our synod; a man of eloquence, full of grace, experienced in religion, an associate of angels, a man to be loved, attractive in countenance, magnificent in appearance, six feet in stature. Him I advise you to summon here.'

"Messengers are immediately dispatched, who come to the holy bishop, and announce the reason for their coming. But the holy bishop declined, saying: 'Let no man tempt me. Who am I to succeed where those have failed? I know my own

⁶¹⁰ The saint's military help was much appreciated by the Britons, who in 446 appealed to the Roman leader Flavius Aetius: "The barbarians drive us to the sea, the sea drives us back to the barbarians, death comes by one means or another: we are either slaughtered or drowned."

⁶¹¹ See "Svyatitel' Patrikij, Prosvetitel' Irlandii", *Pravoslavnaia Zhizn'*, December, 1999, p. 5.

⁶¹² In their debates with St. Germanus, the Pelagians are described as "men of obvious wealth" (Constantius of Lyons, *Life of Germanus*, 3.14).

⁶¹³ The Patriarch of Jerusalem (probably Elias), who had consecrated David and his companions Teilo and Paternus on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The patriarch gave David a portable altar as a gift. Today, a very ancient square stone object inscribed with crosses, which could perhaps have served as an altar, can be found today in St. David's cathedral under a large icon of the Prophet Elias.

insignificance. Go in peace.’ A second and a third time messengers are sent, but not even then did he consent. Finally, the holiest and the most upright men are sent, the brethren, Daniel [Bishop of Bangor in North Wales] and Dubricius [Archbishop of Llandaff]. But the holy bishop Dewi, foreseeing it with prophetic spirit, said to the brethren: ‘This day, my brethren, very holy men are visiting us. Welcome them joyfully, and for their meal procure fish in addition to bread and water.’ The brethren arrive, exchange mutual greetings and converse about holy things. Food is placed on the table, but they insist that they will never eat a meal in his monastery unless he returns to the synod along with them. To this the saint replied: ‘I cannot refuse you; proceed with your meal, we will go together to the synod. But then, I am unable to preach there: I will give you some help, little though it be, with my prayers.’

“So setting forth, they reach the neighbourhood of the synod, and lo, they heard a wailing and lamentation. Said the saint to his companions; ‘I will go to the scene of this great lamentation.’ But his companions said in reply; ‘But let us go to the assembly, lest our delaying grieve those who await us.’ The man of God approached the place of the mourning; and lo, there a bereaved mother was keeping watch over the body of a youth, to whom, with barbaric uncouthness, she had given a lengthy name. He comforted and raised the mother, consoling and encouraging her; but she, having heard of his fame, flung herself forward at his feet, begging him with cries of entreaty to take pity on her. Filled with compassion for human weakness, he approached the body of the dead boy, whose face he watered with his tears. At length, the limbs grew warm, the soul returned, and the body quivered. He took hold of the boy’s hand and restored him to his mother. But she, her sorrowful weeping turned into tears of joy, then said; ‘I believed that my son was dead; let him henceforth live to God and to you.’ The holy man accepted the boy, laid on his shoulder the Gospel-book which he always carried in his bosom, and made him go with him to the synod. That boy, afterwards, while life lasted, lived a holy life.

“He then enters the synod; the company of bishops is glad, the multitude is joyful, the whole assembly exults. He is asked to preach, and does not decline the synod’s decision. They bid him ascend the mound piled up with garments; and, in the sight of all, a snow-white dove from heaven settled on his shoulder, and remained there as long as he preached. Whilst he preached, with a loud voice, heard equally by those who were nearest and those who were furthest, the ground beneath him grew higher, rising to a hill; and, stationed on its summit, visible to all as though standing on a lofty mountain, he raised his voice until it rang like a trumpet: on the summit of that hill a church is situated. The heresy is expelled, the faith is confirmed in sound hearts, all are of one accord, and thanks are rendered to God and St. David.”⁶¹⁴

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⁶¹⁴ Rhigyfarch’s *Life of St. David*, chapters 49-52. Shortly after this Council, says Rhigyfarch, there was another Council, called the Synod of Victory, which “reaffirmed the decisions of its predecessor”. The records of these Councils were written down by St. David, but had been lost by the eleventh century. However, from a Breton manuscript we do have seven disciplinary canons attributed to a West British Synod, and another sixteen to “another Council of the Victory of Light [Luci]”. It is likely that these Councils are the same as those led by St. David (A.W. Haddan and W. Stubbs, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1869, 1964, vol. I, pp. 116-120

Some modernist twentieth-century Orthodox theologians, such as Fr. John Romanides, have concluded, from Augustine's writings on free will and other issues, that he is the fount and source of all the heresies of the West. This is unjust. Augustine was called "holy" at the Fifth Ecumenical Council, and St. Photius the Great "embraced" him spiritually (while accepting that he may have erred at times).⁶¹⁵

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the largely uncritical acclaim in which Augustine came to be held in the West, while not in itself sufficient to create the schism, became one of the main reasons why eastern and western theology diverged during the Middle Ages and the Reformation. Thus the Roman Catholics labelled St. John Cassian a "semi-Pelagian", that is, "semi-heretical", and Calvin's doctrine of predestination may be construed as a misinterpretation of St. Augustine's writings on free will. Calvin believed that all human beings are assigned by God in a completely arbitrary manner to two categories: the saved and the damned, and that there is nothing that any man can do to take himself out of one category and into the other. "Predestination" for him meant "predetermination" and fatalism; and it involved the denial of the place of freewill in our salvation. Such an error could have been avoided by a reading of St. John Cassian's more balanced discussion of the subject.

⁶¹⁵ "If [these]... Fathers [like Augustine] had spoken in opposition when the debated question was brought before them and had fought it contentiously and had maintained their opinion and had persevered in this false teaching, and when convicted of it held to their doctrine unto death, then they would necessarily be rejected together with the error of their mind. But if they spoke badly or, for some reason not known to us, deviated from the right path, but no question was put to them nor did anyone challenge them to learn the truth, we admit them to the list of the Fathers, as if they had not said it - because of their righteousness of life and distinguished virtues and their faith, faultless in other respects. We do not, however, follow their teaching in which they stray from the path of truth... We, though, who know that some of our Holy Fathers and teachers strayed from the Faith of true dogmas, do not take as doctrine those areas in which they strayed, but we embrace the men. So also in the case of any who are charged with teaching that the Spirit proceeds from the Son, we do not admit what is opposed to the word of the Lord, but we do not cast them from the rank of the Fathers." (*P.G.* 102, 813)

39. THE FALL OF OLD ROME

Pelagius' heresy was elicited in part by the horror he experienced at the luxuriousness of the Romans. His reaction to Roman morals may have been misguided, but the wrath of God was about to visit the corrupt capital - which, however, was still great in material terms. "Itineraries of the city from just a few decades prior to Alaric's arrival tell us that Rome had 2 main markets, 2 colossal statues, 2 circuses, 2 amphitheatres, 3 theatres, 4 gladiator schools, 5 artificial lakes for mock sea battles, 6 obelisks, 8 bridges, 10 basilicas, 11 forums, 11 public baths, 19 aqueducts, 22 equestrian statues, 28 libraries, 29 avenues, 36 marble arches, 37 gates, 46 brothels, 74 ivory statues of gods, 80 gold statues of gods, 144 public latrines, 254 bakeries, 290 warehouses, 423 neighbourhoods, each with its own temple, 856 private bath houses, 1,790 houses, 2,300 oil sellers, and 46,602 blocks of flats."⁶¹⁶

God's instruments of wrath were the Germanic tribes coming from the north, especially the Goths. In 376 the Goths, fleeing from the Huns, crossed the River Danube into the Eastern Roman Empire. In 378, in accordance with a prophecy of St. Isaac of the Dalmatian monastery, they killed the Emperor Valens and destroyed his army at Hadrianopolis (Adrianople). However, Constantinople itself, its eastern provinces protected from invasion by the Bosphorus and the Roman navy, held out against the barbarians. Valens's successor, St. Theodosius the Great, made peace with them, giving them what is now Bulgaria, with their own laws and rulers, in exchange for providing troops for the imperial army and a cash subsidy.

In 394, the Goths under their new leader Alaric joined with the imperial army led by St. Theodosius and his favourite general, the half-Vandal Stilicho, to defeat the pagan usurper Eugenius. Soon after, Theodosius died and Alaric proceeded to ravage central Greece. Then, in 401, he turned west. The next year, Stilicho managed to stop him at the battle of Pollenia near Turin. Alaric and his Goths then withdrew to Epirus in Greece, while the Western Emperor Honorius (393-423) moved his capital from Milan to Ravenna for greater security. But in 407, having spent a year in Albania without receiving any confirmation of his alliance with Stilicho, Alaric marched into Noricum (Austria), demanding a large tribute.

Stilicho advised Honorius to pay part of the tribute. However, "a Roman senator named Lampadius complained that paying off Alaric was not peace but servitude. His outburst was the beginning of the end for Stilicho. As the gold was raised and paid, his enemies at the Ravenna court poisoned Emperor Honorius against him, claiming that Stilicho, whose Germanic origins made him suspect in Roman eyes, had secret dynastic ambitions for his young son. Late Roman regime change was anything but pretty. In August 408 AD Stilicho was beheaded in a Ravenna church and all his close associates, including his son, were killed. Worse, his death provoked a wave of anti-barbarian feeling across Italy, as Roman troops massacred the families of Germanic soldiers whom Stilicho had recruited..."⁶¹⁷

⁶¹⁶ Kneale, op. cit., p. 38.

⁶¹⁷ Matthew Kneale, *Rome. A History in Seven Sackings*, London: Simon Schuster, 2017, p. 35.

This in turn led to thousands of Goths deserting the army for Alaric, who ravaged Italy, besieged Rome and demanded a vast tribute in gold and silver, including the famous statue of Valour or Fortitude, the symbol of Roman might. "This being destroyed," writes Zosimas, "all that remained of the Roman valour and intrepidity was totally extinguished".

But Alaric was a reluctant avenger; he was not really disposed to destroy Rome. What he was still seeking was a settlement whereby the Goths would be the third main nation of the empire after the Romans and the Greeks. But Honorius, though completely at the mercy of the Goths, would not cooperate. So, on August 24, 410, after a prolonged siege that led some of the besieged to cannibalism, Alaric entered Rome and sacked it. However, he "had given strict orders to limit bloodshed. Orosius, writing while the memory of the sack was still fresh, reported that Alaric 'gave orders that all those who had taken refuge in sacred places, especially in the basilica of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, should be permitted to remain inviolate and unmolested.' There were a few fires, but the city was hardly damaged." ⁶¹⁸ As Simon Jenkins writes: "Despite gruesome reports of devastation, reliable sources speak of the Goths' 'remarkable clemency'. Wealth was certainly stolen, but few houses were destroyed." ⁶¹⁹

Nevertheless, the population of the City, which had been about 800,000 at the time of the sack, had been reduced by starvation and other causes to a little more than 400,000 by the year 419. ⁶²⁰ And the psychological impact was great. Blessed Jerome wrote from Bethlehem: "At the news my speech failed me, and sobs choked the words that I was dictating. She has been captured – the City by whom the whole world had once been taken captive." ⁶²¹ Indeed, for patriotic West Romans like Jerome, the fall of the City of Old Rome was equivalent to the fall of the whole of humanity: "The flame of the world has been extinguished and in the destruction of a single city, the whole human race has perished!" ⁶²²

Tertullian had said: "In the Emperor we reverence the judgement of God, Who has set him over the nations" ⁶²³. It followed that the fall of the western emperor had to express the *reversal* of God's judgement, His guilty verdict against the Romans, at any rate in the West.

(In the East, in Constantinople, while the Goths occupied many important posts in the army and in the government bureaucracy, their influence was better controlled. This may have been due to the prayers of St. John Chrysostom, who until his death in 407, supported the Orthodox Goths while firmly opposing those Arian Goths who tried to take control of churches in the City. ⁶²⁴)

⁶¹⁸ Terry Jones and Alan Ereira, *Barbarians*, London: BBC Books, 2006, p. 145.

⁶¹⁹ Jenkins, *A Short History of Europe*, London: Viking, 2018, p. 40.

⁶²⁰ Kneale, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

⁶²¹ St. Jerome, Letter 127, *P.L.* 22, col. 1094.

⁶²² St. Jerome, *Commentary on Ezekiel*, prologue.

⁶²³ Tertullian, *Apologeticum*, 32.

⁶²⁴ A.S. Vasiliev, *History of the Byzantine Empire*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1952, vol. 1, pp. 94-95.

The Holy Fathers in East and West had somewhat different attitudes to the tragedy. In the eastern half of the empire, They emphasised heavenly patriotism, the patriotism of the City whose "Builder and Maker is God" (Hebrews 10.10) over any earthly patriotism, even Roman patriotism; for "here we have no continuing city, but seek one to come" (Hebrews 13.14). Thus St. John Chrysostom, archbishop of Constantinople, wrote: "If you are a Christian, no earthly city is yours...."

"Though we may gain possession of the whole world, we are withal but strangers and sojourners in it all.

"We are enrolled in heaven: our citizenship is there! Let us not, after the manner of little children, despise things that are great, and admire those which are little!

"Not our city's greatness, but virtue of soul is our ornament and defence.

"If you suppose dignity to belong to a city, think how many persons must partake in this dignity, who are whoremongers, effeminate, depraved and full of ten thousand evil things, and in the end despise such an honour!

"But that City above is not of this kind; for it is impossible that he can be a partaker of it, who has not exhibited every virtue."⁶²⁵

The pagans were quick to come forward with their own explanation of the fall of Rome: Rome had fallen because she had deserted her gods. They pointed out that it was precisely since the ban on pagan practices imposed by Theodosius the Great in 380 that the barbarians had begun to overwhelm the empire.

To refute this notion, and to show that the disasters suffered by the empire were allowed by God to chasten and purify His people, St. Augustine wrote the first five books of *The City of God*, written shortly after Alaric's sack of Rome. "God's providence," he wrote, "constantly uses war to correct and chasten the corrupt morals of mankind, as it also uses such afflictions to train men in a righteous and laudable way of life. It removes to a better state those whose life is approved, or keeps them in this world for further service."⁶²⁶

In the second part of the work, he describes the origin, history and final destiny of two Cities - the City of God, which is holy and destined for eternal bliss, and the City of Man, which is sinful and destined for the eternal fire. The Roman Empire, like the Church herself of which it is the ally, contains citizens of both Cities, both wheat and tares. When the state is ruled by a truly Christian ruler, like Theodosius the Great, one can see "a faint shadowy resemblance between the Roman Empire and the Heavenly City"; which is why one must obey the law and render one's patriotic and civic duty to the State.

⁶²⁵ St. John Chrysostom, *On the Statues*.

⁶²⁶ St. Augustine, *The City of God*, I, 1.

However, this view was juxtaposed, in Augustine's thought, with a more radical, apolitical and even anti-political view. Thus at one point he calls Rome a "second Babylon".⁶²⁷ He points out that there was always a demonic element at the heart of the Roman state, which has not been eliminated even now. The sin of fratricide – Romulus' murder of Remus – lay at the very root of the Roman state, just as sin and fratricide – Cain's murder of Abel – lay at the beginning of the history of fallen humanity. Therefore it should not surprise us that the Roman Empire should decline and fall. "If heaven and earth are to pass away, why is it surprising if at some time the state is going to come to an end? If what God has made will one day vanish, then surely what Romulus made will disappear much sooner."

"As for this mortal life, which ends after a few days' course, what does it matter under whose rule a man lives, being so soon to die, provided that the rulers do not force him to impious and wicked acts?"⁶²⁸

It is the Jerusalem above that is our *real* Fatherland, not Rome here below.

Augustine's purpose was to wean men away from trust in political institutions, whether pagan or Christian, to trust in God alone. Christian rulers were, of course, better than pagan ones. But politics in general was suspect. The empire had been built up through wars, many of them quite unjust. And yet "without justice what are governments but bands of brigands?"⁶²⁹ It was not that Augustine was not a loyal Roman citizen, but the fall of Old Rome contributed to an atmosphere of introspection and self-criticism that sought explanations for the fall in sin, both at the individual and at the collective level. Thus Augustine distanced himself from a too close identification of *Romanitas* (Romanness) and *Christianitas* (Christianity). As F. van der Meer interprets his thought: "Compared with Christianity, what significance was there in things, admittedly good in themselves, like the order, unity and authority of the Roman Empire?..."⁶³⁰

And yet the *Pax Romana* was of great value. Alaric recognized that, which is why he had tried to come to an accommodation with Rome, and, failing that, limit the damage he did to the eternal city. In 409, very late in the day, the city started to issue coins with the inscription INVICTA ROMA AETERNA ("Invincible, Eternal Rome"). Even more respectful was his successor and brother-in-law, Ataulf: "To begin with, I ardently desired to efface the very name of the Romans and to transform the Roman Empire into a Gothic Empire. Romania, as it is commonly called, would have become Gothia; Ataulf would have replaced Caesar Augustus. But long experience taught me that the unruly barbarism of the Goths was incompatible with the laws. Now, without laws there is no state. I therefore decided rather to aspire to the glory of restoring the fame of Rome in all its integrity, and of increasing it by means of the Gothic strength. I hope to go down to posterity as the restorer of Rome, since it is not possible that I should be its supplanter."⁶³¹

⁶²⁷ St. Augustine, *The City of God*, XVIII, 2.

⁶²⁸ St. Augustine, *The City of God*, V, 17.

⁶²⁹ St. Augustine, *The City of God*, IV, 4.

⁶³⁰ Van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop*, London: Sheed and Ward, 1961, p. 584.

⁶³¹ Ataulf, in Grant, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

Arnaulf's respect for Roman law was widely shared. The Romans attached enormous importance to their *law* as the necessary instrument of the Roman peace. As Peter Heather writes, "Roman imperial state ideology had long since identified the existence of written law as the single factor which distinguished the Roman world as a higher order of divinely inspired human society, far superior to that of any known or conceivable neighbour."⁶³²

Again, in the second preface to his *Judicial Code* the Emperor Justinian wrote: "The maintenance of the integrity of the government depends upon two things, namely, the force of arms and the observance of the laws: and, for this reason, the fortunate race of the Romans obtained power and precedence over all other nations in former times, and will do so forever, if God should be propitious; since each of these has ever required the aid of the other, for, as military affairs are rendered secure by the laws, so also are the laws preserved by force of arms."

The Goths bought in to this vision, to the extent of seeing themselves as restorers, rather than supplanters, of Rome, and the upholders of her laws.

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Nevertheless, Rome declined quickly after Alaric's invasion. The devastation wrought by the Goths in Italy had been so great that Honorius was forced twice to remit four-fifths of the tax revenues from the devastated provinces, thereby weakening the empire still more. Moreover, more and more barbarian groups occupied more and more of the taxable agricultural land in other parts of the empire. Meanwhile Honorius faced rebellions by usurpers in Britain and Gaul (Constantine III and Jovinian), in Spain (Maximus) and in Africa (Heraclian), which weakened him still more.⁶³³ "In just five decades," writes Niall Ferguson, "the population of Rome itself fell by three-quarters. Archaeological evidence from the late fifth century – inferior housing, more primitive pottery, fewer coins, smaller cattle – shows that the benign influence of Rome diminished rapidly in the rest of western Europe."⁶³⁴

The last notable victory of the West Romans took place at the bloody battle of the Catalaunian Plains in eastern France in 451, when the fearsome Attila the Hun was defeated for the first time by a Roman-barbarian coalition led by the Roman general Aetius and the Visigothic King Theodoric.⁶³⁵ When, undaunted, Attila invaded Italy again the next year, he was dissuaded from sacking Rome only by an eloquent embassy of Pope Leo I to him at Mantua in 452 and a vision of Saints Peter and Paul, who appeared in a vision with St. Leo and threatened the Hun with death. Having turned away from Rome, he died a sudden and ignoble death in 453.⁶³⁶

⁶³² Peter Heather, *The Restoration of Rome*, London: Pan Books, 2013, p. 118.

⁶³³ Bryan Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome*, Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 44.

⁶³⁴ Ferguson, "Complexity and Collapse: Empires on the Edges of Chaos", *Foreign Affairs*, March-April, 2010, pp. 27-28.

⁶³⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1KMHIGxm9K8>.

⁶³⁶ Patrick Howarth, *Attila*, London: Robinson, 2001, p. 132. After St. Leo had obtained all his requests from Attila, the Hun's followers asked him why he had surrendered to "a single, unarmed Roman".

But that was the last victory of the Western empire. In 455 a Vandal fleet under Gaiseric captured and sacked Rome, taking the Emperor Valentinian's wife and daughters back to Carthage. The Eastern Emperor tried and failed to recapture Carthage from the Vandals in 468. Between 455 and 476 no less than eight men were raised to the throne of the Western Empire and then deposed by a Germanic commander called Ricimer. Finally, as Jenkins writes, "in 475 a Roman official named Orestes, who had served in Attila's retinue, seized power in Ravenna, and appointed his fifteen-year-old son Romulus as emperor, giving the boy the impressive name of Romulus Augustulus ['little Augustus']. There seems no limit to the agonies fathers visit on their sons. The following year the boy was ousted by a Roman soldier of Germanic origin, Flavius Odoacer, who did not bother with emperorship but took the title king of Italy with his capital in Ravenna."⁶³⁷ And yet most significant of all were Odoacer's words on refusing to take the imperial crown for himself in imitation of so many usurper-emperors before him: "there was no need of a divided rule," he said; "one, shared emperor was sufficient for both [Eastern and Western] territories". And then he sent the imperial cloak and diadem to the Eastern Emperor Zeno...

Old Rome died for many reasons, not the least of which was the contemptuous manner in which the last Christian emperors were treated by their foremost subjects. For God does not allow His anointed ones to be mocked, and takes away the gift of Orthodox kingship from the people that is not worthy of it. For "royalty," wrote Edward Gibbon, "was familiar to the barbarians, and the submissive people of Italy was prepared to obey without a murmur, the authority which he [Odoacer] should condescend to exercise as the viceregent of the emperor of the West. But Odoacer had resolved to abolish that useless and expensive office, and such is the weight of antique prejudice, that it required some boldness and penetration to discover the extreme facility of the enterprise. The unfortunate Augustulus was made the instrument of his own disgrace; he signified his resignation to the senate; and that assembly, in their last act of obedience to a Roman prince, still affected the spirit of freedom and the forms of the constitution. An epistle was addressed, by their unanimous decree, to the emperor Zeno, the son-in-law and successor of Leo, who had lately been restored, after a short rebellion, to the Byzantine throne. They solemnly disclaim 'the necessity, or even the wish, of continuing any longer the Imperial succession in Italy; since, in their opinion, the majesty of a sole monarch is sufficient to pervade and protect, at the same time, both the East and the West. In their own name, and in the name of the people, they consent that the seat of universal empire shall be transferred from Rome to Constantinople; and they basely renounce the right of choosing their master, the only vestige that yet remained of the authority that had given laws to the world. The republic' (they repeat the name without a blush) 'might safely confide in the civil and military virtues of Odoacer; and they humbly request that the emperor would invest him with the title of Patrician; and the administration of the *diocese* of Italy.' The deputies of the senate were received at Constantinople with some marks of

"Apparently, you could not see the two men from heaven, one standing to the right of the Pope, the other to the left. They held bared swords and threatened to kill me if I disobeyed God's prelate," replied Attila (in St. Demetrius of Rostov, *The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints*, House Springs, Mo.: Chrysostom Press, vol. 6, February 18, 2003, p. 2006).

⁶³⁷ Jenkins, *A Short History of Europe*, p. 42.

displeasure and indignation: and when they were admitted to the audience of Zeno, he sorely reproached them with their treatment of the two emperors, Anthemius [whom Ricimer beheaded in a Roman church] and Nepos [the *de jure* emperor who was likewise assassinated several years later]⁶³⁸, whom the East had successively granted to the prayers of Italy. 'The first' (continued he) 'you have murdered; the second you have expelled: but the second is still alive, and whilst he lives he is your lawful sovereign.' But the prudent Zeno soon deserted the hopeless cause of his abdicated colleague. His vanity was gratified by the title of sole emperor, and by the statues erected in his honour in the several quarters of Rome; he entertained a friendly, though ambiguous, correspondence with the *patrician* Odoacer; and he gratefully accepted the Imperial ensigns; the sacred ornaments of the throne and palace, which the barbarian was not unwilling to remove from the sight of the people..."⁶³⁹

The old empire of Old Rome was dead, long live the new empire of New Rome!⁶⁴⁰

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St. Augustine believed Old Rome had not been destroyed, only chastized. By this tribulation God was purifying the Roman nation, as He had purified Israel in Old Testament times; for "God's Providence constantly uses war to correct and chasten the corrupt morals of mankind".⁶⁴¹ Rome would emerge from this period of affliction cleansed and better able to carry out her civilising mission in the world...

But the catastrophe of 410 did not produce the regeneration of Rome that Augustine had hoped for; nor the later ones of the 450s and the 470s. If it was still true at the beginning of the century that Rome was being chastized, not destroyed, by the end it had to be admitted that the disease was more serious and chronic than Augustine had recognised... For the sad fact was that Old Rome was still not profiting from the opportunity presented by the conversion of St. Constantine to regenerate herself. She remained throughout the fifth century in a situation of spiritual and political crisis not dissimilar to that in the time of Diocletian.

It was not the Emperors that were to blame: although there were no really distinguished Emperors after Theodosius the Great, they remained Orthodox. The burdens they imposed on the people were not imposed willingly, but because of the desperate situation of the empire. They failed because Roman society was divided both against itself and against her non-Roman subjects and *foederati* - and a divided house cannot stand...

The situation was especially grave in the army. "From the time of Constantine," according to Nigel Rodgers, "Germans came to dominate the best regiments, the *Palatini*. After the disaster at Adrianople in AD 378, whole peoples of dubious loyalty, like the Visigoths, were enrolled in the Roman armies. If barbarians never accepted

⁶³⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julius_Nepos

⁶³⁹ Gibbon, *op. cit.* pp. 282-283.

⁶⁴⁰ Heather, *op. cit.*, p. xiii.

⁶⁴¹ St. Augustine, *The City of God*, I, 1.

Rome's draconian discipline, Roman troops also rejected it. Vegetius, writing c. AD 400, lamented the decline of the old discipline, which had once made the Roman soldier so effective. Even worse, Roman armies too often fought each other."⁶⁴²

The senatorial class had much to lose from the empire's fall. But, snobbish and immensely rich, they did little to defend it. As a visitor to Rome remarked, they did not want to serve the State, "preferring to enjoy their property at leisure".⁶⁴³ Cicero once said that the two prerequisites for happiness were a good library and a fragrant garden. But he had been prepared to fight – and die – for what he saw was in the interests of the state. Such a sense of civic duty appears to have disappeared from his fifth-century successors.

"In spite of frequent lip-service to the romantic concept of Eternal Rome," writes Grant, "many noblemen were not prepared to lift a finger to save it... They also undermined the state in a very active fashion. For of all the obstacles to efficient and honest administration, they were the worst. They forcibly ejected collectors of taxes, harboured deserters and brigands, and repeatedly took the law into their own hands... They often remained hostile to the Emperor, and estranged from his advisers. For a long time many were pagans while their ruler was Christian."⁶⁴⁴

The free poor of Rome did not come far behind the senators in corruption, continually wanting "bread and circuses". In 391 the Syrian monk Telemachus tried to stop a gladiatorial fight in a Roman amphitheatre, and was stoned to death by the crowd. Impressed, the Emperor Honorius abolished the circuses and gladiatorial contests on January 1, 404. But in spite of that, writes Grant, "a hundred and seventy-five days of the year were given up to public shows, as opposed to a mere hundred and thirty-five two centuries earlier; moreover the fabric of the Colosseum was restored as late as 438. It is also true that in the mid-fourth century 300,000 Romans held bread tickets which entitled them to draw free rations from the government; and even a century later, when the population of the city had greatly diminished, there were still 120,000 recipients of these free supplies. Certainly, the population of Rome was largely parasitic, living on pay-outs. However, the city proletariat played little active part in the course of events that brought the later Roman Empire to a halt.

"It was, on the other hand, the 'free' poor of the rural countryside upon whom the government, struggling to raise money for the army, imposed the full rigours and terrors of taxation. Although technically still distinguishable from slaves, they were no better off and perhaps worse off, since they often found themselves driven into total destitution. Between these rustic poor and the government, the relationship was that of oppressed and oppressor, of foe and foe.

"This is perhaps the greatest of all the disunities that afflicted the Western Empire. The state and the unprivileged bulk of its rural subjects were set against each other in a destructive and suicidal disharmony, which played a very large and direct part in

⁶⁴² Rodgers, *The Rise and Fall of Ancient Rome*, London: Lorenz Books, 2004, p. 248.

⁶⁴³ Grant, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

⁶⁴⁴ Grant, *op. cit.*, pp. 75, 76, 78.

the downfall that followed. It was because of this rift that the taxes that were needed to pay the army could not be raised. And because they could not be raised, the Empire failed to find defenders, and collapsed.”⁶⁴⁵

As Christopher Dawson writes: “It was literally Rome that killed Rome. The great cosmopolitan city of gold and marble, the successor of Alexandria and Antioch, had nothing in common with the old capital and rural Latin state. It served no social function, it was an end in itself, and its population drawn from every nation under heaven existed mainly to draw their Government doles, and to attend the free spectacles with which the Government provided them. It was a vast useless burden on the back of the empire which broke at last under the increasing strain.”⁶⁴⁶

It might reasonably be thought that nationalism would be one of the disunities that brought about the fall of Rome. But, as we have seen, the Romans had successfully created a kind of Roman imperial nationalism, which many of the nations of the empire imbibed, thanks to the generous bestowal of Roman citizenship and the extensive advantages that citizenship brought. Local nationalisms were simply destroyed first by cruelty (conquest) and then by kindness (the bestowal of Roman citizenship).

The spread of the Christian faith contributed greatly to the weakness of tribal and provincial nationalisms in the Roman Empire. For, as Saint Augustine wrote in his commentary on Galatians 3:28-29: “Within that faith there is no difference between Jews and Greeks, neither between slaves and free, nor between male and female. Inasmuch as all possess the faith, they are all one in Christ Jesus. And if this is achieved by the faith that makes you walk in holiness for this life, how much greater perfection and abundance will the vision itself make when we see you face to face? (Cf 1Co 13,12) Although now we have the firstfruits of the Spirit that is life mercy to the justice of faith, as the body is still dead because of sin (Cf Rm 8,23.10), the difference based on nationality, social status or sex, has already been eliminated from the unity founded on faith, but still it remains in mortal existence. Moreover, its ordering must be maintained in the course of this life. The apostles send it, who give extremely healthy norms about how they should coexist, according to their different race, Jews and Greeks; according to their different social status, masters and slaves, and according to their different sex, husbands and wives, or according to any other differentiated situation that may occur. The same Lord did the same beforehand, who said: Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God (Mt 22,21). Some are the norms that we keep within the unity of the faith eliminating all differences, and others that we observe, as people on the way, in the ordering of this life, so that it is not an object of blasphemy, neither the name of God nor his doctrine.”

Professor Mary Beard has argued that the main cause of the rise of Rome to mastery over the ancient world was her ability to co-opt the conquered peoples as fellow citizens and then send them out to fight for an empire in which they now had a big stake. Rome won her empire, then, through sheer weight of numbers; she was simply

⁶⁴⁵ Grant, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

⁶⁴⁶ Dawson, *Progress and Decay*.

able to put more men in the field at any one time than any of her rivals.⁶⁴⁷ Only in Judaea and Britain did nationalisms arise, leading to rebellion and bloodshed. But both rebellions were crushed by – “boots on the ground”. Indeed, as David Gilmour writes, “The empire collapsed in the fifth century for many reasons, both internal and external, but nationalistic opposition to Roman hegemony was not one of them. The subject people were not fighting for liberation or self-determination. Most of them, like the British, who had valued the *beata tranquillitas* of Roman peace, wanted the empire to survive...”⁶⁴⁸ If we accept this thesis, then we can put forward an analogous thesis for the *fall* of the empire – namely, that Rome fell when she began to stop respecting and co-opting her conquered peoples, but began to despise them, and so lost reliable, loyal “boots on the ground”. One of the greatest and most enduring legacies of Roman civilization was the principle that every citizen is equal before the law, whatever his nationality or faith. This was no empty principle, as we see as early as the career of St. Paul, who, though a member of the despised race of the Jews, was able to win a trial in Rome because he was a Roman citizen. But by the fifth century this principle was no longer being applied; universalism had given way to a new kind of tribalism, anti-Germanism. And this in spite of the fact that the official religion of Rome was now Christianity, the most universalist of faiths.

By the time of the first sack of Rome, the gulf between the Romans and the (mainly Germanic) barbarians was becoming too great. The barbarians settled in the empire through necessity in order to escape the hordes that pressed on them from the east, and seized their lands. They did not (usually) want to destroy it; as we have seen, as often as not, such leaders as Alaric and Ataulf admired and wanted to emulate it. But the Romans themselves were not interested in converting or integrating them. Empire had gone to their heads; they despised the German hordes. Thus the Christian poet Prudentius, who had once declared that the peoples of the empire were “equals and bound by a single name”, now despised the barbarians:

*As beasts from men, as dumb from those who speak,
As from the good who God's commandments seek,
Differ the foolish heathen, so Rome stands
Alone in pride above barbarian lands.*⁶⁴⁹

In the last analysis it was this pride, a kind of racial snobbery, more than any purely political or economic or military factors, that destroyed Old Rome. It may be regarded as a compensatory mechanism making up for a sense of imperial and national failure. It was the less excusable in Old Rome in that several of Rome's greatest emperors, both pagan and Christian, had come from the provinces: insistence on racial “purity” was not in the Roman tradition.

Old Rome ceased to be the universal ruler when she abandoned her own tradition of universalism, transmuted now into a higher *Christian* universalism. By refusing to come to terms with Alaric because he was a Goth, although he was a (heretical)

⁶⁴⁷ Beard, “Why Rome Ruled the World”, *BBC History Magazine*, April, 2016, pp. 32-36.

⁶⁴⁸ Gilmour, *The Pursuit of Italy*, London: Penguin, 2012, p. 49.

⁶⁴⁹ Prudentius, in Grant, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

Christian and was not seeking to destroy Rome but only find a place for his people within her empire, the Romans provoked the first sack of Rome in 410, and made later, still more catastrophic sacks inevitable.

Not all Romans were so proud, of course: churchmen such as the Italian St. Paulinus, Bishop of Nola, the priest Orosius of Braga (who fled to Hippo from the Vandals) and the Gallic priest Salvian of Marseilles, were hopeful that a new Romano-Germanic order could be constructed.

After all, as St. Augustine and his disciple Prosper of Aquitaine also pointed out, the fall of Rome was the manifestation not only of God's wrath against the Romans, but also of His mercy towards the barbarians; it created an unprecedented opportunity for them to come, see and be conquered by the Roman Christian civilization and faith that they encountered and into which so many of them were baptized. For as Orosius wrote: "It would seem that the mercy of God ought to be praised and glorified in that so many [barbarian] nations are receiving, even at the cost of our own weakening, a knowledge of the truth which they never could have had but for this opportunity."⁶⁵⁰

Again, Prosper of Aquitaine wrote: "The very armies that exhaust the world help on the work of Christian grace. How many indeed who in the quiet of peacetime delayed to receive the sacrament of baptism, were compelled by fear of close danger to hasten to the water of regeneration, and were suddenly forced by threatening terror to fulfil a duty which a peaceful exhortation failed to bring home to their slow and tepid souls? Some sons of the Church, made prisoners by the enemy, changed their masters into servants of the Gospel, and by teaching them the faith they became the superiors of their own wartime lords. Again, some foreign pagans, whilst serving in the Roman armies, were able to learn the faith in our country, when in their own lands they could not have known it; they returned to their homes instructed in the Christian religion. Thus nothing can prevent God's grace from accomplishing His will... For all who at any time will be called and will enter into the Kingdom of God, have been marked out in the adoption which preceded all times. And just as none of the infidels is counted among the elect, so none of the God-fearing is excluded from the blessed. For in fact God's prescience, which is infallible, cannot lose any of the members that make up the fullness of the Body of Christ."⁶⁵¹

Unfortunately, the Goths had been converted to Arianism rather than Orthodox Christianity, in spite of the intense efforts of St. John Chrysostom (+407) to draw them to the truth faith. However, they had the truly Orthodox examples of the Gothic Martyrs Sabbas (+372) and Nicetas (+378), and the very early translation of the Bible into the Gothic language by Ulfilas, to inspire and instruct them. This showed that a real conversion of the barbarians to the truth was possible; they had already shown a desire for *Romanitas*, and could be persuaded to accept true *Christianitas* also.⁶⁵² And in the sixth century most of them were converted to Orthodoxy.

⁶⁵⁰ Orosius, *Seven Books of History against the Pagans*, VII, 41.

⁶⁵¹ Prosper, *The Call of the Nations*, II, 33.

⁶⁵² J.W.C. Wand, *A History of the Early Church to A.D.500*, London: Methuen, 1982, pp. 181-184.

And so, while the Western Empire died, Christian *Romanitas* continued to live in the West. Although the Antichrist took its place temporarily in the sense that pagan and heretical rulers took the place of Orthodox ones, under the rubble of the old empire new kingdoms were arising that were to restore Orthodoxy and reincarnate the spirit of Christian Rome, uniting both Romans and barbarians in the One, Holy and Catholic Church.

As Peter Heather writes, “new rulers at the head of politically reasonably coherent bodies of military manpower, which had within living memory originated from beyond the imperial frontier, were now masters of the bulk of the old Roman west. Alongside Odoacar [in Italy], Anglo-Saxon kings controlled most of central and southern Britain, their Frankish counterparts ran northern and eastern Gaul, Visigothic monarchs controlled south-western Gaul and Spain, Burgundian dynasts the Rhone valley, and the richest lands of Roman North Africa were in the hands of the Vandalic Hasding dynasty. Groups from the old north-central zone of Europe as it had stood at the birth of Christ thus generated a huge revolution on Roman soil, replacing the old monolithic empire with a series of successor states.”⁶⁵³

These “Dark Ages” were dark only in the sense of a sharp decline in the level of their material culture. From a Christian point of view, however, it was a radiant age of sanctity. For whole new peoples were brought to the light of the true faith. As Dawson writes, “To the secular historian, the early Middle Ages must inevitably still appear as the Dark Ages, as ages of barbarism, without secular culture or literature, given up to unintelligible disputes on incomprehensible dogmas... But to the Catholic [that is, Orthodox-Catholic] they are not dark as much as ages of dawn, for they witnessed the conversion of the West, the foundation of [Western] Christian civilization, and the creation of Christian art and Catholic [Orthodox] liturgy. Above all, they were the Age of the Monks...”⁶⁵⁴

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The memory of Old Rome and her achievement did not die; it was to remain profoundly influential for many centuries to come. And if she could no longer be called *aeterna et invicta*, there continued to be great native Romans, such as St. Gregory the Great, who remained passionately attached to bringing the glorious traditions of Rome – both Old and New – to the unenlightened barbarians.

Even the twentieth-century atheist philosopher Bertrand Russell concluded: “The problem of a durable and satisfactory social order can only be solved by combining the solidity of the Roman Empire with the idealism of St. Augustine’s *City of God*...”⁶⁵⁵ Solidity and idealism... What modern polity, founded on democratic principles, has these qualities?

⁶⁵³ Heather, *op. cit.*, p. xvii.

⁶⁵⁴ Dawson, *The Making of Europe: An Introduction to the History of European Unity*, London, 1932, pp. xvii-xviii.

⁶⁵⁵ Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy*, London: Allen Unwin, 1946, p. 515.

Indeed, the influence of Rome may go still deeper. T.S. Eliot said: "We are all, so far as we inherit the civilization of Europe, still citizens of the Roman Empire, and time has not yet proved Virgil wrong."⁶⁵⁶ And according to the Brazilian philosopher Olavo de Carvalho, "Western political history might be easily summarized as the history of the struggles for the right of succeeding the Roman Empire. ... The Roman Empire seems to float over the Western mind like the ghost of an illustrious departed who refuses to die; of someone who, acting over the spirit of the living with a subconscious obsession, possesses their lives as if they were tools for his own resurrection..."⁶⁵⁷

⁶⁵⁶ Eliot, "Virgil and the Christian World", in *On Poetry and Poets*, London: Faber & Faber, 1959, p. 13.

⁶⁵⁷ Carvalho, *O Jardim das Aflicoes* (The Garden of Afflictions), 3rd ed., Campinas, Brazil: VIDE Editorial, 2015, pp. 266, 269.

40. THE ROMAN CHURCH AND THE ROMAN EMPIRE

The fall of Old Rome created a vacuum in political authority in the West which the Eastern Emperors before Justinian were unable to fill and which the Germanic Arian kings only partially filled. Into this vacuum stepped the Popes... There was nobody and nothing else that could fill the vacuum; for the Church was the only institution that survived the fall intact; and without the Church there could be no Christian state and no truly Christian civilization. Therefore it was not pride, but necessity, that compelled the Popes to take a prominent political role. The question was: how would they relate to New Rome, on the one hand, and to the new western kingdoms that had arisen on the ruins of Old Rome, on the other?

Another, closely related question was: how would the Church of Rome relate to the other Churches both of the East and of the West? That the Roman papacy was in some sense the first or most senior of the Churches had been acknowledged in both East and West for centuries. However, *the basis and nature* of this primacy was understood differently in East and West.

In the West, Rome was seen as as “the see of Peter”, or “the apostolic see”, on the basis of the fact that Peter had died and was buried in Rome, and especially on the basis of Christ’s words to him: “Thou art Peter, and on this rock I will build My Church” (Matthew 16.18), which supposedly gave both Peter and the bishops of Rome a pre-eminence over the whole of the Church worldwide (in spite of the fact that, immediately after uttering these words, the Lord gave Peter a fearsome rebuke: «Get thee behind Me, Satan»). Thus Pope Damasus (+384) based his claim “exclusively on his being the direct successor of St. Peter and so the rightful heir of the promises made to him by Christ”.⁶⁵⁸ Later popes came to have a quasi-mystical belief that the apostle lived and spoke through them; so that just as the Lord had bestowed the apostolate on Peter, so the Roman Popes, acting as his successive reincarnations, as it were, were the source of the episcopate of the whole of the rest of the Church.

In the East, on the other hand, the primacy of Rome was recognized on the basis of Rome’s socio-political importance, her status as the capital city of the empire – and no more. When that status passed to the New Rome of Constantinople, the primacy of honour, in eastern eyes, also passed to the New Rome. Apostolic succession was given, not to Peter alone, but to all the apostles. “The remaining apostles,” wrote St. Cyprian of Carthage (who was, of course, a western bishop), “were necessarily also that which Peter was, endowed with an equal partnership both of honour and of power... The episcopate is one, an individual share in which individual bishops hold as owners of a common property.”⁶⁵⁹

Nor was Peter, strictly speaking even the *Bishop* of Rome, but an *apostle* – and apostles, unlike bishops, do not have territorially defined jurisdictions. The first bishop of Rome was St. Linus, who was not even ordained by St. Peter, but by St. Paul. Nor was Peter the founder only of the Church of *Rome*: the Church of Antioch was

⁶⁵⁸ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, London: Adam and Charles Black, 1977, p. 35.

⁶⁵⁹ St. Cyprian, *On the Unity of the Church*, 4, 5.

also founded by him – together with St. Paul (a parchment affirming that and signed by both the apostles still exists). In any case, if any Church has the primacy by virtue of the excellency of its founder, it is the Church of *Jerusalem*, which was by the Lord Himself. And yet neither East nor West considered that Jerusalem, while being undoubtedly “the mother of the Churches”, had the primacy, let alone universal jurisdiction over the others...

“It is undeniable,” writes Fr. John Meyendorff, that, in the first half of the fifth century, the bishop of Rome enjoyed a strong *de facto* authority in helping to solve doctrinal and disciplinary disputes. This authority was recognized in some ways both in the East and in the West, but it had not formally been defined in any conciliar decree. Only the canons of the local council of Sardica (343) gave clerics dissatisfied with the disciplinary judgement of their own metropolitans the right to request in Rome the establishment of a new tribunal of neighbouring bishops. According to these canons, the role of Rome was therefore to assure correct procedure within existing structures of local churches, as defined in Nicaea, and not to issue personal judgement. The division of the empire into Eastern and Western parts after Constantine’s death (337) contributed to the pope’s prestige. Alone among the major leaders of the Church, he was out of direct reach of the powerful emperor of Constantinople, and the much weaker Western emperor were not really in a position to control him. In any case in 476, the Western empire collapsed. It is therefore, primarily against imperial interventions in ecclesiastical affairs that Eastern bishops sought and cherished the support of the Roman bishops. That appeals to the pope were primarily caused by such political factor – and not necessarily by Roman prestige as such – is shown by the fact that letters were usually addressed not only to the Roman pop, but to several major bishops in the West. For instance, in 382, the Eastern bishops gathered in Constantinople wrote a collective letter ‘to the honored and revered brothers and concelebrants Damasus (of Rome), Ambrose (of Milan), Britto, Valerian, Acholius, Anemius, Basil, and the other holy bishops gathered in the great city of Rome’ calling them to unity with the council of 381 and urging them to abandon their support to the small, ‘old Nicaean’ church of Paulinus in Antioch. The Easterners clearly did not consider Rome as the sole and ultimate criterion of communion, but appreciated the pope’s – and his colleagues’ – eventual support in solving the ecclesiastical situation in the East. Similarly, St. John Chrysostom, exiled in 404, appealed not only to pope Innocent, but also to Venerius of Milan and Chromatius of Aquileia. In such appeals, the name of the Roman bishop always appears first, but this obvious sign of priority never excludes the authority of others.”⁶⁶⁰

And so, continues Meyendorff, “the ecclesiastical authority of some churches, including that of Rome, reflects historical realities, not a divine command. It is conditioned by the orthodox faith of the incumbent, and is controlled by the consensus of the whole Church. This concept does not deny the particular role of the apostle Peter and his martyrdom in Rome; but his ministry is seen, following Cyprian as being fulfilled by each bishop in his community, not by the Roman bishop alone.”⁶⁶¹

⁶⁶⁰ Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions*, Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1989, pp. 59-60.

⁶⁶¹ Meyendorff, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

The overweening ambitions of the bishop of Rome were contested not only in the East, but also in Gaul by St. Hilary of Arles, and in North Africa. Thus while the authority of Pope Innocent I was welcomed in 417 by St. Augustine and other bishops in their struggle against Pelagianism, there was a reaction the next year, when an African council formally forbade “appeals beyond the sea”, that is, to Rome. “Furthermore, writing to pope Celestine in 420, the Africans proclaimed what amounted to a formal denial of any ‘divine’ privilege of Rome. ‘Who will believe,’ they stated, ‘that our God could inspire justice in the inquiries of one man only (i.e. the pope) and refuse it to innumerable bishops gathered in council?’”⁶⁶²

Nevertheless, by the middle of the fifth century, the quasi-mystical attitude towards the papal see was entrenched even in the minds of the western emperors. Thus in 445 Emperor Valentinian III declared in his *Constitution*: “We are convinced that the only defence for us and for our Empire is in the favour of the God of heaven: and in order to deserve this favour it is our first care to support the Christian faith and its venerable religion. Therefore, inasmuch as the pre-eminence of the Apostolic See is assured by the merit of St. Peter, the first of the bishops, by the leading position of the city of Rome and also by the authority of the Holy Synod, let not presumption strive to attempt anything contrary to the authority of that See.”⁶⁶³

On June 6, 446, the emperor gave St. Leo the Great (440-461) a rescript recognizing his authority over all the western provinces, which persuaded St. Hilary of Arles to submit to his authority. In the same year, St. Leo reproached Archbishop Anastasius of Thessalonica for the way in which he had treated one of his metropolitan bishops and wrote: “The care of the universal Church should converge towards Peter's one seat, and nothing anywhere should be separated from its Head.” Leo claimed that while the Bishop of Rome had “the plenitude of power”, *plenitudo potestatis*, other bishops had only part of it, *pars sollicitudinis*.⁶⁶⁴

It has to be said that, in spite of this incipient papism, the high reputation of the Church of Rome was well-deserved at this time, as Popes Celestine and Leo played important roles in the struggle against the heresies of Nestorianism and Monophysitism during the period of the Third and Fourth Ecumenical Councils (in 431 and 451 respectively). Thus when Nestorius, the new patriarch of Constantinople, preached that Mary was not the Mother of God (*Theotokos*) but only of the man Jesus, thereby casting doubt on the real union of the Divine and human natures in one Person, St. Celestine accepted Nestorius’ appeal to the Roman see – but supported the Orthodox St. Cyril of Alexandria rather than the heretic Nestorius, who was anathematized at the Third Council. Again, when Eutyches and Dioscurus preached the opposite heresy of Monophysitism, which cast doubt on the reality of Christ’s

⁶⁶² Meyendorff, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

⁶⁶³ Henry Bettenson and Christopher Maunder, *Documents of the Christian Church*, Oxford University Press, third edition, 1999, pp. 24-25.

⁶⁶⁴ St. Leo, *Letter 14*, 1.

human nature after the resurrection, it was the reading of the *Tome* of St. Leo at the Fourth Council that was recognized, even by the eastern delegates, as “the voice of Peter”, for it established the Orthodox confession that Christ is one Person in two natures, unconfused but undivided.

On the other hand, the record of the emperors was mixed. Thus Theodosius II, though a pious man, convened the heretical council of Ephesus in 449, which involved violence against the Orthodox bishops and the death of St. Flavius, Archbishop of Constantinople. For this it was labelled *latrocinium*, a “robbers’ council”, by Leo. But Theodosius recovered, and his successors Marcian and Pulcheria were champions of Orthodoxy.

However, Leo’s attitude to the other *Churches* was sometimes not collegiate or conciliar, but hierarchical and authoritarian. Thus he gave his legates to the Fourth Ecumenical Council strict instructions that, as legates of the see of St. Peter, they should preside over the Council, and that his *Tome* should be read at the beginning and be presented as the fully sufficient expression of the Orthodox position, without the need for any further discussion or debate.

This was not in fact as arrogant as it sounded; for Leo already had a heavenly witness to the truth of his dogmatic position. According to his *Life*, St. Leo wrote his *Tome* and then “put it on the tomb of Peter, the chief Apostle. Then he fasted, prayed, and kept vigil, begging the preeminent Apostle, ‘if I, as a man, have in this letter erred in any way or failed to explain the truth fully, do thou, to whom this Church and episcopal throne were entrusted, set it right.’ Forty days later the Apostle appeared while Leo was praying. He said, ‘I have read your letter and corrected it.’ The Pope took the epistle from the blessed Peter’s tomb, opened it, and found that it had been amended by the Apostle’s hand.”⁶⁶⁵ Therefore the eastern legates were right – literally so – to call the *Tomos* of St. Leo “the voice of Peter”.

Nevertheless, the Eastern delegates were also right in believing in Catholicity and conciliarity, and that it was unacceptable to accept the popes’ “imprimatur” as the end of all argument. (After all, few popes had the holiness of St. Leo.) So Leo’s legates were not allowed to preside at the Council, and his *Tome* was read only at the end, when it was subjected to searching scrutiny.

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There was another problem. At the fourth session of the Council, the Roman legate Paschalius spoke of Pope Leo as “the bishop of all the churches”. The easterners ignored this, but they could not ignore the westerners’ rejection of Canon 28 of the Council, which gave Constantinople second place after Old Rome on account of her position as the imperial city of the Empire. The legates considered this a “humiliation of the apostolic see” in their presence.⁶⁶⁶

⁶⁶⁵ St. Demetrius of Rostov, *The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints*, vol. 6: February, House Springs, Mo.: Chrysostom Press, 2003, p. 207.

⁶⁶⁶ See Dvorkin, *op. cit.*, pp. 299, 309.

Was Canon 28 an essentially political decision, or an ecclesiastical decision shaped by political realities? For Rome it did not matter; the distinction was in any case over-subtle. The important thing for her was that her quasi-imperial dignity had been insulted. So Leo refused to accept it. And all his successors followed his lead... From now on, the other Churches, if they wanted to have relations with the Roman Church, would have to deal with her tactfully, not just as a Church, but as a *quasi-empire*, which was taking the place of the Roman Empire that was now slowly expiring (in the West, if not in the East)...

In any case, St. Leo was too tactful, too Orthodox and too genuinely concerned for the welfare of the Church *as a whole*, to make a big issue out of Canon 28.⁶⁶⁷ While it remained a subject of disagreement between the Eastern and Western Churches, it did not lead to a break in communion. However, as the see of Constantinople grew in power and influence, the Popes renewed their attacks on it. Thus towards the end of the century Pope Gelasius (492-496) saw no reason why Constantinople should be exalted in this way. After all, he wrote to the bishops of Dardania, it was "not even a metropolis!"⁶⁶⁸

Now the West had always been anxious to stress the independence of the Church in relation to the Empire. This was quite natural in view of the fact that the Roman Church had suffered so many martyrdoms at the hands of the pagan Roman emperors; after centuries of persecution, she valued her spiritual freedom. But this meant that, while she did not reject the friendship of her former enemy, she needed to define their relationship very clearly: the Divine and the eternal must not be confused with the merely human and ephemeral.

St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan (+397), which in his time had become the political capital of the West, had made a good first attempt at clarity on this point when writing to Emperor Theodosius I: "The tribute that belongs to Caesar is not to be denied. The Church, however, is God's, and it must not be pledged to Caesar; for God's temple cannot be a right of Caesar. That this is said with sentiments of respect for the emperor no man can deny. And what is more full of respect than that the emperor be styled a son of the Church? And when he is called such, he is called such without sin, because it is a compliment to be called such. For the emperor is in the Church, not over the Church, and far from refusing the Church's help, a good emperor seeks it."⁶⁶⁹

Although St. Theodosius was definitely "a good emperor", Ambrose reproached him with great boldness when he sinned. In 390 the emperor ordered troops to retaliate when a mob killed the governor of Thessalonica. 7000 were killed. St. Ambrose excommunicated the emperor, who accepted his penance with tears and great humility. The outcome of this confrontation was good for both Church and State.

⁶⁶⁷ However, in relation to Western sees that he considered within his own patriarchate, he could be more severe. Thus when St. Hilary, Archbishop of Arles, disputed his jurisdiction over the Gallican see of Besancon, Leo cast him into prison in Rome for his protest. Hilary died in 449 out of communion with Rome (Dvorkin, *op. cit.*, p. 369).

⁶⁶⁸ Abbé Vladimir Guettée, *The Papacy*, New York: Minos, 1866, p. 198.

⁶⁶⁹ St. Ambrose, *Sermon against Auxentius*, 35.

For the Church had demonstrated her spiritual freedom and her courage in defending what was God's, while the State had demonstrated true Christian humility and wisdom in submitting the actions of Caesar to the spiritual judgement of the Church.

But the outcome was less good in other cases, when the emperor behaved less admirably. Thus Valentinian III killed his best general Aetius in the same way and for the same reason (suspected sedition) that his predecessor Emperor Honorius had killed his best general, Stilicho, two generations before. It did not look good for the State... A few years later, St. Leo went to Attila the Hun and succeeded in turning him away from Rome, gaining great prestige for the Church in the process. Again, it did not look good for the State... So it is with pardonable exaggeration that Terry Jones and Alan Ereira write that, as a result of Leo's successful embassy, "the Church was now, it would be said, the true power in Rome, the replacement for military authority..."⁶⁷⁰

Not that the Church *wanted* to humiliate the State. St. Leo was feeling his way to a correct formulation of the Church-State relationship. He would probably have agreed with Justinian's classic formulation of a "symphony of powers" between Church and State, and also with his slogan: "One Faith, One Church, One Empire". After all, it filled well into his grandiose conception of the universal role of the Roman Church. But it is not difficult to see the dangers of comparing the structure of the Church to the structure of the Empire. For one might be tempted to think: just as the Roman Empire is universal and ruled by a single man, so the Catholic - that is, the Roman - Church, as a parallel institution to the Empire, is universal and should be ruled by a single man. And that man has to be the Pope, since he represents St. Peter...

In Pope Gelasius we see the beginnings of a characteristically "western" understanding of Church-State relations that placed particular emphasis on the Church's independence from the State. Thus he rejected the comparison, common in the East, between the Emperor and Melchizedek. This comparison might be valid in some respects, but not if it meant that a mortal man could combine the roles of king and priest in the manner of Melchizedek. Thus "before the coming of Christ," wrote Gelasius, "there existed people... who were, according to what sacred history tells us, at the same time both kings and priests, such as Melchizedek. This example was followed in his domain by the devil, who always, in a tyrannical spirit, claims for his own that which is fitting for divine worship, to the extent that the pagan emperors were also called pontiffs. But when there came He Who was in truth both King and Priest, from that time the emperor ceased to give himself the name of pontiff and the pontiff to lay claim to the royal pomp. For, although we say that the members of Christ, the true King and Priest, have, by reason of their participation in the glorious nature, received both the one and the other dignity through the sacred generosity [of Christ], so that they are at the same time 'a royal and a priestly race', nevertheless Christ, remembering the weakness of men..., has divided the spheres of the two powers by means of a distinction of duties and callings..., desiring that His own [children] should be guarded by grace-filled humility and should not once again become victims of human pride. So that the Christian emperors need the pontiffs for eternal life and the pontiffs conform to the imperial laws as regards the course of

⁶⁷⁰ Jones and Ereira, *Barbarians*, London: BBC Books, 2006, p. 280.

temporal things. Thus spiritual activities have been separated from carnal activities.... He who is entrusted with secular matters should not appear to preside over divine things, so that the modesty of the two orders should be respected....⁶⁷¹

“There are two powers,” Gelasius wrote to the emperor, “which for the most part control this world, the sacred authority of priests and the might of kings. Of these two the office of the priests is the greater inasmuch as they must give account even for kings to the Lord at the Divine Judgement. You know that although by your rank you stand at the head of the human race, you nevertheless bend your will before the leaders of Divine affairs, you turn to them in matters relating to your salvation, and you receive the heavenly sacraments from them. You know, consequently, that in matters of the faith you must submit to their lawful decisions and must not lord it over them – not submit them to your will, but be yourself guided by their judgements.” But “in matters touching public order, the Church hierarchs know that the emperor’s power has been sent down on you from above, and are themselves obedient to your laws, for they fear to be shown as opponents of your will in worldly affairs.”⁶⁷²

Gelasius’ rejection of the comparison with Melchizedek was also influenced, as Dagron points out, by St. Augustine’s *The City of God*, “in which, during his exegesis of Melchisedek, Augustine affirms that from now on Christ is the only Mediator between God and men, the only One to have put on the eternal priesthood. In the time of Israel, the earthly kingdom ‘was a type of’ the spiritual kingdom, but since the Incarnation the City of God has found its King once and for all. The break is a sharp one: before the coming of Christ a royal priesthood is possible whether by Divine economy (Melchisedek) or by diabolical counterfeit (the Roman *imperator-pontifex maximus*); after the coming of Christ this very notion is lanced with illegitimacy; the *regale sacerdotium* has devolved to the Son of God and by extension to the Christians as a whole... A true Christian emperor is not a Roman emperor converted or faithful to Christianity, or an emperor who could draw a new legitimacy from Old Testament models, but an emperor whose power has been in part confiscated by Christ and whose competence has been modified by the installation of Christianity, who will have to adopt the pose of humility before the new wielders of spiritual power, who will be constantly suspected of belonging to ‘the earthly City’, of remaining pagan or of identifying himself through pride with the Antichrist.”⁶⁷³

However, as Dagron points out, this was very much a western perspective: the easterners’ attaching a quasi-priestly character to the figure of the emperor (but without the sacramental functions of the priesthood) smacked, to western minds, of dangerously Hellenistic ideas of divine kingship. Leo sometimes ascribed to the emperor a quasi-priestly character, as when he complimented Marcian and Pulcheria, the saviours of Chalcedon, in this way. But this was not natural to the western way of thinking. It was Leo thinking as an easterner!

⁶⁷¹ Gelasius, *Tractatus IV*; translated from Dagron, *op. cit.*, pp. 190-191.

⁶⁷² Gelasius, quoted in Fomin S. and Fomina T., *Rossia pered Vtorym Prishestvoiem* (Russia before the Second Coming), Moscow, 1998, vol. I, p. 74.

⁶⁷³ Dagron, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

41. JUSTINIAN THE GREAT AND THE UNITY OF THE FAITH

“In Byzantium,” writes Ivan Ilyin, “the monarchy was considered, theoretically and practically, *elective*. The right to the throne was possessed by *every free person*. The presupposition was that the king was elected by the senate and the people; but the senate had been turned into an empty sound, while the people was not organized. There could not be any law of succession to the throne. A plotter who succeeded in ensuring the cooperation of the army and getting possession of the palace was recognized by the officials, and the rebel turned out to be king. Thus Justinian the Great (527-565) was elected as the Byzantine emperor by the leaders of the king’s bodyguards.”⁶⁷⁴

When Justinian ascended the throne, he set about trying to reunite the Christian world. For his great dream, as Protopresbyter James Thornton writes, “was to restore the Empire’s lost Western provinces. Previous rulers had sacrificed these territories, when they became threatened by the onslaughts of barbarian tribes, for the sake of the defense of the far more important and far wealthier East. But Saint Justinian’s thoughts hearkened back to the time of Saint Constantine I and Theodosius I, when the Empire stretched from the British Isles to the Euphrates... That Roman lands should have fallen into the hands of heretics and barbarians was, to the Saint’s mind, an affront to God’s will. It is also true, as the historian Charles Diehl (1859-1944) writes, that in principle Byzantine Emperors never admitted to any loss of territory. It is true that lands were lost to various barbarian incursions; but, to the Byzantine way of thinking, these lands were simply being temporarily administered by another local ruler on behalf of the Emperor. It was Constantinople’s right to reassert outright control when it served the sovereign’s pleasure.”⁶⁷⁵

Now large parts of the Christian world had seceded from the Empire for religious as well as political or military reasons. Thus Old Rome was in schism from Constantinople because of the Monophysitism of the Emperor Anastasius; while most of the Semitic and Coptic parts of the Eastern Empire had fallen into Monophysitism or Nestorianism. And so Justinian pursued his aim in two ways: in the West, through war and a mixture of concessions and pressure on the papacy, and in the East, by intensive theological negotiations with the heretics (led by himself), including Church Councils.

In relation to Old Rome he was largely successful: in relation to the Monophysites in the East - less so. This was partly owing to the fact that his wife Theodora secretly supported the Monophysites. Thus when the great ascetic and wonderworker St. Sabbas of Palestine visited Constantinople, the following incident took place: -

⁶⁷⁴ Ilyin, “O Monarkhii i Respublike” (On Monarchy and Republicanism), *Sobranie Sochinenij* (Collected Works), Moscow, 1994, p. 430.

⁶⁷⁵ Thornton, *Pious Kings and Right-Believing Queens*, Belmont, Mass.: Institute, for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 2013, pp. 251-252.

“Justinian requested the elder to bless the Empress Theodora, who, when she saw the godly Sabbas, also bowed low before him, saying: ‘Pray, Father, that I may be granted to bear children!’

“‘May God the Master of all, preserve your empire,’ replied the elder.

“Said the Empress, ‘Pray to God for me, Father, that He loose the bonds of my barrenness and permit me to conceive a son.’

“The elder answered, ‘May the God of glory preserve the Empire in the Orthodox faith and grant you victory over adversaries.’

“The empress then asked the elder a third time to pray that she be loosed from barrenness, only to receive a similar answer. Because of this she was deeply troubled. As the godly one was leaving, the monks who were with him asked, ‘Father, why did you not show the Empress compassion and agree to pray as she asked?’

“‘Believe me, Fathers,’ replied the elder, ‘her womb shall never bear fruit. It is not the will of the Lord that she be permitted to nurse an heir on the teaching of [the Monophysite heretic] Severus, or that such a child should grow up to reign and trouble the Church of Christ even more than did [the heretical Emperor] Anastasius.’”⁶⁷⁶

Nevertheless, there was a union, albeit fleeting, between the five ancient patriarchates of Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem; and this union in one Church under one right-believing Emperor was a great achievement. There can be little doubt that the person most instrumental in achieving this union was the emperor himself: if the five patriarchates represented the five senses of the Body of Christ on earth, then the head in which they all adhered *on earth* was the emperor. It was through him, therefore, that the ideal of “One Faith, One Church, One Empire” was achieved. At the Fifth Ecumenical Council (553) all the patriarchates except Rome agreed on condemning the heretical “Three Chapters”. (Also anathematized was Origen and his teaching that all will be saved.) Only Pope Vigilius of Rome refused, whereupon he (but not the Roman patriarchate as a whole) was excommunicated; and in its final definition the Council condemned the budding papist heresy that one bishop was above the judgement of his fellow bishops. Pope Vigilius repented of his opposition six months later and was restored to communion with the Church. This condemnation of papism was accepted by all subsequent popes until the eleventh century.⁶⁷⁷

This unity was not achieved without some pressure, especially on the Roman patriarchate. Thus when the Orthodox Pope Agapetus arrived in Constantinople, Justinian said to him: “I shall either force you to agree with us, or else I shall send you

⁶⁷⁶ St. Demetrius of Rostov, *The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints*, House Springs, Mo.: Chrysostom Press, 2000, vol. IV: December, p. 121.

⁶⁷⁷ “Condamnation de la papauté par le Ve Concile Œcuménique”, February 19, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_73BEFBJWPo&fbclid=IwAR2WFDOGA6sMIA1w9ZiETOqg2DzEkt2Q6bMph4Xduh7MkYdLH0lece9n12U.

into exile." Whereupon the Pope replied: "I wished to come to the most Christian of all emperors, Justinian, and I have found now a Diocletian; however, I fear not your threats."⁶⁷⁸

Nevertheless, it is clear that the Lord gave to the Emperor Justinian the same power, not only to convene an ecumenical council, but also to appoint its president, as He gave to the Emperors Constantine the Great and Theodosius the Great in the fourth century, and Emperors Theodosius II, Marcian and Pulcheria in the fifth century. According to the *Life of Eutychios* written by Eustratios the Presbyter, in 552 Justinian went to the church of the Apostle Peter in Athyra in Thrace to participate in the procession for its feast on September 5th. St. Eutychios was also there. Eustratios records the emperor's account of a vision he had there: "He declared that, while asleep in the church of Saint Peter, the head of the Apostles, in Athyra – he was there to perform the procession – he also had a divine vision concerning Eutychios; for he said that he had seen the head of the Apostles clearly pointing to the great Eutychios, and saying: 'Make him become your bishop'."

St. Eutychios went on to become patriarch of Constantinople, and then convened the Fifth Ecumenical Synod in 553.⁶⁷⁹

As Fr. John Meyendorff writes: "Without denying the dangers and the abuses of imperial power, which occurred in particular instances, the system as such, which been created by Theodosius I and Justinian, did not deprive the Church of its ability to define dogma through conciliarity. But conciliarity presupposed the existence of a mechanism making consensus possible and effective. Local churches needed to be grouped into provinces and patriarchates, and patriarchates were to act together to reach an agreement valid for all. The empire provided the universal Church with such a mechanism..."⁶⁸⁰

More precisely, it was the person of the emperor that provided such a mechanism. For since Constantine's time, it was the emperor who acted as the focus of unity of quarrelling Christians. The importance of this function was recognized by all. In consequence, as L.A. Tikhomirov points out, even when an emperor tried to impose heresy on the Church, "this was a struggle that did not besmirch the Church and State power as institutions. In this struggle he acted as a member of the Church, in the name of Church truth, albeit mistakenly understood. This battle was not about the relationship between the Church and the State and did not lead to its interruption, nor to the seeking of any other kind of principles of mutual relationship. As regards the direct conflicts between Church and State power, they arose only for particular reasons, only between given persons, and also did not relate to the principle of the mutual relationship itself."⁶⁸¹

⁶⁷⁸ Pope Agapetus, in A.A. Vasiliev, *A History of the Byzantine Empire*, Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin Press, 1958, p. 151.

⁶⁷⁹ <https://www.johnsanidopoulos.com/2014/09/commemoration-of-appearance-of-apostle.html>.

⁶⁸⁰ Meyendorff, *Rome, Constantinople, Moscow*, Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996, p. 291.

⁶⁸¹ L.A. Tikhomirov, *Monarkhicheskaia Gosudarstvennost'* (Monarchical Statehood), St. Petersburg, 1992, p. 162.

The emperor's role as focus of unity in the Church was also displayed in the initiatives he took to convert the barbarians in the Balkans and in Ethiopia, and create bishoprics for them. Thus through *Novella 11* (535) Justinian created a new autocephalous Church named Justiniana Prima to conduct missions among the Slavs who had recently invaded the Balkan Peninsula. This new Church subordinated the bishops of Sophia and Riparian Dacia, Preslav, Dardania, and upper Moesia under the new Archbishop in a territory that roughly comprised today's former Yugoslavia, Albania and Western Bulgaria. In *Novella 131* (545), however, Justiniana Prima's territories were put back under the jurisdiction of the Roman Church after the Pope protested that this new autocephaly was an infringement on his rights. Justiniana Prima was closed in the seventh century. Nevertheless, its Metropolitans (of Philippi, Thessalonica and Larisa) maintained their independence from Constantinople by forming new bishoprics for the Slavic Diaspora.⁶⁸²

Some historians have been highly critical of Justinian's western wars. Thus A.A. Vasiliev writes: "From Justinian's Roman point of view, his western campaigns are comprehensible and natural, but from the point of view of the welfare of the Empire they must be recognized as superfluous and pernicious. The gap between the East and the West in the sixth century was already so great that the mere idea of uniting the two was an anachronism. A real union was out of the question. The conquered provinces could be retained by force only, and for this the Empire had neither power nor means. Allured by his delusive dreams, Justinian failed to grasp the importance of the eastern border and the eastern provinces, which embodied the really vital interests of the Byzantine Empire. The western campaigns, displaying only the personal will of the Emperor, could not bring about lasting results, and the plan of restoring a united Roman Empire died with Justinian, though not forever. Meanwhile, his general external policy brought about an extremely severe internal economic crisis within the Empire."⁶⁸³

However, this view is based on a serious misconception concerning both the aim and the results of Justinian's western *Reconquista*. Not only from a "Roman" point of view, still less out of personal willfulness, but from a religious point of view first of all, Justinian's wars were fully justified. And their effects, though achieved at great cost, were long-lasting. For they achieved *the return of Italy to Orthodoxy – and through Italy, the rest of the West*. For after the wars, there could be no return of the West to the Arianism of the Italian Ostrogothic and Spanish Visigothic kings; Orthodox Gaul was confirmed in her Orthodoxy; from Italy and France (and Ireland) Anglo-Saxon England, too, would become Orthodox; and from England Germany and Scandinavia would become Orthodox. This meant that the whole of the West, until the Reformation at least, confessed that Jesus Christ is both God and Man in the full, Chalcedonian sense. As for the East, the majority of its population voluntarily rejected Chalcedon, and has to this day remained outside the unity of faith established by Justinian even in that part which did not accept Islam.

⁶⁸² Alexander G. Dragas, "The Constantinople and Moscow Divide", *Theologia*, December, 2017.

⁶⁸³ Vasiliev, *A History of the Byzantine Empire*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1952, vol. 1, p. 142.

This is the triumph and the tragedy of Justinian's reign. The triumph of reuniting millions of lost souls to Christ in the West, and the tragedy of failing to unite further millions to him in the East. But we must salute the grim determination of the emperor who put the souls of millions above his own empire's good, knowing that it profits a man nothing if he gains the whole world but loses his soul...

The symbolic crown of Justinian's attempts to unify the world in Christ was his building of Hagia Sophia, the greatest church in Christendom and without a peer to this day, uniting the vast space under the extraordinary dome in a marvelous way: "Solomon, I have surpassed thee", he said on beholding the completed building. He was right - and it was the sheer celestial beauty of this building that converted the envoys of St. Vladimir, the baptizer of Russia, to recommend Orthodoxy to their ruler over five centuries later...

42. JUSTINIAN AND THE SYMPHONY OF POWERS

The other kind of unity created by Justinian was his *codification of Roman law*. Justinian's *Corpus iuris civilis* (527-534) consisted of the *Digest* (or *Pandects*), the *Institutes* and the *Code*, containing imperial constitutions which were supplemented by Justinian's own, new constitutions, called *Novellae*. The *corpus* therefore united the old and new in one coherent body.

The *Digest* declared that law was "something *all* men ought to obey for many reasons, and chiefly because every law is devised and given by God, but resolved on by intelligent men, a means of correcting offences both intentional and unintentional, a general agreement on the part of the community by which all those living therein ought to order their lives. We may add that Chrysippus [said]: 'Law is the king of all things, both divine and human; it ought to be the controller, ruler and commander of both the good and the bad'."⁶⁸⁴

As Tom Holland writes: "If it was true, as Justinian ringingly declared, that 'what medicine is to disease, so laws are to public affairs', then there was much that first needed to be done before the emperor's prescription could be applied to the sickening world. The sheer scale and antiquity of the Roman people's achievements in the field of law had resulted in a legacy that was intimidatingly chequered. Justinian, however, was hardly the man to duck such a challenge. His first step, only a few months into his reign, was the appointment of a commission to harmonise the various unwieldy collections of laws used by previous emperors, then, a year and a half later, he charged a second commission with the even more daunting task of collecting the entire stupendous body of private writings on Roman law. Complete constitutions had to be revised, almost two thousand individual books called in and minutely sifted; tens of thousands of excerpts made. The resulting codification, achieved in record time, was so staggering that it appeared to many something more than human. Justinian himself presented it proudly as a process of restoration; but there was something about it as well of a revolution. 'We have by means of old laws not only brought matters into a better condition, but we have also promulgated new laws.' The emperor saw no need to conceal the fact. He was himself, as he declared, *nomos empsychos* – the 'living law'. Here, in this self-promotion, was the ultimate refinement of what generations of emperors had been working to achieve. Henceforward, the rules by which the Roman people lived and were bound were to have just the single fountainhead: the emperor himself, enthroned in his palatial citadel. No wonder, then, that Justinian should have sought, not merely to impose his stamp upon the long centuries of Roman legal achievement, but also prescribe where and how that achievement should be taught. Private law schools were definitively banned. No teachers were to be licensed, save for those directly sanctioned by the state. Now, more than ever, the whole world was to be administered from the centre, from the palace of Constantinople."⁶⁸⁵

⁶⁸⁴ R.H.C. Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 310.

⁶⁸⁵ Holland, *In the Shadow of the Sword*, London: Abacus, 2012, pp. 159-160.

“The dominant political message of the *Corpus iuris*,” writes Joseph Canning, “is a theocratic one. The emperor derives his power from God: in the constitution *Deo auctore*, at the beginning of the *Digest* Justinian describes himself as ‘at God’s command governing our empire, which has been entrusted to us by heavenly majesty’. The divine source of imperial authority is constantly reiterated in the *Code* and *Novels*. ‘At divine command we took up the imperial insignia.’ The emperor’s laws are sacred (*sacrae* or *sanctissimae*), thus reflecting the Christianising of his pagan role as *pontifex maximus*. They are, furthermore, of everlasting effect: Justinian decreed that his codification was to be valid ‘forever’ (*in omne aevum*). It is, therefore, his will alone which constitutes law; ‘what has pleased the *princeps* has the force of law’ (*quod principi placuit legis habet vigorem*). He is thus no less than the living law’ (*lex animata*), an application of the Hellenistic concept of the ruler as *nomos empsychos*: ‘Let the imperial rank be exempted from all our provisions [in this constitution], because God has subjected the laws themselves to the emperor, by sending him as a living law to men’. He is in short not bound by the law, but ‘freed from the laws’ (*legibus solutus*). This famous phrase indicates that the emperor is above human law: he is not subjected to the laws which derive from his own universal authority. This formulation laid the foundations for the elaboration of the concept of absolute power in the late Middle Ages.

“On the other hand there are also in the *Corpus iuris* statements which indicate the possession of authority by the Roman people. The historical outline of Roman law in D.1.2.2 includes a brief sketch of the republican period, and republican sources of law are treated in D.1.1.17 and Inst. 1.2, 3-5. The most fundamental question, however, concerns the origin of the imperial power itself: reference is made to the so-called *lex regia* or ‘royal law’, whereby the Roman people transferred its power and authority to the emperor. The meaning of these references to the *lex regia* has been hotly debated by historians. One school of thought has seen it as an *ex post facto* legal construction to justify the transition from the republic to the empire. Such a law never in fact existed, but was postulated by later classical jurists to explain the transfer of sovereignty from the Roman people to the first *princeps*, Augustus, a device, in short, to legitimize the imperial power. The other view identifies the *lex regia* with the *legis de imperio* by which the popular assembly gave power to each emperor at the beginning of his reign... The most likely interpretation is that the *lex regia* was indeed a later and classical juristic construction adopted by Justinian himself as having been genuinely enacted as a law...

“Whatever the truth about the *lex regia*, its significance for political thought was that it expressed the idea that that the emperor’s power derived from the people, and thus provided a model for the popular source of governmental power to be elaborated later in the Middle Ages and the early modern period. The *lex regia* raised a fundamental problem concerning the origins of authority, because its inclusion in the *Corpus iuris* meant that both divine and popular sources of rulership coexisted. These two sources could be seen as mutually exclusive, and the *Corpus iuris* itself does nothing to solve the problem. At the time of Justinian the conception of the divine origin of imperial power overwhelmed any idea that the people were in any meaningful sense the source of authority; the only echo of such an ultimately republican idea was to be found in the acclamation of a new emperor by the senate,

army and people. Such acclamation either sufficed as a form of election after the death of an emperor or, as was more normal in Byzantine history, or confirmed the already co-opted choice of the previous incumbent. Either way, popular acclamation only served to declare the divine choice of an emperor whose power came from God directly..."⁶⁸⁶

In this connection the famous *Sixth Novella* (535) is especially important: "The greatest gifts given by God to men by His supreme kindness are the priesthood and the empire, of which the first serves the things of God and the second rules the things of men and assumes the burden of care for them. Both proceed from one source and adorn the life of man. Nothing therefore will be so greatly desired by the emperors than the honour of the priests, since they always pray to God about both these very things. For if the first is without reproach and adorned with faithfulness to God, and the other adorns the state entrusted to it rightly and competently, a good symphony will exist, which will offer everything that is useful for the human race. We therefore have the greatest care concerning the true dogmas of God and concerning the honour of the priests..., because through this the greatest good things will be given by God – both those things that we already have will be made firm and those things which we do not have yet we shall acquire. Everything will go well if the principle of the matter is right and pleasing to God. We believe that this will come to pass if the holy canons are observed, which have been handed down to us by the apostles, those inspectors and ministers of God worthy of praise and veneration, and which have been preserved and explained." The unity of the two powers was also emphasized in the *Seventh Novella* (2, 1), according to which the goods of the Church, though in principle inalienable, could be the object of transactions with the emperor. "For the difference between the priesthood (ιερωσύνη) and the empire (βασίλεια) is small, as it is between the sacred goods and the goods that are common to the community."⁶⁸⁷

It should be noted that in this formulation of the principle of the "symphony of powers" both the priesthood and the empire are said to "proceed from the same source", that is, God. This has the very important consequence that the normal and natural relationship between the two powers is one of harmony, not rivalry and division. If some of the early Fathers, in both East and West, tended to emphasize the separation and distinctness of the powers rather than their unity from and under God. This was a natural result of the friction between the Church and the pagan and heretical emperors in the early centuries. However, now that unity in Orthodoxy had been achieved the emphasis had to return to the common source and common end of the two institutions. The unity of the Christian world under the Christian emperor had as its foundation-stone this "symphony" between the emperor and the patriarch, this symphony being grounded in their common origin in God. As the coronation ceremony put it: "You were selected by divine decree for the security and exaltation of the universe; you were joined to the people by God's will. Almighty God has blessed you and crowned you with His own hand."⁶⁸⁸

⁶⁸⁶ Canning, *A History of Medieval Political Thought 300-1450*, London: Routledge, 1996, pp. 7-8, 9.

⁶⁸⁷ Gilbert Dagron, *Empereur et Prêtre* (Emperor and Priest), Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1996, p. 313.

⁶⁸⁸ *De Ceremoniis Aulae Byzantinae*, 1:39; in Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

Insofar as the symphony of powers existed, not only between two men, but between two *institutions*, the priesthood and the empire, it went beyond the relationship between emperor and patriarch. As Bishop Dionysius (Alferov) writes: "Symphonicity in Church administration only began at the level of the Emperor and Patriarch, and continued at the level of the bishop and eparch (who also received the blessing of the Church for his service) and was completed at the level of the parish priest and its founder. With such a deep 'enchurchment' from all sides of the life of the Orthodox Empire, and the symphonicity of all levels of the Church-State pyramid, the violations of symphony at the highest level were, while annoying, not especially dangerous. The most important thing still remained the service of 'him who restrains', which was carried out by the Orthodox Emperor in symphony with the whole Church, and not only personally with the Patriarch. The decisive factor was the personal self-consciousness of the Emperor and the activity based on that. Thus Justinian conceived of himself completely as a Christian sovereign, and strove throughout the whole of his life to make the whole world Christian. His symphony with the Patriarch was desirable as a useful means towards that end, but it was not an end-in-itself. During Justinian's time five Patriarchates entered into the Empire, including the Roman, and the Emperor did not establish 'symphonic' relations with all of them personally (as, for example, with Pope Vigilius, who did not want to accept the decisions of the 5th Ecumenical Council). But symphony with the whole Church did exist, and a proof of this is provided by the 5th Ecumenical Council, which was convened through the efforts of Justinian and accepted the dogmatic definitions against the heresies that he presented; and by the multitude of saints who shone forth during his reign and who related completely 'symphonically' to him (for example, St. Sabbas the Sanctified); and by the general flourishing of Christian culture."⁶⁸⁹

Thirdly, Justinian had in mind not any kind of harmony, but only a true "symphony" or meeting of minds that comes from God. As I.N. Andrushkevich points out, the word "symphony" [*consonantia*] here denotes much more than simple agreement or concord. Church and State can agree in an evil way, for evil ends. True symphony is possible only where both the Church "is without reproach and adorned with faithfulness to God" and the State is ruled "rightly and competently" - that is, in accordance with the commandments of God.⁶⁹⁰ Where these conditions are not met, what we have, as A.V. Kartashev, the minister of religion under the Russian Provisional Government, pointed out, "is no longer symphony, but *cacophony*".⁶⁹¹ Or, preserving the Latin root of the words, we should call it the *dissonance* of powers...

Justinian himself, in his preface to the *Novella*, pointed out that, although he was an Autocrat, he could not exercise dominion over the priesthood; he was obliged to allow the priests to follow their own law, the Gospel and the Holy Canons. Thus did he qualify the absolutist principle of Roman power, namely, that *whatever is pleasing to the emperor has the force of law* with the words: *unless it contradicts the holy canons*. Again,

⁶⁸⁹ Alferov, "Ob uderzhanii i symphonii" ("On Restraining and Symphony"), <http://www.monarhist-spb.narod.ru/D-ST/Dionisy-1./htm>, pp. 9-10.

⁶⁹⁰ Andrushkevich, "Doktrina sv. Imperatora Iustiniana Velikago" ("The Teaching of the holy Emperor Justinian the Great"), *Pravoslavnaia Rus'* (Orthodox Russia), N 4 (1529), February 15/28, 1995, pp. 4-12.

⁶⁹¹ Kartashev, *Vossozdanie Svoyatoj Rusi* (The Recreation of Holy Russia), Moscow, 1991, p. 83.

in his *Novella 131* he decreed: "The Church canons have the same force in the State as the State laws: what is permitted or forbidden by the former is permitted or forbidden by the latter. Therefore crimes against the former cannot be tolerated in the State according to State legislation." These Canons include those that forbid resort to the secular power in Church matters: Canon 12 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council; Canons 11 and 12 of Antioch; and (later) Canon 3 of the Seventh Ecumenical Council. Nevertheless, it needs to be pointed out that, as we have seen, Justinian did not always observe this restriction on his own power...

"As regards the judicial branch," writes Fr. Alexis Nikolin, "coordinated action presupposed not simply mutual complementation of the spheres of administration of the ecclesiastical and secular courts, but, which is especially important, the introduction into the activity of the latter of the moral-educational content inherent in Christianity.

"In a single service to the work of God both the Church and the State constitute as it were one whole, one organism – 'unconfused', but also 'undivided'. In this lay the fundamental difference between Orthodox 'symphony' and Latin 'papocaesarism' and Protestant 'caesaropapism'."⁶⁹²

Of course, the principle that the Church canons should automatically be considered as State laws was not always carried out in practice, even in Justinian's reign; and in some spheres, as Nikolin points out, "The Christian Emperor received the ability to reveal the content of the canon in his own way (in the interests of the State). Justinian's rule provides several confirmations of this. The rules for the election, conduct and inter-relations of bishops, clergy and monks, for the punishment of clergy, and for Church property were subjected to his reclamation. Bishops received broad powers in State affairs (more exactly, numerous State duties were imputed to them).

"Justinian's rule was a rule in which the mutual relations of Church and State were inbuilt, and which later lasted in Byzantium right up to the days of her fall, and which were borrowed in the 10th century by Rus'. In the first place this related to the principle: 'Ecclesiastical canons are State laws'. Moreover, the Christian direction of Justinian's reforms told on the content of the majority of juridical norms. This was most vividly revealed in the resolutions of questions concerning the regulation of individual spheres of Church life. Church communities were now provided with the rights of a juridical person. In property questions they were given various privileges...

"A particular feature of Justinian's reforms was that as a result of them State power was transformed into a defender of the faith. This was most clearly revealed in the establishment of restrictions on the juridical rights of citizens of the empire linked with their confession of faith:

- Pagans and Jews were deprived of the right to occupy posts in state or societal service, and were not able to possess Christian slaves;

⁶⁹² Nikolin, *Tserkov' i Gosudarstvo* (Church and State), Moscow, 1997, p. 17.

- Apostates, that is, people going over from Christianity to paganism or Judaism were deprived of the right to compose wills and inherit, and likewise were not able to be witnesses at trials;
- Heretics were not able to occupy posts in state or societal service; they were deprived of the right of inheritance; they could make bequests... only to Orthodox. There were even stricter measures adopted in relation to certain sects."⁶⁹³

Violations of the principle of the symphony of powers were rare if we exclude the pressure Justinian sometimes exerted on heretical hierarchs, and episcopal elections. In the latter, there was a contradiction between Justinian's laws, which included the leading laymen of the locality in the electoral body – an enactment that gave an avenue for imperial influence on the elections through these laymen - and the custom of the Church, according to which only bishops took part in the election. (*De facto*, however, in all Orthodox kingdoms, there was one layman who took part in the election of bishops – the emperor or king.) Conversely, the recruitment of bishops to undertake secular duties was contrary to Apostolic Canon 81 insofar as it led to a secularization of the episcopal calling.⁶⁹⁴

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The principle of the symphony of powers defining the relationship between Church and State was so important, so fundamental, that when it clearly broke down in a more general way - for the first time in the late twelfth century, and again in the late fourteenth century - the City itself also fell...

Bishop Dionysius (Alferov) writes: "After the holy Emperor Justinian any Christian monarch must confess, and reverently and unhypocritically believe that '*Christian piety is the foundation of the strength of the empire*'. For greater clarity let us indicate an example. The Emperor Justinian himself, while paying great attention to theology, Divine services and the building of churches, completely neglected the army and the navy, which under him came to a state of decline. But for his unfeigned piety and faith the Lord protected the empire from invasions and subjected to Justinian a part of the barbarians. After him the iconoclast emperors Leo the Isaurian and Constantine Copronymus were outstanding military commanders who reorganized the army and repelled opponents (the Arabs and Bulgars) far from the empire. But the heresy they introduced and their general impiety shook the foundations of Byzantium from within and brought it to the verge of extinction. Therefore amongst the qualities of an exemplary ruler *his faith and piety occupy the first place*. For the sake of these the Lord protects his kingdom from many woes. *His practical capabilities* in raising national life are already *secondary*."⁶⁹⁵

⁶⁹³ Nikolin, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-33, 34.

⁶⁹⁴ See Bishop Pierre L'Huillier, "Episcopal Elections in the Byzantine East: a few comments", *Eastern Churches Review*, vol. II, N 1, Spring, 1968, pp. 4-7, and *The Church of the Ancient Councils*, Crestwood, NY; St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996, pp. 36-38, 40, 41.

⁶⁹⁵ Alferov, "Monarkhia i Khristianskoe Soznanie" ("The Monarchy and Christian Consciousness"), http://catacomb.org.ua/rubr10/R10_11.htm, p. 7.

43. ST. GREGORY, ST. BENEDICT AND THE ORTHODOX WEST

Rome had suffered terribly during the Gothic Wars, changing hands several times between the Goths and the Byzantines; at one point, it was completely empty for forty days. Its buildings and institutions withered away; even the Senate had disappeared by the end of the sixth century. However, one of the last Romans of senatorial rank, St. Gregory the Great (590-604), was destined to restore its glory – not the vain glory of the secular empire, but the spiritual glory of the Church... He bemoaned the devastation, both physical and spiritual, in the wake of the Gothic Wars and the invasion of the Lombards that followed them: “All of Europe is in the hands of the barbarians... Cities have fallen, fortresses are in ruins... and idol worshipers persecute and even kill the believers. And in the midst of all this, priests [bishops and patriarchs] who should fall down in church courtyards in sackcloth and ashes in prayer, instead run after empty titles”!

The “empty title” that most disgusted him was the Constantinopolitan patriarch’s assumption of the title “universal bishop”...

As we have seen, the scepticism with regard to secular authority of such major figures as St. Augustine and Pope Gelasius, together with the unparalleled prestige of the Popes in the West, combined to introduce a new, specifically western exaltation of ecclesiastical at the expense of imperial and regal power. Rome’s downgrading of the power of the kings may also have had something to do with simple jealousy of Eastern pre-eminence in the Church: apart from St. Leo’s important contribution to the Fourth Ecumenical Council, the main theological debates in the Councils were carried out in Greek by Eastern hierarchs. Rome even went so far once as to break communion with Archbishop Acacius of Constantinople, although the East accepted the pope, rather than the archbishop, as Orthodox. The pope insisted that “the apostolic see has always kept the Orthodox faith unharmed”, and that “those who do not agree in everything with the apostolic see” should not be commemorated. The Greeks did not agree with this, but for the sake of unity they were prepared to condescend to papal pride. And so the “Acacian schism” was ended when Patriarch John II of Constantinople accepted the papist doctrinal formula of Pope Hormisdas – but only after cunningly adding the phrase: “I proclaim that the see of the Apostle Peter and the see of this imperial city are one”, thereby witnessing to the truth of St. Cyprian’s words that “the episcopate is one” ...⁶⁹⁶

Rome’s pretensions were dealt a further blow by the Emperor Justinian nearly forty years later, when he forced Pope Vigilius to accept the condemnation, enshrined in the Fifth Ecumenical Council in 553, of the so-called “Three Chapters” (three heretical passages from three essentially Orthodox writers), although this led to some western councils – in Africa and Northern Italy (the so-called “Aquilean schism”) – breaking communion with Vigilius. However, the fact that these western councils, and some individual saints, felt able to break with the Pope shows that they did not consider him to be infallible. Moreover, Vigilius’ penitential letter to Patriarch Eutyches of Constantinople was an admission of his fallibility...

⁶⁹⁶ Dvorkin, *op. cit.*, pp. 398, 399.

The independence of mind of Western churchmen in relation to the papacy at this time is strikingly illustrated by the Irish St. Columbanus of Luxeuil, who wrote to Pope Vigilius suggesting that he may have fallen into heresy. In that case, he continued, those “who have always kept the Orthodox Faith, whoever these may be, even if they seem to be your subordinates,... shall be your judges... And thus, even as your honour is great in proportion to the dignity of your see, so great care is mindful for you, lest you lose your dignity through some mistake. For power will be in your hands just so long as your principles remain sound; for he is the appointed keybearer of the Kingdom of Heaven, who opens by true knowledge to the worthy and shuts to the unworthy; otherwise if he does the opposite, he shall be able neither to open nor to shut.”

“For all we Irish,” as he said to another Pope, “inhabitants of the world’s edge, are disciples of Saints Peter and Paul and of all the disciples who wrote the sacred canon by the Holy Spirit, and we accept nothing outside the evangelical and apostolic teaching; none has been a heretic, none a Judaizer, none a schismatic; but the Catholic Faith, as it was delivered by you first, who are the successors of the holy apostles, has been maintained unbroken.”⁶⁹⁷

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The tendency towards Papism was halted, at least temporarily, under Pope Gregory I. An Old Roman aristocrat but also loyal subject of the Eastern Empire, he believed in the primacy, but not universal sovereignty, of “the apostolic see”. He never tried to override the rights of Local Churches, still less proclaim an infallible headship over them. Indeed, in his vehement refusal (following the example of his predecessor, Pelagius II) to accept the title of “universal bishop”, first offered by the Emperor Maurice to St. John the Faster, Patriarch of Constantinople, St. Gregory provided an invaluable lesson to all subsequent Popes on the limits of their power and jurisdiction. For he accused St. John of pride, and wrote to him that in accepting this title he was “at enmity with that grace which was given to all [bishops] in common”. He reminded him that the Fourth Ecumenical Council had offered the title of “universal” to the Roman Pope as a mark of honour to St. Peter, but that none of the Popes had accepted it, “lest by assuming a special distinction in the dignity of the episcopate, we should seem to refuse it to all the brethren”.⁶⁹⁸

St. Gregory wrote to the Emperor concerning St. Peter: “He received the keys of the celestial Kingdom; the power to bind and to loose was given to him; the care of all the Church and the primacy were committed to him; and yet he did not call himself *universal Apostle*. But that most holy man, John, my brother in the priesthood, would fain assume the title of *universal bishop*. I can but exclaim, *O tempora! O mores!*”⁶⁹⁹

⁶⁹⁷ G.S.M. Walker, *Sancti Columbani Opera*, Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1970, pp. 47, 49, 51, 39.

⁶⁹⁸ Guettée, *op. cit.*, pp. 208, 211.

⁶⁹⁹ Guettée, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

In another letter to Patriarchs Eulogius of Alexandria and Anastasius of Antioch, he made the point that “if a Patriarch be called universal, this takes from all the others the title of Patriarch”.⁷⁰⁰

And to Patriarch Cyriacus of Constantinople he wrote: “You must not consider this same affair as unimportant; for, if we tolerate it, we *corrupt the faith of the whole Church*. You know how many, not heretics only but heresiarchs, have arisen in the Church of Constantinople. Not to speak of the injury done to your dignity, it cannot be denied that if any one bishop be called *universal*, all the Church *crumbles if that universal one fall!*!”⁷⁰¹

Finally, in another letter to the Emperor, St. Gregory wrote: “I pray your Imperial Piety to observe that there are some frivolous things that are inoffensive, but also some others that are very hurtful. When Antichrist shall come and call himself God, it will be in itself a perfectly frivolous thing, but a very pernicious one. If we only choose to consider the number of syllables in this word, we find but two (*De-us*); but if we conceive the weight of iniquity of this title, we shall find it enormous. I say it without the least hesitation: *whoever calls himself the universal bishop, or desires this title, is, by his pride, THE PRECURSOR OF ANTICHRIST*, because he thus attempts to raise himself above the others. The error into which he falls springs from pride equal to that of Antichrist; for as that wicked one wished to be regarded as exalted above other men, like a god, so likewise whoever would be called *sole bishop* exalteth himself above the others.”⁷⁰²

And so we find the heresy of Papism thoroughly refuted by one of the greatest of the Popes. St. Gregory reaffirms the doctrine taught by St. Cyprian of Carthage and the Orthodox East, that all bishops are essentially equal in grace, because the grace of the episcopate is one, and the bishops receive their grace, not from one man or one see, but from the episcopate as a whole. Consequently, the heresy that attempts to create, as it were, a fourth level of the priesthood above that of bishop, in the form of a *universal* bishop having sovereignty over all the others, undermines the ecclesiology of the Church, and is a heresy of the Antichrist, who will also exalt himself above all...

While opposing the false idea of Church unity that was Papism, St. Gregory also championed a positive ideal that, coming after Justinian’s military conquests and restoration of Orthodoxy in the West, served to create a deeper unity, not only of the West with the East, but also of the West within itself, in the union between the Western nations – Italians, Gallic, Iberian, Anglo-Saxon – and the papacy. He did this in various ways: through his own decrees, epistles to kings, bishops and laymen, and theological works (especially the *Pastoral Rule*, *Homilies on the Gospel* and *Morals on Job*); through his missionary activities (especially in relation to the Anglo-Saxons); in his liturgical reforms (his Presanctified Liturgy is still celebrated by the Orthodox Church during Great Lent); in his music (even if what is called “Gregorian Chant” probably originates in the Carolingian age); and in his *Dialogues* (he is known in the East as “the

⁷⁰⁰ Guettée, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

⁷⁰¹ Guettée, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

⁷⁰² Guettée, *op. cit.*, pp. 225-226.

Dialogist"). The *Dialogues* are essentially a series of *Lives* of the Italian saints, of which the most important and influential is the *Life* of the great monastic founder, St. Benedict of Nursia (+547), in the second Book.

Leonard von Matt and Stephan Hilpisch write: "After spending his patrimony in founding six monasteries in Sicily and one in Rome, Gregory himself embraced the monastic life. Pope Pelagius II employed him in the service of the Church so that, to his great sorrow, Gregory was compelled to exchange contemplation for action; but at heart he remained a monk and when, in 590, he was raised to the Chair of Peter – the first monk to be thus honoured – he showed himself a true friend and patron of monasticism. Devoted as he was to holy reading, prayer, contemplation and the liturgy, Gregory was a monk on the papal throne. He issued a number of ordinances for monasteries and assisted them in their poverty. But his most important work for monasticism is his biography of St. Benedict..."

"... It was the writing of the Rule that he regarded as the Saint's greatest achievement. He writes: 'Among all the wonders which draw a shining halo around Benedict even in this world, we must count his doctrine; for he has written a Rule for monks which is conspicuous by reason of its moderation and the clarity of its language. The teaching of this Rule is a key to the teacher's life for he would not demand from others what he had not practiced in his own person.'

"St. Gregory's biography of St. Benedict has been of incalculable benefit to Benedictine monasticism... St. Gregory's encomium of St Benedict and his Rule reached a wide audience and helped to decide the problem as to what Rule should be adopted by the monks of the West."⁷⁰³

The Rule was very important in helping to unite the Orthodox West and in spreading it to new lands, such as Germany. By the end of the tenth century Benedictine monasteries were everywhere, and most bishops were Benedictine monks.

With the heresy of papism suppressed, at least temporarily, the West flourished and the papacy itself rose to the peak of its real and not vain glory and power. But important differences between East and West remained. One of them was the greater *legalism* of the West.

«When the Roman Empire collapsed in the West,» writes Sir Steven Runciman, «the Roman Church was left as the repository of Roman traditions and Roman law, as opposed to the customs introduced by the barbarian rulers, but also of learning and education. In the chaos of the invasions, with the former lay governors fleeing or dispossessed, ecclesiastical officers were often called upon to take over the administration of cities and whole districts. Moreover, when orderly government was restored, there were for many centuries few literate men outside of ecclesiastical ranks. Churchmen provided the lawyers and clerks on whom the lay rulers depended. This all tended to give the Roman Church a legal outlook. The Papal chancery was

⁷⁰³ Von Matt and Hilpisch, *Saint Benedict*, London: Burn & Oates, 1961, pp. 143-144

obliged to fill itself with trained lawyers, whose tastes began to dominate theology. Roman theologians liked clear-cut definitions. The apophatic tradition, of which Augustine had been so eminent an advocate, tended to give way to Scholastic tastes, to the desire to turn theology into a systematized philosophy...»⁷⁰⁴

The five centuries or so that separate Popes Gregory I and Gregory VII constitute a fascinating period in which the Orthodox Christian forms of political and ecclesiastical life gradually succumbed to Papism in the West – but only after a fierce struggle during which the Orthodox staged several “comebacks”, drawing on the inspired example of Pope Gregory the Great, or, as he called himself, “the servant of the servants of God”

⁷⁰⁴ Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity*, Cambridge University Press, 1968, p. 6.

IV. THE NEW CHRISTIAN NATIONS

44. THE SYMPHONY OF NATIONS

Can unity of faith and law create a unity of nations? Can we speak of a symphony of *nations* as well as a symphony of *powers*? In order to answer these questions, we first need to know to what extent, and in what sense, we can speak of *nations* in the modern sense in the sixth century.

The most primitive form of nation, if it is not rather the embryo of nationhood, is the single tribe. This became the primary form of national organization in Western Europe during the devastating invasions of the Germanic tribes in the fifth and sixth century, which seriously disrupted Roman rule in the region. However, as Francis Fukuyama writes, the Church had a no less “devastating impact on tribal organization throughout Western Europe. The German, Norse, Magyar, and Slavic tribes saw their kinship structures dissolve within two or three generations of their conversion to Christianity.”⁷⁰⁵ This was in sharp contrast to China, India and the Middle East, where tribal bonds continued to be strong, and it made possible the emergence of the larger and more heterogeneous unit of *the nation*.

How did the Church effect this change? In the first place, membership of the Church creates a higher and deeper unity than any ties based on kinship; and so to the extent that the peoples became truly Christian, the family of the Church replaced the family of the tribe, while the family of the nation became an intermediate link between Church and tribe.

However, there were more specific ways in which Church law broke up the old bonds. Thus Larry Siedentop points out that “by transferring religious authority from the father to a separate priesthood, the Christian church removed the religious basis of the paterfamilias. It curtailed the claims to authority of the family head, relaxing [but not destroying] the ties of subordination that had previously bound its members.”⁷⁰⁶

Again, building on the work of the social anthropologist Jack Goody, Fukuyama points out that the Church “took a strong stand against four practices: marriages between close kin, marriages to the widows of dead relatives (the so-called levirate), the adoption of children, and divorce. The Venerable Bede, reporting on the efforts of Pope Gregory I to convert the pagan Anglo-Saxons to Christianity in the sixth century, notes how Gregory explicitly condemned the tribe’s practices of marriage to close relatives and the levirate. Later church edicts forbade concubinage, and promoted an indissoluble, monogamous lifetime marriage bond between men and women...”

The practices banned by the Church were what Goody calls “‘strategies of heirship’ whereby kinship groups are able to keep property under the group’s control as it passed down from one generation to another. Life expectancy in Europe and the Mediterranean world of the time was less than thirty-five. The probability of a couple’s producing a male heir who survived into adulthood and who could carry on

⁷⁰⁵ Fukuyama, *The Origins of Political Order*, London: Profile, 2012, p. 239.

⁷⁰⁶ Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual*, London: Penguin, 2014, p. 116.

the ancestral line was quite low. As a result, societies legitimated a wide range of practices that allowed individuals to produce heirs. Concubinage has already been discussed...; divorce can be seen as a form of serial concubinage in monogamous societies. The levirate was practiced when a brother died before he produced children; his wife's marriage to a younger brother ensured that his property would remain consolidated with that of his siblings. Cross-cousin marriage ensured that property would remain in the hands of close family members."⁷⁰⁷

The Church's rules also enhanced the status of women, who were now allowed to own property in their own names and dispose of it as they wished. We see the change in Gaul, in the transition from Salic law (c. 510) to the *Lex Ribuaria* (c. 600). "Famously, the former prohibits any female inheritance of ancestral land, while the latter relaxes such restrictions."⁷⁰⁸

Fukuyama expresses the somewhat cynical thought that the Church thereby profited materially from these rules, because widows and property-owning Christians who died without heirs often gave their land to the Church. However, it made sense that a believing society should look to the Church rather than the tribe as its agent of social security and endow it accordingly. And the Church certainly carried out this role impressively in this period.

Not only at the social level, but also at the political level, the level of relationships between states, the impact of Christianization was profound... The pagan Roman empire had introduced the important idea that all Roman citizens, of whatever nationality, were in some sense equal under the law. Building on that, the Church proclaimed that all baptized Christians, of whatever nationality, were equal under the law of Christ. Similarly, just as the pagan Roman empire had proclaimed that Rome encompassed the whole *oikoumene* or "inhabited world", so Christian Rome now saw herself as encompassing the whole family of Christian nations under her paternal leadership. As Sir Steven Runciman writes, "Ideally, it [the Empire] should embrace all the peoples of the earth, who, ideally, should all be members of the one true Christian Church, its own Orthodox Church."⁷⁰⁹

"In Roman eyes," as Dominic Lieven writes, "the Roman Empire was a universal monarchy: it encompassed the whole globe, or at least all of it that was worth bothering about. The barbarians beyond the empire's wall they regarded in terms somewhat similar to nineteenth-century European colonists' view of 'natives'. Their only imperial neighbour, the Parthian empire, was considered by the Romans to be 'an oriental despotism, a barbarian, braggart and motley nation'. As in every other aspect of their culture, the Roman sense of universalism owed much to the Greeks.

⁷⁰⁷ Fukuyama, *op. cit.*, pp. 237-238. "The Church in its determination to place married couples, and not ambitious patriarchs, at the heart of a properly Christian society, had tamed the instinct of grasping dynasts to pair off cousins with cousins. Only relationships sanctioned by canons were classed as legitimate. No families were permitted to be joined in marriage except for those licensed by the Church: 'in-laws'. The hold of clans, as a result, had begun to slip" (Tom Holland, *Dominion*, London: Abacus, 2019, pp. 268-269).

⁷⁰⁸ Siedentop, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

⁷⁰⁹ Runciman, *The Byzantine Theocracy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977, p. 1.

Alexander had conquered virtually the whole of the known world and although his empire was very short-lived the spread of Hellenistic culture was not. 'The Greek philosophers, in particular the Stoics, stressed the notion that all mankind formed one community, partaking of universal reason... it was, indeed, the Greeks who from the second century BC had regarded the Roman Empire and the universe (*oikoumene*) as one... Ideas such as these made a deep impression on the minds of the political and intellectual elite of Rome, and through their influence the two notions of *orbis terrarum* and *imperium* came to be regarded in the first century as identical: from then on no distinction was ever made between them.'

"The adoption in the fourth century of Christianity, a world religion which recognized no ethnic or cultural borders, could only increase the Roman imperial sense of universalism. In time Christian clergy undertook evangelizing missions outside their polities' borders, converting whole peoples to their religion and therefore, in the end, to a great extent to their culture. This the rulers of imperial [pagan] Rome had never conceived of..."⁷¹⁰

And so, parallel to the concept of the symphony of *powers*, whose model was the relationship between the two natures of Christ, there emerged the concept of the symphony of *nations*, modeled on the father-son relationship. The Roman Emperor was the father of a family of Christian rulers united, not by law, but by common membership of the civilization of Christian Rome. Within this single Christian commonwealth of nations there was, strictly speaking, only one Christian people, *the people of the Romans*; and Greeks and Latins, Celts and Germans, Semites and Slavs were all equally *Romans*, all equally members of the Roman commonwealth of nations and sons of the Roman Emperor.

That is why the Greek-speaking Fathers spoke of themselves, not as Greeks (which implied paganism), but as Romans.

As it was developed in succeeding centuries, writes I.P. Medvedev, "this doctrine found practical expression in... a hierarchical system of States...The place of each sovereign in this official, hierarchical gradation of all the princes of the world in relation to the Byzantine Emperor was defined by kinship terms borrowed from the terminology of family law: father-son-brother, but also friend... The use of kinship terms by the Byzantine Emperor in addressing a foreign Sovereign was not a simple metaphor or rhetoric, but a definite title which was given on the basis of a mutual agreement, that is, bestowed by the Emperor... And so at the head of the *oikoumene* was the *Basileus Romanon*, the Byzantine Emperor, the father of 'the family of sovereigns and peoples'. Closest of all 'by kinship' among the politically independent sovereigns were certain Christian rulers of countries bordering on the Empire, for example Armenia, Alania and Bulgaria; they were spiritual sons of the Byzantine Emperor. Less close were the Christian masters of the Germans and French, who were included in this 'family of sovereigns and peoples' with the rights of spiritual brothers of the Emperor. After them came the friends, that is, independent sovereigns and peoples who received this title by dint of a special agreement – the emir of Egypt and

⁷¹⁰ Lieven, *Empire*, London: John Murray, 2000, pp. 9-10.

the ruler of India, and later the Venetians, the king of England, etc. Finally, we must name a large group of princes who were ranked, not according to degree of 'kinship', but by dint of particularities of address and protocol – the small appanage principalities of Armenia, Iberia, Abkhazia, the Italian cities, Moravia and Serbia (group 1), and the appanage princes of Hungary and Rus', the Khazar and Pecheneg khans, etc. (group 2)...”⁷¹¹

And so from Britain in the West to Georgia in the East to Ethiopia in the south "a great number of peoples made up the autocracy but without any 'ethnic' differentiation between them.

“The whole racial amalgam,” writes Fr. George Metallinos, “lived and moved in a single civilization (apart from some particularities) - the Greek, and it had a single cohesive spiritual power – Orthodoxy, which was at the same time the ideology of the *oikoumene* - autocracy. The citizens of the autocracy were Romans politically, Greeks culturally and Orthodox Christians spiritually. Through Orthodoxy the old relationship of rulers and ruled was replaced by the sovereign bond of brotherhood. Thus the 'holy race' of the New Testament (I Peter 2.9) became a reality as the 'race of the Romans', that is, of the Orthodox citizens of the autocracy of the New Rome.”⁷¹²

This internationalism was underlined by the diverse nationalities of the emperors themselves. Thus Constantine was a Roman, Theodosius I - a Spaniard, Zeno - a Dacian (Romanian), Justinian I - an Illyrian or Thracian, Maurice and Heraclius - Armenians and Leo the iconoclast - an Isaurian.

“Much suggests that for many centuries after the fall of the Western Roman empire, there persisted within the western consciousness a sentiment that just as Christians knew unity in the one body of Christ which was the universal *ecclesia*, so ideally they should know it also in one body politic, a universal *res publica*. If one reason why this did not find expression was the concrete reality of western political multiplicity, another was the impossibility of conceiving any polity but the Roman empire as having a legitimate claim to universality yet the impossibility also of recognizing in the empire as it actually existed the universal *res publica* of the western vision. This was a deadlock which could be broken only if the Roman empire were recast in a satisfactory western mould. The speed and strength with which the imperial idea came to be reasserted once western circumstances were propitious to such a recasting [in the time of Charlemagne] are themselves the strongest argument that it had never been banished but had simply lain dormant. Two things were necessary for its reinvigoration and realization: first, the emergence of a western *Grossreich* ...; second, the inclusion within this polity of Rome...”⁷¹³

⁷¹¹ Medvedev, in Fomin & Fomina, *op. cit.*, vol. I, pp. 138-139.

⁷¹² Metallinos, “Apo ti Romaiki oikoumenikotita ston Ethnistiko Patriotismo” (“From Roman Universalism to Ethnic Patriotism”), *Exodos*, Athens, 1991, p. 38.

⁷¹³ P.D. King, “The barbarian kingdoms”, in *Cambridge History of Medieval Thought*, c. 350 – c. 1450, Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 144-145, 146.

In the struggle for the purity of the Orthodox teaching on the relationship between the Church and the State, two forces were especially prominent: the papacy itself, and the new national kingdoms of Western Europe. Until the reign of Charlemagne at least, the relationship between these two forces was one of mutual respect and benefit. The Popes, with rare exceptions, were by no means “papist” and dictatorial in relation to the national kingdoms and their national synods of bishops, but provided a vital source of unity, stability and enlightenment for the embryonic new nation-states and Churches. In their turn, the kings and their bishops frequently travelled to Rome and worked closely with the Popes, receiving instruction, books, relics, icons, chanters and moral and spiritual support. Especially important in this struggle was the Orthodox kingdom of the Franks.

The idea of a symphony of nations, of a single Christian Roman Empire extending from the Atlantic to the Caspian, was a living spiritual reality, and one that endured also in the West until at least the reign of Charlemagne at the end of the eighth century. However, it was only to be expected that such a wonderful ideal should have been attacked by the enemy of mankind. His main weapons in the West as in the East were political dissonance (war, rebellion) and ecclesiastical division (schism, heresy).

So let us look at how the ideal fared in reality in each of the major Christian nations that emerged in the West after the fall of Old Rome.

45. THE WESTERN KINGDOMS: (1) VANDAL NORTH AFRICA

In the fifth century, the Western Roman Empire gradually disintegrated; and out of its ruins several barbarian kingdoms composed of amalgamations of various Germanic tribes came into existence. The questions that arose in relation to these kingdoms were: What would be their relationship with the Roman Empire that still existed in the East, in Constantinople? Was the Eastern Roman Empire now the only legitimate political authority for those calling themselves Romans and living on the former territories of the Roman empire? Or were the western barbarian kings also legitimate powers, the legal successors of Rome in some sense?

Since its subjection in the third century BC, North Africa had been the bread-basket of Rome. It was a highly Romanized and Christianized province, as is proved by the numerous well-preserved archaeological remains that survive to this day. Moreover, it gave birth to some of the most influential writers of Western Christendom, such as Tertullian, St. Cyprian of Carthage and St. Augustine of Hippo. At the same time, it was the birthplace of the most stubborn, violent and long-lasting schismatic movement in the Early Church, Donatism. In spite of the heroic efforts of St. Augustine, Donatism remained powerful; and in 429, North Africa became the object of the wrath of God. The Vandals, the most anti-Roman and anti-Christian of all the barbarian tribes, under their king, Genseric and in alliance with the Iranian tribe of the Alans, crossed the Straits of Gibraltar into the province. In 430 St. Augustine was killed during the Vandal siege of Hippo. In 435 the Empire recognized Genseric's suzerainty over the whole region except Carthage. And in 439, after eight years of war, he captured the capital also. St. Quodvultdeus, Metropolitan of Carthage, and many of his flock, were exiled to the Neapolitan coastline. Genseric was an Arian who had apostasized in his youth; he banished Orthodox priests who refused to perform the Arian services and even sacked Rome herself in 455.⁷¹⁴ In 484 his son Huneric, not without some irony, used a Roman law of 412 directed against the Donatists to embark on a savage persecution against the Orthodox Christians.

At that time the North African bishops under St. Eugenius, Archbishop of Carthage, boldly confessed the Orthodox faith against the Arian Vandals. Thus he and his bishops wrote: "We are enjoined by a royal command to provide an account of the Catholic Faith which we hold. So we are setting out to indicate briefly the things that we believe and proclaim, aware of our lack of ability but supported by Divine Assistance. We recognize, then, that the first thing we must do is give an explanation of the Unity of the Substance of the Father and the Son, which the Greeks call 'Homooousion'. Therefore: we acknowledge the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, in the Unity of the Divine Nature in such a way that we can say with a faithful confession that the Father Subsists as a Distinct Person, and the Son Equally Exists in His Own Person, and that the Holy Spirit retains the Distinctiveness of His Own Person, not asserting that the Father is the same as the Son, nor confessing that the Son is the same as the Father or the Holy Spirit, nor understanding the Holy Spirit in such a way that He is the Father or the Son; but we believe the Unbegotten Father, and the Son Begotten of the Father, and the Holy Spirit Proceeding from the Father, to be of One

⁷¹⁴ Tim Newark, *Warlords*, London: Brockhampton Press, 1996, p. 323.

Substance and Essence, because the Unbegotten Father and the Begotten Son and the Holy Spirit Who Proceeds, have One Divine Nature in Common; nevertheless, there are Three Distinct Persons."

The famous Enlightenment historian Edward Gibbon, overcoming his usual scepticism, relates how, in 484, at the command of King Hunneric, Genseric's son, "four hundred and sixty-six Orthodox bishops assembled at Carthage; a banished to the different part of Africa, exposed to the insults of their enemies, and carefully deprived of all the comforts of life. The hardship of ten years' exile must have reduced their numbers and if they had complied with the law of Thrasimund, which prohibited any episcopal consecrations, the Orthodox Church of Africa must have expired with the lives of its actual members. They disobeyed; and their disobedience was punished by a second exile of two hundred and twenty bishops into Sardinia, where they languished fifteen years, till the accession of the gracious Hilderic. The two islands were judiciously chosen by the malice of their Arian tyrants. Seneca, from his own experience, has deplored and exaggerated the miserable state of Corsica, and the plenty of Sardinia was overbalanced by the unwholesome quality of the air.

"The zeal of Genseric and his successors for the conversion of the Catholics [Orthodox] must have rendered them still more jealous to guard the purity of the Vandal faith. Before the churches were finally shut, it was a crime to appear in a barbarian dress; and those who presumed to neglect the royal mandate were rudely dragged backwards by their long hair. The palatine officers, who refused to profess the religion of their prince, were ignominiously stripped of their honours and employment; banished to Sardinia and Sicily; or condemned to the servile labours of slaves and peasants in the fields of Utica. In the districts which had been peculiarly allotted to the Vandals, the exercise of the Catholic worship was more strictly prohibited; and severe penalties were denounced against the guilt both of the missionary and the proselyte. By these arts the faith of the barbarians was preserved, and their zeal was inflamed; and whenever their cavalry took the field, it was the favourite amusement of the march to defile the churches and to insult the clergy of the adverse faction.

"The citizens who had been educated in the luxury of the Roman province were delivered, with exquisite cruelty, to the Moors of the desert. A venerable train of bishops, ninety-six persons, whose guilt is not precisely ascertained, were torn from their homes by the command of Hunneric. During the night they were confined, like a herd of cattle, amidst their own ordure: during the day they pursued their march, over the burning sands, and if they fainted under the heat and fatigue, they were goaded or dragged till they expired in the hands of their tormentors. These unhappy exiles, when they reached the Moorish huts, might excite the compassion of a people whose native humanity was neither improved by reason nor corrupted by fanaticism: but if they escaped the dangers, they were condemned to share the distress, of a savage life.

"... Through the veil of fiction and declamation we can clearly perceive that the Catholics, more especially under the reign of Hunneric, incurred the most cruel and ignominious treatment. Respectable citizens, noble matrons, and consecrated virgins

were stripped naked and raised in the air by pulleys, with a weight suspended at their feet. In this painful attitude their naked bodies were torn with scourges, or burnt in the most tender parts with red-hot plates of iron. The amputation of the ears, the nose, the tongue, and the right hand was inflicted by the Arians; and although the precise number cannot be defined, it is evident that many persons, among whom a bishop and a proconsul may be named, were entitled to the crown of martyrdom. The same honour has been ascribed to the memory of Count Sebastian, who professed the Nicene creed with unshaken constancy; and Genseric might detest as a heretic the brave and ambitious fugitive whom he dreaded as a rival.

“A new mode of conversion, which might subdue the feeble and alarm the timorous, was employed by the Arian ministers. They imposed, by fraud or violence, the rites of baptism; and punished the apostasy of the Catholics, if they disclaimed this odious and profane ceremony, which violated the freedom of the will and the unity of the sacrament. The hostile sects had formerly allowed the validity of each other’s baptism; and the innovation, so fiercely maintained by the Vandals, can be imputed only to the example and advice of the Donatists [who rejected the validity of the True Church’s sacraments].

“The Arian clergy surpassed in religious cruelty the king and his Vandals; but they were incapable of cultivating the spiritual vineyard which they were so desirous to possess. A patriarch might seat himself on the throne of Carthage; some bishops, in the principal cities, might usurp the place of their rivals; but the smallness of their numbers, and their ignorance of the Latin language, disqualified the barbarians for the ecclesiastical ministry of a great church; and the Africans, after the loss of their Orthodox pastors, were deprived of the public exercise of Christianity.

“The [Roman] emperors were the natural protectors of the Homoousian {Orthodox} doctrine, and the faithful people of Africa, both as Romans and as [Orthodox] Catholics, preferred their lawful sovereignty to the usurpation of the barbarian heretics. During an interval of peace and friendship Hunneric restored the cathedral of Carthage, at the intercession of Zeno, who reigned in the East, and of Placida, his daughter and relict of emperors and the sister of the queen of the Vandals. But this decent regard was of short duration, and the haughty tyrant displayed his contempt for the religion of the empire by studiously arranging the bloody images of persecution in all the principal streets through which the Roman ambassador must pass in his way to the palace. An oath was required from the bishops who were assembled at Carthage, that they would support the succession of his son Hilderic, and that they would renounce all foreign or *transmarine* correspondence. This engagement, consistent, as it should seem, with their moral and religious duties, was refused by the more sagacious members of the assembly. Their refusal, faintly coloured by the pretence that is unlawful for a Christian to swear, must provoke the suspicions of a jealous tyrant.

“The historian who views this religious conflict with an impartial eye may condescend to mention one preternatural event, which will edify the devout and surprise the incredulous. Tipasa, a maritime colony of Mauritania, sixteen miles to the east of Caesarea, had been distinguished in every age by the Orthodox zeal of its

inhabitants. They had braved the fury of the Donatists; they resisted or eluded the tyranny of the Arians. The town was deserted on the approach of a heretical bishop: most of the inhabitants who could procure ships passed over to the coast of Spain; and the unhappy remnant, refusing all communion with the usurper, still presumed to hold their pious, but illegal, assemblies. Their disobedience exasperated the cruelty of Hunneric. A military count was despatched from Carthage to Tipasa: he collected the Catholics in the Forum, and, in the presence of the whole province, deprived the guilty of their right hands and their tongues. But the holy confessors continued to speak without tongues; and this miracle is attested by Victor, an African bishop, who published an history of the persecution within two years after the event. 'If anyone,' says Victor, 'should doubt of the truth, let him repair to Constantinople, and listen to the clear and perfect language of Restitutus, the subdeacon, one of those glorious sufferers, who is now lodged in the palace of the emperor Zeno, and is respected by the devout empress.' At Constantinople we are astonished to find a cool, a learned, and an exceptional witness, without interest, and without passion. Aeneas of Gaza, a Platonic philosopher, has accurately described his own observations on these African sufferers. 'I saw them myself: I heard them speak: I diligently inquired by what means such and articulate voice could be formed without any organ of speech: I used my eyes to examine the report of my ears: I opened their mouth, and saw that the whole tongue had been completely torn away by the roots; an operation which the physicians generally suppose to be mortal.' The testimony of Aeneas of Gaza might be confirmed by the superfluous evidence of the emperor Justinian, in a perpetual edict of Count Marcellinus, in his Chronicle of the times; and of pope Gregory I, who had resided at Constantinople as the minister of the Roman pontiff. They all lived within the compass of a century, and they all appeal to their personal knowledge or the public notoriety for the truth of a miracle which was repeated in several instances, displayed on the greatest theatre of the world, and submitted during a series of year to the calm examination of the senses. This supernatural gift of the African confessor, who spoke without tongues, will command the assent of those only, who already believe that their language was pure and Orthodox. But the stubborn mind of an infidel is guarded by secret, incurable suspicion; and the Arian... who has solemnly rejected the doctrine of the Trinity, will not be shaken by the most plausible evidence of an Athanasian miracle."⁷¹⁵

The Vandal kingdom of North Africa could never have been considered a legitimate successor of Roman power because it was not only not Orthodox, but a persecutor of the Orthodox. Its aggression can be explained in part, as Heather writes, by the fact that it "had been carved out of the living body of a still very vital Western Empire by the Vandal conquest of Carthage in 439, whereas all the other Western successor states emerged both more slowly and more consensually, a generation or so later, as the central Roman state gradually ran out of revenues and the capacity to direct events. And since Catholicism [Orthodoxy] was unambiguously the religion of the empire, Vandal monarchs tended to be highly hostile towards it, deliberately fostering an alternate Christianity among the warriors who had put them in power."⁷¹⁶

⁷¹⁵ Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, London: The Folio Society, 1788, 1986, vol. IV, pp. 111-114, 115-117.

⁷¹⁶ Heather, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

Nevertheless, although, as Terry Jones and Alan Ereira write, Genseric's kingdom was not part of Rome, and did not want to be, "in many ways Rome provided the model for it. He installed his own people in place of Roman landlords (on a scaled that did not happen anywhere else in Europe), but established an autocracy of nobles rather than ruling through any tribal council. This was probably necessary because the Vandals were no longer a single ethnic group: on the long journey that had occupied Gaiseric's [Genseric's] life, they had become a mixture of Suevi, Visigoths, Alans, Spaniards and probably many other peoples too. But his use of Roman norms extended to minting coins based on Ravenna designs, making Latin the official language (again possibly recognizing a situation that already existed, as the Vandals and Alans spoke completely unrelated languages and may well have used Latin as their *lingua franca*) and employing Roman engineers and architects."⁷¹⁷

Moreover, as Fr. Andrew Louth writes, "the barbarian kingdoms in the West were eager to define themselves in Roman political terms"⁷¹⁸; and if we leave aside the Vandals' persecution of the Church, we may admit that their political philosophy was closely modeled on Christian Rome. Thus in Vandal North Africa we find, as P.D. King writes, "a sovereign monarchy, Roman and Christian in its bases," in which "there is no trace of a popular assembly, of any other constitutional curb on the exercise of the king's will, or any area of activity exempt from royal control. As the emperor wielded authority in religious matters, calling councils, deciding which creed his subjects should follow, persecuting dissidents – for what could be more germane to the public welfare than God's propitiation by correct worship? – so did the Arian Vandal king. Genseric (d. 477) even established a permanent rule of succession, vesting the crown in his house; here he went further than any emperor chose, or dared, to do. A throne and the purple, witnessed for the 530s, will assuredly have appeared earlier, as had the diadem. The king described himself in traditional imperial nomenclature, as 'Our Piety' and 'Our Clemency', held himself to possess 'majesty' and was addressed in reverential language customarily employed of the emperor. Instances of *imitatio imperii* could easily be multiplied. Most significant, the ruler considered heavenly authority to be the source of his own. God Himself had conceded his dominions to him, said Huneric (d. 484); he held them 'by divine favour'.

"The Vandal picture anticipates that eventually yielded by all the [western] *regna* in numerous respects. But Huneric's statements merit especial note as the vanguard of a formidable army of testimony to the currency in the kingdoms of the belief that the ruler was such by God's *fiat*. At its roots lay the most fundamental of principles, that all that existed or occurred terrestrially was ultimately traceable to the celestial will, not to the intrinsic merits or unaided efforts of men... Like anything else, political power existed by God's will; and those who wielded it occupied their positions by His favour. By Christ's own witness (John 19.11), Pilate's power against Him derived 'from above', and Paul's statement in Romans 13.1 was unequivocal: 'There is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God'. When orthodox bishops declared that 'divine favour' had 'provided' Theoderic (d. 526) – an Arian! – to govern

⁷¹⁷ Terry and Ereira, *Barbarians*, London: BBC Books, 2006, p. 254.

⁷¹⁸ Louth, *Greek East and Latin West*, Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2007, p. 4.

Italy, or a seventh-century Frankish formula attributed elevation to kingship to 'divine mercy', or Ine of Wessex (d. 725) called himself king 'mid Godes gife', they were operating with precisely the same notion expressed in the celebrated formula 'king by the grace of God' which was to become part of the Carolingian royal *intitulatio*, for *gratia*, 'grace', meant simply 'favour'. Indeed, already the Lombard, Agilulf (590-616), was 'king by the grace of God' and the Visigoth, Svinthila (621-31), brought to kingship 'by divine grace'. Nicely illustrative of the root-concept was Boniface's designation of Aethelbald of Mercia (d. 757) as 'you whom not your own merits but God's abundant mercy constituted king and prince of many'..."⁷¹⁹

In 530, the Orthodox King Hilderic was overthrown by the anti-Roman and anti-Orthodox Gelimer. This gave the Emperor Justinian the excuse he needed, and in a short six-month campaign (533-34) his general Belisarius, supported by the local population, destroyed the Vandal kingdom and placed all the heretics under ban. As he said, God "deemed it proper that the injuries of the Church should be avenged through me".⁷²⁰

⁷¹⁹ King, *op. cit.*, pp. 127-128.

⁷²⁰ *Cod. Just.* 1.27.1.1-2; in Heather, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

46. THE WESTERN KINGDOMS: (2) OSTROGOTHIC ITALY

In north-western Europe, the impact of the invasions of the Germanic tribes was, as we have seen, devastating. However, as John Julius Norwich writes, the situation in south-western Europe from Spain through Southern France to Italy was that of “a Roman land-owning aristocracy living comfortably on its estates, perfectly satisfied with the status quo and doubtless grateful that the immense distance separating them from Constantinople reduced imperial interference [expressed especially in the form of heavy taxation] to the point of imperceptibility.”⁷²¹

For the Romans of North Africa, it was clear where their loyalties lay: with Rome, and not with their barbarian and heretical rulers. But for the Romans of Italy and Spain the matter was less clear-cut. On the one hand, they remained socially, legally and religiously separate from their Gothic rulers (“Ostrogothic”, that is, Eastern Gothic in Italy, and “Visigothic”, that is, Western Gothic in Spain). But on the other hand, unlike the Vandals the Goths did not, in general, persecute the Faith; they fostered Roman culture, and allowed the Romans to follow their own laws.

The consciousness of *Romanitas*, of belonging to a single Roman nation in East and West, survived the fall of Rome. “In reality,” write Fr. Patric Ranson and Laurent Motte, “the barbarian invasions - Visigoth, Lombard, Vandal, Frank - in spite of their violence, did not break this Roman national unity; at first they could do no more than displace its visible centre: bypassing the Roman political structures, it was around the Church that the vanquished people reassembled and it was the Church that then exercised a true ethnarchy. It was with her that the barbarians had to do business; the bishop was still freely elected by the faithful and the clergy; she was their interlocutor. In Gaul, this ethnarchy was for a long time assumed by the bishop of Arles, a true Roman capital that bore the name of Constantine, in Spain - by that of Cordoba, in Italy by that of Rome...”⁷²²

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The Ostrogothic rulers of Italy had a healthy respect for Rome and her traditions of law and education. We have seen how much Ataulf, the son of Alaric, had respected *Romanitas*. And after the last Western Emperor, Romulus, was deposed by the Odoacer, he was not killed but given a respectable pension; while Odoacer, as David Gilmour writes, “governed largely in accordance with Roman practice, and resided in the Emperor’s palace in Ravenna, which had been the imperial capital since the beginning of the century. Unfortunately he provoked the anger of the Byzantine emperor, Zeno, who persuaded Theoderic, chief of the Ostrogoths, to abandon his raids on the Balkans and instead invade Italy, where, having killed Odoacer, he would be permitted to make himself king as a vassal of Constantinople.

⁷²¹ Norwich, *Byzantium: The Early Centuries*, London: Penguin, 1990, p. 253.

⁷²² Ranson and Motte, introduction to Cyriaque Lampryllos, *La Mystification Fatale* (The Fatal Mystification), Lausanne: L’Age de l’Homme, 1987, p. 11.

“The reign of the new king began with a bloodbath and ended soon after the execution of the philosopher Boethius, who wrote his celebrated *The Consolation of Philosophy* while waiting in prison for his death. Yet for three decades Theodoric ruled wisely and peacefully. He insisted on religious tolerance, refusing to favour either side in the controversy over Arianism, the heresy that denied the full divinity of Christ, and he managed to dissuade his victorious Goths from bullying the Roman population. His was the last kingdom to extend over the whole of Italy for over 1,500 years, yet it was even more transient than other regimes of the age, disappearing shortly after his death and leaving little visible trace apart from his imposingly primitive mausoleum in Ravenna”⁷²³

Theodoric quite consciously modeled his rule on that of the Emperor in Constantinople, where he had spent ten years as a child. In about 507 he wrote to the Emperor Anastasius in Constantinople: “You are the fairest ornament of all realms; you are the healthful defence of the whole world, to which all other rulers rightfully look up with reverence, because they know that there is in you something which is unlike all others: we above all, who by Divine help learned in your Republic the art of governing Romans with equity. Our royalty is an imitation of yours, modeled on your good purpose, a copy of the only Empire; and in so far as we follow you do we excel all other nations.”⁷²⁴

“Procopius, the main Byzantine historian of this era, describes Theodoric as popular and dignified. The Gothic king, we are told, ‘was exceedingly careful to observe justice, he preserved the laws on a sure basis, he protected the land and kept it safe from the barbarians dwelling round about [but gave about a third of it to his Goths], and attained the highest possible degree of wisdom and manliness.’ Though in time Theodoric himself could be considered ‘in name a tyrant’, Procopius goes on, ‘in fact he was as truly an emperor as any who have distinguished themselves in this office from the beginning.’”⁷²⁵

So pro-Roman was Theodoric that “in about 510, soon after he had taken over control of a large part of southern Gaul from the Visigoths, [he] wrote to his new Gallic subjects, describing his own rule as ‘Roman’ and regulated by law, and contrasting it explicitly with the unregulated ‘barbarian’ rule of the Visigoths: ‘You who have been restored to it after many years should gladly obey Roman customs... And therefore, as men by God’s favour, recalled to ancient liberty, clothe yourself in the morals of the toga, cast off barbarism, throw aside savagery of mind, for it is wrong for you, in my just times, to live by alien ways.’ Only rarely, as with Theodoric’s moustache, does a different reality show through – one that reveals the survival of a Gothic identity, which, of course, the Romans would have had no hesitation in branding as ‘barbarian’.”⁷²⁶

⁷²³ Gilmour, *The Pursuit of Italy*, London: Penguin, 2012, p. 50.

⁷²⁴ Theodoric, in Heather, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁷²⁵ Colin Wells, *Sailing from Byzantium*, New York: Bantam Deli, 2007, p. 12.

⁷²⁶ Bryan Wayne-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome*, Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 74-75.

What could be wrong with obeying a ruler who, though not a Roman, consciously modeled himself on Rome? He was a heretic, yes; but he did not persecute the Orthodox. And in any case, his formal overlord, the Emperor Anastasius, was also a (Monophysite) heretic. So was there any reason why the Orthodox Christians of Italy should not obey him, especially since that pillar of Orthodoxy, the Roman Pope, recognized him.⁷²⁷

However, things changed after the ascension to the throne of the New Rome of the strictly Orthodox Justin I, and then, after the death of King Theoderic, of his nephew, the famous Justinian I, in 527... We have seen that Justinian wanted to reconquer the West for Rome and Orthodoxy, and that he had found a clear *casus belli* for going to war with the Vandals in their persecution of the Orthodox. Such a *casus* was more difficult to find in relation to the religiously tolerant and pro-Roman Ostrogothic kings. However, he found one in the murder of the pro-Roman Ostrogothic Queen Amalasantha (Theoderic's daughter) in 534 by the new King Theodahad.

Led by the famous generals Belisarius and Nerses, Roman armies reconquered Italy, and "the ancient and lesser Rome," in Michael Psellus' words, was returned to the dominion of "the later, more powerful city". A Byzantine governor ruled Northern and Central Italy from Ravenna; Byzantine titles were lavished on the Roman aristocracy; and the Pope commemorated the Emperor at the liturgy.⁷²⁸ Tactfully, Patriarch John Kappadokes of Constantinople continued to recognize the primacy of the see of Old Rome (which, however, he declared to be "one church" with the see of New Rome),⁷²⁹ and Pope John II responded by exalting the emperor as high as any western bishop had ever done: "'The King's heart is in the hand of God and He directs it as He pleases' (Proverbs 21.1). There lies the foundation of your Empire and the endurance of your rule. For the peace of the Church and the unity of religion raise their originator to the highest place and sustain him there in happiness and peace. God's power will never fail him who protects the Church against the evil and stain of division, for it is written: 'When a righteous King sits on the throne, no evil will befall him' (Proverbs 20:8)."⁷³⁰

Italy was again Roman and Orthodox. The famous frescoes of Justinian and Theodora in the church of San Vitale in Ravenna, the former Ostrogothic capital, were superimposed on the earlier frescoes of Theoderic, thereby commemorating the restoration of Romanity. And although the wars had lasted a generation and been exceedingly costly, and the north was soon (in 568-572) overrun by another Arian Germanic race, the Lombards, the leaders of Roman society, such as Pope Gregory I, were convinced it had all been worth it.

And yet after Justinian's death, no ruler in continental Western Europe continued to acknowledge the authority of the Roman Empire over himself (although they sometimes used Byzantine titles such as "basileus"); and his ideology of "One Faith,

⁷²⁷ Heather, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

⁷²⁸ Tom Holland, *Millenium*, London: Abacus Books, 2009, p. 19.

⁷²⁹ Meyendorff, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

⁷³⁰ T.S. A. Gerostergios, *Justinian the Great: the Emperor and Saint*, Belmont, Mass.: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 1982, p. 82.

One Church, One Empire" began to weaken there, as it was already weakening in the Monophysite East. Thus, as King writes, "no writer testifies to the currency of the old ideology. Though this was still maintained by imperial subjects [in Italy], it could not have carried its earlier conviction. It had been the closeness of correspondence between universalist ideality and political, cultural and religious reality which had endowed the former with the great strength of its grasp upon men's minds. That correspondence was now lacking, as Jordanes, writing in 551, acknowledged. To him, the *res publica* (destined on Daniel's authority to last until the end of the world) still indeed held what it had once subjected ('almost the entire earth'); but it did so, when not actually, then – the word is an exquisite choice – 'imaginarie'. Time served only to widen the gap which had opened up. It is not clear that any western *regnum* recognized imperial authority after Justinian, while the incongruity of identifying the Christian world and the empire grew ever more patent. The calamitous reverses suffered by the seventh-century empire at Muslim and pagan hands made matters worse. Moreover, westerners were deeply alienated by the character, real or perceived, of the contemporary empire. Fear and hostility on the political and military fronts played a role, while in imperial Italy resentment at high taxation and inadequate defence fuelled animosity towards what was seen as a foreign regime. Throughout the west as a whole, indeed, the empire was regarded as essentially a Greek affair... Closely related was enmity in the theological sphere; the age was full of controversies which confirmed the widespread – and again traditional – western distrust of easterners as intellectual conjurers, given to unorthodoxy. In turn the theological disputes were bound up with the fundamental papal-imperial conflict, usually latent but occasionally exploding into violent life; this and its concomitants, including the ill-treatment of some popes by some emperors, brought further hostility..."⁷³¹

Yet none of this argues for repudiation of the universalist *ideal*; and the fact is that this was never *denied*, even implicitly... The only exception to this rule, as we have seen, was the Vandal kingdom of North Africa. But in Europe the ideal, though battered, survived until Charlemagne...

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T.S. Brown writes: "The invasion launched by war-bands of Lombard and other peoples led by Alboin in 568 had a decisive effect on the map of Italy for centuries. Much of the north was rapidly conquered, including Milan in 569 and Pavia in 572. The inadequate Byzantine garrisons were thrown into disarray, Lombard raiding parties penetrated into Tuscany and the Rome area and semi-autonomous duchies were set up in the south at Spoleto and Benevento. Gradually the empire was able to put up more effective resistance by exploiting Lombard divisions, bribing the Franks to invade the Lombard kingdom, recruiting Lombard renegades as mercenaries and concentrating authority in the hands of one military governor, known by 584 as the exarch. By 603, when a truce was declared, the empire retained secure control of the Rome and Ravenna areas, together with a corridor following the line of the Via

⁷³¹ King, *op. cit.*

Amerina through Umbria, and coastal enclaves around Venice, Genoa, Naples and other southern cities.

“For much of the seventh century the frontier remained static, broken by King Rothari’s capture of Genoa in 643 and the defeat of the Emperor Constans’ expedition against Benevento in 663/ 4. As the empire became increasingly endangered by threats in the east, more power within the Byzantine territories was exercised by the local military garrisons and their leaders, and in the case of Rome by the pope. In the Lombard kingdom dynastic instability did not prevent increasing prosperity and adoption of Roman institutions. By c. 680 the Lombards had dropped their Arian and pagan beliefs in favour of Catholic Christianity and secured recognition from the empire. Gradually their pressure on the imperial provinces increased, as the Romans became discontented with the religious and taxation policies of the eastern empire and King Liutprand (712–44) attempted to unite the peninsula under Lombard rule. Resistance to such a take-over was led by the popes, who remained essentially loyal to Byzantium, but they were unable to gain any substantial aid from their imperial ‘protectors’. Following the Lombard Aistulf’s capture of Ravenna in 751, and threats to Rome itself, Pope Stephen II obtained the intervention of the Frankish king Pepin III, who defeated Aistulf and recognized sweeping papal claims over much of central Italy (Donation of Pepin, 756). Threats were renewed by Aistulf’s successor Desiderius against Pope Hadrian I, who called on Pepin’s son Charles to intervene in 773. In 774 Charles captured Pavia and became king of the Lombards. The Lombard kingdom retained its distinctive social and governmental institutions and only gradually did an influx of Frankish officials and an increase in the wealth and power of the Church take place.

“The political map of Italy remained confused in the late eighth century. Benevento (unlike its neighbour to the north, Spoleto) remained outside effective Frankish control and became a principality and a centre of traditional Lombard legitimacy under Desiderius’ son-in-law Arichis, often allying itself with Byzantium to preserve its independence. The empire itself retained Sicily and its footholds in Calabria and Apulia, together with the nominal allegiance of the maritime cities of Amalfi, Gaeta, Naples and Venice. Its province of Istria fell to the Franks in the late eighth century. The papacy’s claim to much of central Italy, including southern Tuscany, Spoleto, as well as the duchy of Rome and the old Exarchate, was zealously propagated by Lateran officials on the basis of the Donation of Constantine (a contemporary forgery) as well as the vague promises of the Frankish kings. In no sense, however, did it amount to a papal state. In many areas the papacy was more concerned with estates and rights than overall jurisdiction, while in others the Franks were induced by bribes or *Realpolitik* to leave power in the hands of local figures such as the archbishop of Ravenna. Even in the duchy of Rome, the papacy’s authority was far from secure, as was shown by the revolt against Pope Leo III (795–816), which led to the latter’s appeal to Charles for aid and the Frankish king’s assumption of the imperial title in St Peter’s on Christmas Day 800.”⁷³²

⁷³² Brown, in Angus Mackay and David Ditchburn (eds.), *Atlas of Medieval Europe*, London and New York: Routledge, 1997, pp. 16-18.

47. THE WESTERN KINGDOMS: (3) FRANKISH GAUL

T.S. Brown writes: "The collapse of the Rhine frontier in 406/7 had wide repercussions. Britain saw its Roman garrison withdrawn and the assumption of power by rival British chieftains until the Anglo-Saxon invasions in the late 440s. The Burgundians were permitted to set up a kingdom on the upper Rhine in 413. Transferred as federates to the Jura/Lake Geneva area in 443, they built up a Romanized kingdom incorporating the Lyon and Vienne areas from 457. Along the middle and lower Rhine groups of Franks became powerful and attacked cities such as Cologne and Trier. In northern Gaul Roman rule was undermined by obscure rivalries between usurping generals, Bretons, peasant rebels (*Bagaudae*), Alans and the sub-Roman regimes of Aegidius and his son Syagrius based on Soissons (c. 456–86). The long-term beneficiary of this power vacuum was the Salian Frank dynasty of Childeric (d. 481) and his son Clovis, who gradually expanded from their original centre of Tournai by conquering or allying themselves with rival bands of Franks, including established *laeti* (soldier-farmers)...

"Most of south-west Gaul and the Visigoths were compelled to transfer their political base to Spain, with their eventual capital at Toledo. The kingdom of their Ostrogothic cousins fell into decline on Theoderic's death as a result of dynastic uncertainties and tension between pro-Roman and traditionalist elements. Two of the initially powerful kingdoms were conquered in 533–4: the Burgundians' territories in south-east Gaul were incorporated by the Franks and Vandals...

"Although Clovis had extended the Merovingian kingdom over most of Gaul, for much of the sixth and seventh centuries it was beset by the strife vividly chronicled by the historian Gregory of Tours (d. 594). In 511 a complex division took place between Clovis' four sons, which hampered efficient royal administration. The Burgundian kingdom was taken over in 534 and Provence in 536. Theudebert I (533–48) expanded his territory east of the Rhine and even beyond the Alps, but this overlordship collapsed after his death. The kingdom was then reunited under Clothar, but partition between his four sons on his death in 561 soon led to civil war and an increasing sense of identity within each *Teilreich* (part-kingdom).

"The murder of King Sigibert of Austrasia in 575 provoked bitter conflict. For several decades the dominant force was Sigibert's widow, the Visigoth Brunhilda, but in 613 she was executed and the kingdom was reunited under Clothar II of Neustria (584–629). His son Dagobert I (623–38) proved the last effective Merovingian ruler, as royal power was undermined by the alienation of rights and estates, the loss of Byzantine subsidies and tribute from client peoples east of the Rhine and the growing power of counts and other territorial magnates. Subsequent Merovingian 'do-nothing kings' were incapable of ruling personally and power fell into the hands of aristocratic factions led by the mayors of the palace, such as the Arnulfings, the hereditary mayors of the palace of Austrasia. Under Pepin II this family capitalized on its powerful following in the north-east and its alliance with the Church to become the dominant force throughout the kingdom from 687. A serious revolt followed Pepin's death in 714 but effective power over Neustria and the Merovingian puppet-kings was restored by his illegitimate son Charles Martel (d. 741), who enhanced the power and

prestige of his dynasty (the Carolingians) by his campaigns against Saxons, Alamans, Thuringians and Bavarians and most famously by his defeat of an Arab invading force at Poitiers in 733.

“The conflicts of the Merovingian period should not obscure its achievements. The kingdom remained the most powerful force in the west as a result of its military strength, its relatively centralized structures, a number of centres of religious and cultural life, and the assimilation which occurred between a small Frankish elite and Gallo-Roman elements prepared to adopt Frankish laws and customs.”⁷³³

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Let us now turn to the religious allegiances in the region.

In the fifth century, for various reasons, of which the Arian Bishop Ulphilas' translation of the Gospel into German was perhaps the most important, the great majority of barbarians who now dominated Western Europe were Arian. *Romanitas* was associated with Orthodox Christianity, and several Orthodox bishops in the old Roman cities ably and courageously defended the faith of the Orthodox Romans while remaining loyal politically to their barbarian and Arian political leaders. This was a difficult juggling act; but, in contrast with North Africa, most of the Arian barbarian rulers of Western Europe respected these Roman Orthodox bishops and did not persecute them, which laid the foundations for the conversion of the whole of the West to Orthodoxy (whereas North Africa fell to Islam).

Perhaps the only exception was the Visigothic King Euric (466-84), who “suspended the exercise of ecclesiastical, or, at least, episcopal functions, and punished popular bishops of Aquitaine with imprisonment, exile, and confiscation.”⁷³⁴

As Chris Wickham writes, Euric “was the first major ruler of a ‘barbarian’ polity in Gaul – the second in the empire after Geiseric – to have a fully autonomous political practice, uninfluenced by any residual Roman loyalties. Between 471 and 476 he expanded his power east to the Rhône (and beyond, into Provence), north to the Loire, and south into Spain. The Goths had already been fighting in Spain since the later 450s (initially on behalf of the emperor Avitus), but Euric organized a fully fledged conquest there, which is ill-documented, but seems to have been complete (except for a Suevic enclave in the north-west) by the time of his death. By far the best documented of Euric’s conquests, though not the most important, was the Auvergne in 471-5, because the bishop of its central city, Clermont, was the Roman senator Sidonius Apollinarius. Sidonius, who was [Bishop] Avitus’ son-in-law, and had been a leading lay official for both [Emperors] Majorian and Anthemius, ended his political career besieged inside his home city, and we can see all the political changes of the 450s-470s through his eyes. A supporter of alliance with the Visigoths in the 450s, by

⁷³³ Brown, in Angus Mackay and David Ditchburn (eds.), *Atlas of Medieval Europe*, London and New York: Routledge, 1997, pp. 9-10.

⁷³⁴ Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, p. 309.

the late 460s Sidonius had become increasingly aware of the dangers involved, and hostile to Roman officials who still dealt with them; then in the 470s we see him despairing of any further help for Clermont, and contemptuous of the Italian envoys who sacrificed the Auvergne so as to keep Provence under Roman control. By around 480, as he put it, 'now that the old degrees of official rank are swept away... the only token of nobility... will henceforth be a knowledge of letters'; the official hierarchy had gone, only traditional Roman culture remained..."⁷³⁵

In Provence, the archiepiscopate of Arles was a bastion of Roman traditions, and for a time played the role of a metropolitan centre on a par with Rome. Thus St. Hilary, Archbishop of Arles (430-449) became "*de facto* head of the whole of the Gallican Church and presided over Episcopal councils in Riez (429), Orange (441) and Bezons (442)." Again, St. Caesarius of Arles (503-542) "fully restored relations with Rome [after the quarrel between St. Leo and St. Hilary over papal jurisdiction]" and from 514 was invested "with the title of papal vicar over Gaul and Spain. He also succeeded in establishing regular collaboration with the Gothic kings Alaric II of Toulouse (whose power would eventually be suppressed by the Franks) and, especially, Theodoric (508-526)." These kings represented a potential threat to the survival of Christian Roman Gaul insofar as they were Arian. But they were tolerant of Orthodoxy...

At the Council of Agde (506) Caesarius "introduced a series of disciplinary reforms in the spirit of *Romanitas* (Romanity), which confirmed the independence of bishops from the local civil and juridical authorities, proclaimed the inalienability of church property, introduced disciplinary rules for clergy (including celibacy for the priesthood) and established sacramental obligations for laymen (regular communion, conditions for marriage, etc.)."⁷³⁶

It is to Orthodox Provence that we owe one of the best definitions of the criteria of Orthodoxy. St. Vincent of Lerins (c. 445) wrote: "I have often then inquired earnestly and attentively of very many men eminent for sanctity and learning, how and by what sure and so to speak universal rule I may be able to distinguish the truth of Catholic faith from the falsehood of heretical depravity; and I have always, and in almost every instance, received an answer to this effect: That whether I or any one else should wish to detect the frauds and avoid the snares of heretics as they rise, and to continue sound and complete in the Catholic faith, we must, the Lord helping, fortify our own belief in two ways; first, by the authority of the Divine Law, and then, by the Tradition of the Catholic Church.

"But here some one perhaps will ask, Since the canon of Scripture is complete, and sufficient of itself for everything, and more than sufficient, what need is there to join with it the authority of the Church's interpretation? For this reason – because, owing to the depth of Holy Scripture, all do not accept it in one and the same sense, but one understands its words in one way, another in another; so that it seems to be capable of as many interpretations as there are interpreters. For Novatian expounds it one

⁷³⁵ Wickham, *The Inheritance of Rome: A History of Europe from 400 to 1000*, London: Penguin, 2009, p. 87.

⁷³⁶ Dvorkin, *op. cit.*, pp. 354, 359.

way, Sabellius another, Donatus another, Arius, Eunomius, Macedonius, another, Photinus, Apollinaris, Priscillian, another, Iovinian, Pelagius, Celestius, another, lastly, Nestorius another. Therefore, it is very necessary, on account of so great intricacies of such various errors, that the rule for the right understanding of the prophets and apostles should be framed in accordance with the standard of Ecclesiastical and Catholic interpretation.

“Moreover, in the Catholic Church itself, all possible care must be taken, that we hold that faith which has been believed everywhere, always, by all. For that is truly and in the strictest sense Catholic, which, as the name itself and the reason of the thing declare, comprehends all universally. This rule we shall observe if we follow universality, antiquity, consent. We shall follow universality if we confess that one faith to be true, which the whole Church throughout the world confesses; antiquity, if we in no wise depart from those interpretations which it is manifest were notoriously held by our holy ancestors and fathers; consent, in like manner, if in antiquity itself we adhere to the consentient definitions and determinations of all, or at the least of almost all priests and doctors.”⁷³⁷

Another threat was originally posed by the pagan Clovis, second king of the Franks, who in 486 defeated the last representative of Roman power at the Battle of Soissons. However, in 496 he was converted to Orthodoxy under the influence of his wife, St. Clothilde, and St. Remigius, Bishop of Rheims. “The queen asked Saint Remigius, Bishop of Rheims, to summon Clovis secretly, urging him to introduce the king to the word of salvation. And the bishop sent for him secretly and began to urge him to believe in the true God, maker of heaven and earth, and to cease worshipping idols, which could help neither themselves nor any one else. But the king said: ‘I gladly hear you, most holy father; but there remains one thing: the people who follow me cannot endure to abandon their gods; but I shall go and speak to them according to your words.’ He met with his followers, but before he could speak the power of God anticipated him, and all the people cried out together: ‘O pious king, we reject our mortal gods, and we are ready to follow the immortal God whom Remigius preaches.’ This was reported to the bishop, who greatly rejoiced, and bade them get ready the baptismal font. The squares were shaded with tapestried canopies, the churches adorned with white curtains, the baptistery set in order, the aroma of incense spread, candles of fragrant odour burned brightly, and the whole shrine of the baptistery was filled with a divine fragrance: and the Lord gave such grace to those who stood by that they thought they were placed amid the odours of paradise. And the king was the first to ask to be baptized by the bishop. Another Constantine advanced to the baptismal font, to terminate the disease of ancient leprosy and wash away with fresh water the foul spots that had long been borne. And when he entered to be baptized, the saint of God began with ready speech: ‘Gently bend your neck, Sigamber; worship what you burned; burn what you worshipped.’ The holy bishop Remigius was a man of excellent wisdom and especially trained in rhetorical studies, and of such surpassing holiness that he equalled the miracles of Sylvester. For there is extant a book of his life which tells that he raised a dead man. And so the king confessed the all-powerful God in the Trinity, and was baptized in the name of the Father, Son and

737 St Vincent, *Commonitory* 2:4-6.

Holy Spirit, and was anointed with the holy ointment with the sign of the cross of Christ. And of his army more than 3000 were baptized. His sister also, Albofled, was baptized, who not long after passed to the Lord. And when the king was in mourning for her, the holy Remigius sent a letter of consolation which began in this way: 'The reason of your mourning pains me, and pains me greatly, that Albofled your sister, of good memory, has passed away. But I can give you this comfort, that her departure from the world was such that she ought to be envied rather than mourned.' Another sister also was converted, Lanthechild by name, who had fallen into the heresy of the Arians, and she confessed that the Son and the holy Spirit were equal to the Father, and was anointed."⁷³⁸

Clovis' baptism, together with the stunning victories that he won over the Arian kings, was a tremendous boost to Gallic *Romanitas*. St. Avitus, Bishop of Vienne, congratulated him on his baptism in terms that showed that he regarded Clovis' kingdom as part of the Christian Roman Empire: "Let Greece rejoice in having chosen our *princeps*".⁷³⁹ Again, St. Gregory of Tours wrote that he received letters "from the Emperor Anastasius to confer the consulate on him. In Saint Martin's church he stood clad in a purple tunic and the military mantle, and he crowned himself with a diadem. He then rode out on his horse and with his own hand showered gold and silver coins among the people present all the way from the doorway of Saint Martin's church to Tours cathedral. From that day on he was called Consul or Augustus."⁷⁴⁰

Actually, since the Emperor Anastasius was a heretic, Clovis was the only major Orthodox ruler on the continent at this time. Moreover, he consciously stressed the continuity of his rule with that of Rome. As Fr. Andrew Louth writes: "Like most of the barbarian kingdoms that appeared in the Western Roman Empire, [the Frankish realms] inherited something of the administrative structure of the Roman Empire, and could claim to rule as representative, in some way, of the true Roman emperor, who resided in New Rome, Constantinople. This understanding was fictional in several respects: the Roman or Byzantine emperor had no choice over his Merovingian representative in Gaul and, although taxes were still being collected, the dynamics of political society in the West were changing in the direction of a society ruled by military warlords, who gave protection to those who lived in their domains and rewarded their followers with booty from fighting amongst themselves, and further afield, and who accepted the overlordship of the Merovingian kings. The fiction was nevertheless significant, not least in the way it articulated political legitimacy in terms of the ideals of the Roman Empire."⁷⁴¹

Clovis defeated the Arian Visigothic King Alaric II at Vouillé in 507. Then in 511 the Franks' allies against the Visigoths, the Burgundians, were converted from Arianism to Orthodoxy. And although the Arian Theoderic profited from the

⁷³⁸ St. Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*.

⁷³⁹ St. Avitus, *Letter 4*; in Cohen and Major, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

⁷⁴⁰ St. Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, II, 38, p. 154. During the coronation of the Russian Tsars, too, the bystanders were showered with gold and silver, symbolizing the betrothal of the Tsar with the State. See Fr. Nikita Chakirov (ed.), *Tsarskie Koronatsii na Rusi* (Imperial Coronations in Rus'), New York: Russian Orthodox Youth Committee, 1971, p. 22.

⁷⁴¹ Louth, *Greek East and Latin West*, Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2007, pp. 67-68.

Visigoths' defeat to incorporate their kingdom into his, the revival of Orthodoxy continued as the Franks took Aquitaine. Then, in 518, the Monophysite Emperor Anastasius, died, and was succeeded by the Orthodox Justin I, whose overlordship was welcomed by King Sigismund of Burgundy: "Our homeland is a part of your world, nor does my royal administration in any way reduce your sovereignty".⁷⁴² In 526 the Ostrogothic King Theoderic died, and his kingdom lost its hold on the Visigoths and Vandals, leaving the Franks as the most powerful force in the West. The Emperor Justinian confirmed the Franks in their dominion over the whole land beyond the Alps.⁷⁴³ The Gallo-Romans worked with their Frankish king to create the Merovingian Orthodox kingdom, the most glorious period in the history of France.

"Established at Paris, Clovis governed this kingdom by virtue of an agreement concluded with the bishops of Gaul, according to which [Gallo-Roman] natives and [Frankish] barbarians were to be on terms of equality... All free men bore the title of Frank, had the same political status, and were eligible to the same offices. Besides, each individual observed the law of the people among whom he belonged; the Gallo-Roman lived according to their code, the barbarian according to the Salian or Ripuarian law; in other words, the law was personal, not territorial. If there were any privileges they belonged to the Gallo-Romans, who, in the beginning were the only ones on whom the episcopal dignity was conferred. The king governed the provinces through his counts, and had a considerable voice in the selection of the clergy. The drawing up of the Salian Law (*Lex Salica*), which seems to date from the early part of the reign of Clovis, and the Council of Orléans, convoked by him and held in the last year of his reign, prove that the legislative activity of this king was not eclipsed by his military energy."⁷⁴⁴

Our main source for Frankish history, *The History of the Franks* by St. Gregory of Tours, confirms this account. As Wickham writes, St. Gregory, "although of an aristocratic Roman family, seems hardly aware the empire has gone at all; his founding hero was Clovis, and all his loyalties Frankish."⁷⁴⁵ Nowhere does he dispute the legitimacy of Frankish rule; and the rebellions that take place are of Franks against Franks rather than Gallo-Romans against Franks. One exception to this rule was the attempt of Bishop Egidius of Rheims to kill King Childebert (V, 19). But St. Gregory shows no sympathy for the bishop, and records his trial and exile by his fellow-bishops without criticism. St. Gregory himself was elected to the episcopate completely freely, with no interference by the king.⁷⁴⁶

"The Frankish kings," writes John Julius Norwich, "immediately distinguishable from their subjects by their shoulder-length blondish hair - said to represent the sun's rays - journeyed endlessly from one village to the next with their officials and their men-at-arms, carrying with them their huge triple-sealed coffers of treasure... Violence was never far away. For an example we have to look no further than Clovis's

⁷⁴² Sigismund, in Tom Holland, *In the Shadow of the Sword*, London: Abacus, 2013, p. 278.

⁷⁴³ Gibbon, *op. cit.*, vol. IV, p. 339.

⁷⁴⁴ "New Advent" Catholic encyclopaedia, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06238a.htm>

⁷⁴⁵ Wickham, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

⁷⁴⁶ Abbot Odo, *The Life of St. Gregory of Tours*, translated by Fr. Seraphim Rose in *Vita Patrum*, Platina, Ca.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1988, p. 45.

son Chilperic, whom... Gregory of Tours dubbed 'the Nero and Herod of his time' and who took as his second wife Galswintha, daughter of the Visigothic King of Spain. The marriage was not a success, and one morning Galswintha was found strangled in her bed. This seems to have been the work of a serving-maid called Fredegund, who had long been the king's mistress and whom he married a short time later. Now it happened that Galswintha had a sister, Brunhilda, who was the wife of Chilperic's brother Sigebert. The murder caused a series of fearsome wars between the two brothers, until in 575, just when he had Chilperic at his mercy, Sigebert was murdered by Fredegund. Chilperic lived on for another nine years – during which he introduced eye-gouging as a new sort of punishment – before being stabbed to death in 584 by an unknown assailant, probably one of Brunhilda's men, but he was posthumously avenged when his son Clothar II seized Brunhilda and had her lashed to the tail of a horse, which was then sent off at a gallop."⁷⁴⁷

In about 630, King Dagobert I expanded the kingdom to include Alsace, the Vosges and the Ardennes, and made Paris his capital. He founded the church of Saint-Denis, and was the first king to be buried there.

As in neighbouring England, this was a golden age in the production of many saints of both sexes. As an example, let us take St. Bathild, an Anglo-Saxon slave-girl, was sold into the household of the mayor of the Frankish imperial palace, Erchinoald, in the first half of the seventh century. Being beautiful in body and humble and obedient in soul, she quickly won the favour of the prince, and was nearly always in his presence, even bringing him drinks in his bedroom. She also served the older women in the household, washing their feet, dressing them and helping them in every way.

When Erchinoald's wife died, he wanted to marry the beautiful English virgin. But she hid herself from him, and Erchinoald eventually took a different woman to be his wife. Then Divine Providence, which raises the poor from the dung-hill, arranged that Bathild should attract the attention of the King of France, Clovis II, and in the year 649 they were married. From this marriage three sons were born: Clotaire III, Childeric II and Thierry III.

St. Bathild proved to be an exemplary queen. Using her influence, with the king her husband, and with the help of Abbot Genesisius (later Bishop of Lyons), she gave great alms to the poor and to the churches of God. After the death of King Clovis in 657, she became regent of the kingdom during the minority of her son Clotaire. She founded the monasteries of Corbie and Chelles, gave generous alms to many others, and urged hierarchs and abbots to enforce the keeping of the monastic rules. She supported the work of Saints Ouen and Leger, put an end to the simoniac buying of offices in the Church, suppressed the slave-trade of which she herself had been a victim, and redeemed many slaves. Indeed, through her work France may be considered the first nation to have eliminated the slave trade. In the political sphere, the Austrasians (living in north-eastern France Belgium and western Germany) were persuaded to accept her son Childeric as their king, which led to the union of the Franks and the Burgundians.

⁷⁴⁷ Norwich, *France, A History from Gaul to De Gaulle*, London: John Murray, 2018, p. 8.

However, in 667 a plot hatched by Bishop Sigebertus, which caused her sons to entertain unjust suspicions of her temporarily, led to her retirement to the monastery of Chelles, near Paris. There she remained in obedience to Abbess Berthille until her death, performing all the humblest tasks and displaying all the virtues to perfection. After having a vision of the Mother of God, she died in 680, and there were many miracles at her tomb.⁷⁴⁸

Gaul was the great success story of Romanity in the West. It remained loyal to Constantinople, preserving both the faith and the political forms of Romanity more closely than any other continental nation. As Janet Nelson writes, "the Franks were distinguished by their Orthodoxy and by their kings' determination to destroy heresy."⁷⁴⁹ And, as David Starkey writes, under the rule of Clovis and his successors, "most aspects of sub-Roman society – the architecture, language, literature, manners and, above all, Roman Christianity – continued to flourish in the most successful regime since the fall of the Western Empire".⁷⁵⁰

Thus the 6th century Byzantine lawyer, scholar, poet, and historian Agathias Scholasticus writes in his *Histories*: "The Franks have a common frontier with Italy. They may reasonably be identified with the people who in ancient times were called 'Germans'... Their system of government, administration and laws are modelled more or less on the Roman pattern, apart from which they uphold similar standards with regard to contracts, marriage, and religious observance. They are in fact all Christians and adhere to the strictest Orthodoxy. They also have magistrates in their cities and priests and celebrate the feasts in the same way as we do, and, for a barbarian people, strike me as extremely well-bred and civilized and as practically the same as ourselves except for their uncouth style of dress and peculiar language. I admire them for their other attributes and especially for the spirit of justice and harmony that prevails amongst them. Although on many occasions in the past and even during my own lifetime their kingdom has been divided between three or more rulers they have never yet waged war against one another or seen fit to stain their country's honour by the slaughter of their kith and kin. And yet whenever great powers are seen to have reached a state of parity, arrogant and uncompromising attitudes are inevitably engendered and the logical outcome is rivalry, the lust for domination and a host of other passions that constitute a fertile breeding-ground for unrest and dissension. Nevertheless nothing of the kind occurs in their case no matter how many different kingdoms they are split up into. In the rare event of some dispute arising between their kings they draw themselves up ostensibly in battle-formation and with the apparent object of deciding the issue by force of arms and then confront one another. But once the main body of the army on either side has come face to face they immediately lay aside all animosity, return to mutual understanding and enjoin their leaders to settle their differences by arbitration, or failing that by placing their own lives at stake in single combat. For it is not right, they say, or in keeping with ancestral precedent for the common good to suffer injury and upheaval on account of some

⁷⁴⁸ See her *Life* in M.G.H. *Scriptores rerum merov.*, ii, 475-508.

⁷⁴⁹ Nelson, *King and Emperor. A New Life of Charlemagne*, London: Allen Press, 2019, p. 16.

⁷⁵⁰ Starkey, *Crown & Country*, London: Harper, 2011, pp. 28-29.

personal feud of theirs. The immediate result is that they break their ranks and lay down their arms. Peace and quiet are restored, normal communications resumed, and the horrors of war are forgotten. So law-abiding therefore and public spirited are the subject classes and so docile and amendable to reason, when need be, are the masters. It is for this reason that the basis of their power remains secure and their government stable and that they have not lost any of their territory but have actually increased it greatly. When justice and amity are second nature to a people then their state is guaranteed happiness and stability and rendered impregnable to enemy attack. So, living this virtuous life, the Franks rule over their own people and their neighbours, the succession passing from father to son."⁷⁵¹

⁷⁵¹ However, Gibbon considered Agathias' enthusiasm "partial"; it could not "be sufficiently justified by their domestic annals [i.e. those of Gregory of Tours]" (op. cit., p. 339).

48. THE WESTERN KINGDOMS: (4) VISIGOTHIC SPAIN

In the fourth century Spain had been an important part of the Roman Empire, producing such great Christians as St. Osius, bishop of Cordoba, and the Emperor Theodosius I. Its recovery from the hands of the Arian Visigoths was therefore an important part of Justinian's strategy of reuniting the Empire. By the 550s the Roman armies had carved out a province in the south-east of Iberia called Spania.

Now it might have been expected that the Roman inhabitants of the peninsula, who constituted perhaps 90% of the population, would have risen up in support of the Byzantines against their foreign rulers. However, many of the Hispano-Romans fled inland from Cartagena when the Byzantines invaded, including even the most notable Spaniard of the age, St. Leander, archbishop of Seville. As a result of this loyalty of the Roman Spaniards to the Visigothic regime, the restoration of Orthodoxy in Spain came about, neither through the might of Byzantine arms from without, nor through the rebellion of Hispano-Romans from within, but through the conversion of the Visigoths themselves.

It began, writes Protopresbyter James Thornton, in 568, when "Leovigild became King. He is regarded by historians as 'the greatest king of Visigothic Spain, pursuing by dint of wars on all sides the unification of the peninsula and the consolidation of the tottering royal authority.' He was indeed surrounded by adversities, external and internal.

"There were the Suevi in the north-west,... the Basques in the Cantabrian mountains, and the petty Hispano-Roman princes of the west-centre. There were the Byzantines in the south and the aggressive Franks in the north. Internally there were the discontented subject Catholics and, as hostile as any, the rival Visigothic nobles.' Nonetheless, Leovigild triumphed over his enemies, or at least held them at bay, although his methods were ruthless: 'executions and confiscations were his method of strengthening the monarchy: it seemed ferocious even to the Franks.' And all the while the King held stubbornly, even fanatically, to the Arian creed.

"Saint Hermenegild, Leogivild's eldest son, thus Crown Prince and heir, married a Frankish princess, Ingundis, in 579. Pressured by the Royal Court to convert to Arianism, Ingundis adamantly refused [even when subjected to torture by the Queen Mother Goisuntha]. Sent by Leogivild to Seville [as ruler], the Crown Prince there came under the influence of Saint Leander... The Holy Bishop assisted Princess Ingundis in convincing the young Prince of the truth of Orthodox Christianity, to which holy faith he converted [along with several thousand Goths]. The King responded violently, Saint Hermenegild then joining in a revolt against his father's savage rule."⁷⁵²

Now Arianism was the national religion of the Goths: every Goth was required to be Arian, just as every Roman was encouraged to remain Orthodox. Intermarriage

⁷⁵² Thornton, *Pious Kings and Right-Believing Queens*, Belmont, Mass.: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 2013, pp. 215-216.

between the two sub-nations was illegal – but this was not so much a matter of faith, as of national identity. The Goths did not try to convert the Romans because that would have meant a confusion of the races, and they discouraged conversion by insisting on the rebaptism of converts from Orthodoxy. Already, however, some confusion was taking place through the Goths' adoption of Roman manners and dress. If they adopted the faith of the Romans as well, what would distinguish them from their subjects?

And so, writes Scott, "in the political situation of the kingdom the transference of the allegiance of the heir apparent from the Arian to the Catholic confession involved and proclaimed a withdrawal of his allegiance to the king. This ecclesiastical defection was necessarily accompanied by a political rebellion."⁷⁵³ Indeed, as David Keys writes, "Hermenegild's conversion was a massive challenge to the political system as a whole."⁷⁵⁴

Thornton continues: "Leogivild at first tried to conciliate his rebellious subjects by offering peace and tolerance to the Orthodox, even assembling a local synod of Arian and Orthodox Bishops in Toledo. However, when the Orthodox refused to compromise, the King 'resorted to fierce persecution – banishment, death, and confiscation – without gaining many converts thereby.'"⁷⁵⁵

However, the rebellion of Hermenegild, though aided by the Orthodox Sueves in the north-west (they converted from Arianism to Orthodoxy in the 550s), and the Byzantines in the south-east, was crushed by King Leogivild, while the Byzantine general was bribed to stay in camp.⁷⁵⁶

"In 585, King Leogivild captured Seville, which he had besieged for two years. His son, Saint Hermenegild, surrendered and was imprisoned. When, during his captivity, he was visited by an Arian Bishop, who sought to obtain his repudiation of Orthodoxy and return to the King's religion, the Saint refused. He likewise refused Communion from the hands of an Arian Priest, reminding the Priest that the reception of Communion signifies (among other things) oneness of Faith. Since he would not assent to Arianism, he of course refused to Commune with an Arian heretic.

"For King Leogivild, his son's refusal to return to Arianism was the final straw. He ordered Saint Hermenegild's immediate execution. The Saint went to his death on April 13, 585..."⁷⁵⁷

⁷⁵³ C.A.A. Scott, *Ulfilas, Apostle of the Goths*, Cambridge, 1885, p. 199; quoted in E.A. Thompson, *The Goths in Spain*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969, pp. 65-66.

⁷⁵⁴ Keys, *Catastrophe*, London: Arrow Books, 2000, p. 204.

⁷⁵⁵ Thornton, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

⁷⁵⁶ St. Gregory of Tours wrote that Hermenegild "joined the party of the Emperor Tiberius, making overtures to the Emperor's army commander, who was then invading Spain", but that "as soon as Leovigild ordered his troops to advance Hermenegild found himself deserted by the Greeks" (*History of the Franks*, V, 38).

⁷⁵⁷ Thornton, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

Hermenegild was immediately hailed as a martyr by Pope St. Gregory, the writer of his *Life*, while St. Gregory of Tours treated the war between the king and his son as religious in essence. Moreover, his brother Rekhared, who became king after the death of Leogivild, “commanded that the body of his elder brother, Saint Hermenegild, be given all the honors due a martyr of Christ”.⁷⁵⁸ However, the Spanish sources, both Gothic and Roman, speak of him as a rebel rather than a martyr. And “it seems evident,” writes Aloysius Ziegler, “that the Spanish Church did not espouse the cause of the Catholic [i.e. Orthodox] prince against his Arian father”⁷⁵⁹

So it is clear that those within and outside the country attached different priorities to the purity of the faith, on the one hand, and the integrity of the kingdom, on the other. For the Franks and the Italians (and the Orthodox of other nations who inscribed St. Hermenegild’s name among the saints), the triumph of Orthodoxy justified even the horrors of civil war. But the Spaniards, who, as St. Gregory of Tours wrote, “had adopted this detestable custom of killing with the sword any of their kings who did not please them, and of appointing as king whomsoever their fancy lighted upon”⁷⁶⁰, preferred the peaceful *status quo*.

And yet putting the faith first bore rich fruit; for within a very few years, at the great Council of Toledo in 589, the new king, Recared and the whole of the Gothic nobility accepted Orthodoxy “Revolts led by Arian bishops blazed forth, and in 603, the usurper, Witteric, murdered King Liuva II (Recared’s son and successor) and briefly restored Arianism to official favor. But this was the heresy’s last gasp. With Witteric’s assassination in 610 Arianism disappeared as a force in Spanish political and ecclesiastical life.”⁷⁶¹ Thus, as St. Demetrius of Rostov writes, “the fruit of the death of this one man was life and Orthodoxy for all the people of Spain”.⁷⁶²

The Church’s glorification of St. Hermenegild established the principle that *legitimate political power was either Roman power, or that power which shared in the faith of the Romans, Orthodoxy*. A heterodox power could legitimately be overthrown as long as the motive was the establishment or re-establishment of Orthodoxy. This did not mean, however, that Christians were *obliged* to rebel against pagan or heterodox régimes; for civil war is one of the worst of all evils and is to be undertaken only in the most exceptional circumstances...

Led by the Church, Spain now entered a period of revival. The two law-codes, one for the Romans and the other for the Visigoths, were fused into one.⁷⁶³ There were frequent councils in which the king and the bishops took part, and at which an extensive programme of legislation was enacted. “Gothic law” was clearly related to the imperial code of Theodosius II; and although the Byzantine province of Spania was reconquered in 628, “it is fairly clear that the late seventh-century Visigoths had

⁷⁵⁸ St. Demetrius of Rostov, *The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints*, House Springs, Mo.: Chrysostom Press, 2001, vol. III: November, p. 17.

⁷⁵⁹ Ziegler, *Church and State in Visigothic Spain*, Washington, D.C., 1930, p. 30.

⁷⁶⁰ St. Gregory, *History of the Franks*, III, 30.

⁷⁶¹ Thornton, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

⁷⁶² St. Demetrius, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

⁷⁶³ See Siedentop, *op. cit.*, pp. 138-139.

the contemporary Byzantine empire as a point of reference..., at least as a model for ceremonial, and for a close identification between the episcopacy and the king."⁷⁶⁴

But the kingship completely dominated the episcopate in Visigothic Spain. As King writes, "nothing lay outside the purview of the king. Far from there being an autonomous body, 'the church', authority over which belonged to others, society and the church were conceptually equated. It was precisely because fact did not correspond to idea that such savage action was taken against the Jews, whose presence within the territorial but beyond the ideological confines of the kingdom affronted the Christian, unitary premisses of the Visigothic standpoint. The king's authority over clerics and religious matters, inherent in his God-given responsibility for the health of society, was fully accepted by the *sacerdotium* itself. Kings nominated bishops, judged metropolitans, summoned councils, established agenda and confirmed rulings. They even provided excommunication as a legal penalty."⁷⁶⁵

Joseph Canning writes: "The king legislated in ecclesiastical matters, nominated bishops and even excommunicated. The role of the clergy was to formulate and teach the norms of Christian society, and that of the king to enforce them: as Isidore said, it was the role of the temporal ruler to accomplish 'through the terror of discipline' what the priest has failed to bring about 'through the preaching of doctrine'. Although the monarch himself was subject to the norms set forth by the episcopacy this did not result in any right of resistance or deposition on the part of the clergy."⁷⁶⁶

At the same time, the influence of the bishops was great. In 633, for example, the Fourth Council of Toledo condemned the Visigothic King Suintila as unjust and faithless, and declared that he had already deprived himself of the kingship. However, the king had already been removed by a Frankish army, and the nobles had already elected a new king, Sisenand, before the convening of this Council, so it was not the clergy who deposed the king in this case.

The bishops then proceeded to condemn rebellions against kings with an extraordinarily powerful anathema! Led by St. Isidore of Seville, they "begged that there should be no usurpations in Spain, no attempts to stir up rebellion, no plots against the lives of the monarchs. In future, when a king died, his successor must be appointed by the magnates of the whole kingdom sitting along with the bishops in a common council. Three times the bishops repeated their awful anathema against anyone who should conspire to break his oath of allegiance, or make an attempt on the king's life, or try to usurp the throne. Three times the anathema was read out to the concourse with profound solemnity, and three times the notaries copied it into the minutes. All the clergy and laymen present shouted out their agreement. Then the bishops called upon Sisenand and his successors for ever to rule moderately and mildly, with justice and piety, over the peoples entrusted to them by God. Any successor of Sisenand's who ruled harshly or oppressively would be anathema. After

⁷⁶⁴ Wickham, *op. cit.*, p. 136. This is confirmed by Heather: the kings "drenched themselves in a Roman and Christian sacrality, which determinedly echoed that of the emperors in Constantinople" (*op. cit.*, p. 214).

⁷⁶⁵ King, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

⁷⁶⁶ Canning, *A History of Medieval Political Thought 300-1450*, London: Routledge, 1996, pp. 26-27.

this impressive scene the bishops condemned and sentenced Suinthila and his family...⁷⁶⁷

The Visigothic kings insisted on bringing the Church right into the process of civil legislation, allowing bishops to take part in the election of kings.

Thus “the decisions of the council,” writes Ziegler, “had the strange character of being partly civil and partly ecclesiastical, with the important distinction, however, that the ecclesiastical as well as the civil had the force of statute law for all living within the kingdom... It cannot be denied that the presence of the bishops at these councils had the result of placing the legal code of Visigothic Spain on a philosophical basis and of resting it on principles which expressed to a very large degree the social doctrines of the Christian religion. The enactment of laws by the synod did not have the necessary result of making the Church an integral or essential part of the civic administration, but it did introduce into the laws principles of morality and justice which must ultimately have resulted in the greatest benefit to all the people of Spain...”⁷⁶⁸

There were two major blots on the Spanish Church. The first was that in a series of Councils between 589 and 769 the heresy of the *Filioque* was asserted, at the same time as fidelity to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (which does not contain the *Filioque*) – a contradiction that the Fathers of these Councils do not seem to have been aware of. That is why Charlemagne’s counsellor Alcuin, when writing against the *Filioque* to the brothers of Lyons, called it “*Hispanici erroris sectam* (the sect of the Spanish error).”⁷⁶⁹

The second major blot on the Spanish Church was its persecution of the Jews. As Paul Johnson writes, “Jewish communities had prospered here under the Roman empire and to some extent under the Byzantine rule, but under the Visigoth kings a church-state policy of systematic anti-Semitism was pursued. A succession of royal ecclesiastical councils at Toledo, brushing aside orthodox Christian policy, either decreed the forcible baptism of the Jews or forbade circumcision, Jewish rites and observance of the Sabbath and festivals. Throughout the seventh century, Jews were flogged, executed, had their property confiscated, were subjected to ruinous taxes, forbidden to trade and, at times, dragged to the baptismal font. Many were obliged to accept Christianity, but continued privately to observe the Jewish laws. Thus the secret Jew, later called the *marrano*, emerged into history – the source of endless anxiety for Spain, for Spanish Christianity, and for Spanish Judaism.

“Hence when the Moslems invaded Spain in 711, the Jews helped them to overrun it, often garrisoning captured cities behind the advancing Arab armies...”⁷⁷⁰

⁷⁶⁷ E.A. Thompson, *The Goths in Spain*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969, pp. 174, 175.

⁷⁶⁸ Ziegler, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

⁷⁶⁹ Cyriaque Lampryllos, *La Mystification Fatale* (The Fatal Mystification), Lausanne: L’Age de l’Homme, 1987, part I, p. 28.

⁷⁷⁰ Johnson, *A History of the Jews*, London: Phoenix, 1995, p. 177.

By 715, writes Holland, “Arab armies had long since swept far beyond the limits of the crumbled empires ruled from Ctesiphon and the New Rome. In the East, they had advance into the one-time kingdom of the Hephthalites, passing not only the abandoned red wall of Gurgan but an even mightier barrier, the river Oxus: a natural barrier to immense and fast flowing that the Arabs would come to define the whole vastness of Central Asia simply as ‘Transoxania’. Meanwhile, in the West, with Carthage and the long coastal strip of North Africa already subdued, they had crossed the sea in pursuit of fresh conquests. In 711, a tiny Arab raiding party had landed on Gibraltar. Within the course of only a few months, this venturesome war band had succeeded in defeating the Visigoths in battle, killing their king and seizing their capital of Toledo, deep in the vitals of Spain. An achievement such as this, secured on the outermost edge of the world, appeared so astounding to the Arabs as to verge on the fantastical...”⁷⁷¹

The Arabs were stopped only Charles Martel, leader of the Franks, at the Battle of Tours in 732. As Douglas Murray writes, “Martel’s victory is recognized for having prevented the spread of Islam throughout Europe. Had his Frankish armies not succeeded no other power in Europe could have stopped the Muslim armies from conquering the continent. When those armies had crossed into Europe in 711 one of their leaders, Tariq bin-Zayad, famously ordered their boats to be burnt, saying, ‘We have not come here to return. Either we conquer and establish ourselves, or we perish.’ Martel ensured that they perished and that other than having gained a foothold in southern Spain, Islam would never progress further into Europe. As Edward Gibbon famously wrote a millenium later, were it not for the victory of the man who became known as ‘The Hammer’: ‘Perhaps the interpretation of the Koran would now be taught in the schools of Oxford, and her pulpits might demonstrate to a circumcised people the sanctity and truth of the revelation of Mohammed,’ As Gibbon went on, ‘From such calamities was Christendom delivered by the genius and fortune of one man.’

“Today’s visitor to the basilica in which Martel’s tomb sits may well wonder whether he did indeed succeed – or at least reflect that after he succeeded his descendants failed. To wander the district of Saint Denis today is to see a district more resembling North Africa than France...”⁷⁷²

⁷⁷¹ Holland, *In the Shadow of the Sword*, London: Abacus, 2013, p. 434.

⁷⁷² Murray, *The Strange Death of Europe*, London: Bloomsbury, 2018, pp. 109-110.

49. THE WESTERN KINGDOMS: (5) CELTIC BRITAIN AND IRELAND

It was not only in the Mediterranean provinces of France, Spain and Italy that the consciousness of Romanity survived and re-established itself around the Church. The distant province of Britain had reason to be more committed to the new order of Christian Rome than any other for the simple reason that the first Christian Emperor, Constantine the Great, had been proclaimed emperor for the first time precisely in Britain⁷⁷³, and had taken the title *Britannicus Maximus*, “the greatest of the Britons”, in 315. However, in spite of some impressive architectural remains at Bath, York, Wroxeter and Hadrian’s Wall, signs of Romanization are fewer in Britain than on the continent even after four centuries of Roman rule. Romans writings about Britain exhibit a certain antipathy towards this province. And the Britons retained, with the Jews, the reputation of being the least assimilated people in the Empire.⁷⁷⁴

Perhaps for that reason Britain became the platform for several rebellions against the central authorities in the late Empire, and why Britain became, in later ages, a most fertile breeding-ground for innovation in political theory and practice. Thus in 350 a British officer called Magnentius donned the purple and was acclaimed by the army at Autun, only to be defeated the next year. Again, in 383 Magnus Clemens Maximus, leader of the army in Britain, seized power in the West and killed the Western Emperor Gratian. Now Maximus, unlike Magnentius, was an Orthodox Christian, a champion of the Church and a fine defender of the Western frontier against the Germans. Moreover, his usurpation of the empire did not automatically debar him from the throne: many emperors before and after came to the throne by the same means. Nevertheless, he is consistently portrayed in the sources as a tyrant; and Sulpicius Severus wrote of him that he was a man “whose whole life would have been praiseworthy if he could have refused the crown illegally thrust upon him by a mutinous army”.⁷⁷⁵

St. Ambrose of Milan rejected Maximus and remained loyal to Gratian’s co-emperor Valentinian II (in spite of the fact that his mother, Justina, was an Arian and his resolute enemy). He travelled to Trier in the winter of 383-4 to meet Maximus, but refused to give him communion, warning him that “he must do penance for shedding the blood of one who was his master [the Western Emperor Gratian] and... an innocent man.” Maximus refused, and in 388 he was defeated and executed by the Eastern Emperor Theodosius.⁷⁷⁶ And so, according to Paulinus, Maximus “laid down in fear, like a woman, the realm that he had wickedly usurped, thereby acknowledging that he had been merely the administrator, not the sovereign [*imperator*] of the state.”⁷⁷⁷

⁷⁷³ In York. The place under York Minster where this hugely important event took place has now been excavated by archaeologists.

⁷⁷⁴ Michael Jones, *The End of Roman Britain*, Cornell University Press, 1998.

⁷⁷⁵ Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogues*, I (2, VI).

⁷⁷⁶ Norwich, *op. cit.*, pp. 109-111.

⁷⁷⁷ Paulinus, *Life of St. Ambrose*, chapter 19, in the translation by E.R. Hoare.

The way in which Ambrose could reject the British usurper Maximus, although his credentials were as good as many a pagan emperor, was a tribute to the way in which Christian Rome had transformed political thought in the ancient world. In early Rome a “tyrant” was a man who seized power by force; and in Republican Rome tyrants were those who, like Julius Caesar, imposed one-man rule on the true and only lawful sovereigns – *Senatus PopulusQue Romanorum*, the senate and people of Rome. During the first three centuries of the empire, many generals seized power by force and the senate and the people were forced to accept their legitimacy. However, this changed with the coming of St. Constantine, who became the source and model of all legitimate emperors. Constantine, of course, had seized the empire by force; but he had done so against anti-Christian tyrants and was therefore seen to have been acting with the blessing of God. Now legitimate rulers would have to prove that they were in the image of Constantine, both in their Orthodoxy and in their legitimate succession from Constantine and his successors.

In the years 406-410, the ever-rebellious Army of Britain attempted to place the “tyrants” Marcus, Gratian and Constantine III on the throne of the Western Empire. Thus Gratian was given “a purple robe, a crown and a body-guard, just like an emperor,” according to Zosimus.⁷⁷⁸ In 410 the Roman legions left Britain and the British found themselves outside the Empire. As Procopius wrote: “The Romans never succeeded in recovering Britain, but it remained from that time on under tyrants.”⁷⁷⁹ St. Gildas the Wise, writing in the 540s, blamed his countrymen, saying that they had “ungratefully rebelled” against “Roman kings”, and had failed in their “loyalty to the Roman Empire”.⁷⁸⁰ It is difficult to argue with that judgement: the British began as they continued to be thereafter - innovators, even revolutionaries, in political theory and practice... The land formerly known as “the Roman island” became, from the beginning of the fifth century, “a province fertile in tyrants” (St. Jerome)⁷⁸¹, reverting to the rebelliousness it had displayed under Carausius and Allectus in the late third century.⁷⁸²

And yet the British themselves distinguished between true kings and tyrants in their own land. Thus St. Patrick, the British apostle of Ireland, who considered himself a Roman citizen, called the Scottish chieftain Coroticus a “tyrant” because he did not fear God or His priests; “for the sake of a miserable temporal kingdom [*regnum*]” he would face God’s judgement on “wicked kings” [*regibus*].⁷⁸³ Patrick’s use of the terms “king” and “tyrant” is not clear; his definition of the word “tyrant” seems to be a mixture between the old, secular meaning of “usurper” and the newer, more religious, Ambrosian meaning of “unjust or immoral person in authority”.

St. Gildas makes the distinction between kings and tyrants still clearer. Among past rulers in Britain, Diocletian, Maximus, Marcus, Gratian, Constantine, Constans and Vortigern were all “tyrants”. On the other hand, there had been legitimate rulers, such

⁷⁷⁸ Zosimus, *New History*, 6.2.

⁷⁷⁹ Procopius, *The Vandal War*, 3.2.38.

⁷⁸⁰ St. Gildas, *On the Ruin of Britain*, 4.1, 5.1, 15.1.

⁷⁸¹ Christopher Snyder, *An Age of Tyrants*, Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1998, chapters 2, 8 and 9.

⁷⁸² Kevin Butcher, “The First British Empire”, *BBC History Magazine*, June, 2016.

⁷⁸³ St. Patrick, *Letter to Coroticus*, 21, 19.

as Ambrosius Aurelianus, “a modest man, who alone of the Roman nation had been left alive in the confusion of this troubled period... He provoked the cruel conquerors [the Anglo-Saxons] to battle, and by the goodness of our Lord got the victory”. His parents even “wore the purple”.⁷⁸⁴

And then, at the turn of the century, came the famous King Arthur. He won twelve victories over the Saxons, fighting with a cross or icon of the Virgin Mary on his back, and halted the pagan advance westwards for at least a generation, until his death in 519. David Miles writes: “It is possible that Artos/Arthur - ‘The Bear’ in Celtic, was the *signum*, or nickname, of Aurelianus himself. A bearskin cloak would have been a distinguishing element of his uniform as a Roman general.”⁷⁸⁵ John Morris has identified Arthur with Owain, king of the Welsh kingdom of Powys, who ruled from the Roman city of Wroxeter (Virocinium), the only Romano-British city surviving in the early sixth century. In any case, Arthur of Britain, with Clovis of France, was the first great king of the post-Roman West, and became the stuff of innumerable medieval legends.⁷⁸⁶

In general, however, Gildas was withering about the kings: “Britain has kings [*reges*], but they are tyrants [*tyrannos*]; she has judges, but they are wicked. They often plunder and terrorize the innocent; they defend and protect the guilty and thieving; they have many wives, whores and adulteresses; they constantly swear false oaths, they make vows, but almost at once tell lies; they wage wars, civil and unjust; they chase thieves energetically all over the country, but love and reward the thieves who sit with them at table; they distribute alms profusely, but pile up an immense mountain of crime for all to see; they take their seats as judges, but rarely seek out the rules of right judgement; they despise the harmless and humble, but exalt to the stars, as far as they can, their military companions, bloody, proud and murderous men, adulterers and enemies of God... They hang around the altars swearing oaths, then shortly afterwards scorn them as though they were filthy stones...”⁷⁸⁷

Thus by the sixth century it looks as if the problem of formal legitimacy had been solved, at least in the eyes of the Britons themselves. The kings Gildas were talking about were both Christian and “anointed” – they had that link, at any rate, with the anointed kings of Israel and Christian Rome.⁷⁸⁸ But they did not fulfill their vows; they were a terror to good works, but not to the evil – and by that criterion they were not true authorities (Romans 13.3), being linked by Gildas rather with the tyrants of old.

⁷⁸⁴ St. Gildas *On the Ruin of Britain*, 25. Bede interprets this to mean that they were “of royal race”.

⁷⁸⁵ Miles, *The Tribes of Britain*, London: Phoenix, 2006, p. 162.

⁷⁸⁶ Graham Phillips and Martin Keatman (*King Arthur: The True Story*, London: Arrow, 1993) have made an excellent case for the historicity of King Arthur.

⁷⁸⁷ St. Gildas *On the Ruin of Britain*, 27.

⁷⁸⁸ There is intriguing evidence that the Britons remained in contact with Christian Rome. In about 540 the Emperor Justinian was sending subsidies to the kingdom of Gwynedd. However, after the great plague of 547, links between Britain and the East appear to have been cut off. See Michelle Ziegler, “Emperor Justinian and the British Kings, c. 540”, Heavenfield, <https://hefenfelth.wordpress.com/2015/03/20/emperor-justinian-and-the-british-kings-c-540>.

So the break with Rome was still keenly felt. Celtic Britain had many great monks and hierarchs, but very few great, or even powerful, kings. And by the middle of the sixth century there was little to link the Britons with their Roman heritage - with the important exception of the Church, a Roman institution that was now stronger than ever. Thus Simon Young writes that “in the west... there are various Celtic successor states but those too have left Rome far behind them. No surprise there. The west had, after all, always been the least Romanised part of Britannia and it was the very fact that they had primitive tribal societies instead of sophisticated urban ones that allowed the Celtic kingdoms to come through the storm in one piece. They were better able to fight off the barbarians. Indeed, the only Roman thing that survived there was Christianity - that had been the official religion of the later empire - and, closely connected to Christianity, Latin writing...”⁷⁸⁹

Fr. Gregory Telepneff notes that “early Celtic monasticism was Byzantine in character, i.e., a manifestation of the Eastern Orthodox Faith. The cultural hegemony of the Roman Empire, which extended beyond its political borders, decisively shaped the spiritual environment of ancient Hibernia [Ireland].”⁷⁹⁰

However, Telepneff also provides evidence of the strong influence of the Egyptian Coptic Church on the Celts of the British Isles. And William Dalrymple has pointed out a very close resemblance between a seventh-century rock-carving from Perthshire depicting Saints Anthony and Paul of Egypt with an icon in St. Anthony’s monastery in Egypt⁷⁹¹, and cites the words of the seventh-century *Antiphonary* of the Irish monastery of Bangor:

*The house full of delight
Is built on the rock
And indeed the true vine
Transplanted out of Egypt.*

“Moreover,” he continues, “the Egyptian ancestry of the Celtic Church was acknowledged by contemporaries: in a letter to Charlemagne, the English scholar-monk Alcuin described the Celtic Culdees as ‘*pueri egyptiaci*’, the children of the Egyptians. Whether this implied direct contact between Coptic Egypt and Celtic Ireland and Scotland is a matter of scholarly debate. Common sense suggests that it is unlikely, yet a growing body of scholars think that that is exactly what Alcuin meant. For there are an extraordinary number of otherwise inexplicable similarities between the Celtic and Coptic Churches which were shared by no other Western Churches. In both, the bishops wore crowns rather than mitres and held T-shaped Tau crosses rather than crooks or crosiers. In both the hand-bell played a very prominent place in ritual, so much so that in early Irish sculpture clerics are distinguished from lay persons by placing a clochette in their hand. The same device performs a similar function on Coptic stelae - yet bells of any sort are quite unknown in the dominant

⁷⁸⁹ Young, “Apocalypse then *circa* 410”, *BBC History Magazine*, March, 2010, p. 48.

⁷⁹⁰ Telepneff, *The Egyptian Desert in the Irish Bogs*, Etna, Ca.: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1998, p. 70.

⁷⁹¹ Stone depictions of these two saints are also common in the Isle of Man.

Greek or Latin Churches until the tenth century at the earliest. Stranger still, the Celtic wheel cross, the most common symbol of Celtic Christianity, has recently been shown to have been a Coptic invention, depicted on a Coptic burial pall of the fifth century, three centuries before the design first appears in Scotland and Ireland."⁷⁹²

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The most important of the Celtic Churches turned out to be the *Irish Church*. Now Ireland was almost entirely a pagan land. As Holland writes: "That the island had been won for Christ was a miracle in itself. Roman rule had never reached its shores."⁷⁹³ St. Celestine the Pope had sent a Bishop Palladius to Ireland, but his mission had failed. Ireland's conversion to Christ in the fifth century was the work largely of one man, St. Patrick. The son of a deacon and grandson of a priest in Wales or Scotland, Patrick was captured by Irish pirates in his youth. But he escaped to France, where he became a monk and a bishop. Instead of returning to his homeland, however, he felt a call to preach to the Irish who had enslaved him. His *Epistle to Coroticus* and autobiographical *Confession* are the earliest works of British literature, and breathe the spirit of humility and Apostolic Christianity. In an astonishingly short time he succeeded in planting monasteries for men and women throughout the island. And within a few decades of his death Ireland was producing her own native saints, such as the famous Abbess Brigid of Kildare (+522), "the Mary of the Gael".

The Irish Church had certain characteristics that distinguished it from traditional monasticism.

First, the abbots appear to have been more important than the bishops, not in the sacramental sense but in terms of influence within the Church. Thus the many saints of the period were almost all abbots and abbesses, and there is hardly a mention of an Irish bishop after the death of St. Patrick. (An exception to this rule is Bishop Conleth, who lived in St. Brigid's monastery in Kildare.)

A possible explanation of this fact is that many, if not all the abbots were also bishops, which is why the writers of the lives of the holy abbots did not think it necessary to mention their episcopate. Certainly, it seems likely that St. Columba, the Irish Apostle of Scotland (+597) was exercising an episcopal ministry when he ordained the first Orthodox king of Scotland, Aidan Mor... Hieromonk Gorazd (Vopatny) of Charles University, Prague, has suggested that "bishops had a classical leadership role in the Irish Church until approximately the thirties of the 6th century. With the spread of monasticism the whole system of ecclesiastical control was affected. Jurisdiction was exercised not only by bishops whether they were also abbots

⁷⁹² Dalrymple, *From the Holy Mountain*, London: HarperCollins, 2005, pp. 418-419.

Most recently, a papyrus has been found attached to the cover of an early Irish psalter, which is the first tangible proof of links between the Irish and Coptic Churches (Philip Kosloski, "Irish Worker Discovers Ancient Manuscript that Links Irish Church to Egypt", November 30, 2016, http://aleteia.org/2016/11/30/irish-worker-discovers-ancient-manuscript-that-links-irish-church-to-egypt/?utm_campaign=english_page&utm_medium=aleteia_en&utm_source=Facebook#link_time=1480489892).

⁷⁹³ Holland, *Dominion*, London: Abacus, 2019, p. 156.

or not, but also by abbots who were only priests. About one half of the main abbots were bishops and about a half were priests.”⁷⁹⁴

Perhaps because many bishops were also abbots, the Irish Church appears to have been administered on tribal, rather than territorial lines, with abbots ruling extended “monastic families”. Thus St. Columba, who was a member of the royal family of the Northern Irish tribe of Ui Neill, appears to have been the leader of the Ui Neill monks throughout the island.

Secondly, there was a great emphasis in Ireland on *learning* - Irish history, classical literature, and Greek, Latin and Holy Scripture. St. Columbanus of Luxeuil (+615), is even thought to have known Hebrew... Some of the monasteries had schools attached to them with thousands of scholars, such as that of St. Finian, Abbot of Clonard (+552). Once St. Columba visited St. Finian, and was allowed by him to copy onto vellum (cow’s skin) Jerome’s translation of the Holy Scriptures, which differed from the Old Latin translation then in use in Ireland. Unfortunately, this led to a dispute between the two saints over who owned the new manuscript that ended in an Irish Synod exiling St. Columba from Ireland...

The copying of the Holy Scriptures led to the development of the unique illuminated art of the Celtic Churches. Several illuminated Gospels from this period, such as the Lindisfarne Gospel and the Book of Kells, are still in existence. A close study of these Gospels reveals a third peculiarity of the Irish Church – its close cultural connection with the Coptic Church of Egypt. Thus the interlacing pattern of the illuminations in Irish manuscripts, as well as the way in which men and animals are drawn, and even the pigments used in drawing them, have been traced to Coptic Egypt, as have the architecture of Irish churches and the “beehive” construction of Irish monastic cells.

Scholars have detected both Greek and Coptic influences on the language and liturgical practices of the Irish. Thus the Great Doxology in Mattins in the Irish Church followed the Greek practice exactly, and Greek words such as “Synaxis” and “Archimandrite” were in common use. However, the Irish word for a deserted place suitable for hesychasm, usually an uninhabited island, is *disert*, a Coptic term translated as *desert* in modern English.

A third characteristic of the Irish Church was its zeal for missionary work. Now the Irish distinguished between three kinds of monasticism: green, red and white. Green monasticism was conventional asceticism, fasting and prayer. Red monasticism was martyrdom for Christ’s sake. White monasticism was exile from one’s native land for Christ’s sake and for the sake of the unbaptized pagans.

St. Columba was the first to undertake white monasticism, albeit involuntarily. He and twelve monks settled on the Scottish island of Iona and proceeded to evangelize

⁷⁹⁴ Hieromonk Gorazd, private communication; John Ryan, *Irish Monasticism*.

the whole of North-Western Scotland.⁷⁹⁵ After him, St. Columbanus travelled from Bangor in Ireland to France, Switzerland and Italy. Several of the monasteries founded by him and his disciples are still in existence, such as St. Gall in Switzerland and Bobbio in Italy. According to the French medievalist Jacques Le Goff, “Over the sixth and seventh centuries Ireland ‘exported’ about 115 holy men to Germany, forty-five to France, forty-four to England, thirty-six to the territory of what is now Belgium, twenty-five to Scotland, and thirteen to Italy.”⁷⁹⁶

We also know that there were Irish priests at one time in Iceland, and the ninth-century *Life* of St. Brendan the Navigator suggests that he crossed the Atlantic many centuries before Columbus. And indeed, archaeologists have claimed to find Celtic inscriptions as far afield as Valaam in Russia, West Virginia and Newfoundland. Thus the Irish monks were the first globalists in Christian history. They were at the same time the most isolated and the most “Catholic”, in the sense of “universalist”, of Christians...

But the greatest achievement of Irish mission was probably the re-evangelization of Southern Scotland and Northern England, which had been conquered by the pagan Angles and Saxons. A mission led by St. Aidan, the first bishop of Lindisfarne (+635), set out from Iona and converted the North English kingdoms of Northumbria and Deira. The whole region became culturally a province of the Scottish-Irish Church,

⁷⁹⁵ According to St. Adomnan’s *Life of Columba* (seventh century), they encountered the Loch Ness monster on the way. St. Columba’s mission linked up with that of his friend St. Kentigern, bishop of Glasgow, whose influence was felt as far as the Lake District in North-West England.

⁷⁹⁶ Le Goff, in Archpriest Vladislav Tsylin, “Irish Monasticism and the Paschal Controversy”, *Orthodox Christianity*, March 30, 2018, <http://orthochristian.com/111809.html>.

50. THE WESTERN KINGDOMS: (6) ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

While the Celts were preserving the faith in the north and the west of the British Isles, the south and east, the heart of the old Roman province of Britain, had been overrun by the pagan Anglo-Saxons. By the end of the sixth century, Old Rome, restored to ecclesiastical and political unity with New Rome, was recovering its power and influence in the West. The crucial figure in this revival was Pope Gregory I – “the Great”, as he is known in the West, “the Dialogist”, as he is known in the East. As well as restoring the power and influence of the papacy throughout continental Western Europe, he determined on recovering Britain, “the Roman island”, where the heirs of Christian Rome had been exiled to the West or absorbed into the pagan Anglo-Saxon settlements that dominated most of the island.⁷⁹⁷ In 597 he sent a band of 40 Roman monks led by St. Augustine, first archbishop of Canterbury, to England with the specific task of restoring Roman-ness, *Romanitas* to what had been, and now definitely was not, “the Roman island”.

In 597 St. Gregory sent a band of forty Roman monks, led, as we have seen, by St. Augustine of Canterbury, to England to convert the Anglo-Saxons. The Roman missionaries tried hard to reconstruct the few bridges that connected the land with its Romano-British past, heading straight for the former Roman centres such as Canterbury and York, London and Dorchester. Thus three churches in Kent were built over late Roman mausoleums; the memory of the first British martyr Alban was faithfully kept at Verulamium; and the first wooden church in York was built in the middle of the vast Roman *praetorium* where St. Constantine had been hailed as emperor in 306.⁷⁹⁸

Place-names in “eccles-”, coming from the Brittonic **ecles*, “a church” (ultimately from the Greek *ecclesia*), in some parts of Southern Scotland, the Midlands and East Anglia probably indicate the continuity of church life there from Romano-British into Anglo-Saxon times.⁷⁹⁹ In general, however, the missionaries found a virtual cultural *tabula rasa* amid pagans who knew next to nothing about Rome.⁸⁰⁰ This makes the enthusiastic embrace by the English of *Romanitas*, both in its religious and political aspects, the more remarkable. Thus by the 680s the last English kingdom, Sussex, had been converted to the faith. Thereafter references to paganism in the sources are remarkably few.⁸⁰¹

The enthusiasm of the English for Christianity may be explained by the fact that, unlike the other Germanic tribes who, for generations before accepting the faith, had been settled within the boundaries of the Empire, they were newcomers whose conversion to *Romanitas*, the world of Roman Christendom, was the stronger in that it

⁷⁹⁷ Trefor Jones, *The English Saints: East Anglia*, Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1999, pp. 13-21.

⁷⁹⁸ Richard Fletcher, *The Conversion of Europe*, London: HarperCollins, 1997, p. 8.

⁷⁹⁹ John Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 70-71, 29-30.

⁸⁰⁰ “Augustine of Canterbury began his mission with an almost clean slate” (Blair, *op. cit.*, p. 25). Nevertheless, many Byzantine finds have been found by archaeologists in Anglo-Saxon England. See Dr. Caitlin Green, “A Very Long Way from Home: Early Byzantine Finds at the Far Ends of the World”, <http://www.caitlingreen.org/2017/03/a-very-long-way-from-home.html?m=1>, March 21, 2017.

⁸⁰¹ Blair, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

was fresher, less hindered by historical hatreds. They had been called by God from darkness into light by Pope Gregory and his disciples; and their gratitude to St. Gregory, "the Apostle of the English", was boundless. As we read in the earliest work of English hagiography, a monk of Whitby's *Life of St. Gregory*: "When all the apostles, leading their Churches with them, and each of the teachers of separate races, present them to the Lord on Judgement Day in accord with Gregory's opinion, we believe he will wondrously lead us, that is, the English nation, taught by him through the grace of God, to the Lord."⁸⁰²

From that time English men and women of all classes and conditions poured across the Channel in a well-beaten path to the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul in Rome (to whom almost all the English cathedrals were dedicated).⁸⁰³ English missionaries such as St. Boniface of Germany and St. Willibrord of Holland worked as the legates of the Roman Popes. And the voluntary tax known as "Peter's Pence" was paid by the English to the Roman see even during the Viking invasions, when it was the English themselves who were in need of alms.

Of all the pagan Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of England in the sixth century, the one most ready to accept the Christian Faith was undoubtedly that of Kent. Being nearest to the continent, it already had considerable knowledge of, and intercourse with, Frankish Christian civilization. Moreover, King Aethelbert was married to a Frankish Christian princess, Bertha, who had brought with her a Frankish bishop, Liutprand. So it was not with hostility that King Aethelbert received Augustine and his monks; he gave them food, shelter, the freedom to preach and baptize, and a Romano-British church dedicated to the Gallic St. Martin within the walls of his capital, Canterbury. Soon the holy life of the Roman monks began to bear fruit. And the many miracles they performed brought the king, too, to repentance and Holy Baptism, which took place on the Feast of Pentecost, June 9, 597.⁸⁰⁴

The Roman monks were not simply renewing what had already been a most important element in British history – the relationship with Rome: they were also rekindling those elements of Orthodox Christianity and Orthodox Christian Autocracy which, while never completely destroyed by the Anglo-Saxon invasions, were nevertheless in danger of being destroyed, at any rate in the east of the island. They made "the Roman island" Roman again – if not part of the Roman Empire, at least part of *Romanitas*. And while Britain always remained "different" because of its long separation from the Roman Empire, it returned to its Roman roots with joy and gratitude.

⁸⁰² C.W. Jones, *Saints' Lives and Chronicles in Early England*, Cornell, 1947.

⁸⁰³ A whole quarter of the city was called "Il Borgo Saxono" because of the large number of English pilgrims it accommodated. Peter Llewellyn, (*Rome in the Dark Ages*, London: Constable, 1996, p. 254) writes that, during the pontificate of Pope Pascal (early ninth century) "the English colony of the Borgo, near St. Peter's, which followed its native custom of building in wood, lost its houses in a disastrous fire, the first of many to sweep the crowded quarter around the basilica. Pascal, roused at midnight, hurried barefoot to the scene and supervised the fire-fighting operations himself; ever solicitous of pilgrims, he granted the Saxon community estates and money for rebuilding, with woods for a supply of timber."

⁸⁰⁴ On the very same day, in the north-western Scottish island of Iona, Columba, perhaps the greatest of the Celtic saints, died.

On November 16, 597, Augustine was consecrated to the episcopate in France by Archbishop Virgilius of Arles and other French bishops with the blessing of Pope Gregory, although another source indicates that he was probably consecrated by bishops in the ecclesiastical provinces of Trier and Rheims. Then he returned to Canterbury, where he was received with great joy by the king, who promptly gave him his palace as a monastery and archiepiscopal residence. That Christmas more than 10,000 Englishmen received Holy Baptism.

On receiving the news, St. Gregory wrote to St. Eulogius, Patriarch of Alexandria: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of goodwill, because a grain of wheat, falling into the earth, has died that it might not reign in heaven alone - even He by Whose death we live, by Whose weakness we are made strong, through Whose love we seek in Britain for brethren whom we know not, by Whose gift we find them whom without knowing we sought."

Augustine now cleansed the pagan temple in which the king had celebrated his idolatrous rites, and rededicated it in the name of the holy Martyr Pancras. During the first Liturgy there, the building was violently shaken as if by an earthquake, as the devil struggled against his expulsion. The ground next to the church became the site of the Monastery of Saints Peter and Paul. It was consecrated on Christmas Day, 605, and from 611 it acquired stavropegial status as "the first-born and chief mother of monasteries in England". From the time of St. Dunstan, who dedicated it anew in the second half of the tenth century, it became known as St. Augustine's.

In 599 Augustine sent messengers to Rome to seek the answers to certain pastoral questions from St. Gregory. These messengers were St. Laurence, later Augustine's successor as archbishop, and St. Peter, first abbot of the monastery of Saints Peter and Paul. They came back in 601 with the answers to the questions and several more missionaries, including Saints Mellitus, Justus and Paulinus.

David Starkey writes that "one of the first things Aethelbert did after his conversion was to issue a Law Code, like Justinian and other Christian Roman emperors. But, though the *form* is Roman, the *content* of the Code is wholly Anglo-Saxon and merely sets down in writing the existing law of the folk in their own language, with the necessary adaptations to their new Christian status. Indeed, the Code may be the first document written in English and the story goes that Augustine himself had to devise additional new letters of the alphabet in order to write Anglo-Saxon down. And it is revered: at the top of the document, written in red, it reads: 'These are the dooms [judgements] that King Aethelbert fixed in Augustine's days.'"⁸⁰⁵

Augustine made successful missionary journeys to Dorset and to Yorkshire, and also made contact with the British bishops of Wales. On his return from the West, he baptized King Sebert of Essex and consecrated St. Mellitus as bishop of Sebert's capital, London. In the same year he consecrated St. Justus as bishop of Rochester. Then just before his death he consecrated St. Laurence as his successor at Canterbury.

⁸⁰⁵ Starkey, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

These consecrations by a single bishop were blessed by St. Gregory as an exception to the apostolic rule that bishops should be consecrated by no less than two bishops, because of the fact that there were no other canonical bishops in Britain.

Having consolidated the Church in Kent, Augustine set off to bring the Gospel to other parts of England. He was a very tall and strong man, and the miraculous signs that accompanied him were similarly great. Thus near York he healed a beggar who had been suffering from blindness and paralysis; he baptized vast numbers of people in the River Swale in Yorkshire; and on leaving York he healed a leper.

From Yorkshire Augustine headed for Wales, in order to meet the British bishops whose fathers had fled to there to escape the invasions of the pagan Anglo-Saxons. Augustine had been given authority over the British bishops by St. Gregory; but the task of uniting with the British did not prove to be easy. The first obstacle was that the British, having suffered much from the Anglo-Saxons, were not willing to join with Augustine in trying to convert them to the Faith. The second obstacle was that as a result of their isolation from the Church on the continent, the British Church had slipped into practices which were at variance with the apostolic traditions.

One of these was that they sometimes allowed Pascha to be celebrated on the 14th day of Nisan, whereas the Council of Nicaea had decreed that it should never be celebrated before the 15th. Another was that they performed the sacrament of Baptism in an irregular (but unknown) manner. Augustine stipulated three conditions for union: that the British should correct these two irregularities; and that they should cooperate with him in converting the Saxons. However, the British refused to concede any of these points. In particular, they refused to help in converting the Saxons, whom Gildas had called "hateful to God and man".

At length, Augustine suggested that they pray to God to reveal His will in the following manner: "Let a sick person be brought near, and by whosoever's prayers he will be healed, let the faith and works of that one be judged devout before God and an example for men to follow." The British reluctantly agreed, and a blind Saxon was brought before them. The British clergy tried, but failed to heal him. But through Augustine's prayers he received recovery of his sight. The British were impressed, but pleaded for time in which to discuss these questions with their elders before coming to a decision.

Augustine travelled to his second meeting with the British accompanied by Saints Mellitus and Justus. The British were represented by seven bishops and Abbot Dinot of the great monastery of Bangor, which had well over a thousand monks. Before the meeting they had approached a hermit and asked him how they should answer Augustine. He said that if Augustine rose when they entered, this showed that he was humble and should be obeyed. If he did not rise, then they should not accede to him. Therefore when Augustine did not rise at their entrance, the British became angry and refused both to accept his stipulations and to acknowledge him as their archbishop.

As the meeting broke up, St. Augustine prophesied that since the British had refused to cooperate in the conversion of the pagan English they would themselves be

put to sword by the same English - a prophecy which was fulfilled a few years later when the pagan King Aethelfrid of Northumbria defeated the British in battle at Chester and killed 1200 of the monks of Bangor.

Now that the Welsh had refused to cooperate in converting the pagan Anglo-Saxons, the mission field was left, on the one hand, to the Romans, who came from the south and east and concentrated on the old Roman towns, and on the other hand, to the Irish, who came from the north and west and concentrated on the country districts. For the Irish did not have the Britons' hatred of the English, and some had been converted to the Roman-Byzantine Paschalion. One of those was the Holy Abbot Cummian (+662), who in 634 wrote to the Abbot of a Scottish monastery with considerable irony: "Rome is mistaken; Jerusalem is mistaken; Antioch is mistaken; the whole world is mistaken; the British and Irish alone hold the truth!"

Hieromonk Enoch writes: "This is very similar to the language of St. Vincent of Lerins in the *Commonitory* which appeals to all the ancient Apostolic Sees and tradition of the consensus of the Fathers on these questions. St. Cummian does a number of things. 1. He appeals to multiple Apostolic Sees and a universal tradition to determine a disputed question. 2. Although St. Patrick had left instructions that, if an Irish Synod could come to no conclusion on some disputed point, the matter was to be taken to the See of Old Rome, we note that, this was not interpreted simply in the sense of dictatorial fiat. It seems more to have been an issue of 'last resort'. 3. Even after the letter from Old Rome in the 620s encouraging the acceptances of the Alexandrian Paschal cycle, the Irish still held a Synod to discuss the issue. If it had simply all been about the fiat of Rome, what was the point in holding a Synod? What's the point about discussing it at the Synod with a debate? And, why didn't the Southern Irish episcopate sever communion with the Irish in the North and Scotland, for supposedly 'disobeying' the Pope?"

The Roman and Irish missionaries met in the northern English kingdom of Northumbria, which had been under the jurisdiction of the Scottish-Irish Church since the days of St. Aidan, bishop of Lindisfarne and his spiritual son, the Northumbrian Martyr-King Oswald (+642). But here a problem arose; for King Oswy of Northumbria had been baptised in the Irish Church, following the Celtic calendar, whereas his queen had been baptised in the Roman Church, following the Roman calendar. Displeased that he and his wife were feasting and fasting at different times, the king convened a council of bishops in 664 from both the Roman and Irish traditions in the monastery of Whitby. As a result of this council, it was decided that all the Christians in the kingdom should follow the Roman calendar. A few years later, the Church of England, led by her Greek archbishop, St. Theodore (+691), decreed that all Christians who followed the Celtic calendar were schismatics.

The Synod of Whitby united the Celtic and Roman traditions in the British Isles. Its decision on the calendar was accepted even by most of those Christians who had been brought up in the Celtic traditions. Thus St. Chad, Bishop of Lichfield (+672), consented to have his consecration corrected by St. Theodore, and St. Cuthbert, Bishop of Lindisfarne (+687), whose body was completely incorrupt until the Protestant Reformation, told his monks as he was dying: "Have no communion with those who

err from the Catholic Faith, either by keeping Pascha at the wrong time, or by their perverse life. And know and remember: if of the two evils you are compelled to choose one, I would rather that you take up my bones, and leave these places, to live wherever God may send you, than agree in any way with the wickedness of schismatics, and so place a yoke upon your necks."⁸⁰⁶

However, the Synod was rejected by the Welsh, who went into schism for a century.⁸⁰⁷ Both the Anglo-Saxon and Irish Churches regarded them as schismatics. As an Irish canon put it, "the Britons [of Wales] are... contrary to all men, separating themselves both from the Roman way of life and the unity of the Church".⁸⁰⁸

Again, St. Aldhelm of Sherborne, wrote about them: "Glorifying in the private purity of their own way of life, they detest our communion to such a great extent that they disdain equally to celebrate the Divine offices in church with us and to take course of food at table for the sake of charity. Rather,.. they order the vessels and flagons [used in common with clergy of the Roman Church] to be purified and purged with grains of sandy gravel, or with the dusky cinders of ash.. Should any of us, I mean Catholics, go to them for the purpose of habitation, they do not deign to admit us to the company of their brotherhood until we have been compelled to spend the space of forty days in penance... As Christ truly said: 'Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees; because you make clean the outside of the cup and of the dish'."⁸⁰⁹

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As the English were absorbed into Christian Rome by the Roman missionaries, the symbolism of *Romanitas* reappeared in the English land. Thus St. Gregory compared the newly enlightened King Ethelbert of Kent to St. Constantine and Queen Bertha to St. Helena, and according to Fr. Andrew Phillips they "had, it would seem, actually emulated Constantine. Having made Canterbury over to the Church, they had moved to Reculver, there to build a new palace. Reculver was their New Rome just as pagan Byzantium had become the Christian city of New Rome, Constantinople. Nevertheless, King Ethelbert had retained, symbolically, a royal mint in his 'Old Rome' - symbolically, because it was his treasury, both spiritually and physically. The coins he minted carried a design of Romulus and Remus and the wolf on the Capitol. Ethelbert had entered *Romanitas*, becoming one of those numerous kings who owed allegiance, albeit formal, to the Emperor in New Rome..."⁸¹⁰

⁸⁰⁶ Through the efforts of St. Adomnan and St. Egbert, the great Scottish monastery of Iona eventually accepted the Byzantine Paschalion in 716.

⁸⁰⁷ The Welsh Church remained in schism until Bishop Elbod of Bangor restored the northern Welsh to unity in 768 (the southerners followed in 777). Iona was brought into line early in the eighth century through the efforts of the holy Abbots Egbert and Adomnan. But the problem must have lingered on for a while. For it is recorded that a Welsh delegation visited St. Methodius, patriarch of Constantinople (+847) in order to discuss the calendar question...

⁸⁰⁸ Quoted in A.W. Haddan & W. Stubbs, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1869, 1964, volume I, p. 122.

⁸⁰⁹ *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, translated by Michael Lapidge and Michael Herren, Ipswich: Brewer, 1979, p. 158. The Latin text is in Haddan & Stubbs, *op. cit.*, pp. 202-203.

⁸¹⁰ Phillips, *Orthodox Christianity and the Old English Church*, English Orthodox Trust, 1996, p. 15.

The Romanization of England was greatly aided by the appointment, in 668, of a Greek from Tarsus, St. Theodore, as archbishop of Canterbury. He created a single Church organization and body of canonical law, and convened Councils that formally recognised the Ecumenical Councils and rejected the heresy of Monothelitism. Bishops like SS. Wilfrid, Egwin and Aldhelm strengthened the links with Rome by frequent trips there, and abbots like SS. Benedict Biscop and Ceolfrid imported books, icons and even the chief chanter of the Roman Church to make sure that even in the furthest recesses of the north things were done as the Romans did them.

In Church-State relations, too, the English followed the Roman-Byzantine model. Thus King Ethelbert and Archbishop Augustine (in Kent), King Oswald and Bishop Aidan (in Northumbria), and King Cynegils and Bishop Birinus (in Wessex) enjoyed “symphonic” relations.

A striking example of such “symphony” was to be found in eighth-century Northumbria, where Archbishop Egbert ruled the Church while his brother Edbert ruled the State:

*So then Northumbria was prosperous,
When king and pontiff ruled in harmony,
One in the Church and one in government;
One wore the pall the Pope conferred on him,
And one the crown his fathers wore of old.
One brave and forceful, one devout and kind,
They kept their power in brotherly accord,
Each happy in the other's sure accord.⁸¹¹*

The acceptance of the symphonic pattern of Church-State relations in England may well have been aided by the fact that sacral kingship was a traditional institution among the Germanic tribes even before their conversion to Christianity. With the coming of Christianity, writes Chaney, there was “a separation of royal functions, the sacrificial-priestly role of the Germanic tribal monarch going to the Church hierarchy and that of sacral protector remaining with the king. This separation of power manifested itself not in the obliteration of the religious nature of kingship but in the establishment of a sphere of action by and for the *ecclesia* apart... from that of the *regnum*.”⁸¹²

According to the liberal French Prime Minister François Guizot, this separation of powers was the source and guarantor of one of the most fundamental principles of Christian, and especially English Christian civilization, liberty of conscience. “The separation of temporal and spiritual power is based upon the idea that physical force has neither right nor influence over souls, over conviction, over truth. It flows from

⁸¹¹ Alcuin, *On the Saints of the Church of York*, 11.1250-283; in Stephen Allott, *Alcuin of York*, York: Sessions Book Trust, 1974

⁸¹² Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England*, Manchester University Press, 1970, p. 259.

the distinction established between the world of thought and the world of action, between the world of internal and that of external facts..."⁸¹³

The English Church retained close links with Rome, and Canterbury never made claims for autonomy in the manner of Arles or Ravenna. Nevertheless, the English Church remained *de facto* independent of Rome administratively. Between 669 and 1050, according to Dvorkin, there were 376 episcopal ordinations in England, and not one of them required papal intervention...⁸¹⁴

⁸¹³ Guizot, *History of Civilization in Europe*, London: Penguin, 1997, p. 42.

⁸¹⁴ Dvorkin, *op. cit.*, p. 477. However, papal legates presided at the Council of Chelsea in 786.

51. THE WEST AND THE SACRAMENT OF ROYAL ANOINTING

The rite of royal anointing appears to have originated in the West, although it is not certain where. According to one tradition, Clovis, first Christian king of the Franks, received the sacrament (if it was not in fact the initiatory rite of chrismation) in a miraculous fashion after his baptism by St. Remigius, Archbishop of Rheims, on Christmas Day, 496: "When the moment came for anointing the newly-baptized King with holy Chrism, the Bishop saw that it was lacking. Raising his eyes to Heaven, he implored God to provide it, whereupon a white dove came down from Heaven with a vial of miraculous oil."⁸¹⁵

Early in the sixth century the Italian archbishop Gregory anointed the first Christian King of the South Arabian kingdom of Omir (or Himyar), Abraham, in the presence of St. Elesbaan, king of Ethiopia: "Raising his eyes and mind and hands to heaven, he prayed fervently and for a long time that God, Who knows the life and thoughts of every man, should indicate to him the man who was worthy of the kingdom. During the prayer of the archbishop, the invisible power of the Lord suddenly raised a certain man by the name of Abraham into the air and placed him in front of King Elesbaan. Everyone cried out in awe for a long time: 'Lord, have mercy!' The archbishop said: 'Here is the man whom you demanded should be anointed to the kingdom. Leave him here as king, we shall be of one mind with him, and God will help us in everything.' Great joy filled everyone on beholding the providence of God. Then King Elesbaan took the man Abraham, who had been revealed by God, led him to the temple of the All-Holy Trinity which was in the royal city of Afar, put the royal purple on him and laid the diadem on his head. Then St. Gregory anointed him and the bloodless Sacrifice was offered for the kings and all the people, and both kings communicated in the Divine Mysteries from the hands of the archbishop..."⁸¹⁶

It may be that royal anointing originated in Britain; for St. Gildas, referring to events taking place in the fifth century, wrote: "Kings were anointed [*Ungebantur*] not in God's name, but as being crueller than the rest; before long, they would be killed,

⁸¹⁵ *The Synaxarion*, Convent of the Annunciation of our Lady of Ormylia (Chalkidike), 1998, volume I, October 1, p. 254. Harold Nicolson, tells the story as it was recounted some 300 years later: "On that occasion there was such a crowd in church that the priest who arrived with the holy oil with which the king was to be anointed was unable to push through the throng. The bishop, having no oil available, paused; a state of embarrassed tension descended on the king and the congregation. At that moment a dove fluttered into the cathedral bearing in its beak a *lekythion* or phial of scented oil brought straight from heaven. It was with this sacred oil that Clovis was anointed and the *lekythion* was thereafter preserved in a reliquary shaped like a dove. This precious relic, known as *la sainte Ampoule*, was jealously preserved by succeeding Archbishops of Rheims, who insisted that no French monarch could claim to have been properly anointed unless the ceremony were performed at Rheims and the oil of the *sainte Ampoule* (which had the magic property of renewing itself at every coronation) poured over his head and hands. Even Joan of Arc refused to recognise Charles VII as King of France and always addressed him as Dauphin until he had been anointed at Rheims." (*Monarchy*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962, p. 23)

⁸¹⁶ St. Demetrius of Rostov, *The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints*, House Springs: Chrysostom Press, 2000, vol. IV: December, pp. 364-392.

with no enquiry into the truth, by those who had anointed them, and others still crueller were chosen to replace them.”⁸¹⁷

Not long after this, in 574, the Irish apostle of Scotland, St. Columba, consecrated the first Orthodox King of Scotland, Aidan Mor, who was to become the ancestor of all the Celtic kings of Scotland and, through James VI of Scotland and I of England, of the present British royal family.⁸¹⁸ The seventh-century Abbots of Iona Cummineus Albus and Adomnan both relate how, when the saint was staying “in the island of Hymba [probably Jura], he was in an ecstasy of mind one night and saw an Angel of the Lord who had been sent to him, and who held in his hand a glass book of the Ordination of Kings. The venerable man received it from the Angel’s hand, and at his command began to read it. And when he refused to ordain Aidan as king according to the direction given to him in the book, because he loved his brother Iogenan more, the Angel, suddenly stretching out his hand, struck the saint with a scourge, of which the livid mark remained on his side all the days of his life, and he added these words, saying: ‘Know thou for certain that I am sent to thee by God with this glass book, that according to the words which thou hast read in it, thou mayest ordain Aidan to the kingship – and if thou art not willing to obey this command, I shall strike thee again.’ When, then, this Angel of the Lord had appeared on three successive nights, having in his hand that same glass book, and had pressed the same commands of the Lord concerning the ordination of that king, the saint obeyed the Word of the Lord, and sailed across to the isle of Iona where, as he had been commanded, he ordained Aidan as king, Aidan having arrived there at the same time.”⁸¹⁹

St. Columba then went with King Aidan to the Synod of Drumceatt in Ireland, where the independence of Dalriada (that part of Western Scotland colonised by the Irish) was agreed upon in exchange for a pledge of assistance to the mother country in the event of invasion from abroad.

It is significant that these early examples of Christian kingmaking come from parts of the world remote from the centres of Imperial power. Neither Ethiopia nor Scotland had ever been part of the Roman Empire while Britain had fallen away from it. Perhaps it was precisely here, where *Romanitas* was weakest or non-existent, that the Church had to step in to supply political legitimacy through the sacrament, especially since here *a new dynasty in a new Christian land* was being created, which required both the blessing of the former rulers and a special act of the Church.

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⁸¹⁷ St. Gildas, *On the Ruin of Britain*, 21.4.

⁸¹⁸ Lucy Menzies, *Saint Columba of Iona*, Felinlach: J.M.F. Books, 1920, 1992, p. 134; John Marsden, *The Illustrated Columcille*, London: Macmillan, 1991, p. 145.

⁸¹⁹ St. Adomnan of Iona, *Life of Columba*. St. Columba is usually described as an abbot, but he may also have been a bishop. Hieromonk Gorazd (Vopatryny) of Charles University, Prague, has suggested, on the basis of John Ryan’s *Irish Monasticism*, that “bishops had a classical leadership role in the Irish Church until approximately the thirties of the 6th century. With the spread of monasticism the whole system of ecclesiastical control was affected. Jurisdiction was exercised not only by bishops whether they were also abbots or not, but also by abbots who were only priests. About one half of the main abbots were bishops and about a half were priests.” (private communication, November 7, 2012)

In continental Europe, if we exclude the doubtful case of Clovis, the sacrament of royal anointing first appeared in Spain. A possible reason for this is that Spain lacked a stable monarchy, and the sacrament may have been seen as helping to supply stability. Thus Collins writes that in the first half of the seventh century, “principles by which legitimacy of any king could be judged, other than sheer success in holding onto his throne against all comers, seem to be conspicuously lacking. Thus Witteric had deposed and killed Liuva II in 603, Witteric had been murdered in 610, Sisebut’s son Reccared II was probably deposed by Swinthila in 621, Swinthila was certainly deposed by Sisenand in 631, Tulga by Chindaswinth in 642. Ephemeral kings, such as Iudila, who managed to strike a few coins in Baetica and Lusitania in the early 630s, also made their bids for power.”⁸²⁰

The only generally recognized authority that could introduce order into this chaos was the Church. And so, probably toward the middle of the seventh century, the Orthodox Church in Spain introduced the rite of royal anointing. From now on, kings would not only be *called* “kings by the grace of God”, they would be *seen* to be such by the visible bestowal of sacramental grace at the hands of the archbishop.

Moreover, paradoxically, it gave some kind of justification for the deposition of kings. For, as King writes, “they never talked of deposition, and it was the fiction of abdication to which they resorted when Swinthila was in fact toppled by revolt. The introduction of the Old Testament rite of royal anointing, perhaps in 631 to make it visibly and ceremonially clear that Swinthila’s usurping successor ruled by God’s favour, confirmed and buttressed the loftiness of the monarchical status.”⁸²¹

In 672 King Wamba was anointed by the archbishop of Toledo.⁸²² The ceremony was described by St. Julian of Toledo: “When he had arrived there, where he was to receive the *vexilla* of the holy unction, in the praetorian church, that is to say the church of Saints Peter and Paul, he stood resplendent in his regalia in front of the holy altar and, as the custom is, recited the creed to the people. Next, on his bended knees the oil of blessing was poured onto his head by the hand of the blessed bishop Quiricus, and the strength of the benediction was made clear, for at once this sign of salvation appeared. For suddenly from his head, where the oil had first been poured on, a kind of vapour, similar to smoke, rose upon the form of a column, and from the very top of this a bee was seen to spring forth, which sign was undoubtedly a portent of his future good fortune.”⁸²³

It was probably from Spain that the rite of the anointing of kings was introduced into France.⁸²⁴ And after Pope Stephen anointed the Frankish King Pepin in 754 the rite became standard practice in kingmaking throughout the West. Thus in 781 Pepin’s

⁸²⁰ Roger Collins, “Julian of Toledo and the Royal Succession in Late Seventh-Century Spain”, in P.H. Sawyer & I.N. Wood, *Early Medieval Kingship*, University of Leeds, 1979, p. 47.

⁸²¹ King, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

⁸²² Wickham (*op. cit.*, p. 130) regards this as a “novelty” introduced by Wamba himself.

⁸²³ St. Julian, in Collins, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-42.

⁸²⁴ Louth, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

successor, Charlemagne, had two of his sons anointed by Pope Hadrian as kings of Aquitaine and Italy. And in 786 King Offa of Mercia had his son Egfrith anointed.

It was some time, however, before anointing came to be seen as *constitutive* of true kingship. As in Rome and Byzantium, western kings who were raised to the throne by election or acclamation only were not considered illegitimate; it was simply that anointing added an extra authority and sacred character to the monarchy. The extra authority and grace provided by the sacrament of anointing produced tangible results: in Spain, Francia and England the introduction of anointing, accompanied by stern conciliar warnings “not to touch the Lord’s Anointed”, led to a reduction in regicides and rebellions and a strengthening of monarchical power. In Spain, this process came to an abrupt end in 711, when most of the peninsula was conquered by the Arab Muslims. In Western Francia (modern France), it was brought to an end towards the end of the ninth century by the Vikings, in spite of the efforts of such champions of royal power (and opponents of papal despotism) as Archbishop Hincmar of Rheims; and France did not develop a powerful monarchy until the twelfth century. But in Eastern Francia (modern Germany) and in England, the monarchy survived and put down deep roots.

Janet Nelson writes: “If relatively many reigning Merovingians and no Carolingians were assassinated, this can hardly be explained simply in terms of the protective effect of anointing for the latter dynasty, at least in its earlier period. More relevant here are such factors as the maintenance of a fairly restrictive form of royal succession (and the Carolingians’ abandonment of polygamy must soon have narrowed the circle of royals) and the growth of a clerically-fostered ideology of Christian kingship.”⁸²⁵

However, all these factors were related. Once it became accepted that the Church had an important part to play in kingmaking through the sacrament of anointing, it also became natural for the Church to have a say in deciding who was the best candidate for the throne, and then in administering a coronation-oath in which the king swore to protect the Church...

Theoretically, too, the Church could refuse to sanction a king, and even lead the people in rebellion if he did not rule rightly. Thus St. Isidore of Seville said: “You will be king if you act rightly; if you do not, you will not be”, which contains a play on the words *rex*, “king”, and *recte*, “rightly”,⁸²⁶ and an implicit threat on the part of the Church to withhold recognition of the king in certain circumstances. Moreover, in the Latin version of Justinian’s famous *Sixth Novella*, there is also a clear indication that, for the symphony of powers to be effective, the king must rule rightly (*recte*).

Joseph Canning writes: “The specific contribution which the anointing rituals made to the development of the idea of theocratic kingship appeared clearly in Hincmar’s *ordines*. Anointing had become the constitutive element in the king-making process: it

⁸²⁵ Nelson, J.L. “Inauguration Rituals”, in Nelson, J.L. *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe*, London: Hambledon Press, 1986, p. 59.

⁸²⁶ St. Isidore, *Etymologiae*, 9.3.4, col. 342.

was the bishops who as mediators of divine grace made the king. There was thus a relative downgrading of other, traditional aspects of inauguration: the consent of the great men of the kingdom, enthronement and the feast. The episcopal anointing represented the third stage of the elaboration of the notion of kingship by the grace of God, the first being the Pauline view that all rulership was divinely sanctioned, and the second that the monarch derived his power directly from God. Anointing transformed kingship into another, higher dimension, because such unction was understood to be a sacrament. There was thereby involved a crucial change in the meaning attributed to the 'grace' by which the medieval king ruled. Whereas previously, *gratia* in this context meant 'favour', thus indicating the source of his power (the possibly sacramental nature of eighth-century unction remains obscure), now *gratia* also definitely signified 'supernatural grace' infused into the king through the mediation of the bishops in order to enable him to perform his sacred ministry of rulership over clergy and laity within his kingdom understood as a church in the wider sense."⁸²⁷

St. Constantine had called himself "the bishop of those outside", his ministry being understood as analogous to that of a bishop, but extending beyond the jurisdiction of any bishop into the pagan world and therefore subject to the Church in a moral, but not in a jurisdictional sense. In the West by the ninth century, however, when the boundaries of the kingdom and the Church were almost coterminous, the king's ministry was seen as almost entirely *within* the Church, which perception was reinforced by his anointing *by* the Church, and by the fact that the symbolism of the rite, including the staff and ring and vestments, were almost identical to that of episcopal consecration. This served to increase the king's sacred character; but it also enabled the Church to intervene more decisively both in the kingmaking process and in the definition of what the king could and could not do, and, if necessary, in his deposition...

There was a contractual element between Germanic kings and their subjects. Thus "in 843 Charles the Bald swore to uphold the honour of both his clerical and lay *fideles*, and the respective laws under which they lived, whereas they swore to sustain the honour of the king". And in 858 he promised "'like a faithful king' to honour and protect the persons and legal position of his *fideles*".⁸²⁸ What was new from the ninth century onwards was the increased role played by the Church in this process, both in that protecting the Church's rights was considered the *most* important part of the king's obligations and in that it was the Church that administered the coronation oath. Also new was the hint, as we have seen, that the bishops might depose the king if he broke his oath, as Charles the Bald implicitly admitted at his coronation in 869, when he said that he could be expelled from his consecration "by no one, at least without hearing and judgement by the bishops, by whose ministry I was consecrated king".⁸²⁹

⁸²⁷ Canning, *A History of Western Political Thought, 300-1450*, London and New York: Routledge, 1996, p. 55.

⁸²⁸ Canning, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

⁸²⁹ Canning, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

Now the fact that the king was anointed by the bishop did not mean that the king was thereby subject to the bishop, any more than Christ's baptism at the hands of St. John the Baptist meant that He was subject to the Baptist.⁸³⁰ Nevertheless, the hint was there, and in 833 Louis the Pious, Charlemagne's son, was in fact forced to abdicate by his bishops, even though he had been anointed by the Pope himself. Again, Archbishop Hincmar of Rheims, "subjected more than one king to harsh criticism, to penance and even to excommunication"⁸³¹ As he put it in 881: "So much greater is the responsibility of the priesthood in that they must render account in God's judgement even for the very kings of men, and by so much greater are the rank and prestige of bishops than of kings because kings are consecrated to their kingship by bishops, but bishops cannot be consecrated by kings."⁸³² Unlike later popes like Gregory VII, Hincmar was not trying to weaken monarchy, but to strengthen and purify it; for he saw that Christian society in his troubled age could not survive without the sacred power of the anointed kings...

⁸³⁰ Archimandrite Pantaleimon, "On the Royal Martyrs", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 31, N 4, July-August, 1981, p. 22.

⁸³¹ Janet Nelson, "Hincmar of Rheims: Kingship, Law and Liturgy", in *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe*, pp. 169-170.

⁸³² Hincmar, in Janet Nelson, "National Synods, Kingship and Royal Anointing", in *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe*, p. 253.

52. ARMENIA AND GEORGIA

In the Eastern Empire religious differences were older and deeper than in the West, and unity proved much more difficult to achieve...The degree of identity achieved by Justinian between the Orthodox Church and the Orthodox Empire was striking, but it was not, of course, complete. Not only were there Roman citizens who were not Orthodox, such as the Monophysite Copts and Syrians: there were also large bodies of Orthodox that remained outside the bounds of the Empire – for example, the Celts in the West, the Georgians in the East and the Arabs and Ethiopians in the South. Moreover, friction continued between the nations of the Byzantine commonwealth.

Something similar to what we now call nationalism, but much more closely linked to religious disputes, is certainly evident in antiquity. Cases in which national hatred has been suspected to lie beneath religious separatism in the East are the Donatist Berbers, the Nestorian Assyrians and Persians and the Monophysite Copts, Syrians and Armenians.

Perhaps the clearest example is that of the Armenians, who lay claim, with some justice, to having been the first Christian national state under their first king, Tiridates, in the early fourth century. In the middle of the fifth century, in the wake of the Emperor Marcian's refusal to support an Armenian revolt against Persia, the Armenian Church ignored and then rejected the Council of Chalcedon. From this time it was alienated from Orthodoxy, but not completely from Romanity; permanent estrangement between Armenia and its Orthodox neighbours did not take place until after the Muslim conquest.

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During the great doctrinal controversies of the fifth century, the newly converted people of the Georgians remained faithful to Chalcedonian Orthodoxy. In 482, under King Vakhtang, they rebelled from the Persians and aligned themselves with the Orthodox Byzantines.

"The holy and right-believing king Vakhtang I [446-502] ascended the throne of Kartli at the age of fifteen. At that time Kartli was continually being invaded by the Persians from the south and by the Ossetians from the north. The situation was no better in western Georgia: the Byzantines had captured all the lands from Egrisi to Tsikhegoji.

"After his coronation, the young King Vakhtang summoned his court and addressed his dedicated servants with great wisdom. He said that the sorrowful circumstances in which the nation had found itself were a manifestation of God's anger at the sins of the king and the people. He called upon everyone to struggle in unity and selflessness on behalf of the Faith and motherland.

"King Vakhtang led a victorious campaign against the Ossetians, freed the captive princess (his older sister), and signed several treaties with the Caucasian mountain tribes to secure their cooperation in the struggle against foreign conquerors. Then he

carried out another campaign in western Georgia, freed that region from the Byzantines, reinforced the authority of King Gubaz, and returned in triumph to Kartli.

“King Vakhtang was remarkable in faith, wisdom, grace, virtue, and appearance (he towered above all others at a stately seven feet ten inches). He spent many nights in prayer and distributed alms to the poor, in this way dedicating his life to God. King Vakhtang could fight tirelessly in battle. Vested in armor and fully armed, he could carry a war-horse on his shoulders and climb from Mtskheta to the Armazi Fortress in the mountains outside the city. On foot he could outrun a deer. The holy king was judicious in politics, displayed great composure, and preserved a sense of calm even when critical decisions needed to be made.

“On the brow of Vakhtang’s military helmet was depicted a wolf, and on the back, a lion. Catching a glimpse of the helmet with the wolf and lion, the Persians would cry out to one another: ‘Dar’ az gurgsar!’ (‘Beware of the wolf’s head!’) This was the source of King Vakhtang’s appellation Gorgasali.’

“During King Vakhtang’s reign the Georgian Church was first recognized as autocephalous. When the holy king banished the pagan fire-worshippers from Georgia, he also sent a certain Bishop Michael – who was inclined to the Monophysite heresy, which had been planted in Georgia by the Persians – to Constantinople to be tried by the patriarch. The bishop had disgracefully cursed the king and his army for rising up against the Monophysites. In fact, he was so infuriated that when King Vakhtang approached him to receive his blessing, he kicked him in the mouth and broke several of his teeth.

“The patriarch of Constantinople subsequently defrocked Bishop Michael and sent him to a monastery to repent.

“More importantly perhaps, the patriarch and the Byzantine emperor then sent to the patriarch of Antioch several clergymen whom King Vakhtang had chosen for consecration. In Antioch the patriarch consecrated twelve of these clergymen as bishops and enthroned a certain Petre as the first Catholicos of Georgia.

“Vakhtang fulfilled the will of Holy King Mirian by founding the Georgian Holy Cross Monastery in Jerusalem. In addition, he replaced a wooden church that had been built in Mtskheta at the time of St. Nino with a church made of stone. During his reign several new dioceses were founded. King Vakhtang built a cathedral in Nikozi (Inner Kartli) and established a new diocese there, to which he translated the holy relics of the Protomartyr Razhden.

“King Vakhtang built fortresses at Tukhari, Artanuji, and Akhiza; founded monasteries in Klarjeti at Artanuji, Mere, Shindobi, and Akhiza; and established many other strongholds, churches, and monasteries as well. He built a new royal residence in Ujarma and laid the foundations of the new Georgian capital, Tbilisi. His political creed consisted of three parts: an equal union of the Georgian Church with the Byzantine Church, national independence, and the unity of the Church and nation.

“In the year 502 the sixty-year-old King Vakhtang was obliged to defend his country for the last time. In a battle with the Persians he was fatally wounded when a poisoned arrow pierced him under the arm. Before he died, King Vakhtang summoned the clergy, his family and his court and urged them to be strong in the Faith and to seek death for Christ’s sake in order to gain eternal glory.”

However, “by the time of Holy King Vakhtang’s repose, the country was again embroiled in a struggle against the Persians, resulting in the division of eastern and western Georgia between the Persians and the Byzantines.”⁸³³

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Early in the sixth century, the Mother of God appeared to an ascetic living in the desert of Syria called John of Zedazneni. She ordered him “to go with twelve disciples to Georgia... in order to confirm Christianity there and also sow the seed of the monastic tradition. After having appointed a replacement to guide the rest of his disciples, he chose, under the guidance of an angel, twelve of them to accompany him: Shio, David, Anthony, Thaddeus, Stephen, Isidore, Michael, Pyrrhus, Zenon, Jesse, Joseph and Abibus. After having received the blessing of Saint Symeon the Younger (521-97), they began their journey on foot, clad in tunics of skins and confiding themselves to Providence for their subsistence. Arriving in Georgia, they were welcomed by Archbishop Eulabius – who had been told of their coming by an angel – in the presence of his clergy and of a large crowd. As soon as they had received the primate’s blessing, Saint John began to speak the Georgian language, which had been completely unknown to him, with ease. The Syrian monks immediately began preaching, but it was mainly by their ascetic life and their charity that they showed the people the model of evangelical perfection. The faithful came from the whole countryside to be taught and blessed by the monks. The sick were brought to them, and they healed them with their prayer. King Parsman VI (541-53) also visited them frequently to ask their advice.

“The holy fathers visited all the places in which Saint Nino [the enlightener of Georgia] had preached, feeling that she was alive at their side; they then prayed God that He would show them where they could make a permanent foundation. The Lord showed Saint John an inaccessible cave on Mount Zaden, some way from the capital Mtskheta, and the other fathers built themselves huts of branches in the surroundings. By his super-human fasts and night-long prayers, John succeeded in driving away the demons that were infesting the area, which had formerly been consecrated to idol-worship, and he shone with such light that the whole Church of Georgia was

⁸³³ Riassophor Monk Adrian, in Archpriest Zakaria Machitadze, *Lives of the Georgian Saints*, Platina, Ca.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2006, pp. 19-20.

“All of Georgia mourned the passing of the king. His body was moved from the royal residence in Ujarma to Mtskheta, to Svetitskhoveli Cathedral, which he had himself built. There he was buried with great honor.

Some fifteen centuries later, with the blessing of Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II, an addition was built onto the Sioni Patriarchal Cathedral in Holy King Vakhtang Gorgasali’s name, and a cathedral in his honor was founded in the city of Rustavi.

illuminated from that mountain. Devout people opened a path through the forest that covered the mountain, and crowds soon began to hurry to the saints to find grace and heavenly consolation.

“Some time later, Archbishop Eulabius went to Mount Zaden and chose Abibus and Jesse for consecration to the sees of Dtzikatni and Nekressi, which had just become vacant. Abibus’ diocese was later occupied by the Persians, who tried to force the Christians to worship fire. The holy Bishop then ran forward, threw water on the sacred fire and put it out. The furious Persians seized him, beat him savagely and stoned him. Saint Jesse was seen to be an extraordinary wonder-worker, and he changed the course of a river with his pastoral staff.

“On Mount Zaden, many candidates for the monastic life presented themselves to Saint John, and the desert became a veritable monastic city. One night, the All-Holy appeared to the man of God, together with Saint Nino, and ordered him to send his disciples throughout the whole of Georgia to teach men how to be pleasing to God. Archbishop Eulabius recommended to the missionaries that each take a monk as companion. Only Saint Shio, out of love for the solitary life, refused to go and settled in a cave near Mtskheta, where a pigeon took him food and where he could, without witnesses, shed torrents of tears before God day and night. Some time later, however, a powerful personage at court called Evagrius asked to become a monk under his direction. Their fame spread so widely that they attracted the king’s favour, and Saint Shio finally gathered two thousand monks under his direction. Thanks to royal donations, his desert became covered with churches, and the saint worked many miracles for the people.

“At the time he sent his other disciples as missionaries, Saint John taught them how to preach in imitation of the Apostles, and they, guided on their way by the Holy Spirit, acquired the power to ‘tread on serpents and scorpions’, and to thwart all the devil’s devices. They gave themselves to trials and afflictions with a good heart, taking no account of the difficulties of the climate or the hostility of the pagans in their bearing of the Good News of salvation. Strengthened by the power of their spiritual father and the grace of the Holy Spirit, they communicated the ardour of their faith to the people, throwing down the altars and temples of the idolaters, exhorting their flock to purity of conduct and bringing many souls to the angelic life.

“Saint John stayed on Mount Zaden, with only Deacon Elias to assist him in his old age, and continued to confront the demons’ assaults with courage. He sent all those who wanted to lead the monastic life to the monastery founded by Saint Thaddeus at the foot of the mountain. He visited the other disciples, though, dispersed as they were around the country to be apostles of the monastic life, and strengthened them in their struggles by reminding them of the account they must render on the day of their encounter with Christ...”⁸³⁴

⁸³⁴ Hieromonk Makarios of Simonos Petra, *The Synaxarion*, Ormylia: Convent of the Annunciation, 2005, volume 5: May, June, pp. 81-83.

The Georgian Catholicos Kvirion II (r. 595-610)," writes Donald Rayfield, "after writing to Pope Gregory I to clarify doctrinal points, defiantly declared Kartli [Central Georgia] as dyophysite [Orthodox] Christian, that is professing Christ's dual nature, divine and human. This was one of the most fateful decisions ever taken in Kartli: it permanently split Kartli from its former ally, Armenia. Armenia had chosen monophysitism... in order to remain Christian and at peace with Persia. {For} Dyophysitism, and thus adherence to the Council of Chalcedon, was in 608 a declaration of alliance with Byzantium. Until 604 the rift between monophysites and dyophysites had caused no dissension in the Caucasus. A council of Caucasian Churches in the Armenian ecclesiastical capital of Dvin in 506 accepted Emperor Zeno's tolerant [but heretical] *Henotikon*. In 525 Procopius called the Iberians the most orthodox dyophysites in the Persian empire; in 551 the Armenian Church voted for monophysitism, and began converting Caucasian Albanians from dyophysitism (leading to the extinction of the Caucasian Albanian written language. For their scriptures were dyophysite, heretical to Armenians, stressing Christ's full incarnation, not reducing the humanity to mere 'clothing in human form': Caucasian Albanians henceforth heard [the Divine Liturgy] in Armenian.) The Armenians found Catholicos Kvirion II's declaration especially offensive because he had until 599 been an Armenian bishop. Mose, Armenian bishop of Tsurtavi (a mixed Georgian and Armenian diocese), fled to Armenia in 605: a polemical correspondence in Armenian followed. In 608 Catholic Abraham of Armenia forbade any relationship, outside commerce, with Iberians or Caucasian Albanians. The Georgian Catholicos Kvirion was branded a 'liar and traitor'; Georgians were accused of 'killing like a wolf' a bishop Petre who argued against a breach with the Armenians. Conversely Armenian dyophysites fled to Georgia and founded churches there. The Persian Church in Ctesipon then banned dyophysitism; more dyophysites fled to Kartli."⁸³⁵

In 626, as we shall see, Persia capitulated to the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius, who made Lazica and Iberia into vassal states of the Byzantine empire, deepening the separation between the Orthodox Georgians and the Monophysite Armenians. "The breach became final by 700, under the Armenian patriarch Sahak III, when Arab victories over Byzantium encouraged monophysitism."⁸³⁶By this time the Armenian Church had become entrenched, not only in anti-Chalcedonian Monophysitism, but also in a kind of nationalism that made it the first national church in the negative sense of that phrase – that is, a church that was so identified with the nation as to lose any claim to universalism.

⁸³⁵ Rayfield, *Edge of Empires: A History of Georgia*, London: Reaktion, 2012, pp. 52-53.

⁸³⁶ Rayfield, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

53. THE PERSIAN EMPIRE

The great Persian empire contained many Christians, both Orthodox and heretical (mainly Nestorian), but was never subdued by the Roman Empire. The two Persian empires, of the Parthians and (from 224) the Sassanids, had been the greatest enemies of Rome in the late pagan and early Christian periods, and had given *Roma invicta* her most massive and humiliating defeats. Persia at its peak extended from Armenia and Mesopotamia in the west to the Hindu Kush in the east to the Indian Ocean in the south. It was by far the greatest rival and threat to Christian Rome – similar to the threat that China poses to the United States today – and the threat it posed was not only political but also religious, insofar as many heretical sects and teachings, particularly those of a dualist nature such as Manichaeism and Zoroastrianism, as well as the heretical Nestorianism, lived in Persia or the Iraqi lands under Persian control.

The great Persian empire of Cyrus and Darius had been conquered by Alexander the Great, and then by the Parthians from the north of the country near the Caspian. In 53 BC “the Parthians inflicted a savage defeat on the Roman legions and for a time occupied Syria... Augustus ignored the demands of some of his generals that the defeat of the Roman legions be avenged, preferring to have peace in order to organize Rome’s new eastern provinces.”⁸³⁷

The magi-kings of the East who worshipped the Christ-Child were therefore very probably from the Parthian empire; and Christ’s birth as a subject of Augustus, but worshipped by subjects of the other great world power, showed that He was in fact the Heavenly Sovereign of the whole world.

In 224, a quasi-restoration of the Persia of Cyrus the Great took place under the new Sassanid dynasty and its first ruler Ardashir (or Artaxerxes). “The Sassanid Empire lasted for four centuries in which it was almost incessantly at war with the rival great power in the west. Shapur I, the second Sassanian ruler, took the title of ‘King of Kings of Iran and non-Iran’, thus emphasizing his claim to dominion of the world.”⁸³⁸

“Sassanid Persia,” writes J.M. Roberts, “was a religious as well as a political unity. Zoroastrianism had been formally restored by Ardashir, who gave important privileges to its priests, the *magi*. These led in due course to political power as well. Priests confirmed the divine nature of the kingship, had important judicial duties, and came, too, to supervise the collection of the land-tax which was the basis of Persian finances. The doctrines they taught seem to have varied considerably from the strict monotheism attributed to Zoroaster but focused on a creator, Ahura Mazda, whose viceroy on earth was the king. The Sassanids’ promotion of the state religion was closely connected with the assertion of their own authority.”⁸³⁹

A wave of barbarian invasions towards the end of the fourth century affected both the Roman and the Persian empires, including one that came through the Caucasus

⁸³⁷ Mansfield, *A History of the Middle East*, London: Penguin, 2003, p. 9.

⁸³⁸ Mansfield, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁸³⁹ Roberts, *History of the World*, Oxford: Helicon Publishing, 1992, pp. 252-253.

and reached as far as Ctesiphon, the Persian capital, in 395. "United by a common interest in repelling the barbarian hordes, Persia and Rome now formed a remarkable alliance. To keep the nomads from descending through the Caucasus, a massive fortified wall was constructed, running for nearly 125 miles between the Caspian and Black Seas, protecting the Persian frontier from attack and serving as a physical barrier between the ordered world to the south and the chaos to the north. Studded with thirty forts evenly spaced along its length, the wall was also protected by a canal fifteen feet deep. It was a marvel of architectural planning and engineering, and the fortification was manned by some 30,000 troops...

"Rome not only agreed to make regular financial contributions to the maintenance of this Persian wall, but also, according to several contemporary sources, supplied soldiers to help defend it. In a sign of how past rivalries had been set to one side, in 402 the Emperor Arcadius in Constantinople appointed none other than the Shah to act as guardian to his son and heir...."⁸⁴⁰

The Byzantines and the Persians continued to war against each other on occasion. But this did not prevent acts of Christian kindness to the enemies of the faith and the nation. Thus during one war between the Romans and the Persians (421-422), the Byzantines had captured seven thousand prisoners, whom they refused to feed or to release. So St. Akakios, Bishop of the Armenian city of Amida, summoned his clergy and addressed the following words to them, among others: "Our God needs neither dishes nor cups, for He neither eats nor drinks.... Since our Church possesses many gold and silver vessels, which derive from the generosity of the Faithful, it is our duty to ransom the prisoners with these and to feed them." And that is what happened: the treasures were melted down, the prisoners were ransomed, given food, and sent back to their king with the necessary provisions for the return journey. Shah Baranos V was so amazed by this magnanimous act of St. Akakios that he asked to meet the holy hierarch in person.

By this time the Shahs had become much more tolerant of the Christians, both Orthodox and heretical, that multiplied in their country. "Bishops from Persia and elsewhere outside the boundaries of the Roman Empire had not been invited to attend Nicaea. Councils held in Persia in 410, and again in 420 and 424, were therefore organised to enable bishops to resolve the same issues that had been looked at by their peers in the west. The impulse to meet and discuss was supported by the Shah, described by one source as the 'victorious king of kings [*Shahanshah*], on whom the churches rely for peace', who like Constantine was keen to benefit from the support of the Christian communities."⁸⁴¹

Unfortunately, however, the heresy of Nestorianism triumphed over Orthodoxy in Persia – and extended its missionary activity eastwards as far as China. "In 635 missionaries in China were able to convince the Emperor to withdraw opposition to

⁸⁴⁰ Peter Frankopan, *Silk Roads*, London: Bloomsbury, 2015, p. 47.

⁸⁴¹ Frankopan, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

the faith and to recognize it as a legitimate a religion whose message not only did not compromise imperial identity but potentially reinforced it.”⁸⁴²

India was first evangelized by the holy Apostle Thomas. It returned briefly to the true faith through the conversion of Joasaph, son of King Abenner of India, through the preaching of the holy hermit Barlaam, from the neighbouring land of Senaar.⁸⁴³ India even provided an early example of sacramental kingmaking in the consecration of King Barachias by St. Ioasaph.⁸⁴⁴

Later, however, Indian Christianity probably fell into heresy. “A Greek-speaking visitor to Sri Lanka in about 550 found a robust community of Christians [perhaps Monophysites], overseen by clergy appointed ‘from Persia’.”⁸⁴⁵

The last Orthodox we know of in the region is St. Isaac, Bishop of Nineveh, who died in about 700...

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In 484 the Persian *Shahanshah*, Peroz, was defeated and killed by northern nomads, the Hephthalites, or “White Huns”, which triggered a social and religious revolution under his successor, Kavad, that looked back to the Jewish revolution of 67-70 and forward to the Russian revolution of 1917.

“The ragged army of the dispossessed,” writes Tom Holland, “when they seized the property of the rich, were motivated by more than mere hatred, or even hunger. Just as the *mowbeds* [Zoroastrian priests] passionately believed themselves entrusted by Ohrmazd [their “good” god] with the maintenance of the traditional order of things, so had the poor, no less passionately, come to believe themselves entrusted with a divine mission to bring it crashing down around their heads. Men, they declared, were created equal. It followed, then, that all good things, from food to land to women, should be held in common. The privileges of the nobility, the pretensions of the priesthood: both had to be dissolved. Such were the demands of the self-proclaimed ‘Adherents of Justice’: the world’s first communist manifesto.

“How was it, in the bowels of the world’s most intimidating monarchy, that such a startling movement had come into existence? Clearly the evils and injustices of the preceding decades had done much to inspire the spirit of revolution, as too had all the many varied currents of belief abroad in *Iranshahr*, the cults and shadowy heresies that had always plagued the Zoroastrian Church. Subsequent tradition, however, would attribute the unprecedented eruption of the Adherents of Justice to the teachings of a single prophet, the messenger from Ohrmazd long foretold: a one-time priest by the name of Mazdak. Four hundred years on, and historians would still commemorate

⁸⁴² Frankopan, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-62.

⁸⁴³ St. Demetrius of Rostov, *The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints*, House Springs, Mo.: Chrysostom Press, 2000, vol. III, November 19.

⁸⁴⁴ See St. John of Damascus, *Barlaam and Ioasaph*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967, pp. 552-553.

⁸⁴⁵ Peter Frankopan, *The Silk Roads*, London: Bloomsbury, 2018, p. 55.

how he had ringingly 'proclaimed that what God had given to man should be distributed equally, and that men had abused this in their injustice to one another.'...

"Amid all the uncertainty [about the existence of Mazdak], two facts are clear. The first is that *Iranshahr*, by the time of Kavad's reign, was teetering on the brink of a full-scale social revolution. The second is that Kavad himself, ever the opportunist, had helped to push it over the edge. Monarchs are rarely in the habit of promoting class warfare, but Kavad, 'a man who for cunning and energy had no rivals', was desperately negotiating uncharted waters. His support for the revolutionaries had two aims: to ensure that his own estates were untouched; and to foster assaults on those of the great Parthian dynasts. Yet, it is possible - even likely - that there was more to this strategy than mere cold calculation: perhaps he did genuinely look with sympathy upon the miseries and the demands of the poor. Tradition would recall that Mazdak, brought into the royal presence, had converted the *Shahanshah* to his infant faith, and tradition might conceivably be correct. Certainly, the sheer audacity of Kavad's attempt to neutralise the nobility is the best evidence we have that Mazdak did after all exist. It is hard to believe that a Sassanian would ever have identified himself with peasant insurrectionists had he not possessed an inner insurance that he was truly fulfilling the divine purpose. Cynicism fused with religiosity: such was the combination, surely, that made of Kavad a Mazdakite.

"Inevitably, though, his conversion stirred up a hornets' nest. Events now began to move very fast. In 496, an alliance of nobles and *maowbeds* [priests] forced Kavad's abdication. His brother, a young boy by the name of Zamasp, was proclaimed *Shahanshah* in his place. Kavad himself was immured in the empire's most fearsome prison, the aptly named 'Castle of Oblivion' - 'for the name of anyone cast into its dungeons is forbidden to be mentioned ever again, with death as the penalty for anyone who speaks it.' Yet, to Kavad - a king so enterprising that he had toyed with communism - this was never likely to prove a territorial roadblock. Sure enough, he soon procured a complete outfit of women's clothes, gave his gaolers the slip while disguised as his own wife, and fled to the court of the Hephthalites. There, just as his father had done nearly four decades before, he secured the khan's backing and returned to *Iranshahr* at the head of a Hephthalite army. The Parthian dynasts, struggling desperately to keep their heads above the Mazdakite floodtide, found themselves powerless to help their royal cipher; Zamasp was duly toppled without a battle; blinded with burning olive oil, or else with an iron needle, he was banished into oblivion himself.

"So it was, by 498, that Kavad was again the *Shahanshah*. Nevertheless, the desperate circumstances of his realm still threatened to give the lie to that title. The empire remained racked by religious controversy, social upheaval and dynastic feuding. It was also effectively bankrupt. How, then, was Kavad to pay his Hephthalite backers for their support? A challenge, it might have been thought, fit to defeat even his ingenuity.

"But Kavad was, as ever, nothing daunted. Instead, with his empire seemingly on the verge of implosion, he opted to go on the attack: to fix his gaze towards the setting sun, to cross his western border, and to take the gold he needed from there.

“He would go to war with the only empire in the world that could rival his own...”⁸⁴⁶

So the Persian King of kings became the first of many revolutionary despots who chose to quell domestic unrest by foreign wars, using the complexes of all revolutionaries - envy, resentment, wounded pride. In 501, employing his enemies, the Hephthalites and the Parthian nobles into his army, he invaded Rome's eastern provinces, taking Theodosiopolis and then Amida. “Then, in an ecstasy of triumph and greed, they stripped the city bare. Although many of its inhabitants were taken as slaves, with notables carefully rounded up to serve as hostages, far more were put to the sword. Tens of thousands of bodies, when the killing was finally done, were slung beyond the city's walls. Great piles of reeking corpses, tangled and gore-smearred, provided the Persians with an intimidating trophy of their victory. Decades later, the terrible slaughter would still haunt the imaginings of all those who live along Rome's eastern frontier.

“Which, no doubt, had been precisely Kavad's aim. Although the war he had launched would soon peter out into bloody stalemate, and although Amida itself, besieged in turn by the Romans, would end up being sold back to them, albeit for a tidy profit, the *Shahnshah* could consider his war aims to have been more than met. A fearsome market had been laid down. After long years of defeat and decay, the lord of *Iranshah* had triumphantly demonstrated to his own subjects, and the rest of the world, that the spiral of his dynasty's decline was over. There would be no collapse. The House of Sasan had weathered the storm...”⁸⁴⁷

But after Kavad, Persia returned to its traditional religion of Zoroastrianism. And the shahs no longer needed to pretend to be champions of the poor... Still more importantly, the Roman emperors, including even Justinian, gave up any idea of conquering Persia for the universal empire of Christian Rome...

⁸⁴⁶ Holland, *op. cit.*, pp. 94-97.

⁸⁴⁷ Holland, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

54. BYZANTIUM, THE JEWS AND THE ARABS

While Justinian's armies were reconquering Western Europe, writes M. Angold, "along the eastern frontier, Petra was recovered from the Sassanians in 551 and with it control of Lazica [Western Georgia]. In the desert war the Ghassanids, an Arab tribe allied to the Byzantines, bested the Lakmids, who were clients of the Sassanians. In 562 a peace was concluded between Persia and Byzantium, designed to last for fifty years. Among other things it regulated cross-border trade, trade routes being an element in Byzantine- Sassanian rivalry. The Byzantines were dependent on these for raw silk to feed their industry which was centred on Berytus."⁸⁴⁸

There were many Jews in Arabia. They were the only people who never, at any time, aspired to join the New Roman symphony of nations, but rather remained permanently "the enemy within" ... The hostility of the Jews towards Christianity and Christian Rome had not waned since apostolic times. Sergei and Tamara Fomin write: "To the prayer 'birkam za-minim' which was read everyday against heretics and apostates there was added the 'curse' against 'the proud state' (of Rome) and against all the enemies of Israel, in particular the Christians... [The Christians were also identified with] the scapegoat, on which the sins of the Jews were laid and which was then driven into the wilderness as a gift to the devil. According to rabbinic teaching, the goat signified Esau and his descendants, who at the present time were the Christians."⁸⁴⁹

As for Christ Himself, said the rabbis who wrote the Talmud, he was "in fact 'the son of a harlot', a failed student who had been dismissed by his rabbi for assorted sexual misdemeanours, and had then, out of pique, fallen to worshipping a brick. Far from reigning in heaven, as the *minim* [heretics] laughably claimed, the truth was that he had been consigned to hell, where he would spend the rest of eternity in a plunge-bath of boiling shit. God Himself, in His infinite wisdom, had foreseen the threat that Jesus would pose His Chosen People, and that was precisely why he had given them hidden as well as written Torah [i.e. the oral traditions on which the Talmud was supposedly based] so that the *minim* would not be able to get their filthy hands on it, 'and say that they were the Chosen People'."⁸⁵⁰

The Jews also called the Roman Empire "the kingdom of the Edomites". Thus Rabbi David Kimchi wrote in *Obadiah*: "What the Prophets foretold about the destruction of Edom in the last days was intended for Rome, as Isaiah explains (34.1)... For when Rome is destroyed, Israel shall be redeemed." And Rabbi Abraham in his book *Tseror Hammor* wrote: "Immediately after Rome is destroyed, we shall be redeemed."⁸⁵¹

The teaching of the Talmud incited the Jews to terrible crimes against Gentiles, especially Christians. Thus "under Theodosius II," writes L.A. Tikhomirov, "it was

⁸⁴⁸ Angold, in Angus Mackay and David Ditchburn (eds.), *Atlas of Medieval Europe*, London and New York: Routledge, 1997, p. 14.

⁸⁴⁹ Fomin and Fomina, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 201-202.

⁸⁵⁰ Holland, *In the Shadow of the Sword*, London: Abacus, 2013, pp. 132-133; *Numeri Rabbah*, 14.10.

⁸⁵¹ Quoted in Rev. I.B. Pranaitis, *The Talmud Unmasked*, St. Petersburg, 1892, Bloomfield Books, Sudbury, Suffolk, pp. 43, 80, 81.

discovered that the Jews, on the day of the feast of the execution of Haman [Purim], had introduced the practice of burning the Cross. The government had to undertake repressions against the blasphemy, but the Jews were not pacified. Under the same Theodosius II, in the city of Imma, the Jews during one of their feasts took hold of a Christian child, crucified him on a cross and with scourges cut him into pieces. The disturbed Christians took to arms, and a bloody battle took place. This incident, as they said, was not unique. The Christian historian Socrates relates that the Jews more than once crucified Christian children. At that time it was not a matter of 'ritual killings', and in such acts only the hatred of the Jews for Christians and mockery of them was seen. In the given case Theodosius II executed those guilty of the murder, but at the same time the government began to take measures to weaken Jewry. Theodosius destroyed the Jewish patriarchate in Palestine and confiscated the sums collected throughout Jewry for the patriarchate. But all these repressions did not quickly pacify the Jews. Under the same Theodosius II there took place in 415 the well-known brawl in Alexandria elicited by the killing of Christians by the Jews. All this boldness of the Jews in the face of a power that was evidently incomparably greater than theirs seems improbable. But we must bear in mind that this was an age of terrible Messianic fanaticism on the part of the Jews. It often drove them to acts that were senseless, in which pure psychosis was operating... [Thus] in 432, on the island of Cyprus there took place an event which shows to what an inflamed condition the Jews of that time could come. On the island there appeared a man who was evidently mad, called Moses, the same who had led the people out of Egypt through the Red Sea. He declared that he now had an order from the Lord to lead the Jews out of Cyprus into Palestine through the Mediterranean Sea. His preaching attracted crowds of Jews who did not hesitate to follow the prophet. These hordes went to the sea and, at a sign from Moses, began to hurl themselves from a lofty cliff into the water. Many crashed against the rocks, others drowned, and only the forcible intervention of the Christians saved the rest: fishermen dragged them from the water, while other inhabitants forcibly drove the Jews from the shore. This mass psychosis shows to what lengths the Jews could go in the name of the idea of the re-establishment of the Kingdom of Israel...

"The [Western] Church had already quite early, in the sixth century, begun to take measures to protect Christians from the influence of the Jews. Councils in Orleans in 538 and 545 decreed the suppression of relations between Christians and Jews and, moreover, forbade the Jews from publicly showing themselves during the Christian Pascha, doubtless to cut off the possibility of any blasphemous outrages. But we can understand why these measures could not be maintained, nor were they systematic, and relations inevitably continued, having two kinds of consequences: some they spiritually cut off from Christianity and drew them into heresy, and others they filled with hatred for the Jews."⁸⁵²

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⁸⁵² Tikhomirov, *Religiozno-Filosofskie Osnovy Istorii*, Moscow, 1997, pp. 340-341, 350.

In about 520, 4000 Christians were martyred by the Jewish ruler of the South Arabian land of Omir (or Homer, modern-day Yemen), Yusuf A'sar Yath'ar, who was finally defeated by the Christian king of Ethiopia.⁸⁵³

Homer was converted by an Italian bishop called Gregory. In his remarkable *Life* we read: "There he was granted a vision of the holy Apostle, who told him to walk the path of virtue and to live according to God's will. That night he saw the Apostle Paul in a dream bringing to him a cup filled with oil, foretelling that he should receive the grace of the priesthood and the episcopacy.

"During this time the armies of the Ethiopian emperor Elesbaan (October 24)⁸⁵⁴ vanquished the Himyarite king Dunaan, who was of Jewish background. The city of Negran was liberated, and Christianity restored in the land of Homer. But all the clergy had been cruelly exterminated by Dunaan, and therefore Elesbaan sent emissaries to the Patriarch of Alexandria asking him to send a bishop to Negran, and clergy for the churches. While he was praying, the holy Apostle Mark appeared to the patriarch, bidding him to find a deacon named Gregory, who was to be ordained to the priesthood, consecrated as a bishop, and then to be sent to Elesbaan. The patriarch did this. During the service a miracle took place. Saint Gregory's face shone with the grace of the Holy Spirit, and from his vestments came a sweet fragrance like myrrh or incense, filling the whole church with the scent.

"Arriving in Homer, Saint Gregory began to set the Church in order, preaching to both pagans and Jews. After three years Elesbaan returned to Ethiopia, leaving the noble Abramius behind as King of Homer. Saint Gregory crowned and anointed Abramius as king. Soon he issued a decree that all his subjects be baptized. Then certain prominent Jews turned to the emperor saying that it was better for people to believe willingly rather than under compulsion. They requested that he should permit a debate on faith to be held between them and the Christians, vowing that if the Christians proved victorious in this debate, the Jews would then accept Baptism.

"The Jews were given forty days to prepare for the debate, which lasted for several days. Saint Gregory refuted all the arguments of the head of the Hebrew elder, Rabbi Ervan, using only texts from the Old Testament. In a vision Ervan beheld the holy Prophet Moses, who worshipped the Lord Jesus Christ. The prophet told Ervan that Ervan was in opposition to the truth and would be defeated.

"By the grace of God Christian truth prevailed in the debate, but Ervan would not acknowledge his defeat. He made a last desperate attempt. He said, 'If you want me to believe in your Christ, and to acknowledge that yours is the true God, then show Him to me, bishop!' The saint replied: 'Your request is impertinent. It is not with man that you contend now, but with God. However, the Lord can do what you have asked in order to convince you.'

⁸⁵³ See the *Life* of the Holy Martyr Al-Harith, in St. Demetrius of Rostov, *The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints*, House Springs, MO; Chrysostom Press, 1995, vol. II, pp. 351-376; Mango, *op. cit.*, p. 92; Tikhomirov, *op. cit.*, chapters 41 and 42; Holland, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4.

⁸⁵⁴ Ethiopia was converted in the fourth century by St. Frumentius, who converted King Ezana.

“Everyone waited to see what would happen. Saint Gregory, having steadfast faith in God and trusting in Him, began to pray aloud. He recalled the mystery of the Incarnation of God the Word, the miracles of His earthly life, the Three-day Resurrection and the Ascension into Heaven, and he invoked the power of the Life-Creating Cross. ‘Show Thyself to these people, O Lord,’ he prayed, ‘and glorify Thy holy Name!’

“When he finished the prayer, the earth quaked, and in the east the heavens were opened, and in a radiant cloud of light the Lord Jesus Christ came down on earth, and the Voice of the Lord was heard: ‘Through the prayers of Bishop Gregory, He Whom your fathers put to death will heal you.’

“Like Saul, who was struck blind by the Heavenly light on the road to Damascus, the Jews were struck blind. Then they believed in Christ and they implored the holy bishop to heal them. Upon receiving holy Baptism, all of them were healed. Rabbi Ervan received the Christian name Leo (meaning ‘lion’).

“After this most extraordinary miracle, Saint Gregory guided the flock of Homer for another thirty years. He reposed in the year 552 and was buried in a crypt in the cathedral of Afar.”⁸⁵⁵

However, in spite of this miraculous appearance of Christ to the Jews, in their majority they remained unbelieving, and in 555 they supported the Samaritans in their rebellion against Byzantium.

The hostility of the Jews, not only to Christ and Christians, but also to all Three Romes – Old Rome, New Rome and the Third Rome of Russia - would be a constant and very important factor in world history...

⁸⁵⁵ “Saint Gregory, Archbishop of Omirits”, <https://www.oca.org/saints/lives/2013/12/19/103592-saint-gregory-archbishop-of-omirits>. A more detailed account of St. Gregory’s life can be found in St. Demetrius of Rostov, *The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints*, House Springs, Mo.: Chrysostom Press, 2000, vol. IV, December 19.

55. THE BYZANTINE-PERSIAN WARS

Justinian's empire began to disintegrate from the beginning of the 540s. Belisarius, his famous general, had re-conquered Italy, but at a terrible cost. Thus Rome herself had been depopulated, albeit temporarily. In 540 the Persian King Chosroes I (531–79), captured and sacked Antioch, in accordance with the prophecy of the Lord through St. Symeon the Younger: "I will abandon the greater part of the population to the sword, and those who survive to captivity." In 541 bubonic plague hit Alexandria and spread to Constantinople, continuing on to the West and Asia Minor and causing drastic depopulation throughout the Middle East. Meanwhile, Slavs were infiltrating the Balkans from the north. In 554, as we have seen, the Ghassanids, led by the Christian Arethas and allied to the Romans, defeated the Lakhmids, led by the pagan Mundhir and allied to the Persians, at Chalcis. In 557 a terrible earthquake hit Constantinople, and the dome of Hagia Sophia caved in. And in 568, three years after the death of an exhausted Justinian, the Lombards invaded North Italy... No wonder that the people expected the end of the world soon.

In 602, the Emperor Maurice was murdered, together with all his sons, by the usurper Phocas. In 608, Phocas took the opportunity provided by the death of the anti-papist Pope Gregory the Great to encourage papism in the West, giving Pope Boniface IV the title "Vicar of Christ". Meanwhile he reserved for himself the caesaropapist title, "Christ's deputy in the East"...

In 609 AD the Jews of Antioch went out of control and revolted against the Christians. They slaughtered Anastasios, the great Patriarch of Antioch: they hurled his genitals into his face, then dragged him into the Mese and murdered him and many landowners. Then they burned their bodies. Phocas appointed Bonosos Count of the East and Kottanas general and sent them against the Hebrews, but they were unable to quell their rebellion. The Jews gathered together an army, attacked them, killed and mutilated many of their men, and drove them away from the city.⁸⁵⁶

Phocas was defeated, on the one hand, by the Sassanid King Chosroes II, and on the other by Heraclius the Elder, Exarch of Africa, whose son, Heraclius, was crowned emperor.

Chosroes displayed the typical *hubris* of the pagan despot, writing to Heraclius: "Chosroes, greatest of gods, and master of the earth, to Heraclius, his vile and insensate slave. Why do you still call yourself a king?"⁸⁵⁷ He represented pagan despotism at its most gaudily splendid. "Few who enjoyed the supreme privilege of being ushered into the royal presence would have doubted that Khorow [Chosroes] had what it took for success. 'May you be immortal!' sounded the response to his every utterance; and certainly, to look upon a *Shahanshah* enthroned in all his glory was still, as it had ever been, to behold a man as close as any mortal could be to a god. His robes gleamed with jewels; his beard was dusted with gold; his face was painted like some ancient idol. Most dazzling of all was his diadem: the symbol of his *farr*

⁸⁵⁶ St. Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronicle*.

⁸⁵⁷ Chosroes, in Charles Oman, *The Dark Ages, AD 476-918*, London, 1919, p. 207.

[divine aura]. By the time of Khusrow, however, it was no longer possible for a king to wear one unsupported. Instead, as he sat on his throne, the crown had to be suspended by a chain hung from the ceiling above his head. So massive had it become, and so stupefyingly heavy the gold and jewels that adorned it, that it would otherwise have snapped his neck.”⁸⁵⁸

In Antioch in 608, as the Persians threatened the city, the Jews in the city rebelled, and Patriarch Anastasius was killed. In 609 the Persians conquered Amida, and then in 613, Damascus with the help of the Jews. In 614 Chosroes, having passed through the whole of Asia Minor, burned Ephesus to the ground.

In 615 he reached Chalcedon. “It was at this point, according to [Sebeos](#), that Heraclius had agreed to stand down and was about ready to allow the Byzantine Empire to become a Persian [client state](#), even permitting Khosrow II to choose the emperor. In a letter delivered by his ambassadors, Heraclius acknowledged the Persian empire as superior, described himself as Khosrow II's ‘obedient son, one who is eager to perform the services of your serenity in all things,’ and even called Khosrow II the ‘supreme emperor.’ Khosrow II nevertheless rejected the peace offer, and arrested Heraclius' ambassadors.

“With the Persians at the very gates of Constantinople, Heraclius thought of abandoning the city and moving the capital to Carthage, but the powerful church figure Patriarch Sergius convinced him to stay. Safe behind the walls of Constantinople, Heraclius was able to sue for peace in exchange for an annual tribute of a thousand talents of gold, a thousand talents of silver, a thousand silk robes, a thousand horses, and a thousand virgins to the Persian King. The peace allowed him to rebuild the Empire's army by slashing non-military expenditure, devaluing the currency, and melting down, with the backing of Patriarch Sergius, Church treasures to raise the necessary funds to continue the war.”⁸⁵⁹

The situation was desperate for the Byzantines. For, even while their capital was threatened from across the Bosphorus, the Slavs were overrunning the Balkans, and the Avars, too, were attacking from the north. Meanwhile, the Persians under Chosroes' general, the Parthian Shahrbaraz, were overrunning the whole of Syria and Palestine, and then, in 616, Egypt.

While the defenders of the City clung on doggedly, Heraclius patiently reorganized his shattered empire and army.

Finally, he was ready to embark on one of the greatest feats of arms in Christian history.

“On April 5, 622, the year Mohammed left Mecca for Medina, he left Constantinople, entrusting the city to the Mother of God, and to Patriarch Sergius and general [Bonus](#) as regents of his son. He assembled his forces in Asia Minor, and, after

⁸⁵⁸ Holland, [op. cit.](#), pp. 113-114.

⁸⁵⁹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heraclius>.

reviving their broken morale, he launched a new counter-offensive, which took on the character of a holy war ...

“The Roman army proceeded to Armenia, inflicted a defeat on an army led by a Persian-allied Arab chief, and then won a victory over the Persians under Shahrbaraz. Heraclius would stay on campaign for several years. On March 25, 624 he again left Constantinople with his wife, Martina, and his two children; after he celebrated Easter in Nicomedia on April 15, he campaigned in the Caucasus, winning a series of victories in Armenia against Khosrow and his generals Shahrbaraz, Shahin, and Shahraplakan. In the same year the Visigoths succeeded in recapturing Cartagena, capital of the western Byzantine province of Spania, resulting in the loss of one of the few minor provinces that had been conquered by the armies of Justinian I. In 626 the Avars and Slavs supported by a Persian army commanded by Shahrbaraz, besieged Constantinople, but the siege ended in failure (the victory was attributed to the icons of the Virgin which were led in procession by Sergius about the walls of the city⁸⁶⁰), while a second Persian army under Shahin suffered another crushing defeat at the hands of Heraclius's brother Theodore.

“... Heraclius exploited divisions within the Persian Empire, keeping Shahrbaraz neutral by convincing him that Khosrow had grown jealous of him and had ordered his execution. Late in 627 he launched a winter offensive into Mesopotamia, where, despite the desertion of his Turkish allies, he defeated the Persians under Rhahzadh at the Battle of Nineveh. Continuing south along the Tigris he sacked Khosrow's great palace at Dastagird and was only prevented from attacking Ctesiphon by the destruction of the bridges on the Nahrawan Canal. Discredited by this series of disasters, Khosrow was overthrown and killed in a coup led by his son Kavad II, who at once sued for peace, agreeing to withdraw from all occupied territories. In 629 Heraclius restored the True Cross to Jerusalem in a majestic ceremony.

“Heraclius's defeat of the Persians ended a war that had been going on intermittently for almost 400 years and led to instability in the Persian Empire. Kavad II died only months after assuming the throne, plunging Persia into several years of dynastic turmoil and civil war.”⁸⁶¹

In this period there were still many Christians in Persia. One of them was a former magician, Anastasius, who was martyred for the faith just before Heraclius entered in triumph into Persia.⁸⁶²

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⁸⁶⁰ “A sudden hurricane dispersed the fleet of the enemy, casting the vessels on the shore near the Great church of the Theotokos at Blachernae, a quarter of Constantinople inside the Golden Horn. The people spent the whole night, says the account, thanking her for the unexpected deliverance.” The famous akathist hymn to the Mother of God may have been composed and sung for the first time during this siege.

⁸⁶¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heraclius>.

⁸⁶² http://www.stgregoryoc.org/st-anastasius-the-persian/?fbclid=IwAR3zbEQsy80PWFvdjvXMtQOYdtk9FWOcJu4_Y8SMBfJI5ENP3QYe8ngADhQ

In the Byzantine-Persian wars and during the Muslim incursions, the Jews consistently took the side of the enemies of Christian Rome because they believed that the “beast”, that is, the Roman emperor, was about to be killed by the long-awaited Messiah. According to the chronicler St. Theophanes, Jewish crowds killed the Bishop of Tiberias and 90,000 Christians in one day. When the Persians conquered Jerusalem, “some fifty thousand corpses were said to have been left piled up in the streets. A further thirty-five thousand Christians, including the patriarch himself, were hauled off into captivity. With them, exhumed from a vegetable patch where it had been buried upon news of the Persian approach, went the single most precious object in the entire Christian empire: the True Cross. A shudder at the humiliation of this had naturally run deep across the Roman world.”⁸⁶³

The Jews, writes Tikhomirov, “distinguished themselves at this point with a beastly cruelty unique in the history of the world. They spared no money to buy many Christians from the Persians with one purpose only – to gain enjoyment in killing them. They say that in this way they bought and destroyed 80,000 people. The Jewish historian G. Graetz glides silently over this terrible fact, saying only: ‘Filled with rage, the Jews of course did not spare the Christians’ and ‘did not spare the holy things of the Christians’. Graetz reduces the number of Christians killed to 19,000...”⁸⁶⁴

“No sooner had Jerusalem passed into Persian hands than a mysterious figure, ‘Nehemiah the son of Hushiel,’ stepped forward to lead the city’s Jews up on to the Temple Mount, where they constructed an altar. Sacrifices, for the first time in five hundred years, were offered on the sacred rock in accordance with the Law of Moses. The opportunity had come at last, it appeared, ‘to found a temple of holiness’.

“Yet, all these ecstatic expectations were soon cruelly dashed. The Persians, no more tolerant of Jewish pretensions than the Romans had been, did not have the slightest intention of permitting the construction of a new Temple, or allowing some upstart Jew to proclaim himself the Messiah. Only a few months into their occupation of Jerusalem, they arrested Nehemiah, accused him of sedition, and executed him...”⁸⁶⁵

After defeating the Persians, Heraclius turned his attention to the Jews of Jerusalem, banishing them to a distance of three miles from the city.

On May 31, 632, he even sent a letter to the governor of Carthage decreeing that all the Jews in Africa – “visitors as well as residents, their wives, their children, their slave” – should be forcibly baptised...

⁸⁶³ Holland, *op. cit.*, p. 318.

⁸⁶⁴ Tikhomirov, *op. cit.*, p. 343. The Jewish historian Graetz admits that the Jews took a greater part in the destruction of Christian churches and monasteries than the Persians themselves (*Istoria Evreev* (A History of the Jews), Odessa, 1908, vol. 1, pp. 28-32). See Antiochus Strategos, “The Capture of Jerusalem by the Persians in 614 AD,” in F.C. Conybeare, *English Historical Review*, 25 (1910) pp. 502-517, http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/antiochus_strategos_capture.htm.

⁸⁶⁵ Holland, *op. cit.*, p. 319.

“Many Christians, it is true, were appalled: some because they feared the damage that reluctant converts might do to the Church, and others because they believed, as Gregory had put it, that ‘humility and kindness, teaching and persuasion, are the means by which to gather in the foes of the Christian faith.’ Yet even before Heraclius’ decree, many had come to dread that it was too late for such an approach... A few bishops in Francia forced baptism on the local Jews. In Spain, in 612, the king of the Visigoths had followed suit...”⁸⁶⁶

There is no doubt that Heraclius’ decree, however understandable as a furious reaction to the Jews’ cruelties, was wrong; and 150 years later the Seventh Ecumenical Council would forbid forcible baptism. There is little doubt, either, that this decree, together with his incestuous marriage to his niece Marina, and, still more, by his support for the Monothelite heresy, contributed to the drastic reversal in his fortunes that now took place... A new scourge was being prepared for the unfaithful Christians: Islam... And now a long-lasting night would descend on the region where Christianity first originated and flourished.

⁸⁶⁶ Tom Holland, *Dominion*, London: Abacus, 2019, pp. 163-164.

56. MONOTHELITISM AND THE SIXTH ECUMENICAL COUNCIL

The last ten years of Heraclius' reign, until his death in 641, were miserable and tragic: disgraced by personal scandal and his embracing of the heresy of Monothelitism, he saw all his conquests reversed; vast areas of the East – Egypt, Syria, Palestine – were lost to the Muslim Arabs.

The Monothelite heresy embraced by Heraclius was an attempt at a compromise between the Orthodox doctrine proclaimed at Chalcedon in 451, which declared that Christ is one Person in two natures, human and Divine, and the anti-Chalcedonian heresy of the Monophysites, who taught that Christ has had only one, Divine nature since His resurrection. Since the Greek-speaking provinces of the empire were mainly Orthodox, and the Syriac- and Coptic-speaking provinces – Monophysite, the Byzantine emperors, beginning with Heraclius (610-641), had a clear political motive in trying to find a compromise theological formula. That compromise was Monothelitism; it declared that while Christ has two natures, He has only one will.

Now the Syrians, as Daniel J. Sahas writes, “were known for their independent thinking, a trait which, as far as theology is concerned, is reflected in the appearance of various schools and heresies. In spite of a long history under foreign dominion they preserved their religion, their culture, and their language, and they kept themselves, essentially, intact from the influence of the Greco-Roman rulers. Furthermore politico-religious events at times sharpened the differences between the Syrians and the Byzantines. The efforts of Heraclius, for example, to bring the Monophysites and the Chalcedonians closer together, and thus to draw the provinces closer to the capital, led to the outbreak of Monothelitism, which disappointed both the Monophysites and the Chalcedonians and increased the tension in the relations between Syria and Constantinople. Also, the high taxes, the overruling power of the landowners over the peasants and the participation in long, exhaustive and mostly fruitless wars with the Persians were some of the reasons why the Syrians welcomed the change [to Islamic rule]. These wars, which aimed at neutralizing the Persian threats against the provinces and the capital and at strengthening the Byzantine influence, had, ultimately, the opposite effect by preparing the way for the Arabs.”⁸⁶⁷

Not only did Heraclius lose the eastern provinces, but also the loyalty of most of the local populations, Semitic, Coptic and Armenian, whose religious differences with Roman Orthodoxy were compounded, according to some, by anti-Roman nationalist feeling.

However, according to Fr. John Meyendorff, “Recent research does not condone the view that Non-Chalcedonian Copts welcomed Muslims as liberators from the Roman rule: even then, and in spite of Chalcedonian persecutions, there was widespread loyalty to the Christian empire. It appears, therefore, that it is only under Persian or Arab, and later Turkish rule, when intellectual contacts with Greek theology were lost and every connection with Byzantium was viewed with suspicion by the new masters, that the Non-Chalcedonian Christians communities of the Middle

⁸⁶⁷ Sahas, in *John of Damascus on Islam*, Leiden: Brill, 1972, pp. 22-24.

East became close-knit national churches. As long as they were part of the Roman *oikoumene*, Syrians and Copts remained basically loyal to it ideologically, even if they had, in their majority, rejected Chalcedonian orthodoxy and suffered persecution. In their minds, their struggle was not in the name of national particularism – since neither their culture, nor their language, nor their liturgical traditions were challenged by the empire – but against that which their spiritual leaders (often Greek-speaking) saw as a betrayal of the true faith. Egypt, in particular – the cradle of the anti-Chalcedonian dissidence – was not, Peter Brown remarks, a national enclave within the Empire, but a microcosm of Mediterranean civilization, as moulded by Rome...⁸⁶⁸

So the deeper reason for the political schism in the Eastern empire was not nationalism, or not primarily so, but religious. God allowed the eastern provinces to fall away from the Roman empire politically because they had already fallen away from it in faith, embracing the heresies of Monophysitism and Monothelitism. St. Anastasius of Sinai considered the defeats and defections that took place in the reign of Heraclius to be Divine punishment for his heresy...⁸⁶⁹

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In this era there was a parallel between the official religion and Christology of the regime and its political theology. Thus the Orthodox doctrine of the Symphony of Powers, the cooperation of the kingship and the priesthood under the One True Faith, reflected the Chalcedonian teaching on the unity of the Divine and human natures in the one Christ. But the Monothelite emperors, who rejected the human will of Christ, and Iconoclast emperors, who likewise rejected His full incarnation, were bound also to reject the Symphony of Powers. For in accordance with their Unitarian Christologies, the emperor, instead of being a *focus of unity* in the religious sphere, was more naturally seen as an *imposer* of unity – and a false unity at that. Similarly, the Muslim rulers, who saw only one, human nature and will in Christ, believed in only one religio-political power, which necessarily made it despotic.

Thus the Monothelite heretics wanted St. Maximus the Confessor, the main champion of Chalcedonian Orthodoxy, to acknowledge the power of a Monothelite emperor over the Church, as if he were both king and priest like Melchizedek. But Maximus refused. When his interrogators asked: “What? Is not every Christian emperor a priest?” the saint replied: “No, for he has no access to the altar, and after the consecration of the bread does not elevate it with the words: ‘The holy things to the holy’. He does not baptize, he does not go on to the initiation with chrism, he does not ordain or place bishops, priests and deacons, he does not consecrate churches with oil, he does not wear the marks of the priestly dignity – the omophorion and the Gospel, as he wears those of the kingdom, the crown and the purple.” The interrogators objected: “And why does Scripture itself say that Melchizedek is ‘king and priest’ [Genesis 14.18; Hebrews 7.1]?” The saint replied: “There is only One Who

⁸⁶⁸ Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions*, Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1989, p. 27. However, Peter Mansfield writes that “Egypt was a Roman colony in the fullest sense, living under iron military government and paying exorbitant taxes” (*A History of the Middle East*, p. 9).

⁸⁶⁹ Dagron, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

is by nature King, the God of the universe, Who became for our salvation a hierarch by nature, of which Melchizedek is the unique type. If you say that there is another king and priest after the order of Melchizedek, then dare to say what comes next: 'without father, without mother, without genealogy, of whose days there is no beginning and of whose life there is no end' [Hebrews 7.3], and see the disastrous consequences that are entailed: such a person would be another God become man, working our salvation as a priest not in the order of Aaron, but in the order of Melchizedek. But what is the point of multiplying words? During the holy anaphora at the holy table, it is after the hierarchs and deacons and the whole order of the clergy that commemoration is made of the emperors at the same time as the laity, with the deacon saying: 'and the deacons who have reposed in the faith, Constantine, Constans, etc.' Equally, mention is made of the living emperors after all the clergy."⁸⁷⁰ And again he said: "To investigate and define dogmas of the Faith is the task not of the emperors, but of the ministers of the altar, because it is reserved to them both to anoint the emperor and to lay hands upon him, and to stand before the altar, to perform the Mystery of the Eucharist, and to perform all the other divine and most great Mysteries."⁸⁷¹

Although the main opponents of Monothelitism – St. Sophronius of Jerusalem and St. Maximus the Confessor – were Greek, four of the Eastern patriarchates fell into the heresy, leaving only the Western patriarchate of Rome to uphold the Orthodox faith. So St. Maximus fled to Rome, where Pope St. Martin convened a Local Council in the Lateran in 649 that anathematized Monothelitism. In the second session of the Council a special *libellus* was composed by the eastern monks living in Rome.⁸⁷² And so, with the East sunk in heresy and overrun first by the Persians and then, more permanently, by the Muslims, the West became briefly the savior both of Orthodoxy and Romanity.

Later, Saints Martin and Maximus were arrested on the orders of the emperor, and transported in chains to Constantinople. During St. Maximus' interrogation, when Bishop Theodosius of Caesarea claimed that the Lateran Council had been invalid since it was not convened by the Emperor, St. Maximus replied: "If only those councils are confirmed which were summoned by royal decree, then there cannot be an Orthodox Faith. Recall the councils that were summoned by royal decree against the *homoousion*, proclaiming the blasphemous teaching that the Son of God is not of one essence with God the Father... The Orthodox Church recognizes as true and holy only those councils at which true and infallible dogmas were established."⁸⁷³

⁸⁷⁰ Dagron, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

⁸⁷¹ *The Life of our Holy Father Maximus the Confessor*, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

⁸⁷² One of them may have been the future St. Theodore, Archbishop of Canterbury). He may have been the "Theodorus, abbas" who signed the decrees of the Council (Andrew Louth, *Greek East and Latin West*, Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2007, p. 16). Cf. Andrew Ekonomou, *Byzantine Rome and the Greek Popes, Eastern Influences on Rome and the Papacy from Gregory the Great to Zacharias, AD 590-752*, E-book, pp. 176-177.

⁸⁷³ *The Life of our Holy Father Maximus the Confessor*, pp. 22-23. The opposite view to that of Theodosius – namely, that the Lateran Council, in spite of the fact that it was not convened by the Emperor, was ecumenical in status – is sometimes asserted. It hardly matters whether we call it Ecumenical or Local. In either case its dogmatic decisions are valid and binding for eternity. However, there is no doubt that the support of the Emperor was vitally important in seeing that the decisions of any Council, Ecumenical or Local, were enforced throughout the *oecumene*.

Saints Maximus and St. Martin suffered for the faith from the tyrant emperor Constans II, dying after torture in distant exile.⁸⁷⁴

The Popes after St. Martin placed good relations with the Monothelite Eastern Empire above Orthodoxy until the death of Constans II in 668.⁸⁷⁵ And from the time of Pope Vitalian Rome and Constantinople drew steadily closer as invasions by Arabs from the south and Lombards from the north demonstrated to the Romans how much they needed Byzantine protection. Religious differences were underplayed; Constans II received communion from the Pope on a visit to Rome; and Eastern influence in the Roman Patriarchate steadily increased.⁸⁷⁶ Indeed, from the time of Pope St. Agatho (+680), who was a Sicilian Greek, until Pope Zacharias (+752), all the Popes were either Greeks or Syrians; the Roman Church, now filled with eastern refugees from the Muslim invasions, became a thriving centre of Byzantine faith and culture.⁸⁷⁷

The pattern of Greek theological leadership fortified by Western hierarchical constancy continued until the final extirpation of the heresy. Thus a local Council in Hatfield in England in 679 led by St. Theodore “the Greek”, Archbishop of Canterbury⁸⁷⁸ anathematized Monothelitism; a local Council in Milan under Archbishop Mansuetus did the same, as did another local Council in Rome under Pope St. Agatho in 680, at which the decision of the English Council was read out by St. Wilfred of York.

This Western confession of faith was confirmed by the Eastern Churches at the Sixth Ecumenical Council at Constantinople in 681, at which St. Agatho’s epistle played an important part.

Unfortunately, however, traces of the still dormant heresy of papism are evident in St. Agatho’s epistle, notably the assertion that the Orthodox teaching rests on the rock

⁸⁷⁴ St. Maximus summed up the causes of tyranny as follows: “The greatest authors and instigators of evil are ignorance, self-love and tyranny. Each depends on the other two and is supported by them: from ignorance of God comes self-love, and from self-love comes tyranny over one’s own kind...” (*Various Texts on Theology, the Divine Economy, and Virtue and Vice: First Century*).

⁸⁷⁵ Pope Vitalian seems to have cooperated in the persecution of Saints Maximus and Martin, and to have been in full communion with their persecutor, Emperor Constans II, until his death in 668, after which he preached Orthodoxy. As Louth writes, “Martin’s immediate successors – Eugenius I and Vitalian – seem to have compromised, although neither of them formally accepted the Typos, both of them were in communion with the Monothelite Patriarch Peter, who had presided at the trial of Martin. Resistance to Monothelitism was now virtually reduced to one man, the monk Maximus.” (*Maximus the Confessor*, pp. 17-18). See Ubipetrus, “Was Pope Vitalian a Monothelite?” *Ubi Petrus Ibi Ecclesia*, February 14, 2020, <https://ubipetrusibiecclesia.com/2020/02/14/was-pope-vitalian-a-monotheelite/?fbclid=IwAR3ujzd-yJBHUFns06WLsg-zEX79MNNJFbuZw4aNhNSSOzHy-B3lae8pz5Q>

⁸⁷⁶ An example of this was Pope Vitalian’s sending, in 668, of a Greek, St. Theodore, to be archbishop of Canterbury, and another Greek, St. Hadrian, to kick-start English ecclesiastical education, together with a Roman chanter, John, to introduce Roman Byzantine chant into England

⁸⁷⁷ Thus the iconography of Rome in this period is unquestionably Byzantine. See Daniel Esparza, “The ‘Sistine Chapel of the Middle Ages’ is back in business”, *Aleteia*, May 5, 2017.

⁸⁷⁸ St. Agatho calls him “the archbishop and philosopher of the island of Great Britain” in his letter to the 125 bishops of the Roman Synod that was to serve as an instruction for his legates to the Sixth Ecumenical Council (http://www.intratext.com/IXT/ENG0429/_P4.HTM)

of the Roman Church, which “remains foreign to all error of every kind” and “by the grace of God has never departed from the way of truth”. Agatho passes over in silence the uncomfortable fact that in 638 Pope Honorius died in the Monothelite heresy, and was anathematized as “a pillar of heresy” by the Fathers of the Sixth Ecumenical Council⁸⁷⁹ together with Agatho’s legates. This anathematization, as Dvorkin points out, “was repeated at the Seventh Ecumenical Council and proclaimed by all the Popes at their enthronement right until the 11th century.”⁸⁸⁰ In effect, therefore, Rome herself condemned her own incipient teaching on papal infallibility already in the seventh century.

This period – the seventh and early eighth centuries – probably represents the high-water-mark of Western Orthodoxy and western civilization in general, when the West lived through its most truly Christian period, its golden age. Its patriarchate was more consistently Orthodox than any other; its monasticism on the Benedictine model was flourishing; and the national kingdoms in England, France and (up to a point) Spain were consciously based on the Byzantine model of Church-State relations. Moreover, it worked well with the East in defending Christendom against what at one time looked like the all-conquering tide of Islam. For after the Muslims had conquered most of Spain in 711, in 732 they were defeated by the Frankish leader Charles Martel at the Battle of Poitiers, one of the most important battles in history. This victory saved Christianity in the West, and significantly relieved the pressure on the Emperors in the East, who were being attacked by the Arabs. These events demonstrated the real unity and interdependence – for the time being – of the two halves of Christendom...

However, the linguistic and cultural, as well as the doctrinal, differences between East and West were beginning to widen. St. Gregory the Great (+604) was the first Pope who did not speak Greek, although he had served as *apocrisarius* in Constantinople, and remained loyal to the Byzantine Empire. In the sixth century Latin was still regularly spoken in Byzantium⁸⁸¹, but from the time of the Emperor Heraclius in the early seventh the East stopped using Latin even in its official documents, although it always retained the title of “Empire of the Romans”. The last emperor who came to Rome did so in 663 and the last pope to go to Constantinople went there in 710.⁸⁸² Moreover, the Eastern Council *in Trullo* (692), which entered into the documents of the Sixth Ecumenical Council, rejected certain Roman customs, such as fasting on Saturdays.

⁸⁷⁹ When the Acts of the Sixth Council were sent to Rome, St. Agatho’s successor, Leo II, called Honorius’ confession “profane treachery ... who did not attempt to sanctify this Apostolic Church with the teaching of Apostolic tradition”.

⁸⁸⁰ Dvorkin, *op. cit.*, p. 515. Excerpt from the Profession of Faith required upon the Consecration of a new Bishop of Old Rome, used from the late 7th century until sometime in the 11th century: “Also the authors of the new heretical dogmas: Sergius, Pyrrhus, Paul, and Peter of Constantinople, together with Honorius, who paid incentive to their depraved assertions.” (P.L.105, fol. 52, *Liber Diurnus*). Additionally, Pope Leo II (+683), in a letter to the Emperor states: “We anathematize also even Honorius, who did not purify this Apostolic Church with the Doctrine of the Apostolic Tradition, but by wicked betrayal sought to subvert the Immaculate [Faith].” (Letter to Emperor Constantine IV, (P.L.96, fol. 408)

⁸⁸¹ Judith Herrin, *Women in Purple*, London: Phoenix Press, 2002, p. 62.

⁸⁸² Roberts, *op. cit.*, pp. 329-330.

The Lord promised that the Church would prevail against the gates of hell – that is, heresy and schism (Matthew 18.18). But that promise was to the Church as a whole, not to any individual Church or see. And so while Orthodoxy faltered in different places at different times, it never fell in all places at the same time. Moreover, the underlying unity of Orthodox Christian civilization throughout Europe and the Middle East remained unshaken through most of the period of the Seven Ecumenical Councils. It was only in the first half of the seventh century, with the rise of Islam and Monothelitism in the East, and towards the end of the eighth century, with the rise of Iconclasm and Filioquism in the Carolingian empire of the West, that the first more or less permanent cracks and distortions in the unity both of faith and civilization (the two are always closely linked) began to appear.

57. THE RISE OF ISLAM

Modern scholarship has been able to establish little that is historically well-founded about the birth of Islam.⁸⁸³ This is in stark contrast (contrary to the opinion of the dissident Muslim writer Salmon Rushdie) to the wealth of reliable information that we have about the earthly life and teaching of Christ. What we know with reasonable certainty is the following. Mohammed was born in 570 or 571 in Mecca, a trading community in Western Arabia, and married a rich widow. At about the age of forty, a demon posing as the Archangel Gabriel gave him a supposed revelation from God that is recorded in what we know as the Koran, which is for Muslims the literal word of God and, together with the *hadith*, various stories about the sayings and actions of Mohammed, the basis of the religion of Islam.

Muslims believe that Mohammed himself is the last of God's messengers and the seal of the prophets, who included Moses and Jesus. For them it is the one true faith which completes and perfects the partial revelations of Old Testament Judaism and Christianity. And this in spite of its multiple and radical contradictions with those two religions.

St. John of Damascus (+749) knew Islam well, for he was the chief minister of Caliph Abdul Malek before becoming a monk in the monastery of St. Savas near Jerusalem. He writes: "There is also the superstition of the Ishmaelites which to this day prevails and keeps people in error, being a forerunner of the Antichrist. They are descended from Ishmael, [who] was born to Abraham of Agar, and for this reason they are called both Agarenes and Ishmaelites. They are also called Saracens, which is derived from *Sarras kenoi*, or destitute of Sara, because of what Agar said to the angel: 'Sara hath sent me away destitute.' These used to be idolaters and worshiped the morning star and Aphrodite, whom in their own language they called Khabár, which means great. And so down to the time of Heraclius they were very great idolaters. From that time to the present a false prophet named Mohammed has appeared in their midst. This man, after having chanced upon the Old and New Testaments and likewise, it seems, having conversed with an Arian monk, devised his own heresy. Then, having insinuated himself into the good graces of the people by a show of seeming piety, he gave out that a certain book had been sent down to him from heaven. He had set down some ridiculous compositions in this book of his and he gave it to them as an object of veneration."⁸⁸⁴

While unambiguously condemning Islam, St. John saw it as a Christian heresy rather than a separate religion, and indeed it looks like a syncretistic amalgam of paganism, Judaism and Christianity. Thus Abraham, Moses and Jesus are all recognized as prophets, and Mary is recognized as a Virgin if not as the Mother of God. But the Christian doctrine of the Holy Trinity is fiercely attacked, and the Cross and Resurrection are explicitly denied – it is asserted that some other body was substituted for Christ's at the Crucifixion. Paradoxically, however, Jesus is seen as coming again to judge the world at the end of time...

⁸⁸³ Tom Holland, *In the Shadow of the Sword*, London: Abacus, 2013, chapter 1.

⁸⁸⁴ St. John, *The Fount of Knowledge*, Part 2: Epitome of Heresies.

Islam may therefore be seen as a syncretistic religion designed to steal adherents from the other monotheist religions of Judaism and Christianity through its borrowings from them.

Islam owes its success to a number of human factors in addition to demonic influence. First was the power vacuum created by exhaustion of the Romans and Persians after their long wars. Second was the economic disruption and deprivation caused by the same war. Third was the religious chaos created by the competition between the Jews, the Christians and various pagan cults in the Arabian peninsula. Fourth was the disunity of the Arab tribes and the lack of a focus for a Arabic national identity. Fourth was the appeal to fallen men of a religion allowing pre-pubescent marriage and pre-pubescent sexual intercourse, as practised by Mohammed himself.⁸⁸⁵ Mohammed's new religion, promising believers wealth and power in this life and endless sensuous delights in the next, fulfilled all these needs and wants...

Arabia, writes Frankopan, "was a region where belief had been changing, adapting and competing with each other for the best part of a century. What had been a polytheist world of multiple deities, idols and beliefs had given way to monotheism and to ideas about a single, all-powerful deity. Sanctuaries dedicated to multiple gods were becoming so marginalised that one historian has stated that on the eve of the rise of Islam traditional polytheism 'was dying'. In its place came Jewish and Christian concepts of a single, all-powerful God – as well as of angels, paradise, prayer and alms-giving which can be found in inscriptions that begin to proliferate across the Arabian peninsula in the late sixth and early seventh centuries...

There is also growing consensus that Muhammed was preaching to a society that was experiencing acute economic contraction as a result of the Perso-Roman wars. The confrontation and the effective militarisation of Rome and Persia had an important impact on trade originating in or passing through the Hijaz. With government expenditure funnelled into the army and chronic pressure on the domestic economies to support the war effort, demand for luxury items must have fallen considerably. The fact that the traditional markets, above all the cities in the Levant and in Persia, were caught up in the fighting can only have further depressed the economy of southern Arabia.

"Few would have felt the pinch more than [Mohammed's tribe] the Quraysh of Mecca, whose caravans, carrying gold and other valuables to Syria had been the stuff of legend. They also lost their lucrative contract to supply the Roman army with the leather needed for saddles, strapping for boots and shields, belts and more besides. Their livelihood too may have been further threatened by a decline in pilgrims visiting the *baram*, an important shrine dedicated to pagan gods located in Mecca. The site was centred on a series of idols – reportedly including one 'of Abraham as an old man' – but the most important of which was a red agate statue of a man with a golden right hand and with seven divinatory arrows around it. As guardians of Mecca, the Quraysh did well from selling food and water to visitors and performing rituals for

⁸⁸⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ouA2rvBKzMI>

pilgrims. With upheaval in Syria and Mesopotamia having repercussions further beyond, and disruptions in so many aspects of daily life, it was not surprising that Muhammed's warnings of imminent doomsday struck a powerful chord."⁸⁸⁶

However, Mohammed's "ecumenist" message, attempting to combine elements of Judaism, Christianity and paganism, was not popular throughout Arabia. It "met with ferocious opposition from the conservative elite of Mecca, who were enraged by its criticism of traditional polytheistic practices and beliefs. Muhammed was forced to flee to Yathrib (later renamed Medina) in 622 to escape persecution; this flight, known as the *hijra*, became the seminal moment in Islamic history, year zero in the Muslim calendar."

The opposition of the "old believers" of Mecca forced Mohammed, who claimed to abhor every kind of idolatry, to retain certain pagan elements in his Islam. Thus he proclaimed the moon-god Allah to be the one true God.⁸⁸⁷ Another pagan element he retained was the worship of the black stone called "kaaba"⁸⁸⁸, which he associated with Abraham and called the house of Allah.

The flight to Medina was also important because it was a Jewish town, and in it Mohammed made a kind of mutual defence pact with the Jews that was to prove vital in securing the weakening of Byzantine power and the Muslim conquest of Syria and Palestine.

Having made his new religion dominant in Arabia, Mohammed died in Mecca in 632. His three early successors - known as the Rashidoun or Rightly Guided Ones - then burst out of the Arabian desert into the Fertile Crescent, spreading the faith by fire and sword throughout the Middle East and defeating both the Byzantine and the Persian armies. Thus the first caliph, Omar bin al-Khattah, defeated the Byzantines at the Battle of Gaza in 634, and again in 636 at the Battle of the Yarmuk on the Golan Heights in Syria (where the Byzantines lost 52,000 men).

In 638 Jerusalem, after a year-long siege, was surrendered to Omar, who entered the Holy City on foot. St. Sophronius the patriarch of Jerusalem was not impressed: The godless Saracens entered the holy city of Christ our Lord, Jerusalem, with the permission of God and in punishment for our negligence, which is considerable, and immediately proceeded in haste to the place which is called the Capitol. They took with them men, some by force, others by their own will, in order to clean that place

⁸⁸⁶ Frankopan, *The Silk Road*, pp. 73-74.

⁸⁸⁷ Nektarios Lignos writes: "Allah, worshipped in pre-Islamic Arabia, is the god Muhammad's Quraysh tribe worshipped, the moon god who was married to the sun goddess and they had three daughters - Al-Lat, Al-Uzza, and Manat. This is why we see the crescent moon symbol in conjunction with Islam."

⁸⁸⁸ "In her book *Islam: A Short History*, Karen Armstrong asserts that the *Kaaba* was officially dedicated to Hubal, a Nabatean deity, and contained 360 idols which probably represented the days of the year. However, by the time of Muhammad's era, it seems that the *Kaaba* was venerated as the shrine of Allah." (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaaba>)

and to build that cursed thing, intended for their prayer and which they call a mosque (midzgitha).”⁸⁸⁹

“The present circumstances,” he wrote, “are forcing me to think differently about our way of life, for why are so many wars being fought among us? Why do barbarian raids abound? Why are the troops of the Saracens attacking us? Why has there been so much destruction and plunder? Why are there incessant outpourings of human blood? Why are the birds of the sky devouring human bodies? Why have churches been pulled down? Why is the cross mocked? Why is Christ, who is the dispenser of all good things and the provider of this joyousness of ours, blasphemed by pagan mouths (ethnikois tois stomasi) so that he justly cries out to us: ‘Because of you my name is blasphemed among the pagans,’ and this is the worst of all the terrible things that are happening to us. That is why the vengeful and God-hating Saracens, the abomination of desolation clearly foretold to us by the prophets, overrun the places which are not allowed to them, plunder cities, devastate fields, burn down villages, set on fire the holy churches, overturn the sacred monasteries, oppose the Byzantine armies arrayed against them, and in fighting raise up the trophies of war and add victory to victory. Moreover, they are raised up more and more against us and increase their blasphemy of Christ and the church, and utter wicked blasphemies against God. Those God-fighters boast of prevailing over all, assiduously and unrestrainedly imitating their leader, who is the devil, and emulating his vanity because of which he has been expelled from heaven and been assigned to the gloomy shades. Yet these vile ones would not have accomplished this nor seized such a degree of power as to do and utter lawlessly all these things, unless we had first insulted the gift of baptism and first defiled the purification, and in this way grieved Christ, the giver of gifts, and prompted him to be angry with us, good though he is and though he takes no pleasure in evil, being the fount of kindness and not wishing to behold the ruin and destruction of men. We are ourselves, in truth, responsible for all these things and no word will be found for our defence. What word or place will be given us for our defence when we have taken all these gifts from him, befouled them and defiled everything with our vile actions?”⁸⁹⁰

Bishop Dionysius (Alferov) writes that St. Sophronius “handed over the city to Caliph Omar on definite conditions. The churches at the holy places (first of all Golgotha and the Holy Sepulchre) remained in the possession of the Jerusalem Patriarchate, half of whose churches were turned into mosques. The preaching of Christianity to Muslims was forbidden, and the Christian churches into which Caliph Omar entered were seized by the Muslims and converted later into mosques. Later, this agreement was often broken by the Muslims, and the majority of the churches were destroyed. Even the very church of the Resurrection over the Holy Sepulchre was destroyed more than once. And yet the agreement with Omar created a certain basis for the further existence of the Jerusalem Patriarchate. It was recognized as a legal person, and the possessor of a series of churches and plots of land in Palestine. It was allowed to carry out Divine services, to look after the spiritual needs of Christians and even to judge the Christian population in civil cases. On the whole the

⁸⁸⁹ St. Sophronius, addition to his friend John Moschus’ *Spiritual Meadow*, 100-102.

⁸⁹⁰ St. Sophronius, *On Holy Baptism*, 166-167.

Mohammedans did not interfere in the internal administration of the Jerusalem Patriarchate, although they often carried out external acts of violence and theft on the Christian population and clergy. The patriarch himself was elected by the Synod, although the Caliph confirmed him.

“The main feature of this agreement was the preservation of the earthly existence of the Jerusalem Church, the guarantee of its legal existence, possession of churches and property, the right to carry out open public services. The cost that had to be paid for this was not only complete loyalty to the Mohammedan authorities and prayers for the caliph and his army, but also – which is more important – the refusal to preach Christianity to the Muslims and their own children who had been seduced into Islam. But the Arabs by deceit and violence converted thousands of Christians to their faith – and the archpastors of the Church did not dare to protest against this, and did not dare openly to carry out anti-Islamic propaganda, which was punished by death at all times in Islamic countries.”⁸⁹¹

The Jews rejoiced at the Muslim conquest of Jerusalem, saying that Mohammed was a prophet who was preparing the way for the Messiah. And even when the Messiah failed to arrive, “Jews continued to look favourably on Islamic rule in Jerusalem. In a letter written in the eleventh century, the Jerusalem rabbis recalled the ‘mercy’ God had shown his people when he allowed the ‘Kingdom of Ishmael’ to conquer Palestine. They were glad to remember that when the Muslims arrived in Jerusalem, ‘there were people from the children of Israel with them; they showed the spot of the Temple and they settled with them until this very day.’”⁸⁹²

Following the conquest of Jerusalem, the Muslims quickly conquered Antioch, Edessa and Caesarea (642). Between 639 and 642 they conquered Egypt, the bread-basket of Constantinople, driving out the Romans and increasing the taxes threefold.

It was at this time that the long rollcall of martyrs for Christ against Islam began, including that specific form of martyrdom that became so common among the Greeks under the Turkish yoke, in which the martyr suffers for Christ in penance for having (sometimes accidentally) apostasized to Islam. In about 640 an Egyptian called Meirax was tortured and killed. “He was tricked by the Mohammedan Empire into accepting Islam. He later repented, went into a mosque bearing a cross, declared himself a Christian and called upon the Moslems to forsake their errors and turn to the faith.”⁸⁹³ Then he was killed...

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Meanwhile, writes M. Angold, “The Byzantine Empire had to meet the challenge. It contained the Arabs in Anatolia by evolving the *theme* system of defence. Initially, this meant dividing Anatolia into three military commands: Opsikion, Anatolikon and

⁸⁹¹ Alferov, “Vizantijskij servilizm i sovietskoe sergianstvo” (Byzantine servility and Soviet sergianism), <http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/print.php?act=news&id=63406>, pp. 5-6.

⁸⁹² Karen Armstrong, *A History of Jerusalem*, London: HarperCollins, 1996, p. 233.

⁸⁹³ Bishop Nikolai Velimirovich, *Prologue from Ochrid*, Birmingham: Lazarica Press, 1986, vol. II, p. 313.

Armeniakon. The Opsikion, originally the strategic reserve, was now quartered across the approaches to Constantinople. The Anatolikon was the old army of the East, but now withdrawn to defend south-eastern Anatolia. The Armeniakon was the army of Armenia, now established in northern Anatolia and covering the routes from Melitene and the middle Euphrates.

“The threat from the Arabs was all the more formidable because they took to the sea. They occupied Cyprus (649–50) and destroyed the Byzantine fleet at Phoinix (655) off the coast of Anatolia. Constantinople was blockaded from 674 to 678, but this attack was beaten off with Greek fire. Another assault similarly failed in 718. From then on Constantinople and Anatolia were relatively secure, though there were intermittent raids down to the mid-ninth century, some penetrating to within striking distance of Constantinople.

“The Byzantines were less successful in holding the Arabs in the Mediterranean. Carthage finally succumbed in 697, and from their new capital of Kairuan the Arabs converted the Berbers. This fuelled the Muslim advance into Spain. Toledo, the Visigothic capital, fell in 711 and by 718 the conquest of Spain was virtually complete. The Muslims advanced northwards across the Pyrenees, but their defeat in 732 by the Franks at the battle of Tours limited any further conquests in this area. Their efforts were concentrated in the Mediterranean. Crete fell in 824 and a start was made on the conquest of Sicily from the Byzantines. They established a base at Palermo, but it was not until 878 that the Byzantine provincial capital of Syracuse fell. In 840 Bari was captured and became the centre of an emirate which terrorized southern Italy and the Adriatic. It was recovered in 876 by the Byzantines and a degree of stability was restored in the central Mediterranean.

“The Muslim advance stretched Byzantine resources to their limit, for it was also involved in the Balkans. In 582 Sirmium fell to the Avars, and their Slav tributaries swarmed into the Balkans. They settled on a permanent basis and penetrated as far south as the Peloponnese, where Monemvasia provided a refuge for the native population. In 679 the Bulgarians crossed the Danube and settled the lands to the south. Byzantine territories were now limited to Thrace and a few towns along the fringes of the Aegean, such as Thessalonica, which withstood a series of Slav sieges. To hold these areas the *themes* of Thrace and Hellas were established at the end of the seventh century. From the late eighth century a determined effort was made to strengthen the Byzantine hold in Europe. This culminated in the reoccupation of the Peloponnese and the creation (c. 805) of the *theme* of the Peloponnese with its headquarters at Corinth.

“The Byzantine Empire survived the assaults and losses of territory which occurred from the seventh to the early ninth centuries. In many ways, it emerged all the stronger, thanks to its capital Constantinople and the evolution of the *theme* system.”⁸⁹⁴

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⁸⁹⁴ Angold, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-16.

In Persia, meanwhile, anarchy took hold between 628 and 632, when “there were no fewer than six kings who claimed royal authority; one well-informed Arab historian writing later put the number at eight – in addition to two queens.”⁸⁹⁵ In 636, the Persians were shattered at Qadisiyya, near their capital of Ctesiphon on the banks of the Tigris. This “was a huge boost for the surging Arab armies and for Islamic self-confidence. The fact that a swathe of Persian nobles fell in the course of the battle heavily compromised future resistance, and served to put an already teetering state on the canvas...”

“The heart of the world now gaped open. One city after another surrendered, as the attacking forces bore down on Ctesiphon itself. After a lengthy siege, the capital eventually fell, its treasury being captured by the Arabs...”⁸⁹⁶

In 645 the Arabs returned to Persia, killing 40,000 men, destroying many temples and by 651 had extended their rule to the borders of India.

“Heraclius had driven the Persians out of the Caucasus and installed Adarnerse I (619-639) as its ruler. This peace, however, only lasted a few decades... By 645 the Muslims were at the gates of Tbilisi; soon thereafter the entire country was under their dominion. During the period of Arab-Muslim rule many Georgians received the crown of martyrdom, especially at the hands of Marwan bin Muhammed’, known in Georgia as Murvan Qru, ‘the Deaf’, because of his cruelty (to this day in western Georgia heartless people are called ‘Murvanas’). During this period the holy martyrs Abo, Davit and Tarichan, the holy king Archil, and Sts. Davit and Constantine offered up their lives for the Faith.”⁸⁹⁷

After consolidating their gains in the Middle East, the Muslims swept through the whole length of North Africa as far as Spain (which they invaded in 711) and in the south reached as far as Makuria (modern-day Sudan).

However, at this point they were checked by a little-known victory of the Orthodox: “During the summer of 642, the Orthodox Christians of the Kingdom of Makuria defeated a Muslim invasion at the First Battle of Dongola. Ten years later the Orthodox Makurians would defeat a second and larger invasion force by the Caliphate. This resulted in a peace that lasted for nearly 700 years.”⁸⁹⁸

So the Muslims were checked by Orthodox armies in the south and in the west. In the east, however, they encountered no significant opposition. “In 751, the Arab conquerors were brought face to face with the Chinese, defeating them decisively in a confrontation by the Talas River in Central Asia. This brought the Muslims up to a natural boundary, beyond which there was little point in expanding further – at least in the short term. In China, meanwhile, the defeat brought repercussions and

⁸⁹⁵ Frankopan, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

⁸⁹⁶ Frankopan, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

⁸⁹⁷ Riassophore-Monk Adrian, in Archpriest Zakaria Machitadze, *Lives of the Georgian Saints*, Platina, Ca.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2006, p. 20.

⁸⁹⁸ Hieromonk Enoch, *Facebook*, July, 2016.

upheaval, triggering a major revolt against the ruling Tang dynasty led by the Sogdian general An Lushan, which led to an extended period of unrest and instability that created a vacuum for others to exploit...⁸⁹⁹

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“Within thirty years of the Prophet’s death,” writes Peter Mansfield, “decisive events were to shape the future of Islam and of the Prophet’s Arabian homeland. In AD 656 the Caliph Omar’s successor, Othman, was assassinated. His natural successor seemed to be Ali, the first cousin of the Prophet and husband of his daughter Fatima. But Ali was opposed by the ambitious and able Arab general Muawiya, whom Omar had appointed governor of Syria and who, like Othman, belonged to the powerful Umayyad family of Mecca. The defeat of Ali and his son Hussein by the Umayyads led to the first great division in Islam, between the Sunnis, or ‘people of the sunnah’, who are the great majority, and the Shia or ‘partisans’ of Ali, who continue to regard Muawiya and his Umayyad successors as secular usurpers.”⁹⁰⁰

The militant nature of Islam was demonstrated in its first, early years of conquest, and has never been abandoned or apologised for even in later, more peaceful times. Indeed, as Mansfield goes on to say, “Arabs today are still inspired to the point of obsession by the story of the first achievements of Islam”.⁹⁰¹

Hence also the emphasis on *ihad*, armed struggle against the unbelievers, which must continue until the whole world is Islamic and all unbelievers have been destroyed. Many love to make a distinction between the religion of Islam, which is supposedly peaceful, and “Political Islam”, which is not; this is false. Just as there is no fundamental distinction between Church and State in Islam, so there can be no real distinction between the violent religion that we see preached in the Koran and the violent politics of Islam.

That the religion of Islam is inherently violent is proved by the Koran, which says: “Christians and Jews must believe what Allah has revealed to Muhammad or Allah will disfigure their faces or turn them into apes, as he did the Sabbath-breakers.” (Koran 9:30). “Kill the unbelievers wherever you find them” (Koran 2:191). “Make war on the infidels living in your neighbourhood” (Koran 9:123). “Fight and kill the unbelievers wherever you find them, take them captive, harass them, lie in wait and ambush them using every stratagem of war.” (Koran 9:5; cf. 8:60). “O believers, make war on the infidels who dwell around you. Let them find firmness in you” (Sura: 9; Ayat: 123). “Fight those who believe not... even if they be People of the Book [Jews and Christians] until they willingly agree to pay the tribute in recognition of their submissive state” (Sura: 9; Ayat: 29). “You will be called to fight a mighty nation; fight them until they embrace Islam” (Sura: 48; Ayat: 16).

⁸⁹⁹ Frankopan, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

⁹⁰⁰ Mansfield, *A History of the Middle East*, London: Penguin, 2003, pp. 14-15.

⁹⁰¹ Mansfield, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

Paul Johnson writes: "Islamic law to non-Moslems was based on the arrangements Mohammed made with the Jewish rulers of the Hijaz. When they refused to acknowledge his prophetic mission, he applied the principle of what he called the *jihad*. This divides the world into the *dar-al-Islam*, the peaceful territory of Islam, where the law reigns, and the *dar-al-Harb*, the 'territory of war', controlled temporarily by non-Moslems. The *jihad* is the necessary and permanent state of war waged against the *dar-al-Harb*, which can only end when the entire world submits to Islam. Mohammed waged *jihad* against the Jews of Medina, beat them, divided their menfolk (save one, who converted) in the public square, decapitated their women, children, animals and property among his followers. Other Jewish tribes were treated rather more leniently, but at Mohammed's discretion, since God gave him absolute rights over the cities as he saw fit. Mohammed, however, sometimes found it politic to make a treaty, the *dhimma*, with his beaten foes, under which he spared their lives and permitted them to continue to cultivate their oases, provided they gave him half the proceeds. The *dhimma* submitted, receiving the right to his life, the practice of his religion, even protection, in return for special taxes – the *kharaj* or land-tax to the ruler, the *juzya* or poll-tax, higher commercial and travel taxes than the believers of the population, and special taxes at the ruler's pleasure. Moreover, the status of the *dhimma* was always at risk, since the *dhimma* merely suspended the conqueror's natural rights to kill the conquered and confiscate his property; hence it could be revoked unilaterally whenever the Moslem ruler wished."⁹⁰²

Therefore the natural state of relations between the Muslim and non-Muslim worlds must necessarily be one of struggle, or *jihad*, interrupted by periods of peace permitted for purely tactical reasons.⁹⁰³ The 15th-century Islamic scholar Ibn Khaldun wrote: "In the Muslim community, *jihad* is a religious duty because of the universalism of the Muslim mission and the obligation to convert everybody to Islam either by persuasion or by force. The other religious groups did not have a universal mission, and the *jihad* was not a religious duty for them, save only for purposes of defense. But Islam is under obligation to gain power over other nations."

Thus, as L.A. Tikhomirov wrote: "In submitting without question to God, the Muslim becomes a spreader of the power of God on earth. Everyone is obliged to submit to Allah, whether they want to or not. If they do not submit, then they have no right to live. Therefore the pagans are subject either to conversion to Islam, or to extermination. Violent conversion to Islam, is nothing prejudicial, from the Muslim point of view, for people are obliged to obey God without question, not because they desire it, but because Allah demands this of them."⁹⁰⁴

Again, as Kenneth Craig writes, holy war, or *jihad*, "was believed to be the recovery by Islam of what by right belonged to it as the true and final religion but which had been alienated from it by the unbelief or perversity embodied in the minorities whose survival – but no more – it allowed...."⁹⁰⁵

⁹⁰² Johnson, *A History of the Jews*, London: Phoenix, 1995, p. 175.

⁹⁰³ Henry Kissinger, *World Order*, London: Penguin, 2015, pp. 101-102.

⁹⁰⁴ Tikhomirov, *op. cit.*, p. 296.

⁹⁰⁵ Craig, *The Arab Christian*, London: Mowbrays, 1992, pp. 57-58.

And if it allowed their existence, this was not because they had the “right” to survive, but because, for the time being, it was not advantageous to the Muslims – or within their power – to kill them...Orthodox Christianity was spread by twelve defenceless men not enjoying any political or military support and using no power except the power of preaching and prayer; it is truly the religion of peace. However, although Mohammed himself fought only relatively small-scale wars for the control of Arabia, his successors, the early caliphs, went, as we have seen, with fire and sword throughout the Middle East and North Africa, conquering a vast swathe of land from Spain to India in the first sixty years. Carthage was conquered in 695, Spain in 717. In fact, Islam has been the most violent religion in history.⁹⁰⁶

Having said that, it remains true that, once having gained control of a region, the Muslims could be relatively tolerant. “The Muslim advance,” writes Jenkins, “was initially tolerant. In his study of the Silk Roads, the historian Peter Frankopan stresses the sympathy with which early Islam treated the faiths of the near east. ‘The message was inclusive and familiar...’”⁹⁰⁷

This *initial* tolerance and “inclusiveness” did not last long beyond the end of the seventh century. According to Fr. Andrew Louth, “the Muslims seem to have been even-handed in their treatment of the different Christian groups – and also of the adherents of other religions that could claim to be ‘people of the book’, such as the Jews, the Manichees, and perhaps also the Samaritans – but they must have looked with less disfavour on those Christians who did not share the faith of the Byzantine emperor. Despite the fact that monoenergism and monothelitism were imperial policy, the Melkites [those loyal to *malka*, ‘king’ in Syriac] remained staunchly Chalcedonian; the only group of Christians to embrace monothelitism was the Maronites of Lebanon, who adhered to the Christological doctrine after it had been abandoned by the Byzantines (formally at the Sixth Ecumenical Synod of 681-82, though the usurper Bardanes Philippikos attempted to revive it at a synod held in Constantinople in 712).

“The Muslims’ attitude to the Christians in their newly acquired domains was one of tolerant disdain. As non-Muslims, they were required to pay a poll tax, the *jizya*, but otherwise, to begin with at least, the Christians were left alone. There seems to have been little attempt in the seventh century to convert non-Arab Christians to Islam. In this period, too, the Muslim presence was largely a military presence, which

⁹⁰⁶ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, London: Simon & Schuster, 1996, pp. 254-258. St. Gregory Palamas wrote: “It is true that Mohammed started from the east and came to the west, as the sun travels from the east unto the west. Nevertheless, he came with war, knives, pillaging, forced enslavement, murders, and acts that are not from the good God, but instigated by the chief manslayer, the devil. Consider now, in times past, did not Alexander (the Great) prove victorious from the east to the west? There have also been many others, in many other times, who set out on military campaigns and dominated the world. Yet none of the peoples believed in their leaders as you revere Mohammed. Though Mohammed may employ violence and offer pleasures, he cannot secure the approval of the world. Albeit, the teaching of Christ, though it turns away from (worldly) pleasures, it has taken hold to the ends of the world, without violence, since it is opposed to it. This phenomenon is the victory that overcomes the world (I John 5:4).”

⁹⁰⁷ Jenkins, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

remained in a minority. The civil structures of the societies they had conquered they left intact; the personnel of the Byzantine administration remained Christian. The fiscal administration in Damascus, from 661 to 750 the seat of the caliphate, was headed in the seventh century by members of the Christian family to which the monk and theologian, St. John of Damascus, belonged. In such a climate, the principal change for Melkites as a result of the Arab conquest may have been less the presence of Islam than the new freedom experienced by those religious groups that had experienced persecution under the Byzantines: Jews, Manichees, Samaritans and Christians who rejected Imperial Orthodoxy."⁹⁰⁸

⁹⁰⁸ Louth, *Greek East and Latin West*, Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2007, p. 21.

58. ICONOCLASM AND THE SEVENTH ECUMENICAL COUNCIL

The first phase of the iconoclast heresy lasted from the 720s to 787. Then there was an Orthodox interlude, from 787 to 815.⁹⁰⁹ Then the second phase ensued, from 815 to 843. At the beginning of the first phase, after Emperor Leo III espoused the heresy, falsely accusing the Orthodox of worshipping (as opposed to venerating) the icons, and began to persecute the iconophiles, Pope Gregory II condemned it in letters to the emperor. His successor, Gregory III, convened a council in Rome and anathematized it in 733.

“In retaliation,” writes Fr. Andrew Louth, “Leo confiscated the papal patrimonies in Calabria and Sicily, and transferred the ecclesiastical provinces of Calabria, Sicily, and Illyricum, formerly under papal jurisdiction, to the patriarch of Constantinople. In 730, Leo required the patriarch of Constantinople Germanus I, to support imperial policy. When he refused, he was deposed and withdrew to his country estates at Platanion. He was replaced by the more compliant Anastasios. The iconodule sources speak of extensive persecution, and see this as directed not just at the cult of the saints, but also at the veneration of relics, and indeed the cult of the saints itself.”⁹¹⁰

Leo’s quasi-Muslim understanding of the nature of icons went hand in hand with a resurrection of the pagan model of the *imperator-pontifex maximus*. In fact, insofar as the Muslim Caliph considered himself to be both a king and successor of the prophet, Leo could be said to have borrowed his theory of kingship (“I am both king and priest”), as well as his iconoclasm, from the Muslims. It was therefore eminently fitting that his main critic in both spheres should have been St. John of Damascus, the chief minister at the Caliph’s court.

St. John taught that the icons are not worshipped, and therefore not idols, as the Muslims and iconoclasts (and, later, the Protestants) would have it. But they were holy, and therefore to be venerated. For since the Word was made flesh, there is no unbridgeable gulf between spirit and flesh; matter can become Spirit-bearing.

Christ could be venerated on icons insofar as He had assumed flesh and become visible: “Of old, God the incorporeal and uncircumscribed was not depicted at all. But now that God has appeared in the flesh and lived among men, I make an image of the God that can be seen. I do not worship matter but the creator of matter, Who for my

⁹⁰⁹ The heresy was mainly based in the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Other Eastern patriarchates, especially Jerusalem, opposed it. Thus Sergei Shumilo writes: “a Council in Jerusalem was held in 764, at which the Patriarch of Jerusalem Theodore (735–770), together with the Patriarch of Alexandria Cosmos (727–765) and Patriarch of Antioch Theodore, condemned the iconoclastic heresy, and confirmed the acts of the six Ecumenical Councils. Another “Pan-Orthodox” Council in Jerusalem took place in 836, which, in addition to the Jerusalem Patriarch Vasily (820–838) who convened it, was attended by Patriarchs of Alexandria Christopher (817–841) and Antioch Job (813–843), as well as many monks from different monasteries. The council condemned the iconoclastic heresy and sent a message to the Byzantine emperor Theophilos of Constantinople, in defense of the veneration of icons, which was included in the codex of official Orthodox conciliar definitions.” (“Shine Forth, O Kiev, the New Jerusalem – the Mother of Churches Watches over You”, *Orthodox Christianity*, February 27, 2020).

⁹¹⁰ Louth, *Greek East and Latin West*, Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2007, p. 49.

sake became material and deigned to dwell in matter, Who through matter effected my salvation.”

The emperor, said St. John, had no right to impose his false dogmas on the Church. For “What right have emperors to style themselves lawgivers in the Church? What does the holy apostle say? ‘And God has appointed in the Church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers and shepherds, for building up the body of Christ.’ (I Corinthians 12.28). He does not mention emperors... Political prosperity is the business of emperors; the condition of the Church is the concern of shepherds and teachers.”⁹¹¹

Offended by St. John’s bold defence of the faith, Emperor Leo slandered him to the Caliph, “who had his right hand cut off. John fell down in prayer before the icon of the most holy Mother of God, and his hand was re-joined to his arm and miraculously healed.”⁹¹² So the living prototype of the icon witnessed by the miracle to the truth of St. John’s theology of the icon – and simultaneously to the falsehood of the emperor’s despotic theory of state power...

Some years later, in a document probably written early in the ninth century in Constantinople, but ascribed to the earlier Orthodox Pope Gregory II, Leo III’s claim to be both king and priest was refuted, while it was admitted that *true* kings are in *some* ways like priests: “You write: ‘I am Emperor and priest’. Yes, the Emperors who were before you proved this in word and deed: they built churches and cared for them; being zealous for the Orthodox faith, they together with the hierarchs investigated and defended the truth. Emperors such as: Constantine the Great, Theodosius the Great, Constantine [IV], the father of Justinian [II], who was at the Sixth Council. These Emperors reigned piously: they together with the hierarchs with one mind and soul convened councils, investigated the truth of the dogmas, built and adorned the holy churches. These were priests and Emperors! They proved it in word and deed. But you, since the time that you received power, have not begun to observe the decrees of the Fathers...”⁹¹³

The Pope also wrote: “You know, Emperor, that the dogmas of the Holy Church do not belong to the Emperor, but to the Hierarchs, who can safely dogmatize. That is why the Churches have been entrusted to the Hierarchs, and they do not enter into the affairs of the people’s administration. Understand and take note of this... The coming together of the Christ-loving Emperors and pious Hierarchs constitutes a single power, when affairs are governed with peace and love”. And again: “God has given power over all men to the Piety of the Emperors in order that those who strive for virtue may find strengthening in them, - so that the path to the heavens should be wider, - so that the earthly kingdom should serve the Heavenly Kingdom.”⁹¹⁴

⁹¹¹ St. John of Damascus, *Second Apology against those who attack the Divine Images*, 12. It may be pointed out, however, that I Corinthians 12.28 includes among the spiritual gifts that of “governments” (κυβερνησεις), which could plausibly be interpreted as referring to political government. But of course, this gift was that of governing the State, not the Church...

⁹¹² St. Nikolai Velimirovich, *Prologue from Ochrid*, Bimingham: Lazarica Press, 1986, vol. II, p. 283.

⁹¹³ Pope Gregory II, in Fomin and Fomina, op. cit., vol. I, p. 87.

⁹¹⁴ Pope Gregory II, in Fomin and Fomina, op. cit., vol. I, p. 82.

One person in two distinct natures: one power in two distinct functions: the Chalcedonian basis of the symphonic doctrine of Church-State relations is clear. And just as the symphonic doctrine of Church-State relations reflects Chalcedonian Orthodoxy, so the absolutist theory of Church-State relations reflects both Monothelitism and Iconoclasm. Just as Monothelitism denies that there is more than one will in Christ, so the absolutist theory denies that there is more than one will in the government of the Christian commonwealth, declaring that the will of the emperor can take the place of the will of the hierarchs. And just as Iconoclasm destroys the proper relationship between the icon and its archetype, saying that icons are in fact idols, so absolutism destroys the proper relationship and distance between the earthly type and his Heavenly Archetype, so that the emperor becomes, in St. Maximus' words, "another God incarnate" - that is, an idol. For this, no less than for his iconoclasm, Leo III is called "forerunner of the Antichrist" in the service books, and was anathematized by the Church as "the tormentor and *not Emperor* Leo the Isaurian".⁹¹⁵ The later iconoclast emperor, Constantine Copronymus, was also anathematized and denied the title of emperor: "the tyrant, *and not Emperor*". Even more emphatic was the anathematization of Emperor Leo V the Armenian: "the evil first beast, the tormentor of the servants of Christ, *and not Emperor* Leo the Armenian".⁹¹⁶

The iconoclast heresy was confessed by the emperor and the patriarchate of Constantinople: the other patriarchates, of Rome, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem anathematized it. It was in order to avoid the terrifying power of these anathemas that Patriarch Paul repented of his iconoclasm and retired, while his successor Tarasius took his place only on condition that an ecumenical council was convened with the other four patriarchates in order to overthrow the heresy and deliver the Great Church from anathema.⁹¹⁷ So when the iconophile Empress Irene came to the throne, and installed the iconophile Tarasius as patriarch, she immediately convened the Seventh Ecumenical Council in Nicaea in 787, which confirmed the true faith and anathematized not only iconoclasm but all deviations from Holy Tradition.

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The Seventh Council not only brought to an end the period of Christological debates of the first Christian millennium. It also brought to an end the debates over the role of the Emperor in the Church. The role of the Emperor in the Church was now defined in iconographic terms: *the Emperor is an icon of Christ the King, but only so long as he remains Orthodox, holding to the doctrine of Christ in all things. Otherwise, the likeness between icon and archetype is destroyed and the grace of God does not descend from Archetype to icon. The Emperor is in the Church, but not above it. He is not, and never can be, a priest.*

⁹¹⁵ *Menaion*, May 12, Service to St. Germanus of Constantinople, Vespers, "Lord, I have cried"; Fomin and Fomina, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 88. In two hagiographical texts, Theosterict's *Life of Nicetas of Medicion* and St. Methodius' *Life of Euthymius of Sardis*, Leo is given the apocalyptic title of "beast" (D.E. Afinogenov, "Povest' o proshchenii imperatora Feofila" i Torzhestvo Pravoslavia (The "Tale" of the Forgiveness of the Emperor Theophilus and the Triumph of Orthodoxy), Moscow: Ilarik, 2004, pp. 26, 28).

⁹¹⁶ Fomin and Fomina, *op. cit.*, pp. 89, 94.

⁹¹⁷ See the *Life* of St. Tarasius in St. Demetrius of Rostov's *Lives of the Saints* for February 25.

He can be the focus of unity of the Church, but cannot create that unity, which is created by the adherence of the whole Church to the Orthodox Faith.

For, as the Council declared: "The priest is the sanctification and strengthening of the Imperial power, while the Imperial power is the strength and firmness of the priesthood... God gave the greatest gift to men: the Priesthood and the Imperial power. The first regulates and cares for heavenly things, while the second, by means of legal norms, administers earthly things. Now in truth... agreement (symphony) has taken the upper hand over disagreements, and disunity has given way to unity."⁹¹⁸

From 815, however, the second phase, or renewal of the iconoclast heresy began, in which we see an interesting new argument put forward by the iconoclasts: that an emperor that is truly an icon of the Omnipotent Christ must necessarily be victorious in battle, having the blessing of Christ on all his works. And therefore, since the iconoclast emperors Leo III and Constantine V were on the whole victorious in battle, while the iconophile emperors Constantine VI and Irene, Michael I Rangave and Nicephorus, were defeated, this spoke in favour, according to the iconoclasts, of the iconoclast emperors having the true faith...⁹¹⁹

Of course, this was not a theological argument. It is natural, but simplistic, to suppose that the success or failure of an emperor or king in battle is a direct function of the Orthodoxy or heterodoxy of his faith and a due reward for it. Thus Eusebius believed that Constantine the Great was so dear to God and so blessed, "so pious and so fortunate in all that he undertook, that with the greatest facility he obtained authority over more nations than any who had preceded him - and yet retained his power undisturbed to the very end of his life."⁹²⁰ However, this is by no means always the case. Sometimes God allows an Orthodox king to be defeated - for various different reasons that are concealed in the mysteries of Divine Providence. Saul fell at Gilboa because of his impiety, but Josiah, though righteous, was defeated and killed in battle, as were St. Oswald of Northumbria and St. Lazar of Serbia. Heraclius gloriously defeated the Persians, but was routed by the Muslims...

In the *Life* of the sixth-century St. Elesbaan, king of Ethiopia, we read that he "lived when Arabia was ruled by Dunaan, the oppressor of Christians. The pious Elesbaan was unable to look on indifferently as believers in Christ were being massacred. He declared war on Dunaan, but his military campaign was unsuccessful.

⁹¹⁸ Seventh Ecumenical Council, in Fomin and Fomina, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 91; Sobolev, p. 77. As Gervais Dumeige points out, the Seventh Ecumenical Council in Nicaea was freer than the Fifth Council, "which felt the strong pressure of the Emperor Justinian, and more even than Constantinople III [the Sixth Council] where the presence of Constantine IV risked imposing on the conciliar debates... At Nicaea the men of the Church dealt with the affairs of the Church, under the direction of a man of the Church who knew the desires and wishes of the sovereigns. It was on a path prepared in advance that the bishops were able to advance freely" (*Nicée II*, Paris: Éditions de l'Orante, 1978, p. 195).

⁹¹⁹ Nun Cassia (Senina) (editor), *Zhitia Vizantijskikh Sviatykh Epokhi Ikonoborchestva* (Lives of the Byzantine Saints of the Iconoclast Period), vol. I, St. Petersburg: Kvadrivium, 2015, p. 10.; George Peter Bithos, *Saint Methodios of Constantinople*, Rollinsford, NH: Orthodox Research Institute, 2009, p. 28. "Leo V's motives seem clearer: the veneration of icons was to be made the scapegoat for the successive Byzantine defeats at the hands of the Bulgars and the Arabs" (Louth, *op. cit.*, p. 128).

⁹²⁰ Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, 1.6.

“Wishing to learn the reason for his defeat, Elesbaan, with prompting from above, turned to a certain hermit. He revealed to the emperor that he had proceeded unrighteously in deciding to take revenge against Dunaan, since the Lord had said, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay!’ (Hebrews 10:30).

“The hermit counselled St Elesbaan make a vow to devote his final days of life to God, to escape the wrath of God for his self-willed revenge, and then to defeat Dunaan. St Elesbaan made a vow to the Lord, and marching off with his army against the enemy, he defeated, captured and executed him. After the victory the saint resigned as emperor, secluded himself within a monastery and for fifteen years he dwelt in strict fasting and asceticism.”⁹²¹

Another witness that might is not right, and that success on the battlefield does not necessarily signify the favour of God, comes in the lives of the forty-two Amorian martyrs at the hands of the Muslims in 829. When some Muslim sages tried to persuade the Christians to apostasize to Islam on the grounds that they were everywhere victorious against the Christians, the latter replied: "If you would gauge the truth of a faith by victories in wars, then this would mean that all the idolatrous nations, who from time to time have conquered the world, such as the Persians, Greeks, Romans and others, possessed the true faith. This, even you Muslims would never acknowledge. And because you have been victorious over the Christians now, this does not mean that your faith is better; rather, that our sins are greater and because of this, God punishes us, through you."⁹²²

If, therefore, we are to speak of Orthodox kings as icons of Christ the King, we must nevertheless remember that they were sinners who, with their peoples, were very often chastised for their sins with sufferings and defeats...

The reason why the history of the Orthodox peoples is so often a history of wars and suffering lies in the mystery both of God’s mercy and of His justice. Of course, all the peoples, as being the descendants of Adam, fall under the curse of suffering and death. But God especially chastises those whom He loves, His sons by grace and adoption. For “if you endure chastening, God is dealing with you as with sons. For what son is there who his father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons...” (Hebrews 12.7-8).

⁹²¹ *Life of St. Elesbaan*, Holy Cross Monastery.

⁹²² St. Nikolai Velimirovich, *Prologue from Ohrid*, March 6.

CONCLUSION. THE TRUTH IS ONE

If we are asked to point to the most important difference between the ancient and the modern worlds, then we should reply: for the ancients of almost all religions and beliefs, *the truth is one*, whereas for moderns the truth is multiple or relative or even non-existent. Probably the most modern man in the ancient world was Pontius Pilate, who, standing before the Truth Incarnate, asked: "What is truth?" (John 18.38) - and would not wait for an answer. The ancients' *faith in the existence of the one truth* compelled them to anathematize those whom they considered to be in heresy, and even to persecute and kill them at times, in a way that appals modernists. Perhaps rightly: the Truth did not encourage destroying the evil tares of the heretics "lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them" (Matthew 13.29). However, He considers lukewarm indifference to the truth a greater sin than a fiery zeal that is not according to reason; for "because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth" (Revelation 3.16).

Since they believed in the existence of the truth, very many of the ancients - martyrs, priests, ascetics, kings and queens, men, women and children of every class and nation - were given the grace to receive it and be saved by it. That is why the Church of Christ, "the pillar and ground of the truth" (I Timothy 3.15) reached the peak of its power and greatness precisely in the first eight centuries of the Christian era. The enemies of the truth - the pagans, the Jews, the heretics, the Muslims - also had their triumphs. But by far the greatest fact of this period is the glory of the Church and of its multitudes of saints. And since the truth they confessed, and by the power of which they worked so many wonders, remains the truth to this day and forever - for "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever" (Hebrews 13.8) - this period of history will remain forever relevant and vitally precious to every succeeding generation that still wants to know the truth.

For "whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world, and this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" (I John 5.4-5).

"It is a good thing," wrote St. Symeon the Theologian, "to believe in Christ, because without faith in Christ it is impossible for anyone to be saved; but one must also be instructed in the word of truth and understand it. It is a good thing to be instructed in the word of truth, and to understand it is essential; but one must also receive Baptism in the name of the Holy and Life-giving Trinity, for the bringing to life of the soul. It is a good thing to receive Baptism and through it a new spiritual life; but it is necessary that this mystical life, or this mental enlightenment in the spirit, also should be consciously felt. It is a good thing to receive with feeling the mental enlightenment in the spirit; but one must manifest also the works of light. It is a good thing to do the works of light; but one must also be clothed in the humility and meekness of Christ for perfect likeness to Christ. He who attains this and becomes meek and humble of heart, as if these were his natural dispositions, will unfailingly enter into the Kingdom of Heaven and into the joy of His Lord."⁹²³

⁹²³ St. Symeon, *The First-Created Man*, Platina, Ca.: St. Herman of Alaska Press, p. 76.
