

## POLITICS FROM CAIN TO CONSTANTINE

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## INTRODUCTION. THE FAMILY AND THE STATE

In Paradise there was no such thing as political authority, no domination of man over man. There was the mild and loving headship of Adam over Eve, but this was hardly comparable to political power. And even if, in the words of the Lord to Eve after the fall: "He [Adam] will rule over you" (Genesis 3.16), we hear the first note of authority of man over man<sup>1</sup>, this was only an 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.<sup>2</sup>

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."<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

Again, 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."<sup>5</sup>

The State is a product of the fall, and would not have been necessary if Adam had not sinned. It is necessary to fallen, sinful man because "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6.23), and the political order can, if not conquer death in man, 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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).

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 34 on I Corinthians*.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> Metropolitan Anastasy, *Besedy s sobstvennym serdtsem (Conversations with My Own Heart)*, Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1998, p. 159.

And since the first form of state is the city (polis in Greek), we may say that politics began with Cain. For Cain is the first city-builder (Genesis 4.17). He is both the first murderer, the first city-builder, and the first politician...

The process of politicization was 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.

The family, writes St. Augustine, is part of the State. For it 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."<sup>6</sup>

According to St. Philaret of Moscow, "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..."<sup>7</sup>

Again, St. Ignaty Brianchaninov wrote: "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."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> St. Augustine, *The City of God*, XIX, 16.

<sup>7</sup> Metropolitan Philaret, *Sochinenia (Works)*, 1848 edition, volume 2, p. 169.

<sup>8</sup> Bishop Ignaty, *Sobranie Pisem (Collected Letters)*, Moscow, 2000, p. 781.

Again, 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 itself confirms that whatever may be the defects of monarchy, they cannot compare with the evil brought upon men by revolution and anarchy."<sup>9</sup>

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).

According to St. Philaret, "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."<sup>10</sup> 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.

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 punished by their expulsion from Paradise – that is, from communion with God. The second sin, Abel's murder of his brother Cain, was, according to the legal code of every civilized State, a crime as well as a sin. But since there was as yet no State, it was God Himself Who imposed the punishment – expulsion from the society of men: "a fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth" (Genesis 4.12). And after the Flood of Noah it was God Who decreed the first law of all civilized States in the new, postdiluvial order – that of capital punishment for murder: "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed, for in the image of God made He man" (Genesis 9.6)...

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<sup>9</sup> 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).

<sup>10</sup> Metropolitan Philaret, quoted in Lev Regelson, *Tragedia Russoj Tseroki, 1917-1945 (The Tragedy of the Russian Church, 1917-1945)*, Paris: YMCA Press, 1977, pp. 24-25.

## 1. PAGAN DESPOTISM

In the ancient world one-man rule, or monarchy, was the norm. The major exceptions to the norm - Athens in the fifth and fourth centuries BC, and Rome (partially) before Julius Caesar - were fleeting and did not become deeply rooted - although their historical example was to become important in modern times. Thus Greece came under the one-man rule of Alexander the Great, while by the late first century BC the whole of the Roman Empire was firmly under the heel of the first of the Roman Emperors, Augustus Caesar.

One-man rule in antiquity was of two kinds: *Despotism* (or *Absolutism*) and *Autocracy*. From a chronological point of view, despotism appeared first - in the same area where Cain built the first city, that is, Babylon, the mystical fount and root of all antichristian despotic power down the ages. Despotism was characteristic of all developed pagan States throughout the world - in Babylon, Egypt, the Indus valley, China, Central and South America - before the rise of Athenian democracy.

Despotic rulers recognize their power to be absolute, unlimited by any other power in heaven or earth. Autocracy, on the other hand, is not absolutist, but recognizes itself to be limited by the Law of God and the interpreters of that Law on earth - God's faithful priesthood. Autocracy first appeared in embryonic form in the pilgrim Israelite State led by Moses and the Judges, and then in the Israelite State founded by Saul and David.<sup>11</sup>

Sometimes pagan, despotic rulers allowed themselves to be led by the True God. Such was the Pharaoh who venerated Jacob and Joseph, and Nebuchadnezzar when he witnessed that God had saved the three children from the furnace and ordered that enemies of that God should be punished, 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, whether brief or lengthy, we can say that despotism was transformed into autocracy.

The modern world, of course, recognizes neither despotism nor autocracy, but only *democracy*. It will be useful, therefore, at the outset to consider a comparative definition of these three major types of State by the Russian nineteenth-century philosopher, Vladimir Soloviev. The first, *Absolutism*, 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." The second,

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<sup>11</sup> Some monarchist authors - for example, Archbishop Seraphim (Sobolev), identify the term "autocracy" (*samoderzhavie*) with all forms of one-man, monarchical government (*edinoderzhavie*). However, I have found it useful to make the distinction for reasons that will become clear in the course of this book.

*Democracy*, 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 general egoism and anarchy, and a multitude of separate individuals without an inner bond.” The third force, *Autocracy*, he defined as “giving positive content to the other two forces, freeing them from their exclusivity, and reconciling the unity of the higher principle with the free multiplicity of private forms and elements.”<sup>12</sup>

Turning now to the first absolutist State, Nimrod’s Babylon, it appears that the State religion was a mixture of nature-worship and ancestor-worship. Thus, on the one hand, 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”.<sup>13</sup> 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. On the other hand, the chief god, Marduk or Merodach, “brightness of the day”, seems to have been identified with Nimrod himself. We know, moreover, that the later kings of Babylon were also identified with the god Marduk. So the divinity seems to have reincarnated himself in every member of the dynasty.<sup>14</sup>

It was probably Nimrod who invented the traditions of nature-worship and ancestor-worship, or at least combined them in a uniquely powerful and dangerous way. Having risen to power as a hunter or leader in war (he is described in the Holy Scriptures as “a mighty hunter before the Lord” (Genesis 10.9)), he then consolidated his power by giving himself divine honours. By imposing false religion in this way he led men away from God, which earned him the title given him by the Jerusalem Targum of “hunter of the sons of men”; for he said: “Depart from the judgement of the Lord, and adhere to the judgement of Nimrod!”<sup>15</sup>

The great spring festival of Marduk took place at Babylon, at the splendid temple with ascending steps which is called in the Bible the Tower of Babel,<sup>16</sup> and which by tradition was built by Nimrod himself. In Genesis (11.8-9) we read that God destroyed this Tower, divided the languages of its builders so that they could not understand each other, and scattered them in different directions across the face of the earth. This explains both the existence of different nations speaking different languages and the fact that, at least in the earliest phase of their existence, all nations known to anthropologists have

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<sup>12</sup> Soloviev, “Tri Sily” (“Three Forces”), 1878, republished in *Novij Mir (New World)*, N 1, 1989, pp. 198-199.

<sup>13</sup> N. Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind*, London: Fontana, 1971, p. 299.

<sup>14</sup> I.R. Shafarevich, *Sotzializm kak Iavlenie Mirovoj Istorii (Socialism as a Phenomenon of World History)*, Paris: YMCA Press, 1977; Smart, *op. cit.*, p. 299.

<sup>15</sup> Henry Morris, *The Genesis Record*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1976, p. 252.

<sup>16</sup> Smart, *op. cit.*, p. 298.

been pagan, worshipping a multiplicity of gods that often displayed a marked kinship with the gods of other nations and the original Babylonian religion.

"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 [i.e. absolutism] and future imperialism. Having rejected God, this eastern usurper created a kingdom based on his own power."<sup>17</sup>

"Nimrod" means "let us rebel", and "it was Nimrod," according to Josephus, "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."<sup>18</sup>

Nimrod's Babylon, like all the early urban civilisations, was characterised by, on the one hand, a totalitarian state structure, and, on the other hand, a pagan system of religion. Statehood and religion were very closely linked; for both the governmental and the priestly hierarchies culminated in one man, the king-priest-god.<sup>19</sup> This deification of the ruler of the City of Man was, of course, a direct challenge to the truly Divine Ruler of the City of God.

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<sup>17</sup> "Taina Apokalipticheskogo Vavilona" ("The Mystery of the Apocalyptic Babylon"), *Pravoslavnaiia Zhizn'* (*Orthodox Life*), 47, N 5 (545), May, 1995, pp. 14-16.

<sup>18</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, I, 4.

<sup>19</sup> 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. In application to politics it meant that ...the earthly king was as it were a copy of the heavenly king, an incarnation of divinity, an earthly god." ("Khristianstvo i Idea Monarkhii" ("Christianity and the Idea of the Monarchy), *Put'* (*The Way*), N 6, January, 1927, p. 660).



It was from this antitheist civilization that Abraham was commanded to depart, and went to 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” and with heaven’s citizens. They must build their own polity that is not founded on the worship of man, but of God, and does not seek its end in itself, but outside itself, in God.

It was fitting, therefore, that it was only after he had fought a successful battle against a coalition of mainly Babylonian kings that Abraham was met by the first recorded true king and “priest of the Most High God,... Possessor of heaven and earth”, Melchizedek (Genesis 14.18). In fact, Melchizedek is an image of Christ Himself, which is why, unlike any mortal man before or since, he was both a king and a priest in the image of Christ’s Kingship and Priesthood. So Abraham is blessed by Christ Himself to seek a Polity that is not absolutist, but autocratic...

However, it was not given to Abraham or any of the patriarchs to build that Polity. The new, God-pleasing Polity would emerge after a long process lasting hundreds of years that began with a famous “war of national liberation” from the second of the great absolutist monarchies of the ancient world – Egypt. Under the leadership of Moses the Hebrews created an embryonic state of a new kind, which finally acquired a territorial base and stability under Kings Saul and David...

## 2. FROM THEOCRACY TO AUTOCRACY

We have seen that 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 as God, and had no ruler but God; and so 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” – that is, *autocracy*, whose essence consists in a division of powers between a king and a high priest, 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, had placed virtually all power in the hands of Joseph, a servant of the True God, and also showed great honour to Joseph’s 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) and went up with Joseph and his family to bury the patriarch in Canaan. 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 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”.<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, according to St. Ignaty Brianchaninov, it was Joseph, and not any of the pagan Pharaohs, who was “the founder of autocratic (or monarchical) rule in Egypt”<sup>21</sup>, transforming it from patriarchal simplicity to a fully organized state with permanent citizenship and a land tax, which Joseph

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<sup>20</sup> *Menaion*, September 14, Exaltation of the Cross, Mattins, Canon, Canticle 7, troparion.

<sup>21</sup> 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.

instituted to prepare for the years of famine, and which lasted, essentially, for hundreds of years.<sup>22</sup>

Of course, Egypt remained a pagan country, and on Jacob's and Joseph's deaths the embryonic "symphony of powers" that existed between them and Pharaoh 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 lasting autocracy, that of Moses, came into being.

The time was ripe for the formation of a State structure for Israel. By the time of Moses the Israelites had grown to 400,000 souls, far beyond the size of unit that a single patriarchal figure could know and control unaided, and had become a people with its own internal structure of twelve tribes. They needed *order*, and consequently, both a law and a judicial system to administer it.

That law was given by God Himself as the Supreme Ruler (Exodus 20 *et seq.*). And in obedience to God Moses created a quasi-governmental judicial system to administer it, delegating the power of resolving disputes to "the chief of your tribes, wise men, and known," making them "captains over thousands, and captains over hundreds, and captains over fifties, and captains over tens, and officers among your tribes" (Deuteronomy 1.15). The final court of appeal he reserved for himself.

Again, at God's command, he entrusted the priesthood to his brother Aaron, who became the head of the Levitical priesthood. Thus in the relationship between Moses and Aaron we see the first clear foreshadowing of the relationship between the Christian State and Church, monarchy and priesthood. The symphony of these blood brothers foreshadowed the spiritual symphony of powers in both the Israelite and the Christian autocracies.

However, while the Church in Moses' time was already a reality, with a high priest under God, the State was not yet fully formed. For Moses was a lawgiver and prophet rather than a king (in fact, he was himself a priest). The Israelites would have to wait until they had *land* before acquiring a king; for "a king is an advantage to a land with cultivated fields" (Ecclesiastes 5.8).

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<sup>22</sup> Ian Wilson confirms this idea. Records show that there were dramatic fluctuations in the level of Nile flooding, and therefore of the harvest yield, during the reigns of the 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 18<sup>th</sup>-century BC Pharaohs. One of those Pharaohs was Senwosret III, in whose time "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' (Gen. 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?" (*The Bible is History*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999, p. 37)

The Lord said 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 continue 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 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.

In the period from Moses to Saul, the people were ruled by the Judges, many of whom, like Joshua, Jephtha and Gideon, were charismatic leaders. However, towards the end of the period, since "there was no king in Israel; everyone did what seemed right to him" (Judges 21.25), and 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 provide them with a king.

God fulfilled their request. However, since the people's motivation in seeking a king was not pure, He 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 at the expense of the Philistines and Ammonites, he persecuted true piety, as represented by the future King David and his followers, and he allowed the Church, as represented by the priesthood serving the Ark at Shiloh, to fall into the hands of unworthy men (the sons of Eli).

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. Let us consider 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).

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. 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 king who would satisfy the people's notions of kingship rather than God's, - and that this desire amounted to apostasy in the eyes of the Lord, the only true King of Israel.

It is important to realize that the worldly principle was introduced 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. Thus for the kings' subsequent oppression of the people both the priests and the people bore responsibility.

Thus 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 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 in His mercy did not always send such totalitarian 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 major battle with the Philistines, the king made a sacrifice to the Lord without waiting for Samuel. For this sin, the sin of "caesaropapism", as western scholars term it, the sin of the invasion of the Church's sphere by the State, Samuel prophesied that the kingdom would be taken away from Saul and given to a man after God's heart.

This example was also 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."<sup>23</sup>

Then Saul spared Agag, the king of the Amalekites, together with the best of his livestock, 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).

To modern readers Saul's sin might seem small. 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, 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.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Zyzykin, *op. cit.*, part II, p. 17.

<sup>24</sup> That Saul became continued to disobey God is shown by his asking on the witch of Endor to summon the soul of Samuel from Hades, although he himself had passed laws condemning necromancy. 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 anointing of Saul raises the question: are only those kings anointed with a visible anointing recognized by God? The answer to this is: no. 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*, 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!"<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> St. Philaret, *Iz Slova v den' koronatsia Imperatora Aleksandra Pavlovicha. Sbornik propovednicheskikh obraztsov (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.

### 3. KING DAVID

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 supported the claim of Saul's surviving son to the throne, while the southern tribes 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...

The greatness of David lay in the fact that in his person he represented the true autocrat, who both closed the 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 its liturgical worship that was the most important fact about him. As Patrick Henry Reardon points out, 19 chapters are devoted to David, and of these 19 "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)."<sup>26</sup>

"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. It was inherent in Israelite law even at this stage that, although everyone had responsibilities and duties to society as a whole, society - or its representative, the king, or the state - could under no circumstances possess unlimited authority over the individual. Only God could do that. The Jews, unlike the Greeks and later the Romans, did not recognize such concepts as city, state, community as abstracts with legal personalities and rights and privileges. You could commit sins against man, and of course against God; and these sins were crimes; but there was no such thing as a crime/sin against the state.

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<sup>26</sup> Reardon, *Chronicles of History and Worship*, Ben Lomond, Ca.: Conciliar Press, 2006, p. 12.



“This raises a central dilemma about Israelite, later Judaic, religion and its relationship with temporal power. The dilemma can be stated quite simply: could the two institutions coexist, without one fatally weakening the other?”<sup>27</sup>

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 be said to have had the primacy over the priesthood. 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). Again, King Jehoshaphat appointed Amariah the chief priest, saying that he was “over you [the Israelites] in all matters of the Lord” (II Chronicles 19.11). Nevertheless, there was a sphere, the sphere of service in the temple, into which the king entered at his peril, as we see in the case of King Uzziah, who was punished with leprosy for presuming to burn incense before the Lord...

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. 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, 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 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 Jewish 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.”<sup>28</sup>

The Ark was a symbol 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,

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<sup>27</sup> Johnson, *A History of the Jews*, London: Phoenix, 1995, 1998, p. 57.

<sup>28</sup> Bright, *A History of Israel*, London: SCM Press, 1980, pp. 200-201.

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.

Only it was not given to David to complete the third act that was to complete this symbolism, the building of the Temple to house the Ark. That was reserved for 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. Such was the splendour of Solomon’s reign that he also became a type of Christ, and of Christ in His relationship to the Church.

Only 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 geographical extent and splendour, prefigures the Lord’s sending out of the apostles into the Gentile world and the expansion of the Church throughout 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 looks 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).

As St. Philaret of Moscow demonstrates, the superiority of the Israelite Autocracy makes of it a model 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 recognised 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."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> St. Philaret, in S. Fomin & T. Fomina, *Rossia pered Vtorym Prishestviem (Russia before the Second Coming)*, Moscow, 1994, vol. I, pp. 320-321.

#### 4. THE DECLINE OF THE ISRAELITE AUTOCRACY

Although King Solomon forefigured Christ in many ways, in other ways – his luxury, pagan wives and inclination to idolatry, and vast military projects involving forced labour - he displayed the image of the absolutist pagan despot that the Prophet Samuel had warned against. And after his 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 body politic was divided between the two tribes of the southern kingdom of Judah under Rehoboam and the ten tribes of the northern kingdom of Israel under Jeroboam. The political schism was mirrored by a religious schism when Jeroboam built a rival altar and priesthood to the altar and priesthood in Jerusalem.

Archaeology has revealed that the northern kingdom was powerful – perhaps more powerful than the southern kingdom. But in the eyes of the prophets it lacked legitimacy, for its origin was rebellion against God and the God-appointed kingship and priesthood in Jerusalem. And when 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. 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 of Judah over the usurping king of Israel. Thus when both kings, in a rare moment of alliance, 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)...<sup>30</sup> Later, however, Elisha anointed a new king for Israel, Jehu, in the place of Ahab, who led the counter-revolution which killed Jezabel and restored the true faith to Israel.

Here, then, we see the first application of a very important principle, namely, that *loyalty to autocracy is conditional on its loyalty to the true faith*.

Both Israel and Judah enjoyed a certain recovery in the first half of the eighth century. However, idolatry continued, combined with greed, injustice and debauchery. Then Israel descended into a time of time of troubles in which many illegitimate rulers came briefly to power and then disappeared – "they have set up kings, but not by Me," said the Lord through the Prophet Hosea (8.3). Instead of relying on the Lord, Israel turned to the foreign powers, and even invaded its brother-state of Judah. Therefore God permitted

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<sup>30</sup> Jehoshaphat was a good king, who, like David, ruled over the whole life of the nation, and yet carefully distinguished the secular and ecclesiastical spheres. Thus he said: "Take notice: Amariah the chief priest is over you in all matters of the Lord, and Zebadiah the son of Ismael, the ruler of the house of Judah, for all the king's matters" (II Chronicles 19.11).

its conquest by despotic Assyria and the deportation of its inhabitants to the east, which spiritually speaking constituted a reversal of the exodus from Egypt - "now will He remember their iniquity, and visit their sins; they shall return to Egypt" (Hosea 8.13).

Judah was spared for a time because of the remnants of piety that were still preserved in her. Thus King Hezekiah, though a vassal of Assyria, reversed the syncretistic policies of Ahaz, and Josiah - those of Manasseh. 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, which, having been used to punish the sins of the Jews, was then cast away (Isaiah 10.15).

In this period, as the people became weaker in faith, the kingship became stronger. This was good if the king was good, for his strength and piety could in part compensate for the weakness of the Church. 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. Blessed 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."<sup>31</sup>

But betrayal did not only come from the kings: it could come from the high priesthood. Thus the high priest and temple treasurer in the time of King Hezekiah of Judah was called Somnas. Jewish tradition relates that Somnas wished to betray the people of God and flee to the Assyrian King Sennacherib; and St. Cyril of Alexandria says of him: "On receiving the

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<sup>31</sup> St. Jerome, *Letter to Pope Damasus*, quoted in Johanna Manley (ed.), *The Bible and the Holy Fathers*, Menlo Park, Ca.: Monastery Books, 1990, p. 412.

dignity of the high-priesthood, he abused it, going to the extent of imprisoning everybody who contradicted him." <sup>32</sup> Ozias and Somnas represent what have come to be called in Christian times caesaropapism and papocaesarism, respectively – distortion to the right and to the left of the ideal of Church-State symphony.

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).<sup>33</sup>

Josiah was a great king, but he made a fatal mistake in his relations with the contemporary super-power 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 was killed...

This incident demonstrated that God can work His will even through pagan powers, and that the true autocracy is not always right to wage war against them. The Jews would soon have to learn this lesson again, in their relations with the other regional superpower, Babylon...

For the same spiritual sicknesses that had afflicted Israel continued to undermine Judah, and so the Lord raised another despot to punish her – the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar, who destroyed the Temple and exiled the people to Babylon in 586 BC. 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

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<sup>32</sup> St. Cyril, *P.G.* 70, 516B.

<sup>33</sup> A.A.Vasiliev, *History of the Byzantine Empire*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1952, p. 152.

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).

Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Jerusalem and carrying away of the Jews to Babylon, writes 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. 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 Assyro-Babylonians, combined with the teaching of Zoroaster 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' was 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..."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Tikhomirov, *Religio-Filosofskie Osnovy Istorii* (The Religio-Philosophical Foundations of History), Moscow, 1997, pp. 135-136.

## 5. ATHENIAN DEMOCRACY

Each of the main political systems is the reflection of a particular religious (or anti-religious) outlook on the world. Greek democracy, which appeared after the Babylonian captivity of the Jews, is no exception to this rule. Like Hinduism, it was the expression of a particularly *human* view of God or the gods. Thus J.M. Roberts writes: "Greek gods and goddesses, for all their supernatural standing and power, are remarkably human. They express the humanity-centred quality of later Greek civilization. Much as it owed to Egypt and the East, Greek mythology and art usually presents its gods as better, or worse, men and women, a world away from the monsters of Assyria and Babylonia, or from Shiva the many-armed. Whoever is responsible, this is a religious revolution; its converse was the implication that men could be godlike. 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."<sup>35</sup>

If the gods were such uninspiring figures, it was hardly surprising that the kings (whether god-kings or not) should cease to inspire awe. Hence the trend, apparent from Homeric times, to desacralise kingship and remove it from the centre of political power. 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 and those they ruled take their place. 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." Although 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, who are depicted like the tyrannical capitalists of nineteenth-century Marxism. 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

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<sup>35</sup> Roberts, *History of the World*, Oxford: Helicon Publishing, 1992, p. 139.

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."

This 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: "You are past our finding out – whether you are the necessity of nature or the mind of human beings". "[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."<sup>36</sup>

If the dramatists could take such liberties, in spite of the fact that their dramas were 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 sophists, 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.<sup>37</sup> Thus he did not take the final step in the democratic argument, which consists in cutting the bond between human institutions and law (*νομος*) and the Divine order of things (*φύσις*) – a step that was not taken unequivocally until the French revolution in the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, his thought shows that the movement towards democracy went hand in hand with religious scepticism.

It is in the context of this gradual loss of faith in the official "Olympian" religion that Athenian Democracy arose. But just as Athens was not the whole of Greece, so Democracy was not 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 found, most notably in Sparta.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Grant, *The Classical Greeks*, London: Phoenix, 1989, p. 130.

<sup>37</sup> 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*, Routledge: London and New York, 1996, p. 11).

<sup>38</sup> Sparta has been seen as one of the earliest models of socialism in the western world. See Lev Karpinsky, "S 'Sotsializmom' napereves'" ("In a horizontal position with socialism"), *Moskovskie Novosti* (Moscow News), N 21, May 27, 1990; Vladimir Rusak, *Svidetel'stvo*

This naturally led to a debate on which form was the best; and we find one debate on this subject 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.'"<sup>39</sup>

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*obviniensis* (Witness for the Prosecution), Jordanville, N.Y.: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1989, part III, p. 102.

<sup>39</sup> Herodotus, *History*, London: Penguin Books, III, 80.

Otanes' main thesis is true as regards Despotic power, but false as regards Autocratic power, as we shall see; for Autocracy's rule over the people is not absolute in that it is wielded only in "symphony" with the Church, which serves as its conscience and restraining power. The theme of "equality under the law" is also familiar from modern Democracy; it was soon to be subjected to penetrating criticism by Plato and Aristotle. As for the assertion that "the people in power do none of the things that monarchs do", this was to be disproved even sooner by the experience of Athenian Democracy in the war with Sparta.

"Otanes 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."<sup>40</sup>

This to a western ear paradoxical argument that monarchy actually delivers freedom – freedom from the scourge of civil war, especially, but freedom in other senses, too – 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, allowing them to go back to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple. Augustus, the first Roman emperor, freed the Romans from the ravages of civil war. So did St. Constantine, the first Christian Roman emperor, who also granted them religious freedom. Rurik, the first Russian king, was summoned from abroad to deliver the Russians from the misery and oppression that their “freedom” had subjected them to. Tsar Nicolas II tried to free Serbia from Austro-Hungarian despotism, and died trying to save his people from the worst of all despotisms, Communism...

Of course, these men were exceptional rulers: examples of monarchs who enslaved their subjects rather than liberating them are easy to find. 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. But the argument in favour of monarchy as put into the mouth of an oriental despot by a Greek democratic historian also remains valid in its essential point. It should remind us that Greek historical and philosophical thought was more often critical of democracy than in favour of it.

The defeat of Athens in the Peloponnesian war, and the many negative phenomena that war threw up, 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 it 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.

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. For the next one hundred and fifty years, until Alexander the Great reimposed despotism on the city-states, they were almost continually at war with each

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<sup>40</sup> Herodotus, *History*, III, 81, 82.

other. Nor was this disunity manifest only *between* city-states: *within* them traitors were also frequent (the Athenian Alcibiades, for example).

Evidently, attachment to the idea of democracy does not *necessarily* go together with attachment to the idea of the nation, with *patriotism* and *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 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 selfish and destructive individualism is described by Roberts: "Greek democracy... was far from being dominated, as is ours, by the mythology of cooperativeness, and 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 [ἀρετή] 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."<sup>41</sup>

Another defect of Athenian democracy was that it tended implicitly to identify the state with the assembly of free male citizens in separation from the family<sup>42</sup>, whereas, as we have seen, Aristotle saw the state as an organic outgrowth from the family, or the family writ large. This emphasized the individualism and competitiveness that we have already noted, and undermined the natural relations of hierarchy and obedience within society. Perhaps, therefore, it is not by accident that the first feminist work of literature was Aristophanes' comedy, *Lysistrata*.

The Athenians could be as cruel and imperialistic 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.<sup>43</sup> All the Melian males of military age were slaughtered, and all the women and children were

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<sup>41</sup> Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

<sup>42</sup> Jean Bethke Elshtein, *Sovereignty: God, State, and Self*, New York: Basic Books, 2008, p. 8.

<sup>43</sup> Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, II, 37. London: Penguin books, V, 89, 91-97.

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 quality of the religion that the citizens profess...



## 6. PLATO ON THE STATE

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”.<sup>44</sup> The most famous Greek philosopher was, of course, Plato. Prompted by the failure of the Athenian State in the Peloponnesian War, he undertook the construction of the first systematic theory of politics and of the relationship of politics to religion. And his teaching is indeed a nurse, or preparation, for the Christian teaching on the State that we find in the Bible and the Holy Fathers...

According to Plato in *The Republic*, the end of the state is happiness, which is achieved if it produces justice, since justice is the condition of happiness. It was therefore greatly to the discredit of Athenian democracy that it condemned to death its finest citizen and Plato’s own teacher, Socrates. 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, Anytus fails to convince us, 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...’”<sup>45</sup>

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.

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Before examining Plato’s ideal, let us consider first why democracy was for him, not merely not the ideal, but 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.

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<sup>44</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*.

<sup>45</sup> 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.

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.”<sup>46</sup> 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.”<sup>47</sup> “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.

Plato compares the democratic state to a ship: “Suppose the following to be the state of affairs on board a ship or ships. 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, 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?”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, London: Penguin books, 1974, 488.

<sup>47</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, 557.

<sup>48</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, p. 282.

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 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."<sup>49</sup>

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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 had the insight to see 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.<sup>50</sup> 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."<sup>51</sup>

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

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<sup>49</sup> David Held, *Models of Democracy*, Oxford: Polity Press, 1987, pp. 29-31

<sup>50</sup> "The true Philosopher-Ruler," writes McClelland, "is a reluctant ruler. His heart is set on the Good, and he accepts the burdens of rulership because the Good can only survive and prosper in a city which is ruled by just men. Rule by guardians is an attempt to universalize justice in so far as that is possible..." (McClelland, *op. cit.*, p. 36).

<sup>51</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, 473.

critics who see him as the godfather of totalitarianism imply<sup>52</sup>, he was fully aware of the fact that, as Lord Acton put it much later, “power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely”.<sup>53</sup> But he was also enough of a “Platonist”, as it were, to know that the end of human society must *transcend* human society.

Having said that, one cannot deny that there are elements of utopianism in Plato’s system. Thus his approach to statecraft 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...”<sup>54</sup>

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.

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<sup>52</sup> See Sir Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, part I, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966.

<sup>53</sup> 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, 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.”

<sup>54</sup> Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy*, London: Allen Unwin, 1946, pp. 127-128. Metropolitan Anastasy (*op. cit.*, p. 40) 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.”

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, soberly rational beings who alone could inspire wise and soberly rational 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 gods.

But what if there was another divinity higher than these lechers and buffoons, 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 the 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."<sup>55</sup> 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 the despotism that all Greeks despised. It was all for the sake of "justice" - that is, in his conception, 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 became the model for that supremely 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 use of the lie for the sake of the survival of the State.

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<sup>55</sup> McClelland, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

## 7. ARISTOTLE ON THE STATE

Aristotle avoided the extremes of Plato, 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.

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* (or what Polybius was later to call "ochlocracy", "rule by the mob").<sup>56</sup> "Democracy," he wrote, "is a form of government under which the citizens distribute the offices of state among themselves by lot, whereas under oligarchy there is a property qualification, under aristocracy one of education. By education I mean that education which is laid down by the law; for it is those who have been loyal to the national institutions that hold office under an aristocracy. These are bound to be looked upon as 'the best men,' and it is from this fact that this form of government has derived its name ('the rule of the best'). Monarchy, as the word implies, 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."<sup>57</sup>

The fact that Aristotle was prepared to consider the possibility of a good kind of monarchy may have something to do with the fact that one of his pupils was the future King of Macedonia, Alexander the Great, whose father, Philip took advantage of the perennial disunity of the Greek city-states to assume a *de facto* dominion over them. However, Aristotle's favourite form of government was *politeia*, in which, in Copleston's words, "there naturally exists a warlike multitude able to obey and rule in turn by a law which gives office to the well-to-do according to their desert".<sup>58</sup>

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

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<sup>56</sup> McClelland, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

<sup>57</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1366a.

<sup>58</sup> Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, volume I, part II, p. 96.

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.”<sup>59</sup> 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 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.”<sup>60</sup>

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.”<sup>61</sup> In this respect Aristotle was faithful to the thought of 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?”<sup>62</sup>

This attitude was inherited by the Romans, who 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.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, London: Penguin books, 1981, p. 362.

<sup>60</sup> Copleston, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

<sup>61</sup> Copleston, *op. cit.*, pp. 98-99

<sup>62</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, 544.

<sup>63</sup> 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



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 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.<sup>64</sup>

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.”<sup>65</sup> 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.”<sup>66</sup>

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.

This is not to say that Aristotle’s politics was irreligious in a general sense. As 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.<sup>67</sup> But 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. Even Plato, for all his idealism, subordinated religious myth to the needs of the state and the happiness of people in this life. And Aristotle, for all his philosophical belief in an “unmoved Mover”, was a less other-worldly thinker than Plato.

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to understand how a people are governed.” (quoted in Sidentop’s introduction to Guizot’s *History of Civilization in Europe*, London: Penguin Books, 1997).

<sup>64</sup> McClelland, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

<sup>65</sup> McClelland, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

<sup>66</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, I; quoted in Azkoul, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

<sup>67</sup> Quoted by Zyzykin, *op. cit.*, part I, p. 7. Other ancient writers said the same. Thus Lactantius in his work *On the Wrath of God*: “Only the fear of God keeps men together in society... With the removal of religion and justice we descend to the level of mute cattle deprived of reason, or to the savagery of wild beasts.”

However, Greek democracy was not as irreligious and 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..."<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Bowden, "Greek Oracles and Greek Democracy", *The Historian*, N 41, Spring, 1994, pp. 3,4,7,8.

## 8. ALEXANDER, THE STOICS AND THE DEMISE OF DEMOCRACY

Classical Greek Democracy, undermined not only by the disunity, instability and licence highlighted by the critiques of Herodotus, Thucydides, Plato and Aristotle, but also by its narrow nationalism and pride in relation to the “barbarian” world, ended up by succumbing to that same barbarian world – first, the “Greek barbarism” of Macedon, and then the iron-clad savagery of Rome. And if the glittering civilisation made possible by Classical Greek democracy eventually made captives of its captors culturally speaking, politically and morally speaking it had been decisively defeated. Its demise left civilised mankind dazzled, but still thirsting for the ideal polity.

When the West turned again to democratic ideas in the early modern period, it was to the Greek classical writers that they turned for inspiration. Thus Marx and Engels turned to Aristotle’s description of democracy when they planned the Paris Commune of 1871<sup>69</sup>, while Plato’s ideas about philosopher-kings and guardians, child-rearing, censorship and education found a strong echo in the “people’s democracies” of twentieth-century communism...

In the intervening period, only two major ideas made a significant contribution to thinking on politics. One was *Christianity*, which we shall discuss in detail later. And the other was *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.

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.”<sup>70</sup>

Another important element in Stoicism was fate. Stoicism took the idea of fate, and made a virtue of it. Since men cannot control their fate, virtue lies in accepting fate as the expression of the Divine Reason that runs through 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. This attitude led to a more passive, dutiful approach to politics than had been fashionable in the Classical Greek period.

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<sup>69</sup> Held, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>70</sup> Copleston, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

The political event that elicited this broadening in political thought was the rise of the Hellenistic empire of Alexander the Great. 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'." <sup>71</sup>

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. In spreading Greek civilisation throughout the East, he betrayed its greatest ideal, the dignity of man, by making himself into a god (the son of Ammon-Zeus) and forcing his own Greek soldiers to perform an eastern-style act of proskynesis to their fellow man. <sup>72</sup> 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. <sup>73</sup> Thus Alexander, like the deus ex machina of a Greek tragedy, brought the curtain down on Classical Greek civilisation, merging it with its great rival, the despotic civilisations of the East.

Alexander's successor-kingdoms of the Ptolemies and Seleucids went still further in an orientalisising 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)." <sup>74</sup>

Classical Greek civilisation began with the experience of liberation from 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.

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<sup>71</sup> Johnson, op. cit., p. 101.

<sup>72</sup> 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.

<sup>73</sup> Roberts, op. cit., p. 173.

<sup>74</sup> Roberts, op. cit., p. 175.

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 democratic thought *did* bring forth fruit.

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 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 tope 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...”<sup>75</sup>

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, more humane 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 eastern experience 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 civilisation of the Greeks to the universal community and civilisation of all mankind (or, at any rate, of the oikoumene), and from the narrow worship of Athene of Athens or Diana of the Ephesians to the One God Who created *all* men, endowed them *all* with reason and freewill and brought them *all* together under one single dominion. Thus, as McClelland writes, “polis had given way to cosmopolis. 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...”<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> McClelland, op. cit., pp. 76-77.

<sup>76</sup> McClelland, op. cit., p. 82.

## 9. FROM ZERUBBABEL TO THE MACCABEES

Although the political schism between Israel and Judah had been “healed” by the disappearance of the northern kingdom of Israel, and although the political passions of Judah had been at least partially quenched by the exile to Babylon in 586, the spiritual “schism in the soul”, the schism between faithfulness to the God of Israel and the opposite tendency, remained among the Jews. In the Prophets Ezekiel and Jeremiah we see how, even in exile, most of the Jews did not repent but stayed among the pagans and learned their ways. At the same time, the books of Daniel, Esther and Tobit show that piety was not completely extinguished even among those Jews who stayed in Persia, and that a pious remnant, stirred up by the Prophets Haggai and Zechariah, returned to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel to rebuild the Temple.

Zerubbabel is 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, 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.

In chapter 6, we have a striking messianic prophecy about Him Who would combine the roles of king and priest within Himself, being Himself the Source of grace for both the autocracy and the priesthood. 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 primarily to Jesus the Messiah rather than Joshua the Jewish 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, not of the Old Testament Church, but of 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, being the only Person (except for Melchizedek) ever rightfully to combine the two roles, or two “crowns”, 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). 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, sanctifying it by His presence. That is perhaps why, from the time of Zerubbabel and the building of the Second Temple to the Coming of Christ over five hundred years later, there is no real restoration of the Israelite Autocracy: all eyes were now to be trained not on the shadow 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...

Probably the most important Jewish leader in this transitional period was the priest Ezra. “His main task,” writes 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...”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Tikhomirov, *Religiozno-Filosofskie Osnovy Istorii*, pp. 141-142.



However, we are running ahead of our story...

In spite of the attempt to revive observance of the law under Ezra and Nehemiah, piety declined in Israel. And then, in 332, the Persian empire was conquered by Alexander the Great, the third of the despotic beasts seen in Daniel's famous vision...

Not that *he* harmed Judah: on the contrary, 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. Alexander says that "he 'adores' this God, for, as he explains to a surprised aide, he too 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'."<sup>78</sup>

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, autocratic king, whose crown is given him by God, and the false, despotic king, who takes the crown for himself in a self-willed manner.

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<sup>78</sup> Schama, *The Story of the Jews*, London: Vintage, 2014, pp. 94-95.

However, not all the Greek kings were evil despots or enemies of 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 of Alexandria. The resultant Septuagint (meaning “70”) translation became the basis both for the transmission of the Old Testament to the Greek-speaking world and for the Christian Scriptures used by the Apostles.

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 he would die, quickly dragged him away. Later, when he recovered, he still did not repent after being chastised, but went his making bitter threats...” (III Maccabees 2.21-24).

Later, it was the Seleucid kings of Syria who became the persecutors of the Jews. In 175 BC Antiochus IV Epiphanes came to the throne. As Senator Joseph Lieberman points out, “The ruler’s name hinted at imminent struggle; Antiochus added the title to his name because it meant, ‘A 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.”<sup>79</sup>

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

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<sup>79</sup> Lieberman, “Hanukkah”, *Orthodox Christian Witness*, vol. XXXIII, N 10 (1483), January 17/30, 2000, p. 5.

of any kind. Indeed, there was never any possibility of a conflation between Judaism and Greek religion as such; what the reformers [the Hellenising Jews] wanted was for Judaism to universalize itself by pervading Greek culture; and that meant embracing the polis.”<sup>80</sup>

With the agreement of King Antiochus, the Hellenising Jews removed the lawful high priest Onias, replacing him with his brother Jason, a Hellenist. 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 his enemies called him, “Epimanes”, “raving madman”. After conquering Egypt, he returned to Jerusalem in 168 and pillaged the Temple. “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. So all the nations accepted the word of the king. Many from Israel also thought it good to serve him, so they sacrificed to idols and profaned the Sabbath” (I Maccabees 1.41-43). Antiochus led many of the people away into slavery, banned circumcision, Sabbath observance and the reading of the law, declared that the Temple should be dedicated to the worship of Zeus, 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) and his sons succeeded in expelling the Greeks from Israel, purifying the Temple and restoring the True Faith. This victory, which is celebrated to this day in the feast of Hannukah, or Purification, is a clear example of how, in certain extreme circumstances when the faith is under direct attack, God blesses the taking up of arms in defense of the faith.

But a true autocracy on the Davidic model was not re-established in Judah, for the Maccabees (or Hasmoneans, as they were called after Matityahu’s surname, Hasmon) unlawfully combined the roles of king and high priest ((I Maccabees 13.42). Their dynasty, which continued from 168 to 37 B.C., was composed exclusively of representatives of the tribe of Levi, who could only be priests, not kings. For God’s covenant with David had been with him and his son; the promises were only to the descendants of the tribe of the Davidic tribe of Judah.

Meanwhile, the pagan idea of kingship began to be accepted among the Jews. This, writes Tikhomirov, “was only one of the aspects of pagan culture that now began to penetrate Jewry, leading to conflicts between conservative, law-based and reformist, Hellenist-influenced factions among the people.

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<sup>80</sup> Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

Those who were occupied with this and guided the people, that is, the Pharisees and Scribes, who produced interpretations by their joint efforts and composed the ruling class. They were undoubtedly deeply convinced people who faithfully served the idea of the Jewish fatherland and were able to achieve popularity. According to their interpretation, the Messiah who was to come had to appear as the political leader of Israel and accomplish the domination of the Jews in the pagan world. The Kingdom of God was understood as the earthly kingdom of Israel. Their passionate conviction that these dreams would be fulfilled showed itself in successive rebellions of the Jews, in those 'zealots' whose first representative was Judah of Galilee, who died in a rebellion in the time of Christ."<sup>81</sup>

The Hasmonean dynasty probably reached its peak under the second Maccabee brother, Simon. "The other brothers," writes Simon 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. Hellenised 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..."<sup>82</sup>

Nevertheless, Simon Maccabeus was no Solomon. For the Hasmoneans' combination of priestly, kingly and legal power in the hands of one person was illegal. Therefore the crisis of the restoration of the true Jewish autocracy was not resolved. It could only be resolved by the Coming of the Son of David and Lion of Judah, Christ Himself.

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<sup>81</sup> Tikhomirov, *op. cit.*

<sup>82</sup> Schama, *op. cit.*, pp. 120-121.

## 10. HEROD THE GREAT

It was at this point that the shadow of Roman power (with which the Maccabees had maintained friendly relations<sup>83</sup>) began to fall across the scene, taking the place of the already severely weakened Seleucids. In 64 the Roman general Pompey arrived in Antioch and deposed the last of the Seleucid kings. The two sons of Alexander Jannaeus, Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II, were fighting each other for the kingship and high priesthood at this time, and they both appealed to Pompey for help. The Pharisees also sent a delegation to him; but they asked him to abolish the monarchy in Judaea, since they said it was contrary to their traditions. In 63 Pompey, taking the side of Hyrcanus, captured Jerusalem and, to the horror of the Jews, entered the Holy of Holies.

Later, an Idumaeen named Antipater came to power. His son, who was placed in charge of Galilee, was named Herod, known in history as “the Great”, the first persecutor of Christianity, and the man who finally destroyed the Israelite autocracy... In 43 BC, Antipater was poisoned by the Jewish nationalist party, and his son Herod was forced by the Sanhedrin to flee to Rome. Thus when the Hasmonean Antigonus with the help of the Parthians conquered 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 of the Capitol that were impermissible for a Jew, and which caused deep consternation among the Jews, he was formally raised onto the Jewish throne.”<sup>84</sup> Three years later, after a bloody civil war in which the Jews supported Antigonus, Herod was installed in Jerusalem with the aid of the Roman legions.

Now since Herod was not only not of the line of David, but not even a Jew by birth<sup>85</sup>, 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. 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.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, had not the Patriarch Jacob, declared: “The sceptre

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<sup>83</sup> See I Maccabees 8, a fascinating and largely approbatory portrait of the Roman republic.

<sup>84</sup> Paryaeu, “Tsar Irod i ego Soobschiki: Istorija 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.

<sup>85</sup> Tom Mueller writes: “His mother was an ethnic Arab, 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 Hasmonaeen kings had traditionally done. Many of his subjects consider 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 Hasmonaeen theocracy.” (“Herod: The Holy Land’s Visionary Builder”, *National Geographic Magazine*, December, 2008, p. 41).

<sup>86</sup> 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

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?<sup>87</sup>

Herod tried to remedy the fault of his non-Jewish blood by marrying the Hasmonaean princess Mariamne, the grand-daughter of King Aristobulus and Hyrcanus II on her mother's side. He also rebuilt the Temple with unparalleled splendour. But his Jewish faith was superficial. When Octavian declared himself divine, he built a temple in his honour in Samaria, renaming it Sebaste, the Greek equivalent of the emperor's new title, Augustus. And he built so many fortresses, gymnasia, temples and other buildings that Palestine under Herod (Octavian 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. 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."<sup>88</sup>

But of course the essence of the kingdom was quite different from that of David and Solomon. Apart from the fact that the real ruler was Rome, and that outside Jerusalem itself Herod showed himself to be a thorough-going pagan (for example, he rebuilt the temple of Apollo in Rhodes), 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. He was, in fact, the closest type of the Antichrist in Old Testament history...

Metropolitan Moses of Toronto writes: "Without Roman rule, Herod would not have [had] a place in the Jewish kingdom. At a time when it seemed his rule was threatened he killed his father-in-law Hyrcanus. Later he arranged that his brother-in-law Aristobulus be made High Priest. Aristobulus was from the Hasmonaean dynasty and a legitimate choice for

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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)."

<sup>87</sup> 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.*).

<sup>88</sup> Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

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.'"<sup>89</sup>

"The last years of the life of Herod," writes Paryaev, "were simply nightmarish. Feeling that his subjects profoundly hated him, haunted at night by visions of his slaughtered wife, sons and all the Hasmoneans, 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."<sup>90</sup> The final 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).

Perhaps the clearest sign of the degeneration of the Jews under Herod was the behaviour of the Pharisees. We have seen that they had led the movement against Hellenizing influences in the first century BC, and were zealots of the purity of the law. But just as the Maccabee movement for renewal of the true faith degenerated into its opposite, so did that of the Pharisees. They even once sent a delegation to Rome asking for the establishment of a *republic* in Judaea under the sovereignty of Rome.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, they supported Herod, and, like him, persecuted Christ, the True King of the Jews, leading to the abandonment of the Jewish people by God.

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<sup>89</sup> Metropolitan Moses, *Sermon on the Feast of the Entry of the Theotokos into the Temple*, 2013.

<sup>90</sup> Paryaev, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>91</sup> Paryaev, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

## 11. THE KING OF THE JEWS

Christ was “the son of David”, that is, a descendant of the old royal dynastic line; He came to restore that line and make it eternal. For “He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will 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).

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.

“These are the messianic ideas which were in people's minds when Jesus came...”<sup>92</sup>

Christ by no means rejected all of these apocalyptic ideas. After all, several of them were grounded in the God-inspired Scriptures. But He rejected their cruelty, their national ambition, and their anti-Gentilism.

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<sup>92</sup> Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*, pp. 223-230.

He was Himself the Messiah, the Son of David; and His forerunner was St. John the Baptist, who came in the spirit of Elijah. But 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 by the power of the Spirit.

The question was: would the Jews accept Him as the Messiah, as the true King of Israel, embodying the spiritual, not the nationalist image of Messiahship and kingship? On this would depend both their individual salvation and the salvation of their State...

Tragically, in their great majority the Jews failed this test. They both crucified their True Messiah and King, God Himself, 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 recognise 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."<sup>93</sup>

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 from 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 carried out both a *democratic revolution* against their True King, and, at the same time, a *despotic obeisance* to a false god-king. 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 submission to "the god of this world".

In 66-70 AD the Jews rebelled against Rome and were ruthlessly suppressed; hundreds of thousands of Jews were killed, and the Temple was destroyed.<sup>94</sup> The message of the revolutionaries was striking similar to that of another Jewish-inspired revolution - that of Russia in 1917. Thus Neil Faulkner writes: "The revolutionary message of sectarian radicals and messiahs was 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

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<sup>93</sup> 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.

<sup>94</sup> For a moving and instructive discussion of this war, see Fr. Timothy Alferov, "Katastrofa", [http://www.catacomb.org.ua/modules.php?name=Pages&go=print\\_page&pid=659](http://www.catacomb.org.ua/modules.php?name=Pages&go=print_page&pid=659).

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..."<sup>95</sup>

In 130, the Emperor Hadrian renamed Jerusalem Aelia Capitolina after himself, and planned to erect a temple to Jupiter on the site of the Temple. In 135 there was another rebellion under Bar Koseba. It was crushed with the deaths of 580,000 Jewish soldiers, the city and ruins were ploughed over and a completely Hellenic city built in its place...

Paradoxically, the Jews' last stand in both their rebellions took place in the hilltop fortresses built at Herodium and Masada by that arch-Hellenist, Herod the Great.<sup>96</sup> Equally paradoxically, 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, 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 mission to the New Israel, the Church.

"On coming into the world," writes 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

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<sup>95</sup> Faulkner, "The great Jewish revolt against Rome, 66-73 CE", *History Today*, vol. 52 (10), October, 2002, pp. 50, 51.

<sup>96</sup> Mueller, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-59.

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'."<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Tikhomirov, *Religiozno-Filosofskie Osnovy Istorii*, p. 142.

## 12. THE END OF THE STATE

The history of Israel 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: what is the end, that is, *purpose* of the State? And what is the end, that is, *destroyer* of the State, that which brings the State to an end? The two questions are logically as well as linguistically 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.

Now 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”.<sup>98</sup> 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 Aristotle’s famous definition of man as “a political animal”, that is, an animal who reaches his full potential only by living in “polities”, “cities” (for city states were the dominant form of political organization in the Greece of Aristotle’s time). For it is only in states that man is able to develop that free spirit of rational inquiry that enables him to know the True, the Beautiful and the Good. It is only in states that he has 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 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 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.

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<sup>98</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, 1252 b 28.

Israel was a completely different kind of state: the first and only autocracy of the ancient world. The distinguishing mark of this kind of state is that its origin is not the need to survive *physically* but *spiritually*, obeying *the call of God to leave the existing states and their settled way of life and enter the desert on the way to the Promised Land*. Here *physical* survival may actually be more difficult than before: but the prize is *spiritual* survival, life with God. Thus we may say that the negative end of Israelite autocracy is the avoidance of spiritual death (Babylon, Egypt, the kingdom of sin and death), and its positive end is the attainment of spiritual life (the Promised Land, Israel, the Kingdom of righteousness and life).

It follows that since neither spiritual life nor spiritual death are political categories attainable by purely political means, the end of the autocratic state is not in fact political at all as the word "political" is usually understood, but religious. Its aim is 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*. Thus the end of the state is beyond itself, to serve the Church, which alone can lead the people into the Promised Land.

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 faithfulness it was punished by God with exile and suffering. When it faltered to such a degree that it killed its true King, the Lord Jesus Christ, it was finally destroyed. But since the purpose of God remained unchanging, the salvation of men for the Kingdom of heaven, autocracy was re-established on a still firmer and wider base. And in the very state that had destroyed the old Israel – *Rome...*

### 13. CHRIST AND THE ROMAN EMPIRE

“The Roman Republic,” writes T.P. Wiseman, “came into being at the end of the sixth century BC, when King Tarquin the Proud and his family were driven out of the city... Only the assembly of Roman citizens could make law; only the assembly of Roman citizens could elect men to those annual magistracies, to hold joint authority as consuls for one year only. The free Roman people delegated executive power, but to one man alone and not beyond the fixed term. If ever a single command became essential, for instance in a military crisis, the people could elect a dictator, but his term of office ended after six months. It was a constitution designed to prevent what the Romans called regnum (whence our ‘reign’), the concentration of unlimited power in one man’s hands.”<sup>99</sup>

However, democratic institutions gradually atrophied in Rome; and 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 regnum in all but name, ruled despotically by a single man, the Emperor Augustus. 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 in about 170 Melitus, Bishop of Sardis wrote to the Emperor Marcus Aurelius: “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...”<sup>100</sup>

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

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<sup>99</sup> Wiseman, “The Slow Death of Democracy”, *BBC History Magazine*, vol. 6, N 12, December, 2005, p. 15.

<sup>100</sup> St. Melito, in Eusebius, *Church History*, IV, 26, 7-8.

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."<sup>101</sup> Origen considered that the peace of Augustus, which was prophesied in the scriptural verse: "He shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the rivers even unto the ends of the inhabited earth" (Psalm 71.7), 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.<sup>102</sup>

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."<sup>103</sup>

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.<sup>104</sup> 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."<sup>105</sup> 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" <sup>106</sup>

The Church summed up this teaching in her liturgy thus: "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

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<sup>101</sup> Origen, *Against Celsus* II, 30.

<sup>102</sup> Charles Davis, "The Middle Ages", in Richard Jenkyns (ed.), *The Legacy of Rome*, Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 67.

<sup>103</sup> St. Gregory, *Sermon 4*, P.G. 47, col. 564B.

<sup>104</sup> Orosius, *Seven Books of History against the Pagans*; in Jenkyns, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-74.

<sup>105</sup> St. Leo, *Sermon 32*, P.L. 54, col. 423.

<sup>106</sup> Blessed Theodoret, *Commentary on Zechariah*, chapter 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).



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."<sup>107</sup>

That the Roman Empire came into existence for the sake of the Church was, on the face of it, 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. The Romans were pagans; they 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, 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 Nero and Titus 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 an examination of two encounters recounted in the Gospel 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). Here we see that Satan up to that time had 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..."<sup>108</sup>

And indeed, the Lord accepted neither Satan's lordship over the world, nor the satanism that was so closely associated with the pagan statehood of the ancient world (insofar as the pagan god-kings often demanded worship of themselves as gods). 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 in the first place.

For, as K.V. Glazkov writes: "The good news announced by the Lord Jesus Christ could not leave untransfigured a single one of the spheres of man's life.

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<sup>107</sup> *Festal Menaion*, Great Vespers for the Nativity of Christ, "Lord, I have cried", Glory... Both now...

<sup>108</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of Saint Luke*, Homily 12, New York: Studion Publishers, 1983, p. 89.

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).<sup>109</sup>

Thus Christ is the true King, Who grants a qualified authority to earthly kings. For Christians in the Roman empire, this meant an attitude of qualified loyalty to the empire without full integration into it. Full integration was impossible, for, as Fr. George 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. Yet, 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).

"The Early Christians," writes Florovsky, "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,

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<sup>109</sup> Glazkov, "Zashchita ot Liberalizma" ("A Defence from Liberalism"), *Pravoslavnaia Rus'* (*Orthodox Russia*), N 15 (1636), August 1/14, 1999, p. 10.

'we have another system of allegiance', *allo 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...."<sup>110</sup>

Let us now turn to the second time Christ confronted a ruler of this world – His trial before Pilate. While acknowledging that his power was lawful, the Lord at the same time insists that 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 to Pilate, "unless it had been given to you from above" (*John* 19.11). These words, paradoxically, 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 (if not in all its particular manifestations). Nor is this conclusion contradicted by His earlier words: "My Kingdom is not of this world" (*John* 18.36). For, as Blessed Theophylact 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".<sup>111</sup>

Again, Bishop Nikolai Velimirovich 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

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<sup>110</sup> Florovsky, "Antinomies of Christian History: Empire and Desert", *Christianity and Culture*, Belmont, Mass.: Nordland, 1974, pp. 68- 69.

<sup>111</sup> Bl. Theophylact, *On John* 18.36.

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..."<sup>112</sup>

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.<sup>113</sup> 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.

This fact has the consequence that, insofar Pilate could have used his God-given power to save the Lord from an unjust death, Roman state power appears in this situation 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 "that which restrains" the Antichrist (II Thessalonians 2.7) and the guardian of the Body of Christ.

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<sup>112</sup> Bishop Nikolai, *The Prologue from Ochrid*, Birmingham: Lazarica Press, 1986, part III, September 30, pp. 395-396.

<sup>113</sup> Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky), "Christ the Savior and the Jewish Revolution", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 35, no. 4, July-August, 1988, pp. 11-31.

## 14. ROME, THE JEWS AND THE CHRISTIANS

Before continuing, however, we need to look more closely at the cultural and religious milieu into which the Church of Christ was born. The Church grew out of, and defined itself in relation to, the people and faith of the Jews, on the one hand, and the state and faith of the Roman Empire, on the other. The Jews were different from the other conquered 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 each other's faiths and gods practised by the other peoples of the empire (we shall speak more about this ecumenism later). As a consequence, secondly, 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 exert an important influence on the whole of the Roman 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.<sup>114</sup> Everywhere that they lived they refused to be merged into the life of their pagan surroundings, but unflinchingly 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.

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<sup>114</sup> Contrast this with the power of the Jewish lobby in the United States today (V.M.).

“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.”<sup>115</sup>

In spite of the important differences between the Jews and the other peoples of the empire, the Emperors treated them with tolerance, and even gave them privileges. This benefited the Church, which in the beginning was seen as simply a sect of the Jews and lived, in Tertullian’s phrase, “under the cover of Judaism”.

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<sup>115</sup> Dvorkin, *Ocherki po Istorii Vselenskoj Pravoslavnoj Tserkvi* (Sketches on the History of the Universal Orthodox Church), Nizhni-Novogorod, 2006, pp. 41-42.

For their part, the Christians tried to live in peace with both the Jews and the Romans. The Apostles were all Jews, and in spite of persecution from the Jewish authorities did not break definitively with the Jewish community in Jerusalem, continuing to worship in the Temple, to read the Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament, which they saw as fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and to practise Jewish dietary laws and circumcision. True, the first Council of Jerusalem established that pagan converts to Christianity did not have to practise Old Testament rites: faith in Christ and baptism was all that was required to become a fully-entitled member of the Church. But the Jewish Christian community in Palestine retained its outward semblance to Judaism, partly in order to facilitate the conversion of the Jews to Christianity. 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, headed by the much-revered St. James the Just. Of course, the Christians differed fundamentally from the Jews in their worship of Christ as the Messiah and God; and the specifically Christian rite of the Eucharist was restricted only to those – both Jews and Gentiles – 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 its bonds with the Synagogue, hoping that as many Jews as possible could be converted.

However, the condemnation and execution of St. James, followed soon after by the rebellion of the Jews against Rome and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, changed the situation for the Christians – first in relation to the Jews, who saw the Christians as traitors to the national cause, and consequently also with the Romans, who now had to treat the Christians as a separate religion. Since the Christians had not taken part in the rebellion, and always, unlike the Jews, stressed their civic loyalty to the Roman Emperor, one would have thought that the Romans would have had no problems in treating the Christians as tolerantly as they treated the Jews. But the matter was not as simple as that...

“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 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 belonging to historical antiquity – it was the ‘new religion’ so displeasing to the Roman conservative. 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. Celsus, 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...”<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Dvorkin, *op. cit.*, pp. 79-81.

## 15. ROME: PROTECTOR OR PERSECUTOR?

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, but because Nero needed scapegoats for the fire he himself had caused which destroyed a large part of the city.

It was not until the persecution under Domitian in 92 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.

However, over the next two centuries and a bit, until the persecution of Diocletian in the early fourth century, periods of persecution, while cruel, were sporadic and short-lived. Thus in the early second century the Emperor Trajan ordered the end of the persecution after the death of St. Ignatius the God-bearer, so impressed was he by the saint’s confession... With the possible exception of the last persecution, under Diocletian and Galerius, these persecutions did not threaten the very existence of the Church. Indeed, taken as a whole, the persecutions of the first three centuries of the Church’s life under the pagan Roman emperors cannot be compared, either in length or bloodthirstiness, to the much more recent persecutions in Soviet Russia. Rather than destroying the Church, they shed the blood that, in Tertullian’s phrase, was the seed of future Christian generations.

Roman power already began fulfilling the role of protector of the Christians in 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. 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.<sup>117</sup> 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).<sup>118</sup> So at first the Romans, far from being persecutors of the Christians, were their chief protectors against the Jews – the former people of God who had now become His chief enemies.

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<sup>117</sup> Bishop Nikolai, *The Prologue from Ochrid*, part III, July 22, p. 94.

<sup>118</sup> Professor Marta Sordi, *The Christians and the Roman Empire*, London: Routledge, 1994, chapter 1.

The Lord Himself 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).

Following in this tradition, St. 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 emperor" (I Peter 2.13, 17). And St. 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).<sup>119</sup>

The exact meaning of these words of the Apostle Paul has been much disputed in recent times. The question is: is the apostle saying that *all* political authority is established by God, whatever its attitude to God Himself? Or are there grounds for asserting that some authorities are not established by God,

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<sup>119</sup> 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 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)

but only *allowed to exist* by Him, and that these “authorities” should not be obeyed as being in fact established by Satan?

We shall discuss this critical question in detail later. Suffice it to say at this stage that one thing the apostle is clearly *not* doing in this passage is casting any aspersions on monarchical power *as such* – even the pagan monarchical power of the Roman Emperors.

This power was venerated and obeyed by the early Christians. Thus St. Clement, the third Pope of Rome writes: “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.”<sup>120</sup>

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...”<sup>121</sup>

The holy Martyr and senator 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 [the Emperor] 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.”<sup>122</sup>

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

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<sup>120</sup> St. Clement of Rome, *To the Corinthians*, 60.

<sup>121</sup> St. Justin the Martyr, *First Apology*, 17.

<sup>122</sup> *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972, p. 93. Athenagoras of Athens in his *Representation for the Christians* to Marcus Aurelius wrote 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. 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)” (*Three Books to Autolytus*)

“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”.<sup>123</sup>

At the same time, submission to the emperor was never considered to be *unconditional*. Thus in the third century Hieromartyr Hippolytus, Pope of Rome, 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). Consequently, insofar as one can judge from the cited words, the apostle teaches submission to a holy and God-fearing life in this life and that we should have before our eyes the danger that the sword threatens us. [But] when the leaders and scribes hindered the apostles from preaching the word of God, they did not cease from their preaching, but submitted ‘to God rather than to man’ (Acts 5.29). In consequence of this, the leaders, angered, put them in prison, but ‘an angel led them out, saying: God and speak the words of this life’ (Acts 5.20).”<sup>124</sup>

This attitude of conditional obedience was well exemplified by the Egyptian general Maurice, who was martyred with his Christian legion in the Alpine town of Agaunum. Like many martyrs before him (for example, Saints George, Demetrius and Menas), he did not refuse to fight in the armies of the pagan Roman emperors against the pagans. But he refused to destroy a village composed of fellow-Christians. For “we are your soldiers, yes,” he said, “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.”<sup>125</sup>

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

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<sup>123</sup> Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 33.1.

<sup>124</sup> *The Works of St. Hippolytus, Bishop of Rome* in Russian translation, vol. 1, p. 101. Quoted in Fomin, S. & Fomina, T. *Rossia pered Vtorym Prishestviem* (Russia before the Second Coming), Moscow, 1994, vol. I, p. 56.

<sup>125</sup> Eucherius of Lyons, *The Passion of the Martyrs*.

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.

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" <sup>126</sup>

Now the distinction between the true monarch, *basileus*, and the unlawful usurper, rebel or tyrant, *tyrannis*, was not new. Thus King Solomon wrote: "My son, 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)...

The Greek philosophers also made a clear distinction between monarchy and tyranny. Thus 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." <sup>127</sup>

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, 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

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<sup>126</sup> *Festal Menaion*, The Nativity of Christ, Mattins, Canon, Canticle Seven, second irmos.

<sup>127</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, IV, 10.

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 of Petau wrote that the whore’s downfall was “the ruin of great Babylon, that is, of the city of Rome.”<sup>128</sup>

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 all the ancient despotisms that took their origin from Nimrod’s Babylon.<sup>129</sup>

This tradition became more popular as 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 is undoubtedly the more optimistic view of Rome as the true kingdom that prevailed. And the essentially loyal attitude of the Christians to Rome is demonstrated by the fact that even during the persecution of Diocletian, when the Church was threatened with extinction, the Christians never rebelled against the empire, but only against the unlawful demands of the emperors. And in reward for this faith and 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 – the Roman Christian Autocracy...<sup>130</sup>

There was another reason why obedience even to the persecuting Roman emperors was enjoined: Roman power was believed to “restrain” the coming of the Antichrist.

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<sup>128</sup> Hieromartyr Victorinus, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*.

<sup>129</sup> 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.

<sup>130</sup> Fr. Michael Azkoul, *The Teachings of the Orthodox Church*, Buena Vista, Co.: Dormition Skete publications, 1986, part I, p. 110.

“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.”<sup>131</sup>

“The subject here,” writes Professor Marta 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 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’.”<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Tertullian, *Apologeticum*, 32.1.

<sup>132</sup> 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.



Thus St. John Chrysostom wrote about “him that restraineth”: “Some say 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.<sup>133</sup> 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 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.”<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> 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, *op. cit.*, part 2, pp. 48-49).

<sup>134</sup> St. Chrysostom, *Homily 4 on II Thessalonians*.

## 16. WHY ROME?

Why did God choose the Roman Empire over other States as the special instrument of His Providence and protector of His Church, to the extent that, from the fourth century, Christianitas came to be almost identified with Romanitas? Professor 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.”<sup>135</sup>

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. 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 civilisation.

True, there was a universalist element in the Hellenistic philosophy of the Stoics. However, it was not the Greeks, but the Romans who adopted Stoicism most eagerly, 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”.<sup>136</sup> The classical Greek concepts of citizenship and equality before the law were now given a vastly deeper connotation and wider denotation.

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, 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 works of

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<sup>135</sup> Sordi, op. cit., p. 147.

<sup>136</sup> Polybius, in Sordi, op. cit., p. 169.

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."<sup>137</sup>

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..."<sup>138</sup>

In 212 Rome offered citizenship to all free subjects of the empire, which meant that these subjects could both identify with the empire as their own country and rise to the highest positions within it. Already in the first century we hear St. Paul, a member of a savagely treated subject nation, nevertheless 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".<sup>139</sup> And the poet Claudian wrote: "we may drink of the Rhine or Orontes", but "we are all one people". For the nations had become one in Rome:

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<sup>137</sup> Geary, *The Myth of Nations*, Princeton University Press, 2002, pp. 42, 49-50.

<sup>138</sup> Roberts, *op. cit.*, pp. 189, 198.

<sup>139</sup> Charles Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

*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.*<sup>140</sup>

“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.”<sup>141</sup>

A second reason why Rome was chosen by God, according to Sordi, was 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 recognisable to the Romans as their own *collegia*, enlarged and enriched with new ideas and with a deeper sense of human values...”<sup>142</sup>

For “the conversion of the pagan world to Christianity,” concludes Sordi, “was first and foremost a religious conversion and ... that immense attraction the new religion exerted on the greatest of the empires of antiquity and its cosmopolitan capital grew from the fact that it answered the deepest needs and aspirations of the human soul.”<sup>143</sup>

In particular, 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 having an ethical basis and as moving towards a definite end in accordance with justice. 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 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

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<sup>140</sup> Michael Grant, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, London: Phoenix, 1996, p. 128.

<sup>141</sup> Orosius, *Seven Books of History against the Pagans*, 5.2.

<sup>142</sup> Sordi, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

<sup>143</sup> Sordi, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

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. 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..."<sup>144</sup>

Thirdly, the Roman empire was not a "pure" despotism, but, in J.S. McClelland's words, "a fortunate mixture of the three basic types of government: 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."<sup>145</sup>

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 this could not be done without a powerful authoritarian element. 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. And they

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<sup>144</sup> Sordi, op. cit., p. 148.

<sup>145</sup> McClelland, op. cit., pp. 84, 85.

tempered the tendency to deify the ruler which was so pronounced in all the Near Eastern despotisms.

Old Rome was the universal kingdom that summed up the old world of paganism, both despotic and democratic, and later, under St. Constantine, crossed it with the autocratic traditions of Israel, thereby serving as the bridge between the State and the other-worldly Kingdom of the Church. It was universal both in the sense that it encompassed all the major kingdoms of the Mediterranean basin (except Persia), and in the sense that it came to embrace all the major forms of political and religious life of the ancient world. But its *external universalism*, ecumenicity, was soon to be transformed and transfigured by its embracing of *internal universalism*, Catholicity, the Catholicity of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. And from the day that Rome became Christian, her external universalism became more important, precisely because it raised the possibility that the internal universalism of Orthodox Catholicity could be spread throughout the world...

## 17. ROME AND CHINA

As we have seen, Rome encompassed all the major kingdoms of the Mediterranean basin except Persia, and claimed to be the one, universal empire under the sun. 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, the early twentieth century, as the Third Rome, Russia, and 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, but remained more impervious to the True Faith than any other major nation on earth, 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.

China acquired both cultural and political unity at about the same time as Rome – in the late third century BC. Just as the Rome's final 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 the battle of Actium in 31 BC, so the victory of the Ch'in 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.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> 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).

Francis Fukuyama writes that “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 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.”<sup>147</sup>

Each universal empire proclaimed its exclusion of the northern barbarians who did not share in their civilization by building a wall – 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.”<sup>148</sup>

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, evolved a unique state system composed of republican, aristocratic and despotic elements. This meant that the characteristic, and vitally important combination of freedom and discipline that characterised Roman statehood was lacking in China. 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.

“As a rule,” writes 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

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<sup>147</sup> Fukuyama, *The Origins of Political Order*, London: Profile, 2012, p. 21.

<sup>148</sup> Roberts, *History of the World*, Oxford: Helicon Publishing, 1992, p. 359.



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'."149

The concept of the will 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."<sup>150</sup> Already in the Shang dynasty the king, according to Gernet, was both "head of the armies and chief priest".<sup>151</sup> 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's bureaucrats, even the time of marriages was determined by the State.<sup>152</sup>

These despotic tendencies came to their peak in the reign of the first Ch'in emperor, Shihuang. 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, 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.

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<sup>149</sup> Tikhomirov, *op. cit.*, pp. 79-80.

<sup>150</sup> Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

<sup>151</sup> Jacques Gernet, *A History of Chinese Civilization*, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 22.

<sup>152</sup> I.R. Shafarevich, *Sotsializm kak yavlenie mirovoj istorii* (Socialism as a phenomenon of world history), Paris: YMCA Press, 1977, pp. 223-228.

“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.”<sup>153</sup>

In many ways, Shihuang represents the archetypal despot: his rise to power as a warrior, his drive for uniformity, his cruelty, megalomania and paranoia, his building projects, his militarisation of society, his mass displacement of vast numbers of people, his distrust of thinkers and book-learning, his fear of death and search for immortality. It is not, therefore, surprising that the modern despot Mao Tse-tung – who, like Shihuang, seized control over the whole of China from a power-base in 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.’”<sup>154</sup> Again, “Mao praised Lord Shang, a brutal minister in the ancient Qing dynasty, describing both the wisdom and necessity of Lord Shang’s decrees. These included enslaving the lazy, linking households into networks of mutual surveillance and responsibility, and punishing those who failed to report crimes by slicing them in two at the waist”.<sup>155</sup>

The vast structure of Chinese despotism rested upon a complex of ritual rules and hierarchies of family cults whose summit and linchpin was the emperor. It is the emperor, writes Gernet, who, by creating titles and ranks based on merits and demerits, “‘secretely’ the order which ensures the regular functioning of society as a whole. Since he does this, he does not intervene in quarrels; he contents himself with installing a mechanism which avoids them because it is based on the universal consensus... being completely impartial, he is the source and guarantor of universal order...”<sup>156</sup>

“No private undertaking nor any aspect of public life could escape official regulation. In the first place there was a whole series of state monopolies... This welfare state superintended, to the minutest detail, every step its subjects took from the cradle to the grave...”<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Guisso and Pagani, *The First Emperor of China*, London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1989, pp. 14, 16.

<sup>154</sup> Guisso and Pagani, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>155</sup> *The Economist Review*, March 18, 2000, p. 4.

<sup>156</sup> Gernet, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

<sup>157</sup> Etienne Balazs, *La bureaucratie céleste: Recherches sur l'économie et la société de la Chine traditionnelle (The Heavenly Bureaucracy: Research into the Economy and Society of Traditional China)*, Paris: Gallimard, 1968, pp. 22-23; quoted in Landes, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

However, the most extraordinary thing about the First Emperor was not the vastness of his despotism, but its permanence. After all, in spite of changes of dynasty, Chinese despotism lasted for another 2100 years and more! Such extraordinary longevity requires an explanation...

The first reason lies in the fact that China, unlike Rome, was geographically isolated and so had few rivals. With the exception of the Mongols, no other nation attempted to conquer it, whereas Rome had to contend with Carthaginians, Parthians, Picts, Irish, Franks, Vandals, Huns, Goths, Alans, Bulgars, Pechenegs, Russians, Khazars, Arabs, Turks and Jews, not to mention innumerable internal revolts by disaffected generals. Moreover, the Chinese managed to swallow up the barbarians that invaded her, making them into another form of Chinese, whereas the Romans were too few numerically to do that. "The huge prestige and attraction," writes Lieven, "not only of Chinese high culture but also of China's technology, for instance its agricultural techniques, were a great source of both pride and power for the Chinese and their empire. Conquered peoples often assimilated willingly over time, bowing to the superiority of their rulers' civilization. Much the same was true of Roman rule in Western Europe,"<sup>158</sup> especially through the religion that they adopted in their maturity - Christianity. And yet no Germanic tribal ruler, however great his admiration for Roman civilization, would have done the equivalent of what one Tatar ruler did in 500 - impose Chinese customs and dress on his people by decree.<sup>159</sup>

However, this seeming strength of Chinese civilization contained within itself one of its major weaknesses - racial pride. The Romans were able to see the superiority of the Greek civilization which they absorbed, and to learn from it. And their adoption from the Jews 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.'"<sup>160</sup> This conception was reinforced by the attitude of other eastern peoples to them, so that when the first western embassies came to them in the nineteenth century they thought that they must be bringing tribute, and could not understand the westerners' refusal to kow-tow to them. That arrogance cost them dear, and led to the final collapse of the Chinese empire in 1911 and its surrender to communism in 1949.

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<sup>158</sup> Lieven, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>159</sup> Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 354.

<sup>160</sup> Lieven, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

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 giving it 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"<sup>161</sup> - suppressed the striving for higher things.<sup>162</sup> As Roberts writes: "Over a social ocean in which families were the fish that mattered 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".<sup>163</sup>

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 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."<sup>164</sup>

This is not to say that Confucianism never countenanced any rebellion against the state. But rebellion was rationalised in terms of a new "mandate from heaven" in such a way as to preserve the foundations of society 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."<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Fernand Braudel, *A History of Civilizations*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1995, p. 178.

<sup>162</sup> It might have been different if the other Chinese religion, Taoism, with its foreshadowings of Christianity, had triumphed. See Hieromonk Damascene, *Christ the Eternal Tao*, Platina, Ca.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1999. But 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" (Guisso and Pagani, *op. cit.*, p. 134).

<sup>163</sup> Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 355.

<sup>164</sup> Fukuyama, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

<sup>165</sup> Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 360.

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 which rules the world and man. 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".<sup>166</sup> 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... "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."<sup>167</sup>

This meant, however, that the Romans could make dramatic 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 and a new political organization from the East - that made it the best political vehicle for the Gospel of Christ and its spread 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."<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Alexeyev, "Khristianstvo i Idea Monarkhii" ("Christianity and the Idea of the Monarchy), *Put' (The Way)*, N 6, January, 1927, p. 660.

<sup>167</sup> Lieven, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>168</sup> Lieven, *op. cit.*, p. 29. According to the modern Chinese philosopher Gi-ming Shien, as interpreted by Fr. Seraphim Rose, the distinctions between various Chinese philosophies and

## 18. THE CULT OF THE EMPEROR

Let us look a little more closely at the cult of the emperor, that last and most serious obstacle to the whole-hearted embrace of Rome by the Church, and its place in Roman religious life...

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."<sup>169</sup>

Nor was there creed or dogma... Men genuinely felt that the peace of Augustus was the pax deorum, a divine reward for a proper respect for the gods which Augustus had reasserted. Somewhat more cynically, Cicero had remarked that the gods were needed to prevent chaos in society..."<sup>170</sup>

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 such that none of the

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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" (in Hieromonk Damascene (Christensen), *Father Seraphim Rose*, Platina, Ca.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2003, p. 76).

<sup>169</sup> M.V. Zzykyin 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* (Patriarch Nikon), Warsaw, 1931, pt. I, pp. 37, 38, 42, 43) (V.M.)

<sup>170</sup> Roberts, op. cit., p. 203. Still more 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".

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 the gods were worshipped for the sake of the empire, then the empire was the supreme value.

“The most capable emperors,” writes Alexander Dvorkin, “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 practised 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...”<sup>171</sup>

Emperor-worship seems to have begun with Julius Caesar. 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’. 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 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...”<sup>172</sup>

Emperor-worship 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 civilisation he found there, and by its queen, Cleopatra. (He brought back an obelisk to Rome and named himself after the month in which Cleopatra died, August, rather than the month of his own birth, September...) 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

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<sup>171</sup> Dvorkin, *Ocherki po Istorii Vselenskoj Pravoslavnoj Tserkvi* (Sketches on the History of the Universal Orthodox Church), Nizhni-Novogorod, 2006, p. 29.

<sup>172</sup> Hill, *Christianity. The First 400 Years*, London: Lion Hudson, 2013, p. 130.



to remove a dangerous contender to the throne of Rome. For Cleopatra had made her son, Caesarion, her co-ruler, and Caesarion, 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...

“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 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 which 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.”<sup>173</sup>

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.”<sup>174</sup>

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). Pergamum was “Satan’s seat” because it was there that the worship of Augustus was first instituted. The altar at Pergamum later became the model for Lenin’s mausoleum in Moscow...

However, the same emperor was compelled to curb any excessive tendencies in this direction by his regard for the traditions of republican

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<sup>173</sup> Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

<sup>174</sup> Dio Cassius, LI, 20, 6-8; translated by S. Ireland, *Roman Britain: A Sourcebook*, London: Routledge, 1996, p. 175.

Rome, where “king” was a dirty word, and sovereign power was deemed to belong jointly 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 “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.

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 worship 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.”<sup>175</sup>

The intermittency in the cult of the emperor was reflected, as we have seen, by intermittency in the persecution of Christians. Thus in the 150 years between Domitian and Decius, although Christianity remained technically illegal, the emperors initiated no persecution against the Christians, convinced as they were that they did not constitute a political threat. In 112, Pliny the Younger, governor of Bithynia, “wrote a famous letter to the emperor Trajan asking him for advice about Christianity. Apparently many people had been accuse 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

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<sup>175</sup> St. Athanasius, *Contra Gentes*, 9. Cf. Arnobius (*The Case against the Pagans*, I, 37): “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?”

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."<sup>176</sup>

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 – as we see, 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.

This looked as if it might happen already in the mid-third century, under the Emperor Philip the Arab, who was thought by many to be a secret Christian, and a little later under the Emperor Galerius, who declared his faith in Christ after witnessing a miracle of the Martyrs Cosmas and Damian.<sup>177</sup> It was probably in order to counter Philip's influence that the next emperor, Decius, ordered all the citizens of the empire to worship the pagan gods, which led to many Christian martyrdoms. However, the persecutions of Decius and Valerian elicited a wave of revulsion in Roman society, and from the edict of Gallienus to the persecution of Diocletian, there was even a long period in which all the old anti-Christian laws were repealed and the Church was officially recognised as a legal institution

"It is not, perhaps, a coincidence," writes Professor 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."<sup>178</sup>

An important change in the relationship between the Church and the Empire was signalled when, in 270, the Christians of Antioch appealed to the Emperor Aurelian to remove the heretical bishop Paul of Samosata... It was

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<sup>176</sup> Hill, *op. cit.*, pp. 137-138.

<sup>177</sup> Gilbert Dagron, *Empereur et Prêtre* (Emperor and Priest), Paris : Éditions Gallimard, 1996, pp. 142-143. Philip and his son and heir, also called Philip, were baptised by Hieromartyr Fabian, Pope of Rome. See Velimirovich, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, July 1, p. 5, August 5, pp. 157-158.

<sup>178</sup> Sordi, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

Aurelian who introduced the monotheistic cult of the Unconquered Sun, the original faith of the future Emperor Constantine. And it would be Constantine who would make the crucial change from the monotheistic cult of the Unconquered Sun to the monotheistic cult of the Unconquerable Sun of Righteousness, the Lord Jesus Christ...

## 19. ST. CONSTANTINE THE GREAT

The conquest of the Roman Empire by the first Christian Emperor, St. Constantine was surely a vindication of the Christians' attitude to the pagan Roman empire. "The world," Tertullian had said in the third century, "may need its Caesars. But the Emperor can never be a Christian, nor a Christian ever be an Emperor."<sup>179</sup> But he was wrong: in response to the patience and prayer 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).

It began when the sole Emperor Diocletian 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 in various ways, 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, and in 303 the tetrarchy assembled in Rome to celebrate the twentieth century of their joint rule, to introduce various reforms, and to establish the old religions and their morals and "exterminate completely" the new ones.<sup>180</sup>

The cause of the final clash between the Church and paganism was a declaration by the haruspices, the Roman-Etruscan priestly diviners, that it was the presence of the Christians that prevented the gods from giving their responses through the entrails of sacrificial victims. Angered by this, Diocletian ordered that all soldiers and all palatines should sacrifice to the gods. The real persecution began on February 23, 303, the pagan feast of the Terminalia. Churches were destroyed, the Holy Scriptures burned, and Christians who refused to sacrifice were tortured and killed.

To many Christians it seemed that the world was about to end insofar as Diocletian's persecution of the Christians, the worst 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?"<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Tertullian, in Peter de Rosa, *Vicars of Christ*, London: Bantam Press, 1988, p. 155.

<sup>180</sup> Jean-Louis Voisin, "Le Songe de l'Empereur" (The Dream of the Emperor), *Histoire* (Le Figaro), 8, June-July, 2013, p. 46.

<sup>181</sup> Lactantius, *Divine Institutions*; quoted in Robert Garland, "Countdown to the Beginning of Time-Keeping", *History Today*, vol. 49 (4), April, 1999, p. 42.

However, at the height of the persecution, on May 1, 305, Diocletian and Maximian abdicated and handed over power to four Caesars. This allowed the Caesar in the far West, Constantius Chlorus, to bring the persecution to an end in Gaul and Britain. Then, after Constantius' death on July 25, 306, the Roman troops in York proclaimed his son Constantine emperor. In 312 Constantine marched on Rome against the Caesar Maxentius. Just before the fateful battle of the Milvian Bridge, outside Rome, both Constantine and his army saw a cross of light in the sky with the words: "In this sign conquer" above it. Eusebius records the story as Constantine himself related it to him: "He said that at about midday, when the sun was beginning to decline, he saw with his own eyes the trophy of a cross of light in the heavens, above the sun, and bearing the inscription Conquer by This (Hoc Vince). At this sight he himself was struck with amazement, and his whole army also."<sup>182</sup>

The next night Christ appeared to him and told him to make standards for the army in this form, "and to use it as a safeguard in all engagements with his enemies". So the next day Constantine had the pagan standards removed and the Christian one, the so-called Labarum, put in their place, and declared himself publicly to be a Christian. 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.<sup>183</sup>

Breaking with tradition, Constantine refused to offer sacrifice to the pagan gods. "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."<sup>184</sup> Contrary to many western historians, who assert that he diplomatically did not break with paganism, the Emperor 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.'<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Eusebius, *On the Life of Constantine*, I, 28; quoted in John Julius Norwich, *Byzantium: The Early Centuries*, London: Penguin, 1990, p. 39. Much later, in the reign of Julian the Apostate, the Martyrs Eusebius and Artemius confirmed the truth of this vision, having been witnesses of it themselves.

<sup>183</sup> Timothy D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, London & Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981, p. 43.

<sup>184</sup> St. Augustine, *The City of God*, 5.25.

<sup>185</sup> Eusebius, *On the Life of Constantine*, I, 40.

He continued to experience the power of the Cross, “the sceptre of kings”, throughout his reign. 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.”<sup>186</sup>

In the West the persecution of the Christians was over. However, in the East the persecution continued until the death of Galerius in 311 and in the territories of the Caesar Maximinus until 313. In that year St. Constantine met the new emperor in the East, Licinius, 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”.<sup>187</sup>

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.”<sup>188</sup>

It was to be a true Renovatio Imperii, or renovation of the Empire. As 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 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

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<sup>186</sup> Eusebius, *On the Life of Constantine*, II, 7.

<sup>187</sup> Lactantius, *On the Deaths of the Persecutors*, 48. 2-12.

<sup>188</sup> Nikolin, *Tserkov' i Gosudarstvo* (Church and State), Moscow, 1997, p. 27.

particular theory, was the decisive factor in his policy, and in his actual mode of ruling.”<sup>189</sup>

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 the 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, and 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...”<sup>190</sup>

Having said that, the conversion of the Emperor to the Church was an event of the greatest historical significance that brought immeasurable benefits. 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, 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

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<sup>189</sup> Florovsky, “Antinomies of Christian History: Empire and Desert”, *Christianity and Culture*, Belmont, Mass.: Nordland, 1974, pp. 72, 74.

<sup>190</sup> Metropolitan Philaret, quoted in Regelson, *Tragedia Russkoj Tserkvi, 1917-1945* (The Tragedy of the Russian Church, 1917-1945), Paris: YMCA Press, 1977, p. 23.



kingdom that was theirs was preserved securely and without question for Constantine and his sons alone.”<sup>191</sup>

In 324, Constantine defeated Licinius and imposed his rule on the East, thereby restoring true monarchical rule and delivering Christians throughout the Empire from persecution. Rome was now, not the persecutor, but the protector, of the Christian people. Indeed, long before his defeat of the last tyrant, Constantine had started to legislate in favour of Christianity with decrees: “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).”<sup>192</sup>

Among these decrees the one on absolving the clergy from holding civic office is particularly interesting because it shows the underlying motivation of Constantine’s legislation: “[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.”<sup>193</sup> 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 the defender of the faith and “the bishop of those outside the Church”, while the Church helps the emperor through her prayers – all to the ultimate glory of God and the salvation of men.

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

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<sup>191</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, X, 2, 10.

<sup>192</sup> Nikolin, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>193</sup> Quoted in Charles Freeman, “The Emperor’s State of Grace”, *History Today*, vol. 51 (1), January, 2001, p. 11.

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."<sup>194</sup>

"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."<sup>195</sup>

Constantine also defended the Christians against the Jews. He ordered the release of all slaves whom the Jews had dared to circumcise, and those Jews who killed their co-religionists for converting to Christianity were executed.<sup>196</sup>

How central Christianity was to Constantine's conception of empire is illustrated by his words on hearing of the Donatist heresy: "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". Again, 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."<sup>197</sup> And on the decision of the Council of Arles he said: "The bishops' decision should be looked upon as though the Lord Himself had been sitting in judgement."

Thus Constantine separated Church matters from civic matters and did not subject the former to State law, but on the contrary tried to conform his legislation to Christian principles. He gave the Church the full honour due her as an institution founded by the One True God, no less than the Body of the God-Man Himself, and therefore higher by nature than any human institution, not excluding the Empire itself. Christianity did not simply take the place of the old Roman religion in the State apparatus; for Constantine

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<sup>194</sup> Barnes, *op. cit.*, pp. 212-213.

<sup>195</sup> Salway, *A History of Roman Britain*, Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 249-250.

<sup>196</sup> L.A. Tikhomirov, *Religiozno-Filosofskie Osnovy Istorii* (The Religious-Philosophical Foundations of History), Moscow, 1997, p. 340.

<sup>197</sup> Actually, the Donatists, having failed in their petition, began to express a similar sentiment: "What have Christians to do with kings? Or what have bishops to do with the palace?" (Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, I, 22).

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.

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 full established, and on the whole so scrupulously observed, as they were by the first Christian Emperor."<sup>198</sup>

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, and did not sit on a royal throne, but on a little stool.<sup>199</sup>

Later, when he addressed the Council Fathers he demonstrated that for him 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."<sup>200</sup>

Again, to the Fathers who did not attend the Council of Nicaea 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

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<sup>198</sup> Cutts, *Constantine the Great*, London: SPCA, 1881, pp. 160-161.

<sup>199</sup> Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky, "The First Ecumenical Council", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 34, N 6, November-December, 1984, p. 9.

<sup>200</sup> St. Constantine, in Archbishop Seraphim (Sobolev), *Russkaia Ideologia* (The Russian Ideology), St. Petersburg, 1992, p. 71.

said: 'God has made you priests and given you the power the 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.'<sup>201</sup>

Constantine saw himself as the instrument whereby God replaced the 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."<sup>202</sup>

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, 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 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."<sup>203</sup>

The most famous definition of the relationship between Constantine and the Church is to be found in two passages from Eusebius' *Life of Constantine*, which speak of him as "like a common bishop" and "like a bishop of those outside". The first passage is as follows: "[Constantine] was common for all, but he paid a completely special attention to the Church of God. While certain divergences manifested themselves in different regions, he, like a common bishop established by God, 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..."

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<sup>201</sup> Sokolov, *Lektsii po Istorii Greko-Vostochnoj tserkvi* (Lectures on the History of the Greek-Eastern Church), St. Petersburg, 1914, p. 15.

<sup>202</sup> Eusebius, *On the Life of Constantine*, II, 28.

<sup>203</sup> A. Tuskarev, *Tserkov' o Gosudarstve* (The Church on the State), Staritsa, 1992, p. 75.

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.<sup>204</sup> The word translated "overseeing" [επεσκοπει] 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 roles. Thus, on the one hand, he responded vigorously to St. Nina's request that he send bishops and priest 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. And on the other hand, he convened numerous councils of bishops to settle doctrinal disputes throughout the empire. In this way he acted as *the focus of unity* for the Church on earth.

The emperor's role as a focus of unity *within* the Church did not mean that he was thought to have power *over* the Church. Thus when St. Athanasius was condemned by a council at Tyre, and appealed to the emperor against the decision, he was not asking the secular power to overthrow the decision of the ecclesiastical power, as had been the thought of the Donatists earlier in the reign, but was rather calling on a son of the Church to defend the decision of the Holy Fathers of Nicaea against heretics. Of course, being mortal, Constantine was not always consistent in the execution of his principles (as when he refused Athanasius' appeal). But the principles themselves were sound, and he was always sincere in trying to uphold them.

The emperor as focus of unity was especially needed when the Church was afflicted by problems that affected the whole Church, and needed a Council representing the whole Church to solve them. Such, for example, were the problems of Arianism and the Church calendar, both of which were resolved at the First Ecumenical Council. Since the Church herself, contrary to the assertions of later papist propagandists, lacked a "bishop of bishops" having ecumenical jurisdiction, only the emperor could carry out this co-ordinating function. He alone had the ecumenical authority necessary to compel the bishops from all parts of the empire to meet together in Synods, and remain there until decisions were agreed upon. And he alone could then see that these decisions into practice.

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<sup>204</sup> Eusebius, *The Life of Constantine*, I, 44; IV, 24.

## 20. THE CONSTANTINIAN REVOLUTION: (i) THE HIERARCHICAL PRINCIPLE

“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 spiritual 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...”<sup>205</sup>

With regard to statehood, the revolution was only partial. The hierarchical principle, for example, remained unchanged – Constantine was no democrat. The distinction between true autocracy and tyranny also remained, although subtly modified in accordance with Christian priorities, as we shall see in detail later. The real change was in the idea that the State and its prosperity was no longer the highest value. For above the State was the Church, and the State existed in order to serve the Church, not vice-versa.

Let us look at these three points in order, beginning with the hierarchical principle.

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 gentled, but also to the forward” (I Peter 2.18). Again St. Paul says: “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).

Following the Apostles, the Holy Fathers asserted that the hierarchical principle of one-man rule is natural, God-given and superior to any other principle of government. In developing this thought, they adopted the

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<sup>205</sup> Thornton, *Pious Kings and Right-Believing Queens*, Belmont, Mass.: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 2013, p. 97.

originally pagan idea that the earthly king is the image of the Heavenly King, purifying it of the tendency, so natural to pagan thought, to *identify* the earthly and the Heavenly, the image and its archetype. Earthly kings could be images 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." "The ruler of the whole world is the second Person of the All-Holy Trinity – 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".<sup>206</sup>

While rejecting the pagan idea of the despotic god-king, the Christian idea of the emperor as the image of the Heavenly King also excluded the no less pagan idea of democratism, rule by the people. Thus Eusebius: "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."<sup>207</sup>

This idea was taken up by the Fathers of the late fourth century. 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 succession, 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."<sup>208</sup>

Again, 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

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<sup>206</sup> Eusebius, *Oration in Honour of Constantine*.

<sup>207</sup> Eusebius, *Oration in Honour of Constantine*.

<sup>208</sup> St. Basil the Great, *Hexaemeron* 8. In accordance with Roman conceptions, St. Basil did not believe that monarchical power had to be hereditary. The virtue of hereditary succession was developed later.

in the same direction – to disorder; and disorder leads to disintegration; for disorder is the prelude to disintegration. *What we honour is monarchy...*"<sup>209</sup>

In more recent times, Professor I.M. Andreev 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."<sup>210</sup>

Again, we read in St. John Chrysostom: "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."<sup>211</sup>

Again, the champion of St. Chrysostom, "St. Isidore of Pelusium, 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.'<sup>212</sup>

This teaching of the fourth-century Fathers on the God-given nature of one-man rule was confirmed and generalized, over four centuries later, by St. Theodore the Studite: "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."<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> St. Gregory, *Sermon 29, 2*. Cf. *Sermon 3, 2*.

<sup>210</sup> Andreev, "Pomazannik Bozhij" ("The Anointed of God"), *Pravoslavnij Put'* (The Orthodox Way), 1951, p. 129.

<sup>211</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 34 on I Corinthians*, 7.

<sup>212</sup> 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.

<sup>213</sup> St. Theodore, *The Philokalia*, volume IV, p. 93; in Archbishop Seraphim (Sobolev), *Russkaia Ideologia* (The Russian Ideology), St. Petersburg, 1992, pp. 46-47.



## 21. THE CONSTANTINIAN REVOLUTION: (ii) AUTOCRACY AND TYRANNY

As we have seen, the Holy Apostles and Martyrs in the time of the pagan empire believed, on the one hand, that the emperor was established by God and should be obeyed whenever possible, and that on the other hand, 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 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, after the persecutions ended and the empire became Christian, the Church lost her independence and entered into a union with the State that made her a slave of the Emperors. Paradoxically, therefore, the triumph of the Church under St. Constantine was at the same time the end of the Church as an independent institution. However, the truth is rather the opposite: the fourth-century Fathers showed a heroic independence even of the most Christian of the Emperors. Of course, the accession of the first Christian Emperor with its many major benefits for the Church and for the spreading of Christianity was welcomed by the Church, and the bishops willingly entered into a "symphony of powers" between Church and State. But when the Emperors betrayed the Faith - as did, for example, most of the Emperors for a fifty-year period between St. Constantine the Great and St. Theodosius the Great - the Holy Fathers rose up in protest against them, using language that was as strong as anything uttered against the pagan emperors.

Thus when St. Constantine's son Constantius, apostasized from Orthodoxy and converted to the Arian heresy, believing that Christ was not the pre-eternal God and Creator but a created being, 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.<sup>214</sup> Again, St. Hilary of Poitiers wrote to Constantius: "You 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, and you work the mysteries of his secrets."<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> 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".

<sup>215</sup> F.W. Farrar, *The Lives of the Fathers*, Edinburgh, 1889, vol. I, p. 617.

Constantius' heretical cast of mind made it easier for him to assume the place of Christ as head of the Church. Thus at the Council of Milan in 355, he said: "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 Sapor started to kill the 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 possible 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 recognise 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 not to be frightened and to be in hope of eternal life. After everyone had been killed, St. Simeon himself was martyred.<sup>216</sup>

This shows that the Fathers and Martyrs of the Church recognised 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 rebellion against heretical emperors such as Constantius, but only resistance against those of his laws that encroached on Christian piety. However, when Julian the Apostate (361-363) came to the throne, passive resistance turned into active, if not physical, attempts to have him removed. Thus St. Basil the Great prayed for the defeat of Julian in his wars against the Persians; and it was through his prayers, and those of the holy hermit Julian of Mesopotamia, that the apostate was in fact killed.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> St. Demetrius of Rostov, *Lives of the Saints*, April 17.

<sup>217</sup> Theodoret, *Ecclesiastical History*, III, 19; St. Demetrius of Rostov, *Lives of the Saints*, October 21, the *life* of St. Julian; V.A Konovalov, *Otnoshenie Khristianstva k Sovetskoj Vlasti* (The Relationship of Christianity to Soviet Power), Montreal, 1936, p. 35.

St. Basil the Great defined the difference between a true king and a tyrant as follows: "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."<sup>218</sup>

St. Basil's definition of true kingship seems very strict. For what Roman emperor was not subject to sin and 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 which 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.

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. That is why 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)."<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> St. Basil, quoted in Fomin, S. & Fomina, T. *Rossia pered Vtorym Prishestvoiem* (Russia before the Second Coming), Moscow, 1994, pp. 66, 102.

<sup>219</sup> St. Gregory, *First Word against Julian*, 35; *Second Word against Julian*, 26.

Apart from being an apostate, Julian was the first – and last – of the Byzantine emperors who openly trampled on the memory and legitimacy of St. Constantine, declaring that he “insolently usurped the throne”. In this way he questioned the legitimacy of the Christian Empire as such – a revolutionary position very rare in Byzantine history. 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”<sup>220</sup>, 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.”<sup>221</sup> Jovian’s being a “new Constantine” was a guarantee that he represented a return to the old order and true, Christian Romanity (Romanitas). 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.

Another act of Julian’s that elicited particular horror was his reversal of Emperor Hadrian’s decree forbidding the Jews from returning to Jerusalem and, still worse, his helping the Jews to rebuild the Temple... By a miracle of God the rebuilding of the Temple was forcibly 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.”<sup>222</sup>

But if Julian had succeeded, then, wondered the Christians, what would have prevented him from sitting in the Temple as God – that is, from

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<sup>220</sup> Magdalino (ed.), *New Constantines: the Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, Aldershot: Variorum, 1994, pp. 2, 3.

<sup>221</sup> Magdalino, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>222</sup> Quoted 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 and Rufinus all confirm St. Gregory’s story.

becoming the Antichrist himself? And so it is from this time, as Dagron points out, “that the face of each emperor or empress is scrutinised to try and recognise in it the characteristic traits of the Antichrist or of the sovereigns, good or bad, who precede his coming...”<sup>223</sup>

After Julian, there could be no question that *all* emperors were established by God. The principle of monarchical power was good and from God – that was the true meaning of St. Paul’s words 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, who were not kings but rebels and tyrants.

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’.”<sup>224</sup>

Rulers like Julian, according to the Fathers, were not established by God, but they 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.”<sup>225</sup> And again St. Jerome said: “He often permits wicked kings to arise in order that they may in their wickedness punish the wicked.”<sup>226</sup>

As for obedience to the 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.”<sup>227</sup> Again, Blessed Theodoret of Cyr wrote: “Paul does not incite us to obey even if we are being constrained to impiety...”<sup>228</sup>

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

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<sup>223</sup> Gilbert Dagron, *Empereur et Prêtre* (Emperor and Priest), Paris : Gallimard, 1996, p. 167.

<sup>224</sup> St. Chrysostom, *Homily 23 on Romans*, 1.

<sup>225</sup> St. Isidore, *Letter 6 to Dionysius*.

<sup>226</sup> St. Jerome, *Commentary on Daniel*, 2.21.

<sup>227</sup> St. Basil, *The Morals*, Rule 79 (Cap. 1).

<sup>228</sup> Blessed Theodoret, *P.G.* 66, col. 864, commenting on Romans 13.5.

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'."<sup>229</sup>

Not only apostate or heretical emperors experienced the opposition of the Fathers, but also any emperor who transgressed the Law of God. For, as St. Basil the Great wrote: "The Emperors must defend the decrees of God".<sup>230</sup>

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?"<sup>231</sup>

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."<sup>232</sup> And again: "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."<sup>233</sup>

This teaching on the complete independence of the Church in relation to the State, and superiority over it, came to be embodied in the canon law of the Church, as in the 30<sup>th</sup> 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."<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*, VI, 18.

<sup>230</sup> St. Basil, *Rule* 79.

<sup>231</sup> St. Gregory, *Sermon* 17.

<sup>232</sup> St. Chrysostom, *On the Priesthood*.

<sup>233</sup> St. Chrysostom, quoted in Zyzykin, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

<sup>234</sup> *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. Ambrose's 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."<sup>235</sup>

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 innocent as well as guilty 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 recognised the character of the deed. Peradventure your Imperial power prevents your recognising 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 away, the festival of our Saviour's birth came round and the emperor sat in his palace shedding a storm of tears."<sup>236</sup>

Another example of Ambrose's boldness took place in 383, when Magnus Maximus, leader of the army in Britain, seized power in the West and killed

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<sup>235</sup> St. Ambrose, in Michael Grant, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, London: Phoenix, 1997, p. 156.

<sup>236</sup> Theodoret, *Ecclesiastical History*, V, 17, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, pp. 143-144.

the Western Emperor Gratian. Now Maximus was baptized, was a champion of the Church and defended the Western frontier against the Germans well. Moreover, his usurpation of the empire should not have debarred 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”.<sup>237</sup> St. Ambrose 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 he 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.”<sup>238</sup> In 388 he was defeated and executed by the Eastern Emperor Theodosius.

The very fact that western bishops such as Ambrose could recognize the Emperor Theodosius as a true king while rejecting the British usurper Maximus, was a tribute to the way in which Christianity 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. But might usually turned into right: 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. And yet by the early fifth century, perhaps under the influence of St. Ambrose, a new, stricter criterion of legitimacy was emerging. Might was no longer right: right was bestowed by God and the Church. Of course, Constantine himself had seized the empire by force; but he had done so from a legitimate base (his inheritance of Britain from his father) and 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 the previous emperor.

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<sup>237</sup> Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogues*, I (2, VI).

<sup>238</sup> Paulinus, *Life of St. Ambrose*, chapter 19, in the translation by E.R. Hoare.



## 22. THE CONSTANTINIAN REVOLUTION: (iii) EMPIRE AND PRIESTHOOD

The lynch-pin of the pagan absolutist system of government had been the concentration in the hands of one man of supreme power in both the political and the religious spheres. Thus in Rome the emperor was also the leading priest, the pontifex maximus. As we have seen, however, St. Constantine renounced any claims to lord it over the Church, 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 have a quasi-priestly role, if not as pontifex maximus on the pagan model, at any rate as a kind of extra-hierarchical bishop, or “bishop of those outside”, to use St. Constantine’s phrase?

In later centuries this question would be bound up with the question of the significance of the sacrament of royal anointing that the Church bestowed on all new rulers. However, in early Byzantium there was no such sacrament – or at any rate, no *visible* sacrament, so the status of the Christian emperor was viewed not in the context of any Church rite, but in the context of the actual power that the emperor exercised in relation to the Church. And in the first half of the fifth century that power was increasing...

The reason was 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. Some “interference” by them was even sanctioned by Canon 93 (Greek 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.”<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, Eerdmans edition, pp. 488, 489.

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..."<sup>240</sup>

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 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."<sup>241</sup> 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".<sup>242</sup>

Emperors had to intervene especially when heretics became violent - as when the Monophysite heretic Dioscuros murdered St. Flavian. 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 which 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".<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Holy Transfiguration Monastery, "The Seat of Moses", quoted in *The Life of our Holy Father Maximus the Confessor*, Boston, 1982, p. 65.

<sup>241</sup> St. Isidore, *Tvorenia (Works)*, Moscow, 1860, vol. 3, pp. 400, 410.

<sup>242</sup> St. Isidore, quoted in M.V. Zyzykin, *Patriarkh Nikon*, Warsaw, 1931, vol. I, p. 244.

<sup>243</sup> St. Marcian, quoted in Archbishop Seraphim, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

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”.<sup>244</sup> 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”.<sup>245</sup> Of course, this “rule” over the Church was not to be understood literally, but rather in the sense of powerful help, and when the emperor fell into heresy, the popes reverted to a more assertive posture, 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 that 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 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 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]’.”

It is in this context that one has to understand the at times highly rhetorical expressions often applied to the rulers. Dagron again: “The distinction between the two powers was never as clearly formulated as while 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 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

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<sup>244</sup> J. Meyendorff, *Rome, Constantinople, Moscow*, Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1996, p. 11.

<sup>245</sup> St. Leo, in Fomin and Fomina, *Rossia pered Vtorym Prishestviem* (Russia before the Second Coming), Moscow, 1994, p. 73.

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 6<sup>th</sup> 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."<sup>246</sup>

The near-assimilation of the emperor to the priesthood can be seen in the evolution of the ceremony of coronation from pagan to Christian times. 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 present<sup>247</sup>; 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 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

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<sup>246</sup> Dagron, *op. cit.*, pp. 314-315.

<sup>247</sup> According to Alexander Dvorkin, the crowning of Marcian and Pulcheria "was the first in history to be carried out in church" (*op. cit.*, 2006, p. 292).

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..."<sup>248</sup>

Nevertheless, the Empire and the Priesthood remain separate principles in the Byzantine understanding. They are both from God, and should work in "symphony" to the glory of God, as the Emperor Justinian proclaimed in his famous *Novella 6*. But they remain separate principles in the New Testament as in the Old (cf. the punishment of King Uzziah for trying to combine the two).

Indeed, so important is this distinction that its violation is the surest 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 has already come. Hence the fall of the Orthodox Empire must herald his coming and the end of the world....

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<sup>248</sup> Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity*, Cambridge University Press, 1968, pp. 58-59.

## CONCLUSION: NEW ROME AND THE NEW POLITICS

St. Constantine's most radical and famous act was his transfer of his capital from Old Rome to the New Rome of Constantinople. This marked the beginning of the end of the Western Empire; for the old capital, weighed down by its pagan past, was in no position to defend and unify the newly Christianized empire, and would soon prove incapable of defending even herself. As for the new capital, in the words of St. Gregory the Theologian, it was to be "a bond of union between East and West to which the most distant extremes from all sides were to come together, and to which they look up as the common centre and emporium of their faith."<sup>249</sup>

The transfer of the capital from the Old Rome to the New not only marked the *renovatio imperii*, or renovation of the empire, but the renovation of politics itself, its coming to maturity and perfection. For in Constantine and his true successors on the throne of New Rome (and the Third Rome of Moscow after them) we see the full purpose of politics realized for the first time: not only the survival of the family, but the survival of the Church, not only the guarantee of physical life in time, but the protection of spiritual life to eternity. This is the end of the state, its justification, and its glory...

*January 19 / February 1, 2015.  
St. Mark of Ephesus.*

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<sup>249</sup> St. Gregory the Theologian, quoted in Michael Grant, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, London: Phoenix, 1997, p. 198.