AN ESSAY IN UNIVERSAL HISTORY

From an Orthodox Christian Point of View

VOLUME I. THE AGE OF FAITH

PART 1: From the Beginning to 800 AD

Vladimir Moss

© Copyright Vladimir Moss. All Rights Reserved, 2017.
Only a slave of God can a ruler be
And benefit his people eternally.
Hymn to the Holy Prophet Samuel.

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

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

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

If you wish to rule the world, does it follow that everyone welcomes servitude?
British King Caratacus to Emperor Claudius in the Roman Senate (52).

From Him and through Him the king who is dear to God receives an image of the
Kingdom that is above and so in imitation of that greater King himself guides and
directs the course of everything on earth… He looks up to see the archetypal pattern
and guides those whom he rules in accordance with that pattern… Monarchy is
superior to every other constitution and form of government. For polyarchy, where
everyone competes on equal terms, is really anarchy and discord.
Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea, Oration in Honour of Constantine, 1, 3.

I don't want the heretics to be tormented, and I don't rejoice in their sufferings - God
forbid! But I deeply rejoice in their conversion. For what can be sweeter for the
faithful than to see the scattered children of God gathered together in one. I have not
lost my mind so as to advise rating lack of charity above the love of man. On the
contrary, I counsel you to do good to all men and all the faithful with attention and
zeal, and to be all things for those in need. But in addition to that I say we must not
help the heretics in the affirmation of their mindless beliefs. Here we must be sharp
and unbending. For I do not call it love, but hatred of men and a falling away from
Divine love, when anyone confirms the heretics in their error to the inexorable
destruction of these people.
St. Maximus the Confessor (+662).

The priest is the sanctification and strengthening of the Imperial power, while the
Imperial power is the strength and firmness of the priesthood.
Seventh Ecumenical Council (787).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I. PREHISTORY</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>THE CREATION OF MAN</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>THE FALL OF MAN</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>THE ORIGINS OF THE STATE: FROM CAIN TO NOAH</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>NIMROD’S BABYLON</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>II. ISRAEL AND THE GENTILES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>ABRAHAM: THE FATHER OF THE FAITHFUL</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>FROM THEOCRACY TO AUTOCRACY: (1) JOSEPH</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>FROM THEOCRACY TO AUTOCRACY: (2) MOSES</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>FROM THEOCRACY TO AUTOCRACY: (3) SAUL AND DAVID</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>FROM THEOCRACY TO AUTOCRACY: (4) SOLOMON</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>THE DECLINE OF THE ISRAELITE AUTOCRACY</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>THE ORIGINS OF GRECO-ROMAN CIVILIZATION</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>ATHENIAN DEMOCRACY</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>PLATO AND ARISTOTLE ON THE STATE</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>ALEXANDER, THE STOICS AND THE DEMISE OF DEMOCRACY</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>FROM ZERUBBABEL TO THE HASMONAEANS</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>HEROD THE GREAT</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>III. CHRIST, THE JEWS AND THE ROMAN EMPIRE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>CHRIST, ISRAEL AND THE FALL OF JERUSALEM</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>CHRIST AND THE ROMAN EMPIRE</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>CHRIST AND THE SYNAGOGUE</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>WHY ROME?</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>ROME AND CHINA: TWO VISIONS OF UNIVERSAL EMPIRE</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>THE LAST TEMPTATION: EMPEROR-WORSHIP</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
IV. NEW ROME AND THE NATIONS

24. THE TRIUMPH OF THE CROSS

25. THE CONSTANTINIAN REVOLUTION: (1) THE HIERARCHICAL PRINCIPLE

26. THE CONSTANTINIAN REVOLUTION: (2) AUTOCRACY AND TYRANNY

27. THE CONSTANTINIAN REVOLUTION: (3) EMPIRE AND PRIESTHOOD

28. THE CONSTANTINIAN REVOLUTION: (4) RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

29. THE CONSTANTINIAN REVOLUTION: (5) STATEHOOD, MONASTICISM AND CULTURE

30. THE CONSTANTINIAN REVOLUTION: (6) ROME AND THE NON-ROMAN WORLD

31. THE FALL OF OLD ROME

32. THE SYMPHONY OF POWERS

33. THE POSITION OF THE ROMAN PAPACY

34. THE SYMPHONY OF NATIONS

35. THE WESTERN KINGDOMS: (1) VANDAL NORTH AFRICA

36. THE WESTERN KINGDOMS: (2) OSTROGOTHIC ITALY

37. THE WESTERN KINGDOMS: (3) FRANKISH GAUL

38. THE WESTERN KINGDOMS: (4) VISIGOTHIC SPAIN

39. THE WESTERN KINGDOMS: (5) CELTIC BRITAIN AND IRELAND

40. THE WESTERN KINGDOMS: (6) ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

41. THE SACRAMENT OF ROYAL ANOINTING

42. THE DISSONANCE OF NATIONS: CHRISTIANS, JEWS AND PERSIANS

43. ISLAMIC DESPOTISM AND MILITARISM

44. THE DISSONANCE OF POWERS: (1) MONOTHELITISM

45. THE DISSONANCE OF POWERS: (2) ICONOCLASM
INTRODUCTION

I was established as king by Him, upon Sion His holy mountain,
Proclaiming the commandment of the Lord.
Psalm 2.6.

There are very few cases in which desire is sufficient for success… Most often success is due to Providence.
Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War.

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

History is the conscience of mankind.
Dr. Joseph Overbeck (1881).

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

Religion is the Key of History.
Lord Acton.

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

If Gogol’s grandiose conception is still far beyond the powers of this writer, he can nevertheless agree with, and attempt to emulate, his basic aim: to discern in a very general way how and why history has developed to the present point, to “the end of history”, in Hegel’s phrase. Such an aim means that this book cannot be purely historical (as if any history could be “purely” historical!). But neither is it historicist in Hegel’s sense. There is nothing determined in history, in which the free will of God, men and demons play the dominant roles, although this is not to say that it is not wholly foreseen by God and communicated by Him in part to His holy prophets. Thus in trying to discern the footsteps of God on the paths of history, history is inevitably also theological. For “theology and history,” as Peter J. Leithart reminds us, “are not ultimately divisible.” Again, as Archimandrite Lazarus Moore writes, “Christian theology is essentially the knowledge of God and His will revealed to man through God’s action in history, which is truly His story…”

The historical flesh, as it were, of this book is held up by a theological skeleton, a “theology of politics”. According to this theology, there is no such thing as chance. God holds in His almighty hands the threads of the destinies both of every individual human being, civilization and social and political institution. Without violating personal free-will, but always honouring it and taking it into account, God invisibly steers the destinies of states and nations towards a certain end, which is the salvation for eternity of as many people as possible. If we cannot see how certain historical events contribute to this end, this is because of our sinfulness, which limits, obscures and distorts our vision. Nevertheless, it is not wrong, but on the contrary necessary and right, to attempt in fear and trembling to lift a little the veil on God’s judgements in history, using those clues and guiding principles that He has given us in the Holy Scriptures and Holy Tradition, and always calling on His help, without which we can see nothing. For, as Samuel Taylor Coleridge said, “The reading of histories, my dear Sir, may dispose a man to satire; but the science of HISTORY - History studied in the light of philosophy, as the great drama of an ever-unfolding Providence has a very different effect. It infuses hope and reverential thoughts of man and his destination…”

4 Coleridge, On the Condition of the Church and State, 1830.
In order to understand history even approximately, we must understand the difference between the two distinct ways in which God, history’s main actor, works within it: the outer kingdom of nature and the inner Kingdom of Grace. When the Lord Jesus Christ ascended into heaven, He declared: “All power hath been given unto Me in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28.18). All power means just that: power over both angels and men, both believers and unbelievers, both souls and bodies. Jesus Christ is the supreme King of kings and Lord of lords, “the prince of the kings of the earth” (Revelation 1.5): there is nothing created that is not ruled by Him.

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

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

Divine Providence uses the whole of nature, rational and irrational, to attain Its ends. As St. John of Kronstadt says: “The Lord has full respect for nature, which He has created, and for her laws, as the production of His own infinite, most perfect wisdom; this is why He usually accomplishes His will through the medium of nature and her laws; for instance, when He punishes men or blesses them.” So the kingdom of this world embraces the whole of nature, including the State, which is that part of the outer kingdom that is organized by human beings to the highest degree, embracing the whole of society.

---

6 St. John of Kronstadt, My Life in Christ.
The Church, on the other hand, is God’s inner kingdom on earth. Although it has a visible presence and organization on earth, its essence is not of this world, being the Kingdom of Grace. The inner Kingdom of the Church ministers to the inner needs of man, his salvation for eternity. The outer kingdom of the State ministers to his external needs - food and shelter and security from external enemies.

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

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

The relationship between the two kingdoms was highlighted during Christ’s trial before Pilate. While recognizing Pilate’s power as lawful, the Lord at the same time insists that both Pilate’s and Caesar’s power derived from God, the true King and Lawgiver. For “you could have no power at all against Me,” He says, “unless it had been given to you from above” (John 19.11). These words, paradoxically, both limit Caesar’s power, as being subject to God’s, and strengthen it, by indicating that it has God’s seal and blessing in principle (but 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), which refer to the inner Kingdom of Grace.

---

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

Again, the famous Serbian Bishop Nikolai Velimirovich (+1956) writes: “Let no-one imagine that Christ the Lord does not have imperial power over this world because He says to Pilate: ‘My Kingdom is not of this world.’ He who possesses the enduring has power also over the transitory. The Lord speaks of His enduring Kingdom, independent of time and of decay, unrighteousness, illusion and death. Some man might say: ‘My riches are not on paper, but in gold.’ But does he who has gold not have paper also? Is not gold as paper? The Lord, then, does not say to Pilate that He is not a king, but, on the contrary, says that He is a higher king than all kings, and His Kingdom is greater and stronger and more enduring than all earthly kingdoms. He refers to His pre-eminent Kingdom, on which depend all kingdoms in time and in space…”

* 

Now God has created three instruments by means of which He steers us towards salvation: nature, the State and the Church. Through nature, including our own human nature, He sustains and protects us, on the one hand, and chastises and punishes us, on the other. Through the State He enables the basic unit of human society, the family, to survive from one generation to another. And through the Church He provides us with the Holy Spirit, Whose acquisition is the aim of our life on earth. Of these three instruments, the most essential is the Church. The State is in essence an auxiliary instrument protecting the Church, the only Ark of salvation. As for nature, it certainly plays an important part in history – as in the Flood of Noah, or the Black Death of 1348-49, or the severe Russian winters of 1812 and 1941. But it is not on such natural – albeit undoubtedly God-directed - catastrophes that this work will concentrate, but on the central and vital relationship between the Church and the State, religion and politics.

Three major forms of State structure are singled out that differ according to their relation to God and the Church: autocracy, despotism and democracy. Autocracy is monarchy in union with the Church, respectful of her essential independence and autonomy. Despotism is monarchy that attempts to control the people in all aspects of its life, including and regardless of the Church. And democracy is the despotism of public opinion (usually manipulated by unseen actors) regardless of the teaching of the Church. Autocracy is the only

---

9 Blessed Theophylact, On John 18.36.
form of government that is pleasing to God; and in such historical forms as the Byzantine and Russian empires it has guided men to the Church and salvation, in spite of the sins of its rulers. Despotism and democracy are two aspects of the same bipolar disease; in them Providence still guides men to salvation, but in spite of rather than with the help of governments, insofar as the dominant ideology is now not Orthodox Christianity but paganism, heresy or atheism.

Since, as the historian Shlomo Sand rightly points out, “the best way to define a concept is to follow its history”\(^\text{11}\), I have attempted to explicate the concepts of autocracy, despotism and democracy in the context of a universal history spanning six volumes (each divided into two parts) and the whole sweep of history until 1991.

In this first volume, which covers the ancient and medieval periods from ancient Israel, Egypt, Babylon, Greece and Rome to the Fall of Constantinople in 1453, we see the origins and nature of autocracy, despotism and democracy with particular clarity (their nature is summarized in the conclusion). This was the Age of Faith, in which most men, even pagans and heretics, believed in God and the age to come and in the important role of the State - almost always a monarchy - in helping to bring men to salvation.

In later volumes we shall see how secular ideologies undermined this faith, changing and complicating Church-State relations. These ideologies include democratism, human rights, nationalism, socialism and communism, which since the French revolution of 1789 have come to be believed in more than any of the traditional religions. For, as Paul Johnson writes, “perhaps the most significant characteristic of the dawning modern world... was the tendency to relate everything to politics.”\(^\text{12}\) Nevertheless, underneath these modern political ideologies the basic forms of autocracy, despotism and democracy are still discernible. Thus the second volume traces the development of these forms in the Age of Reason, from the Renaissance to the French revolution of 1789; the third volume – in the Age of Revolution, from 1789 to the eve of the American Civil War in 1861; and the fourth volume – in the Age of Empire from 1861 to the eve of the First World War in 1914.

It is only in the fifth volume, covering the period of the two World Wars until 1945, that autocracy disappears from the scene. This is the Age of Catastrophe, when Communism, the most evil form of despotism yet invented, takes control over one quarter of the earth’s surface from Berlin to Peking, in accordance with the prophecy: “I looked, and behold a fourth horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed after him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with the sword, and with hunger, and with death – and by the beasts of the earth” (Revelation 6.8).


The sixth volume, covering the period from 1945 to 1992, which is followed by an epilogue and two appendices, sees the fall of Communism and triumph of Democracy and Globalization throughout most of the civilized world. I have called it the Age of Mammon, because it witnessed both the growth of the world’s material product to unprecedented levels and the similarly unprecedented collapse in its spiritual capital.

It is my contention that only autocracy – that is, a monarchy that is in “symphony” with the True Church of Christ - is blessed by God; and that absolutism and democracy represent two sides of a single coin - equal and opposite deviations from this ideal - that have in common the rejection of the true God as the ultimate source of all true authority and His replacement by one man (despotism, absolutism) or everyman (democracy).

Of course, in modern parlance, “autocracy” and “despotism” are usually regarded as synonymous terms; anything that even hints of authoritarianism is considered bad. This only goes to show how the true meaning of the Orthodox autocratic monarchies of the past has been lost. It is hoped that this book will help to clarify and restore the vital distinction between “autocracy” that submits to the Law of God and “despotism”, “absolutism” or “tyranny” that is in essence lawless, subject to nothing and nobody except its own will.

This book argues that the meaning of universal history consists in the struggle between the Orthodox Christian Autocracy, on the one hand, and “the revolution” on the other, a process of apostasy extending over centuries and millennia that has progressively undermined autocracy through the bipolar sickness of despotism-democracy, and all Christian faith and morality through heresy, atheism and satanism. This process culminated in what appeared to be the final fall of the Orthodox Autocracy in the Russian revolution of 1917, which ushered in what Holy Scripture calls “the last times”, a period of increasing anarchy leading finally to the reign of the most despotic of tyrants, the Antichrist. I will argue that the only hope for the world consists in the return of autocracy, which is called by St. Paul “that which restrains” the appearance of the Antichrist (II Thessalonians 2.7).

This alternation between the three basic modes of politics is of a special, dual kind. On the one hand, despotism alternates with democracy in the prehistoric period before the rise of Israel, and again in the most recent phase of history, since the Russian revolution. And on the other hand, in the intervening period (most of history) the despotism-democracy alternation itself alternates with autocracy (from King David in about 1000 BC to Tsar-Martyr Nicholas’ abdication in 1917 AD). Moreover, history never truly repeats itself, for both unconscious memories and conscious invocations of previous incarnations of autocracy, democracy and despotism interact with, and modify, their reappearance in later ages.
In the writing of this book I am indebted above all to the Holy Fathers – especially, of course, to St. Augustine, whose massive and famous work, The City of God, was the first to attempt to see the whole of history in the light of God’s saving Providence.

Among more recent Fathers and Church writers, I have especially drawn on the works of Patriarch Nikon of Moscow, St. Philaret of Moscow, St. Ignaty Brianchaninov, St. Theophan the Recluse, St. Ambrose of Optina, Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky, Lev Alexandrovich Tikhomirov (whose Religio-Philosophical Foundations of History represents another model for my universal history), M.V. Zyzykin, Archbishop Seraphim (Sobolev) of Lubny, St. John Maximovich, Bishop Dionysius (Alferov) of Novgorod and Archpriest Lev Lebedev (whose Great Russia has been vital for my understanding of Russian history). But I have also drawn extensively on many other contemporary writers and historians, both Orthodox and western, whose names are mentioned in the footnotes.

Inevitably in a work of this scope I have had to rely mainly on secondary sources; only a minority of chapters have been based on a detailed study of primary sources; these have been mainly the chapters on my specialism, contemporary (post-1917) Orthodox Church history. In justification of this, I can do no better than quote from Francis Fukuyama in the preface to his similarly wide-ranging work: “While many of the individual chapters will not pass muster with people whose job it is to study particular societies and historical periods in depth, it does seem to me that there is a virtue in looking across time and space in a comparative fashion. Some of the broader patterns of political development are simply not visible to those who focus too narrowly on specific subjects…”

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

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


Holy Great Prince Vladimir, Baptist of Russia.

East House, Beech Hill, Mayford, Woking, Surrey. England. GU22 0SB.

---

I. PREHISTORY
1. THE CREATION OF MAN

The very beginnings of the life of man are hidden from the gaze both of historical and of scientific research. But they were revealed, in a vision on Mount Sinai, to the holy Prophet and God-seer Moses, who recorded them in the Book of Genesis. Since the Lord Jesus Christ, and all the holy apostles and prophets, accepted the testimony of Moses, and since no later theories have succeeded in overthrowing its authenticity, we shall rely on his account in Genesis with undoubting faith. This of course involves a rejection of Darwinism and the whole naturalist theory of origins. For, as the American Hieromonk Seraphim Rose noted, “The evolutionary philosophy of ‘up from the beasts’ certainly seems irreconcilable with the Christian view of ‘fall from paradise,’ and our whole view of history will certainly be determined by which way we believe!” 15

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1.1) – out of nothing, about seven and half thousand years ago. Having first created the whole of the angelic world, He went on to create the earth with its material, vegetable and animal worlds in the first three days. On the fourth day the sun and all the galaxies were created; they were “stretched out” by His almighty power. This appears to contradict contemporary “Big Bang” cosmology, but there need be no conflict with true science. For, as Dr. John Hartnett writes: “This very rapid acceleration of the cosmos during Day 4 of Creation Week caused cosmic clocks to run very fast compared to Earth clocks. This, then, provides the massive time dilation needed to allow light to travel the vast distances of the universe, even billions of light-years in a matter of one day – as measured by Earth Clocks...

“Observations are consistent with our galaxy being situated somewhere cosmologically near the centre of a spherically symmetric universe of finite extent that has expanded many-fold... The time it took light to travel from the most distant sources to Earth was a matter of only one day, in local time units.” 16

Then, on the sixth day, God proceeded to the crown of His creation, saying: “Let Us create man in our image and after Our likeness” (Genesis 1.26). The plural “Us” indicates that God exists in Three Persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. So man in his spiritual aspect is created in the image of the Holy Trinity; this is the first and most important fact about him. However, Genesis 2 indicated that the body of man is made of earth and water (the word “Adam” means “earth”). Chemical analysis supports this Divine revelation.

The image of God has been given many interpretations by the Holy Fathers, but the general consensus is that it refers to that which distinguishes man from the animals – his free-will, his rationality and his eternity.

As for the relationship between image and likeness, St. Basil the Great writes: “We possess the one by creation, we acquire the other by free will.” In other words, we use our free will in order to steer our created nature, which has the potential to acquire the likeness of God, to the actual possession of that likeness. The likeness of God in man is deification, or holiness, the full indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Adam was holy and in the likeness of God in the beginning, but he lost that holiness after the Fall.

A more modern interpretation, but one still within the Orthodox tradition, is provided by Vladimir Lossky: “The image cannot be objectified, ‘naturalized’ we might say, by being attributed to some part or other of the human being. To be in the image of God, the Fathers affirm, in the last analysis is to be a personal being, that is to say, a free, responsible being. Why, one might ask, did God make man free and responsible? Precisely because He wanted to call him to a supreme vocation: deification; that is to say, to become by grace, in a movement as boundless as God, that which God is by nature. And this call demands a free response; God wishes that this movement be a movement of love…

17 St. Basil, in Rose, op. cit., p. 149. St. Basil’s account of the creation in his Hexaemeron is divinely inspired as is witnessed by his hagiographer: “The Queen of the Angels summoned Saint Basil and gave into his hands a book which had been written containing the creation of everything visible and invisible, and the fashioning of man by God. Indeed, at the beginning of the book the hierarch noticed an inscription, commanding: ‘Speak.’” At the end of the book, where it dealt with the making of man, he read, “The end.’ At this point in the vision, straightway, he awakened. ‘Now in order that none might have doubts about the meaning of the vision regarding the book, I (the hagiographer) shall explain it to you.’

“An eloquent interpretation, known as the Hexaemeron, had come down to us from Saint Basil, expounding in an interpretive manner the six days of creation, as it was formerly recorded by the God-seer Moses. Nine homilies were delivered by Saint Basil on the cosmogony of the opening chapters of Genesis. They were sermons during the Great Fast, delivered at both the morning and evening services. The saint speaks about the following: how God made the heaven and the earth; how the earth was invisible (sic) and unfinished; about the firmament; about the gathering together of the waters; the germination of the earth; the creation of luminous bodies; the creation of moving or creeping creatures; the creation of fowl and aquatic animals; and the creation of terrestrial animals. But when he was about to commence his homily on the seventh (sic) day and how God fashioned Adam and Eve, then it was in those days that the saint was translated into the heavens, leaving the work unfinished. Afterward his brother Gregory, who served as Archbishop of Nyssa, wrote about the making of man, and completed the book. The words, ‘Speak,’ and ‘The end,’ were prophetic for Saint Basil. It is true that, at the Theotokos’ behest, the saint spoke in sermons about the creation. Then when he was about to begin speaking on the making of man, he was not vouchsafed to complete this labor, because it was the end of his earthly sojourn.” (The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, January 1, Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista, CO, 2003)
“A personal being is capable of loving someone more than his own nature, more than his own life. The person, that is to say, the image of God in man, is then man’s freedom with regard to his nature, ‘the fact of being freed from necessity and not being subject to the dominion of nature, but able to determine oneself freely’ (St. Gregory of Nyssa).”\(^{18}\)

Eve also partook of Adam’s God-likeness; for “in the image of God He created them; male and female created He them” (\textit{Genesis} 1.27). But in the very beginning there was only the male of the species, Adam, whose body was created from dust mixed with water, and his soul from the “inbreathing” of the Spirit of God (\textit{Genesis} 2.7). In some texts man is said to be composed of spirit, soul and body (\textit{1 Thessalonians} 5.23). The “spirit” is the higher part of the soul, with which man enters into prayerful communion with God. In addition, as St. Seraphim of Sarov points out, the Divine Spirit (with a capital “S”) can be said to have been part of the original composition of man – before he lost It after the Fall. However, judging that Adam should not be alone and needed “a helper like him” (\textit{Genesis} 2.18, 20), “the Lord God caused a deep sleep [“ecstasy” in the Greek Septuagint text preferred by the Orthodox Church] to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; and the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man He made into a woman, and brought her to the man.” (21-22).

Why from the rib? The surgeon J.E. Shelley explains: “The account in \textit{Genesis} 2.18-25 is as factual as words can make it. It reads like the account which a surgeon writes for the records of the operating theatre! God performs a surgical operation under general anaesthesia, a rib re-section in this case. Note the detail: ‘He closed up the flesh instead thereof’. In just such a manner would a surgeon describe his closing up of an incision. Remarkably enough, provided that the surgeon is careful to leave the periosteum (the membrane which envelops the bones) of the removed rib, the rib will reform in a non-septic case, and the operation performed upon Adam was truly aseptic. So far as I remember, the rib is the only bone in the body of man which will do this. God gave it this property, which is why He chose it. With the vast reservoir of living cells contained in this rib, ‘He built up Eve’.”\(^{19}\)

“It is not without significance,” writes St. Ambrose, “that the woman was made out of Adam’s rib. She was not made of the same earth as he, in order to show that the physical nature of man and woman is identical and that together they were the one source for the propagation of the human race. Thus neither was man created with a woman, nor were two men nor two women created at the beginning, but first a man and then a woman, God willing that human nature be established as one. Therefore from the very beginning of our race He eliminated the possibility that different natures could arise.”\(^{20}\)

\(^{19}\) Shelley, \textit{How God created Man}, a Bible Christian Unity Fellowship Study, p. 6.
So the sexes have the same nature – and yet there is, of course, a difference, a difference that the contemporary sexual revolution tries in vain to destroy since it is rooted in God’s original creation. This difference is for the sake of sexual union and reproduction in marriage: “And Adam said, This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be in one flesh.” (2.23-24) Thus “Adam,” writes St. Ephraim, “was both one and two, one in that he was man, two in that he was created male and female.”21 Again: “He honoured [Eve]”, writes St. John Chrysostom, “and made them one, even before her creation”.22 But “the wise counsel of God at the beginning divided the one into two; and wanting to show that even after division it still remains one, He did not allow that procreation should be possible through one person only…. And so, concludes the holy Father, “one may see that they are one, for she was made from his side, and they are, as it were, two halves.”23

According to biological science, moreover, men and women are complementary, not only physically, for the purposes of sexual reproduction, but also psychologically. The intellectual and emotional differences between men and women may be related to hormonal differences and to different patterns of activity in the right and left hemispheres of the brain, which themselves complement each other rather like male and female.24 It is indeed as if each individual man and woman were one half of a single organism, so that each man appears to be “missing” certain feminine qualities that would make him more whole, while each woman appears to be missing certain masculine qualities that would make her more whole...

A firm and undoubting faith that God created all things out of nothing is the foundation of all true knowledge, including historical knowledge. “The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 1.7, 9.10), and there can be no fear of God where it is not fully understood that the uncreated God holds the whole of creation in the palm of His hand, and that nothing – nothing whatsoever – can prevent Him from carrying out His will. The greatest theologian of recent times, Archbishop Theophan of Poltava, said the following during his acceptance speech to the episcopate: “Only a few years separate me from the abyss of non-being, from which I was summoned into being by an omnipotent gesture of the Divine Will.” As He brought all things into being out of nothing, so He orders all things until the end of time, while always respecting the free will of man. He is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and End of the whole of the historical process.

21 St. Ephraim the Syrian, Commentary on Genesis, 2.12; quoted in Robert Murray, Symbols of Church and Kingdom, Cambridge University Press, 1975, p. 302.
22 St. John Chrysostom, Homily 31 on I Corinthians, 5.
23 St. John Chrysostom, Homily 12 on Colossians, 5.
God placed Adam and Eve in Paradise together with the animals, and there they would have lived forever in joy and harmony without any pain or sorrow. However, although they were sinless and living in a wholly sinless and incorrupt world, the Paradise of delight, their holiness was as it were immature and untested. God decided to test their free will by giving them a small, easily-fulfilled commandment (especially for an unfallen nature), and by allowing the devil (who had fallen away from God before the creation of the material world) to approach them and test their obedience in the guise of a serpent. If they obeyed, they would become more mature and grounded in their holiness, and therefore still closer to God and each other. But if they disobeyed, they would lose that holiness, and the sinless nature both inside and outside them would be corrupted.

The Lord’s commandment was: “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat. But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat, you shall surely die” (Genesis 2.16-17). The devil tempted the woman, first, by suggesting that God was a liar, and that they would not die. Then he suggested that God was in fact envious of the apotheosis they would achieve if they ate of the tree. “For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3.5). Eve liked the look of the fruit, ate of it and then gave it to her husband to eat.

Adam's sin consisted in pride and unbelief. As St. Symeon the New Theologian writes: "Adam sinned with a great sin because he did not believe the words of God, but believed the word of the serpent. Compare God and the serpent, and you will see how great was the sin of most-wise Adam. In his great wisdom he had given names to all the animals (Genesis 2.19-20). But when with his whole soul he believed the serpent and not God, then the Divine grace which had rested on him slipped away from him, so that he became the enemy of God by reason of the unbelief which he had shown to His words."

Having believed in these lies and slander against the all-good God, and eaten of the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve were expelled from Paradise, lost the Grace of the Holy Spirit, and suffered a catastrophic change in their physical and psychological nature. This change is signified in the Biblical text by their being endowed with “garments of skins” (Genesis 3.21). It is necessary to examine the meaning of this term with care insofar as it constitutes the first and only major change in human nature in history.

Now skin is dead, for garments of skin can only be obtained by the killing of an animal. Therefore “by a garment of this kind,” writes the Venerable Bede, “the Lord signifies that they had now been made mortal – the skins contain a figure of death because they cannot be drawn off without the death
And why, asks St. Ephraim, “would animals have been killed in their presence? Perhaps this happened so that by the animal’s flesh Adam and Eve might nourish their own bodies and that with the skins they might cover their nakedness, but also that by the death of the animals Adam and Eve might see the death of their own bodies.”

Thus the spiritual death of man through sin led to the killing of an animal, the first physical death in creation (contrary to the theory of evolution, which posits billions and billions of completely senseless animal deaths before the appearance of man on the scene). This dead animality, in the form of animal skins, was then placed on man like an outer garment. But not simply placed on him: it entered into him, corrupting and coarsening his whole psycho-physical nature. It took hold of his natural faculties and turned them into something different, what we call the passions. Thus St. Gregory Palamas writes: “Through this [the original] sin we have put on the garments of skin... and changed our abode to this transient and perishable world, and we have condemned ourselves to live a life full of passions and many misfortunes”.

There are three kinds of death: (i) spiritual death, the separation of the Holy Spirit from the soul (and hence, as we have seen, the loss of the likeness of God), (ii) physical death, the separation of the soul from the body, which comes later than spiritual death, but is an ineluctable consequence of it, and (iii) eternal death, the fixed and unchangeable abiding of a man in alienation from God.

St. Gregory of Nyssa compares this fallen life, or spiritual death, to “animals turning the mill”: “With our eyes blindfolded we walk round the mill of life, always treading the same circular path and returning to the same things. Let me spell out this circular path: appetite, satiety, sleep, waking up, emptiness, fullness. From the former of each pair we constantly pass to the latter, and back again to the former, and then back again to the latter, and we never cease to go round in a circle.... Solomon well describes this life as a leaking pitcher and an alien house (Ecclesiastes 12.6)... Do you see how men draw up for themselves honors, power, fame and all such things? But what is put in flows out again below and does not remain in the container. We are always consumed with anxious concern for fame and power and honor, but the pitcher of desire remains unfilled.”

---

26 St. Ephraim the Syrian, *Commentary on Genesis*, 2.33.1.
28 For this distinction, see Chrestos Androutsos, *Dogmatiki tis orthodoxou anatolikis Ekklisias* (The Dogmatics of the Orthodox Eastern Church), Athens, 1907, p. 164.
Sexual desire, like hunger, sleepiness and all the other passions are fallen because they all belong to “the pitcher of desire” that “remains forever unfilled”. For fallen man, like the prodigal son, is forced to try and satisfy his hunger from the husks of the constantly changing and delusive world of fallen nature – a diet that only seems to nourish, but ends by making him hungrier than ever. It was not like that in Paradise, where man’s unfallen nature did not need corruptible food, but was constantly feasting on the incorruptible food provided by God Himself.

Thus St. Gregory writes: “When we have put off that dead and ugly garment which was made for us from irrational skins (when I hear ‘skins’ I interpret it as the form of the irrational nature that we have put on from our association with passion), we throw off every part of our irrational skin along with the removal of the garment. These are the things which we have received from the irrational skin: sexual intercourse, conception, childbearing, dirt, lactation, nourishment, evacuation, gradual growth to maturity, the prime of life, old age, disease and death.”

According to St. Gregory, the garments of skin, though the consequence of sin, are intended to turn us away from sin in two ways. The first way was delineated originally by Origen. Jean Daniélou writes: “In his work On the Dead [St. Gregory] explains that ‘the garment of skin’ allows man to turn back again freely to God: since man had despised the life of the spirit for carnal pleasure, God did not wish man ‘to withdraw from sin unwillingly and be forced by necessity towards the good’, for this would have destroyed man’s freedom and the image of God within him. Hence He made use of man’s very tendency by giving him the ‘garment of skin’. This would cause man to experience a disgust with the things of the world, and thus ‘he would willingly desire to return to his former blessedness’.

“In the Great Catechetical Discourse Gregory puts forward the second reason for the ‘garment of skin’, which derives not from Origen but from St. Athanasius. The idea is that the ‘garment of skin’, our present state of mortality, permits the bodily part of man to be destroyed; but since evil is so closely bound up with the body, evil too is destroyed, and thus man can be restored to his original innocence. Man’s body returns to earth like a vase of baked clay; thus the evil that was mingled with his body is now released, and

---

30 St. Gregory of Nyssa, On the Soul and Resurrection, chapter 10; translated by Catherine Roth, Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, p. 114. It may be surprising to think of “gradual growth” as a consequence of the fall. But St. Ephraim the Syrian writes that in Paradise “just as the trees, the vegetation, the animals, the birds and even humankind were old, so also were they young. They were old according to the appearance of their limbs and their substances, yet they were young because of the hour and moment of their creation. Likewise, the moon was both old and young. It was young, for it was but a moment old, but was also old, for it was full as it is on the fifteenth day” (Commentary on Genesis, 1.24.1). Thus while there might be moral development in Paradise, there was no physical development or ageing. That came only as a result of the fall.
the divine Potter can raise him up once more to his original beauty. Thus the ‘garment of skin’, though really foreign to human nature, was only given to man by a solicitous providence, as by a doctor giving us a medicine to cure our inclination to evil without its being intended to last forever.

“In answer to the question whether man was created without the ‘garment of skin’ (that is, without mortality and all the things that sex implies), Gregory gives one answer in his work On the Creation of Man: ‘The grace of the resurrection is the restoration of fallen man to his primitive state’. But in another passage in On the Creation of Man he puts forward another hypothesis, ‘as a kind of exercise’. Here he suggests that God in His foreknowledge knew that man would abuse his freedom and would fall; and hence ‘seeing that man by his sin had fallen from his blessed angelic state, God established a way by which the human race could be propagated in accordance with our nature; thus the total number of human souls would not be deficient, even though man had now lost the method of propagation by which the angelic hosts had multiplied.’ On this view (which is the one most important to us), God would have created man from the beginning with a mortal body through His foreknowledge of man’s sin.

“It is against the background of this doctrine that Gregory explains the two accounts in Genesis of the creation of man. Philo had already detected in Genesis two stages in man’s creation: in the first account, man, the first-born, is created in God’s image as the pre-existent archetype of the intelligible world; in the second, man, created as man and female, is man as he actually appears on earth... In man created in God’s image he sees the pre-existence of human nature in the perfection of the divine foreknowledge – such as it will be only at the end of time. Thus for Gregory, man created as male and female though first in the order of time is only second in the order of intention...”

St. Maximus the Confessor develops some of St. Gregory’s ideas. Thus he describes this cyclical alteration of desire and fear, pleasure and pain as follows: “When God created human nature, he did not create sensible pleasure and pain along with it; rather, he furnished it with a certain spiritual capacity for pleasure, a pleasure whereby human beings would be able to enjoy God ineffably. But at the instant he was created, the first man, by the use of his senses, squandered this spiritual capacity – the natural desire of the mind for God – on sensible things. In this, his very first movement, he activated an unnatural pleasure through the medium of the senses. Being, in His providence, concerned for our salvation, God therefore affixed pain (οδυνη) alongside this sensible pleasure (ηδονη) as a kind of punitive faculty, whereby the law of death was wisely planted in our corporeal nature to curb

32 Since, according to St. Maximus, pleasure is defined as “that for which we naturally strive” (Ambigae 7, P.G. 91: 1088D), some kind of pleasure was present in us even before the fall. But this was a spiritual pleasure, a pleasure in God rather than in sensible things. (V.M.)
the foolish mind in its desire to incline unnaturally toward sensible things.33

“Henceforth, because irrational pleasure entered human nature, pain entered our nature opposite this pleasure in accordance with reason, and, through the many sufferings (παθηματα) in which and from which death occurs, pain uproots unnatural pleasure, but does not completely destroy it, whereby, then, the grace of the divine pleasure of the mind is naturally exalted. For every suffering (πονος), effectively having pleasure as its primary cause, is quite naturally, in view of its cause, a penalty exacted from all who share in human nature. Indeed, such suffering invariably accompanies unnatural pleasure in everyone for whom the law of pleasure, itself having no prior cause, has preconditioned their birth. By that I mean that the pleasure stemming from the original transgression was ‘uncaused’ insofar as it quite obviously did not follow upon an antecedent suffering.

“After the transgression pleasure naturally preconditioned the births of all human beings, and no one at all was by nature free from birth subject to the passion associated with this pleasure; rather, everyone was requited with sufferings, and subsequent death, as the natural punishment. The way to freedom is hard for all who were tyrannized by unrighteous pleasure and naturally subject to just sufferings and to the thoroughly just death accompanying them.”34

In spite of this, some of the passions – what are called the innocent passions - are necessary for survival in life after the fall. For, as St. John Chrysostom says, after the fall God “refashioned” the human body, which was “originally superior to what it is not”, so that it would be useful to us in our new situation.35 This is most obvious with hunger and sleep. If man did not feel hunger or weariness, he would not eat or rest and would waste away; for death, the first result of the fall, constantly erodes the strength of man from within, necessitating his restoration through food and sleep. It is also obvious in the case of sexual desire, which, while not necessary for the life of the individual, is necessary for the survival of the species as a whole. As St. Symeon of Thessalonica writes, marriage “is permitted because of the death that follows the disobedience, in order that, until the life [ζωη] and immortality that is through Christ should come, this present corrupt life [βιος] should remain.”36 Moreover, sexual desire not only stimulates the act that propagates the species. It is also an important factor in cementing the bond between the father and mother far beyond the duration of the sexual act (in human beings desire lasts longer, and fluctuates less, than in animals).

33 There is a pun here on the words “pain” and “pleasure”, οδυνη and ηδονη, which sound similar in Greek. (V.M.)
34 St. Maximus the Confessor, Questions to Thalassius, 61; translated by Paul M. Blowers and Robert Louis Wilken in On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ: St. Maximus the Confessor, Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003, pp. 131-133.
36 St. Symeon of Thessalonica, Περι του τιμου νομου γαμου (On Honourable and Lawful Marriage), P.G. 155:504C.
The family unit in turn is the building block of the State (and the Church), which provides other essential survival functions.

It is not only these “crude” passions that have this dual character, both positive and negative, in the fall. Thus Nellas writes, interpreting Saints Gregory the Theologian and Maximus the Confessor: “Learning and work, in particular, constitute a coarsening, so to speak, of the original natural properties of wisdom and lordship over nature which man possessed as an image of God. They constitute an expression and function of these properties in material dress. Their aim when properly used was to lead man, and with him the world, towards God. But with sin they became imprisoned in the corrupt biological cycle, and they were coarsened and transformed into ‘garments of skin’.

“The same is true, to mention one more example, with regard to the deep and natural communion between persons which existed before the fall. (We have seen that a fundamental dimension of man’s being ‘in the image’ is that he constitutes at the same time both person and nature.) With the decline of man into individuality this communion was corrupted and shattered, and consequently in order to survive socially human beings needed some external organization, that is to say, they needed the city and, by extension, political life.

“The laborious cultivation of the soil, then, the professions, the sciences, the arts, politics, all the operations and functions by which man lives in this world, make up the content of the ‘garments of skin’ and bear the two-fold character which we have discussed above. On the one hand they are a consequence of sin and constitute a misuse of various aspects of our creation ‘in the image’. On the other they are a result of the wise and compassionate intervention of God and constitute the new clothing thanks to which human beings are able to live under the new conditions created by the fall.”

Thus, as St. Isaac the Syrian writes: “All existing passions are given for the support of each of the natures to which they belong naturally and for whose growth they were given by God. The bodily passions are placed in the body by God for its support and growth; the passions of the soul, that is, the soul’s powers, [are placed there] for the growth and support of the soul.” But the fall has made each set of passions, though natural in themselves, opposed to each other. And so “when the body is constrained to go out from its passibility by abstaining from the passions in favour of the soul it is injured. Likewise, when the soul leaves what is its own and cleaves to that which is of the body it is injured.”

So even in the fall, even in the act of clothing us with the garment of the fallen passions, God in His Providence mixed mercy with punishment, life

---

37 Nellas, op. cit., p. 89.
with death. Just as He mixed the pain of childbirth for Eve with the promise that she would give birth to the Redeemer Who would crush the head of the serpent...

Moreover, even death for the individual is a good, in that it cuts off sin, and by dissolving the body into its constituent elements gives the hope of their eventual reassembling, free of any admixture of evil, at the general resurrection. Thus St. Theophilus of Antioch writes: "God showed great beneficence to man because He did not leave him in sin unto the ages... For just as a vessel that has been made with a flaw is melted down or remolded to become new and whole, the same thing happens to man by death. For he is broken into pieces that he may rise whole in the resurrection; I mean spotless and righteous and immortal." In other words, physical death gives us a chance to be remade, and avoid eternal death.

Thus in the longer term physical death is a good; but in the shorter term, during the course of our earthly life, it is both evil in itself and one of the causes of our committing further evil, both because it impairs the good working of the brain and its ability to resist the machinations of the demons, and because it engenders the fear of death and the love of pleasure, the supposed antidote to death, in the soul.

St. Methodius of Olympus raises the question whether the "garments of skin" are bodies as such. He replies in the negative, referring to the verses in which Adam calls Eve "bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh". For here, "before the preparation of these coats of skin, the first man himself acknowledges that he has both bones and flesh". The "garments of skin", therefore, are not the body as such, but "the body of this death", to use St. Paul’s phrase (Romans 7.24). "By which he does not mean,’ writes St. Photius the Great, interpreting St. Methodius’ thought, “that the body is death, but the law of sin which is in his members, lying hidden in his members, lying hidden in us through the transgression, and ever deluding the soul to the death of unrighteousness.... [The apostle] says not that this body was death, but the sin which dwells in the body through lust...”

But if the garments of skin do not signify the body as such, they do signify a new state of the body, its mortality and its grossness. “Man,” writes St. John of Damascus, “was ensnared by the assault of the arch-fiend, and broke his Creator’s command, and was stripped of grace and put off his confidence with God, and covered himself with the asperities of a toilsome life (for this is

39 St. Theophilus, To Autolycus, 2, 26. And St. Irenaeus writes: “He set a boundary to the sin of man, interposing death, and thus causing the end of sin, putting an end to it by the dissolution of the flesh in the earth so that man, ceasing to live unto sin and dying to it, might begin to live unto God” (Refutation, 3, XXVII, 6). Quoted in Romanides, The Ancestral Sin, 1957, pp. 99-100. See also St. Ambrose’s discourse, On the Good of Death.

40 St. Methodius of Olympus, Discourse on the Resurrection, 2.

41 St. Photius the Great, A Synopsis of some Apostolic Words from the same Discourse [on the Resurrection by St. Methodius of Olympus], 3.
the meaning of the fig-leaves), and was clothed about with death, that is, mortality and the grossness of the flesh (for that is what the garment of skins signifies).”

Again, St. Ignaty Brianchaninov writes, “the garments of skin signify our coarse flesh, which changed after the Fall, losing its subtlety and spirituality and receiving its present grossness.”

* 

With the change in human nature, the whole of the rest of nature also changed; death and corruption entered the whole universe, while Paradise itself was withdrawn from the earth. For the next five-and-a-half thousand years, until the Coming of Christ (prophesied as the “Seed of the woman”, who would crush the head of the serpent, that is, the devil (Genesis 3.15)), there was absolutely no remedy for this, and all men lived in suffering, alleviated only by the hope of the Coming Saviour, Christ, Who just before raising Lazarus from the dead, and eight days before raising Himself from the dead, declared: “I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die” (John 11.25-26)...

This does not mean that man can escape physical death at the end of his earthly life; for man has sinned, and must suffer “the wages of sin”, which is death (Romans 5). It means that if he believes in Christ, thereby receiving the remission of his sins (both original and personal), he will escape eternal death, and at the end of the world will receive the resurrection of his body also in a glorified, incorruptible form (John 5).

However, for those who do not believe in Christ, death remains the main problem of life, and eating of the tree of knowledge its only possible “solution”. Yuval Noah Harari calls this search for immortality “the Gilgamesh Project”. But it should more justly be called Adam and Eve’s project, for it was to them that Satan first presented the hope of escaping death by disobeying God’s commandment. “Of all mankind’s ostensibly insoluble problems, one has remained the most vexing, interesting and important: the problem of death itself. Before the late medieval era, most religions and ideologies took it for granted that death was our inevitable fate. Moreover, most faiths turned death into the main source of meaning in life.”

But then came SCIENCE, the modern tree of knowledge; and only today, according to Harari, is death not an inevitable destiny for men of science, “but only a technical problem” that could in principle be solved. “Until recently, you would not have heard scientists, or anyone speak so bluntly. ‘Defeat death?! What nonsense! We are only trying to cure cancer, tuberculosis and

42 St. John of Damascus, Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, III, 1.
Alzheimer’s disease,’ they insisted. People avoided the issue of death because the goal seemed too elusive. Why create unreasonable expectations? We’re now at a point, however, where we can be frank about it. The leading project of the Scientific Revolution is to give humankind eternal life.”

Thus does Satan continue to speak into the ears of deluded and faithless men, still whispering that they can be immortal gods through partaking of the fruit of that same tree, just as he did in the Garden of Eden…

---

3. THE ORIGINS OF THE STATE: FROM CAIN TO NOAH

In Paradise there had been 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, 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.

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.” 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.

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.”

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.

---

45 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).

46 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.

47 St. John Chrysostom, Homily 34 on I Corinthians.


The process of politicization is aided by the fact that man is social by nature, and comes into the world already as a member of a family. So, contrary to the teaching of some, it is not only out of fear that men unite into large groups, but out of the natural bonds of family life. In this sense the state is simply the family writ large; for, as Aristotle says, “the king is in the same relationship with his subjects as the head of a family with his children”; just as the family has a father as its head, so the state has a king as its head.

The family, writes St. Augustine, is a 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.”

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

Again, St. Ignaty Brianchaninov writes: “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.”

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,

---

50 St. Augustine, *The City of God*, XIX, 16.
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.\(^{53}\)

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."\(^{54}\) 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 a sin that was punished by their expulsion from Paradise – that is, from intimate 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 in the proper sense of the word, it was God Himself Who imposed the punishment. Man had already been punished by expulsion from Paradise and communion with God, so now the punishment was different: expulsion from the society of men: “a fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth” (Genesis 4.12).

Let us look more closely at the story of Cain and Abel and what it tells us about the nature and origins of the State.

\(^{53}\) 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).

Although none of the Patriarchs, and no man before Christ, was able to receive again Divine grace and innocence in the measure that Adam had enjoyed it, they were able to reverse the Fall to this extent, that where Adam had shown unbelief they showed faith. Faith in the Providence of God, and hope in His promises, was characteristic of all the Patriarchs. The very first words of Eve after the expulsion from Eden express this faith: "And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the Lord" (Genesis 4.1). Thus Eve saw the hand of God in the birth of Cain. According to one interpretation of the Hebrew text, what she actually said was: “I have gotten the God-man”, by which she expressed her belief that Cain was that Redeemer, “the seed of the woman (Genesis 3.15), whom the Lord had promised while she was still in the Garden – a mistake, but one based on faith. And in his murder of Abel she no doubt saw the fulfilment of His word that she would bring forth in sorrow (Genesis 3.16).

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

The faith of the Patriarchs expressed itself in other ways which show their spiritual kinship and prototypical relationship with the New Testament Church - for example, in the offering of sacrifices well-pleasing to God. In this respect, the relationship between Abel and Cain is typical of the relationship between the True Church and the false; for while the sacrifice of the True Church, like Abel's, is accepted by God, the sacrifice of the heretics and schismatics, like Cain's, is rejected. Indeed, according to the Theodotion text of this Scripture, "the Lord kindled a fire over Abel and his sacrifice, but did not kindle a fire over Cain and his sacrifice". On which the Venerable Bede comments: "By fire sent down from heaven He accepted Abel's victim, which we read is very often done when holy men offer. But he held back from consuming Cain's sacrifice by fire. For the Apostle also seems to signify this when he says, 'By faith Abel offered a greater sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying over his gifts' (Hebrews..."
Therefore God 'testified to the gifts' of Abel through fire, receiving them from the heavens, by which testimony of the Apostle we are also taught that the victim of Abel was made acceptable to God through the devotion of his faith, and on the contrary we should understand that Cain was condemned because he did not serve his Creator with integral faith.\footnote{Bede, \textit{Homilies on Genesis.}}

In his famous work \textit{The City of God}, St. Augustine traced the beginning of The City of God, that is, the Church, to Abel and the brother who replaced him, Seth, whereas the city of man takes its origin from Cain and his descendants, who are separated “from the Church in which God reveals His grace-filled presence”. Thus Abel, according to Augustine, means 'Sorrow' and Seth - 'Resurrection', prefiguring the Death and Resurrection of Christ. And in the time of Seth's son Enos it is said that "men began to call upon the name of the Lord" (\textit{Genesis} 4.26) because the sons of the resurrection live in hope, calling upon the name of the Lord. The name Cain, on the other hand, means 'Possession', and that of his son Enoch, the first city-builder - 'Dedication', indicating that the sons of perdition aim to possess the cities of this earth, being completely dedicated to their pleasures. That is why, moreover, the later descendants of Cain, such as Jabal and Tubal-cain were inventors of metal instruments - technology is necessary for the enjoyment of this life's pleasures.

If the Church began with Abel and Seth, then the State began with Cain. For since the first form of state is the city, \textit{polis} in Greek, we may say that Cain was the first city-builder (\textit{Genesis} 4.17), and so the first politician.\footnote{What was this city? David Rohl (\textit{Legend: The Genesis of Civilization}, London: Random House, 1998, pp. 198-200) suggests three alternatives from three neighbouring Mesopotamian cities: 1. Erech, known as Uruk, Unuk or Unug in Sumerian. The latter may be the same name as Enoch, Cain's son, after whom the city was named according to the usual reading of \textit{Genesis} 4.17. A later ruler of Erech-Uruk-Enoch was Nimrod, the builder of the Tower of Babel. 2. Eridu, which may be the same name as Jared, Cain's grandson, after whom the city was named according to another reading of \textit{Genesis} 4.17. 3. Ur, whose original name may have been Uru-Unuki or 'City of Enoch'. This was, of course, the “Ur of the Chaldees” that Abraham was ordered to leave.} He was also the first murderer, for he murdered his brother Abel...

The fact that the first State was founded by the first murderer has cast a shadow over Statehood ever since... On the one hand, the State exists in order to curb sin in its cruelest and most destructive aspects. To that extent state power is \textit{in principle} of God (\textit{Romans} 13.1), that is, established by Him “Who rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He will” (\textit{Daniel} 4.17). For, as St. Irenaeus of Lyons writes: “God imposed upon mankind the fear of man as some do not fear God. It was necessary that they be subject to the authority of men, and kept under restraint by their laws whereby they might attain to some degree of justice and exercise mutual forbearance through dread of the sword...”\footnote{St. Irenaeus, \textit{Against Heresies}, V, 24; quoted in Fr. Michael Azkoul, \textit{Once Delivered to the Saints}, Seattle: Saint Nectarios Press, 2000, p. 219.} Again, St. John Chrysostom says: “Since equality of honour often leads to fighting, He has made many governments and forms of
subjection.” Again, St. Gregory the Great writes that, although men are created by nature equal, God has ordained that “insofar as every man does not have the same manner of life, one should be governed by another.”

On the other hand, the greatest crimes known to man have been committed precisely by the State, and to that extent it is an instrument of evil, permitted but not blessed by God – for God sometimes “sets over it the lowest of men” (Daniel 4.17). Moreover, since Cain and at least until Saul and the kings of Israel, all states known to man were not only the main agents both of mass murder and of slavery, but were also worshippers of demons who compelled their citizens to worship demons, too. And if Blessed Augustine, in his famous book, The City of God, could see the Providence and Justice of God working even in the most antichristian states and institutions, this could not prevent him from taking a most pessimistic view of the origin and nature of most states (even Rome).

St. Augustine traced the history of two lines of men descending from Seth and Cain respectively - the City of God, or the community of those who are saved, and the City of Man, or the community of those who are damned. The City of God is not to be identified with the Church (because the Church contains both good and bad), nor is the City of Man to be identified with the State (because the State contains both good and bad). Nevertheless, the Church is clearly closer to the first pole as the State is to the second.

This is why the history of Church-State relations until Constantine is a history of almost perpetual conflict. Until David and the foundation of the state of Israel, the people of God – that is, the Church – was not associated with any state, but was constantly being persecuted by contemporary rulers, as Moses and the Israelites were by Pharaoh. And this symbolises a deeper truth: that the people of God, spiritually speaking, have never lived in states, but have always been stateless wanderers, desert people, as it were; “for here have we no continuining city, but we seek one to come” (Hebrews 13.14). We seek, that is, the City of God, the new Jerusalem, which is to be fully revealed only in the age to come (Revelation 21-22).

On the other hand, the people who reject God are spiritually speaking citizens of the kingdoms of this earth, rooted in the earth of worldly cares and desires. That is why they like to build huge urban states and civilisations that enable them to satisfy these desires to the maximum extent. It is not by accident, therefore, that Cain and his immediate descendants were the creators not only of cities, but also of all the cultural and technological inventions that make city life so alluring to fallen man.

58 St. Chrysostom, Homily 23 on Romans, 1.
60 St. Augustine, The City of God, XIX, 15.
For, as New Hieroconfessor Barnabas, Bishop of Pechersk, writes: "In its original source culture is the fruit, not of the fallen human spirit in general, but a consequence of its exceptional darkening in one of the primordial branches of the race of Adam... The Cainites had only one aim - the construction of a secure, carnal, material life, whatever the cost. They understood, of course, that the Seed of the Woman, the Promised Deliverer from evil that was coming at the end of the ages, would never appear in their descendants, so, instead of humbling themselves and repenting, the Cainites did the opposite: in blasphemous despair and hatred towards God, they gave themselves over irrevocably to bestial passions and the construction on earth of their kingdom, which is continually fighting against the Kingdom of God."61

The Cainites eventually became the overwhelming majority of mankind, corrupting even most of the Sethites. Thus Josephus writes: “This posterity of Seth continued to esteem God as the Lord of the universe, and to have an entire regard to virtue, for seven generations; but in process of time they were perverted...

“But Noah was very uneasy at what they did; and being displeased at their conduct, persuaded them to change their disposition, and their actions for the better: but seeing they did not yield to him, but were slaves to wicked pleasures, he was afraid they would kill him, together with his wife and children, and those they had married; so he departed out of the land."62

Since cities were built soon after the fall of man, we must presume that there was some kind of political organization in the antediluvian world. But it clearly was not effective; for the earth was filled with sin and criminality, and the Holy Spirit departed from men (Genesis 6.3).

So God decided to wipe out human civilization, the civilization of Cain, and even the whole of the animal kingdom, and start again. Hence the Flood of Noah, a universal flood that destroyed all life except Noah and his family and the animals that were with him in the Ark, who represent the Church that survives the destruction of the world. So Statehood in its first historical examples was antichristian and was destroyed by the just judgement of God.

The veracity of the Flood was witnessed by the Lord Himself and the Apostle Peter (Matthew 28.38-39; II Peter 3.5-6), as well as by the folklore of almost all human races. According to the Holy Fathers, the world was created in about 5500 BC63, and the Flood took place about one and a half thousand years later. It covered all the mountains of the earth; only one part of the globe remained untouched – Paradise.

63 Fr. Seraphim Rose, Genesis, Creation and Early Man, Platina, Ca.: St. Herman of Alaska Press, 2000, p. 236.
For as St. Ephraim the Syrian wrote:

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

The Flood permanently altered the climate and living conditions of the earth, and marked a new beginning for the human race. From Noah and his three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth and their wives came all the nations of man. Spreading south from the mountains in the Ararat region, where the ark came to rest, Noah’s descendants came to Sumeria (Iraq), and built the world’s first postdiluvial civilization.

Immediately after the flood, Noah offered a sacrifice to God of all the clean beasts that entered with him into the ark. For God accepts as sacrifices in the Church only those whose lives have been cleansed by repentance. Only "then shalt Thou be pleased with a sacrifice of righteousness, with oblation and whole-burnt offerings" (Psalm 50.19). And in return God blessed Noah and his sons, and established a covenant with him whereby He promised never to destroy the earth again by a flood. "And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between Me and the earth..." (Genesis 9.12-13) This is the first of many Old Testament covenants between God and the people of God, but the last which relates to the whole of mankind, irrespective of their faith or lack of it. And this is in accordance with the universal nature of the judgement that had just been inflicted on mankind, and the fact that mankind was not yet divided into races speaking different languages.

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

---

Commenting on these words, Protopriest Basil Boshchansky writes, that they “give the blessing of God to that institution which appeared in defence of human life” – that is, the State.\textsuperscript{65}

As Henry Morris explains: “The word ‘require’ is a judicial term, God appearing as a judge who exacts a strict and severe penalty for infraction of a sacred law. If a beast kills a man, the beast must be put to death (note also Exodus 21.28). If a man kills another man (wilfully and culpably, it is assumed), then he also must be put to death by ‘every man’s brother’. This latter phrase is not intended to initiate family revenge slayings, of course, but rather to stress that all men are responsible to see that this justice is executed. At the time these words were first spoken, all men indeed were blood brothers; for only the three sons of Noah were living at the time, other than Noah himself. Since all future people would be descended from these three men and their wives, in a very real sense all men are brothers, because all were once in the loins of these three brothers. This is in essence a command to establish a formal system of human government, in order to assure that justice is carried out, especially in the case of murder. The authority to execute this judgement of God on a murderer was thus delegated to man.”\textsuperscript{66}

But not to every man. The authority to pronounce the judgement of God can only be given to one whom God has appointed to judge – that is, to rulers. We see this in the story of Moses, who went out and saw two Hebrews quarrelling. He said to the one who did the wrong, “Why are you striking your companion?”, who replied: “Who made you a prince and a judge over us?” (Exodus 2.13-14). And indeed, Moses had not at that time received the power to judge Israel. Only when he had fled into the wilderness and been given power by true King of Israel, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, was he accepted as having true authority. Only then was he able to deliver his people from Pharaoh, who had usurped power over God’s own people...\textsuperscript{67}

As the revolutionary-turned-monarchist Lev Alexandrovich Tikhomirov writes, the idea that “the state is ‘the monopoly of violence’ completely coincides with the Christian attitude to the state. The complete removal of violence from private right and its exclusive concentration in the hands of the state means that violence in personal interests is unconditionally removed and forbidden. But it is allowed only in those hands in which there is in principle no personal interest, but only the interest of justice. With the monopolization of violence in the hands of the state violence is released only to support justice.”\textsuperscript{68}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[67] E. Kholmogorov, “O Khristianskom tsarstve i ‘vooruzhennom narode’” (“On the Christian Kingdom and ‘the Armed People’”), Tserkovnost’ (Churchness), N 1, 2000, pp. 35-38.
\item[68] Tikhomirov, Religioznofilosofskie osnovy istorii (The Religio-Philosophical Foundations of History), Moscow, 1997, p. 268.
\end{footnotes}
That is why political authority is *in principle* good and established by God: “there is no authority that is not from God” (Romans 13.1). This is true especially of the political leaders of the people of God, for whom the Lord established a special sacrament, the anointing to the kingdom: “I have found David My servant, with My holy oil have I anointed him” (Psalm 88.19). Even certain pagan kings were given an invisible anointing to rule justly and help the people of God, such as Cyrus of Persia (Isaiah 45.1).
4. NIMROD’S BABYLON

In the postdiluvial world one-man rule, or monarchy, was the norm. The major exceptions – Athens in the fifth and fourth centuries BC, and Rome before Julius Caesar – were fleeting and did not become deeply rooted, although their historical example was to become important in modern times. Greece returned under one-man rule in the time 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 and Autocracy. From a chronological point of view, despotism appeared first – in Nimrod’s 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, Greece and Rome, China, Central and South America - before the rise of Athenian democracy. Despotic rulers recognize their power as absolute, unlimited by any other power in heaven or on earth. Autocracy, on the other hand, is not absolute, 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 Israeliite State led by Moses and the Judges, and then in the Israeliite State founded by Saul and David.69

Sometimes pagan 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, we can say that despotism was transformed fleetingly into autocracy.

The modern world 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, 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.

69 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 a distinction between monarchy and autocracy for reasons explained in the introduction.
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.”70

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".71 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. According to Herodotus, at the top of the Tower was a 23.5-ton statue to Marduk and representations of 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.72 It was probably Nimrod who invented nature- and ancestor-worship. First he rose 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). Then he 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!”73 According to Blessed Jerome, “Nimrod was the first to seize despotic rule over the people, which men were not yet accustomed to”.74

---

72 I.R. Shafarevich, Sozializm kak Iavlenie Mirovoj Istorii (Socialism as a Phenomenon of World History), Paris: YMCA Press, 1977; Smart, op. cit., p. 299. “If you drop the first consonant of Nimrod’s name and take the others M, R, D you will have the basic root of the god of Babylon, whose name was Marduk, and whom most scholars identify with Nimrod. In the Babylonian religion, Nimrod (or Marduk) held a unique place. His wife was Semiramis. (In Cairo, Egypt, the Semiramis Hotel is named after this woman.) Marduk and Semiramis were the ancient god and goddess of Babylon. They had a son whom Semiramis claimed was virgin-born, and they founded the mother and child cult. This was the central character of the religion of ancient Babylon, the worship of a mother and child, supposedly virgin-born. You can see in this a clever attempt on the part of Satan to anticipate the genuine virgin birth and thus to cast disrepute upon the story when the Lord Jesus would later be born into history. This ancient Babylonian cult of the mother and child spread to other parts of the earth. You will find it in the Egyptian religion as Isis and Osiris. In Greece it is Venus and Adonis, and in the Hindu religion it is Ushas and Vishnu. The same cult prevails in various other localities. It appears in the Old Testament in Jeremiah where the Israelites are warned against offering sacrifices to ‘the Queen of Heaven.’ This Queen of Heaven is Semiramis, the wife of Nimrod.”
74 St. Jerome, Hebrew Questions on Genesis, 10.9.
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, and which by tradition was vaingloriously built by Nimrod himself in order to reach the heavens. 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 been pagan, worshipping a multiplicity of gods that often displayed a marked kinship with the gods of other nations and the original Babylonian religion.

The root meaning of the word “Babylon” is revealing. According to Hebrew tradition, it come from the Hebrew word “meaning confusion, or mixing up (and from which the English word ‘babble’ is derived).” ‘Ironically,” continues Juan Luis Montero Fenollos, “this interpretation was itself a confusing of languages. In Akkadian, the root of the words Babylon and Babel does not mean to mix: it means ‘gateway of the gods.’” In either case, the name is appropriate; for the Tower of Babel was begun as a gateway of the gods, an ascent to heaven, but ended up as the cause of the confusion of languages and the dispersal of the nations around the world...

The Biblical genealogies date this event to approximately 3500 BC, which is also, not coincidentally, the approximate date of the origins and dispersal of the Indo-European languages according to the latest linguistic research...

"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.”

---

77 “Taina Apokalipticheskogo Vavilona” (The Mystery of the Apocalyptic Babylon), Prawoslavnaia Zhizn’ (Orthodox Life), 47, N 5 (545), May, 1995, pp. 14-16.
“Nimrod” means "let us rebel", and "it was Nimrod," according to Josephus, “who excited them to... 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.

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

The Catacombs Church nuns continue: “Nimrod's very idea of founding a universal monarchy was a protest against Noah's curse of Canaan... A sign of protest and at the same time of power was the huge tower which the Hamites attempted to raise. God punished them, confusing the language of the proud builders, so that they no longer understood each other... Herodotus writes in his History that they built small ziggurats in Babylon (evidently in memory of the first failure) consisting of towers placed on top of each other. On the top of the small ziggurat E-temen-anki was raised a statue of the idol Marduk weighing 23.5 tons. Many centuries later the notable tyrant Nebuchadnezzar

78 Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, I, 4. Rohl (op. cit., p. 216) has argued that Nimrod is to be identified with the Sumerian Enmerkar, whose name means "Enmeru the hunter". "Look at what we have here. Nimrod was closely associated with Erech - the biblical name for Uruk - where Enmerkar ruled. Enmerkar built a great sacred precinct at Uruk and constructed a temple at Eridu - that much we know from the epic poem 'Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta'. The Sumerian King List adds that Enmerkar was ‘the one who built Uruk’. Nimrod was also a great builder, constructing the cities of Uruk, Akkad and Babel. Both Nimrod and Enmerkar were renowned for their huntsmanship. Nimrod, as the grandson of Ham, belongs to the second 'generation' after the flood (Noah-Ham-Flood-Cush-Nimrod) and this is also true of Enmerkar who is recorded in the Sumerian King List as the second ruler of Uruk after the flood (Ubartutu-(Utnapishtim)-Flood-Meskiagkasher-Enmerkar). Both ruled over their empires in the land of Shinar/Sumer.”
said: 'I laid my hand to finishing the construction of the top of E-temen-anki, so that it might quarrel with heaven.'”

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

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. 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.

79 “Taina”, op. cit.
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.81

II. ISRAEL AND THE GENTILES
5. ABRAHAM: THE FATHER OF THE FAITHFUL

The earliest period of man’s history saw three terrible moral falls with global consequences: that of Adam and Eve, that of Cain and his descendants, and that of Nimrod and the tower-builders. Each crime was followed by a fitting and catastrophic punishment: the death of Adam and all his descendants in the manner that is familiar to all of us, the descendants of Cain in the universal Flood, and the scattering of the tower-builders around the world. And yet a tiny but holy remnant was preserved in each case: that of Seth and his descendants, that of Noah and his descendants, and that of Abraham and his descendants...

The deification of the ruler of the City of Man in the person of Nimrod, and the building of the tower of Babel at his command, was, of course, a direct challenge to the truly Divine Ruler of the City of God. "However," writes Archpriest Lev Lebedev, "not all of humanity agreed to take part in the building of the tower. Our Russian Tale of Burning Years (The Chronicle of Nestor), relying on the chronicle of George Armatoll, says that righteous Heber ('from him came the Hebrews') refused to take part in the undertaking. And the Armenian and some other chronicles add that certain Japhethites also refused, because of which a war took place between them and Nimrod."82

It is from this tiny remnant, descendants of Shem and Japeth, that a new beginning was made according to a new principle that was racial as well as religious - although, as we shall see, this racial principle admitted of many exceptions and was always intended to be only a preparation for the re-admittance of all nations into the Church. This new beginning was made with Abraham, a descendant of Noah's first son Shem and Shem's great-grandson Eber, from which we derive the word 'Hebrew'. Abraham was therefore the father of the Hebrews. And yet he was not the father of the Hebrews only, even in a purely genetic sense. His first son Ishmael is traditionally considered to be the father of the Arabs. And his grandson through Isaac, Esau, was the father of the Edomites. In the Apostle Paul’s allegorical interpretation, Isaac represents the Church, and Ishmael – the unbelieving Jews enslaved to the Law (Galatians 3.16).

God commanded Abraham to depart from Babylonia and go to an unknown country, where he would live “in tents, while he looked forward to a city founded, designed and built by God” (Hebrews 11.10). For the worshippers of God, who wish to be at peace with heaven, cannot co-exist in peace with the worshippers of man, who seek to “quarrel with heaven”; better to be stateless than citizens of such a state. They must build their own state that is not founded on the worship of man, but of God. Abraham did not build that state – that was the work of Moses and David. But he did build the nation, and receive the faith, that animated that state, the kingdom of Israel.

Abraham’s story, recounted in chapters 12 to 22 of Genesis, is that of a man who obeys no man or state or institution; his only king was God. Like every true son of God, he was free of men, and obeyed them “only lest we offend them” (Matthew 17.27). So truly independent was he that we read of no priest or king to whom he deferred.

The only exception to this was Melchizedek, the mysterious king-priest of Shalem, who blessed him on his return from the slaughter of the Babylonian kings. However, Melchizedek was the exception that proved the rule; for he was more like God than man, being both the first and the last man in the history of the People of God lawfully to combine the roles of king and priest. Indeed, he was the first recorded true king and “priest of the Most High God”, who was called “Possessor of heaven and earth” (Genesis 14.18). This title shows, according to St. Paul (Hebrews 7.3), that he was the type, not of any merely human king, but of Christ God, the Supreme King and Chief High Priest. Like Christ in His Divine generation, he was “without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remaining a priest continually” (Hebrews 7.3). Again like Christ at the Last Supper, Melchizedek offers Abraham bread and wine, which is why Christ is called “a priest after the order of Melchizedek” (Hebrews 7.17). His offering is a figure of Christ’s offering of His Body and Blood under the appearance of bread and wine. So in being blessed by Melchizedek, the “king of peace” Abraham is blessed by Christ Himself, the true King of Peace.

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

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

83 Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow, Zapiski rukovodstvsnicheskikh o razumenii Knigi Byta (Notes Leading to a Fundamental Understanding of the Book of Genesis), Moscow, 1817, p. 78. Exceptions may be found in the history of the tiny kingdom of Montenegro in the Ottoman period.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

St. Gregory Palamas takes Abraham’s heroic work of faith as his main illustration of the difference between philosophical or scientific knowledge and the super-rational knowledge of faith: “I believe that our holy faith is, in a certain manner, a vision of our heart which goes beyond all sensation and all thought, for it transcends the mental powers of our soul. I mean by 'faith', not the Orthodox confession, but being unshakably established upon it and upon the promises of God. For how through faith do we see those things which are

86 St. Philaret, Zapiski.
promised for that unending age which is to come? By the senses? But faith is 'the basis of things hoped for' (Hebrews 11.1); and there is no way in which that which is to come and is hoped for may be seen by the senses; which is why the Apostle added: 'the proof of things not seen'. Is there, then, some mental power which will see the things hoped for? But how could there be if they 'have not gone up into the heart of man' (I Corinthians 2.9)?

What, then? Do we not see through faith the things that have been promised by God, since they transcend all sensual and mental activity? But all those who from the beginning of time sought the heavenly fatherland through works died, according to the Apostle, 'without having obtained the promises' (Hebrews 11.39), but saw and greeted them from afar. There is, then, both a vision and an understanding of the heart beyond all mental activity... Faith is this supra-mental vision, while the enjoyment of that which is believed in is a vision surpassing that vision...

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

47
is the Leader of eternal life (John 20.29; Acts 3.15). For through the supercosmic eyes of faith they have seen and venerated those things which the eye has not believed it can see and which reason cannot conceive.

"This is the victory which has conquered the world, even our faith' (I John 5.4). Paradoxical though it may be to say so, this faith is that which, in different ways and at different times, re-established the world which had previously fallen. Then it transformed it into a more Divine state, placing it above the heavens, and making a heaven out of the earth. What preserved the seeds of the second world? Was it not the faith of Noah? What made Abram Abraham and the father of many nations, like the sand and the stars in number? Was it not faith in the promises which at that time were incomprehensible? For he held his only-begotten heir ready for slaughter and, O wonder!, never ceased to believe that through him he would have many children. What, then? Did not the old man appear to be a fool to those who see things by reason? But the final issue showed, through the grace of God, that his faith was not folly but a knowledge surpassing all reasoning. 87

Thus the new beginning for the Church which God created in Abraham He created in the faith of Abraham, which is the faith in Christ. That Abraham’s faith was precisely faith in Christ was witnessed by the Lord Himself when He said: "Abraham rejoiced to see My Day: he saw it, and was glad" (John 8.56). Indeed, Abraham’s whole life is a model of the Christian life of faith demonstrated by works performed for God’s sake. Purified and strengthened through a series of trials, in each of which he is called to obey God by performing a work of faith, in Abraham we see “faith working together with his works, and by works faith being made perfect” (James 2.22). These works of faith include: exile from his native land (Chaldea), separation from his relatives (Lot), struggle against the enemies of the faith (the four kings headed by the king of Babylon), struggle against his fallen desires (Pharaoh, Hagar), reception of the sacraments (circumcision as a figure of baptism, and bread and wine as a figure of the Eucharist), charity (rescuing his brother Lot and is household, the hospitality given to the Angels at the Oak of Mamre) and, finally, the complete sacrifice of the heart to God (the sacrifice of Isaac). The supreme demonstration of Abraham’s faith was his belief that “God was able to raise [Isaac] from the dead” (Hebrews 11.19), which was a type of the Resurrection of Christ.

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

87 St. Gregory, Triads.
As we have seen Abraham believed in God’s promise that from his seed would come the Seed, in Whom all the nations of the world would be blessed (Genesis 12.3). St. Paul explains that this Seed is Christ the Messiah and Saviour of the world, Jesus Christ (Galatians 3.16). In other words, as St. Theophan the Recluse writes, “the blessing given to him for his faith would be spread to all peoples, but not because of Abraham himself or all of his descendants, but because of One of his descendants – his Seed, Who is Christ; through Him all the tribes of the earth would receive the blessing.”88 Thus while Abraham is the father of the Jewish race, the chosen people of the Old Testament, the new beginning that God made in Abraham related not only to the Jews but to all peoples of all ages. In fact, the nation which Abraham founded was not defined genetically, but by faith; it was a nation of believers, of those who believe in Christ; for, as St. Paul says, "they which are of the faith, they are the children of Abraham" (Galatians 3.7) - which faith the majority of the Jews of Christ's time did not share (John 8.33-58).

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

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

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

---

88 St. Theophan, Tolkovanie na Poslanie k Galatam (Interpretation of the Epistle to the Galatians), 3.16.
89 St. Philaret, Zapiski, part 2, p. 98.
A similar interpretation appears to stand true for the next generation, to Isaac’s sons Jacob and Esau, who are said to correspond to the Jews (Jacob), on the one hand, and the Idumeans (Esau), on the other. This fits very well with the Lord’s words to Isaac’s wife Rebecca, that “two nations are in thy womb..., and the one people shall be stronger than the other people, and the elder [Esau] shall serve the younger [Jacob]” (Genesis 25.23); for the Jews, from Jacob to David to the Hasmonean kings, almost always showed themselves to be stronger than the Idumeans and often held them in bondage. It was only towards the Coming of Christ that an Idumean, Herod the Great, reversed the relationship by killing the Hasmoneans and becoming the first non-Jewish king of Israel – the event which, according to the prophecy of Jacob, would usher in the reign of the Messiah (Genesis 49.10).

But to return to the spiritual interpretation of the Apostle Paul: the two peoples – or two covenants, as he calls them - represent, not racial, but spiritual categories: “Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar – for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.” (Galatians 4.22-26). In other words, Isaac stands for the Christians, both Jewish and Gentile, while Ishmael stands for the Jews who reject Christ. For the Christians, - and this includes the Jews before Christ who believed in His Coming, - become through faith in Christ the freeborn heirs of the promises made to Abraham and Isaac, whereas the Jews, by remaining slaves to the Law of Moses and refusing to believe in Christ, show themselves to be the children of the bondwoman, and therefore cannot inherit the promises together with the Christians. Moreover, it can be said of the Jews, as of the men of Ishmael’s race, that ever since they rejected Christ they have become “wild”, with their hands against all, and the hands of all against them, always striving for “freedom” but remaining voluntarily in slavery to the Law (and to their own kahal). It may therefore be that the age-old phenomenon of mutual enmity between the Jews and the Gentiles, of anti-semitism and anti-Gentilism, is prophesied in these verses.

That Isaac is the ancestor of Christ and the Christians is indicated also by his choice of wife, Rebecca, who signifies the Bride of Christ, the Church. Rebecca is freeborn, being of the family of Abraham, and is an even closer image of the Church than Sarah; for she is Isaac's only wife as the Church is Christ's only Bride. Moreover, the Holy Fathers see in the story of the wooing of Rebecca a parable of Christ's wooing of the Church, in which Eleazar, signifying the Holy Spirit, conveyed Isaac's proposal to her at the well, which

---

90 St. Philaret, Zapiski, p. 100.
signifies Baptism, and gave her gifts of precious jewels, signifying the gifts of the Holy Spirit bestowed at Chrismation.\footnote{St. Ambrose of Milan, \textit{On Isaac, or the Soul}.}

Ishmael, on the other hand, receives a wife from outside the holy family – from Egypt. And she is chosen for him, not by a trusted member of the family, but by his rejected mother, the slave-woman Hagar.

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

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

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

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

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

“While Esau looks for a hunting catch in order to merit his father’s blessing, Jacob, on the instructions of his mother, to whom God has revealed his destinies, puts on the garments of the first-born and seizes it before him. While the carnal Israel supposes that by the external works of the law it will acquire the earthly blessing of God, the spiritual Israel, with Grace leading it, having put on the garments of the merits and righteousness of the First-Born of all creation, ‘is blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ’ (Ephesians 1.3).
“The sword of battle and continuing slavery is given to the rejected Esau as his inheritance. And for the carnal Israel, from the time of its rejection, there remained only the sword of rebellion, inner enslavement and external humiliation.

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

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

Christ recognized that the unbelieving Jews were from a genetic, physical point of view, the children of Abraham, saying: “I know that you are Abraham’s seed” (John 8.37). And yet only a few moments later He denied them this honour, saying: “If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill Me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God. This did not Abraham. Ye do the deeds of your father… Ye are of your father, the devil” (John 8.39-41, 44). Ultimately, therefore, only Christians belong to the chosen people. As St. Justin the Martyr writes: “The seed is divided after Jacob and comes down through Judah and Phares and Jesse to David. Now this is surely a sign that some of you Jews are surely the children of Abraham, and that you will share in the inheritance of Christ; but… a greater part of your people… drink of bitter and godless doctrine while you spurn the word of God.”

93 St. Justin, Dialogue with Trypho, 34.
6. FROM THEOCRACY TO AUTOCRACY: (1) JOSEPH

The distinguishing mark of the Hebrew nation and state was its claim, quite contrary to the claims of the Babylonian and Egyptian despotisms, that its origin and end lay outside itself, in the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It took its origin, as we have seen, from a direct call by God to Abraham to leave his homeland, the Sumerian city of Ur, and go into a land which God had promised him. The God of Abraham was different from the false gods of polytheism in several ways.

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

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

But Israel was founded upon a rejection of this idolatry of the state and its leader, and an exclusive subordination to the will of the God of Abraham, Who could in no way be identified with any man or state or material thing whatsoever. It followed that the criterion for membership of the nation of the Hebrews was neither race (for the Hebrews were not clearly distinguished racially from the other Semitic tribes of the Fertile Crescent, at any rate at the beginning, and God promised not only to multiply Abraham’s seed, but also that “in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 22.18)), nor citizenship of a certain state (for they had none at the beginning), nor residence in a certain geographical region (for it was not until 500 years after Abraham that the Hebrews conquered Palestine). The foundation of the nation, and criterion of its membership, was faith, faith in the God Who revealed Himself to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob - and acceptance of the rite of circumcision. At the same time, the very exclusivity of this faith meant that Israel was chosen above all other nations to be the Lord’s: “in the division of the nations of the whole earth, He set a ruler over every people; but Israel is the Lord’s portion.” (Wisdom of Sirach 17.17).
Some half a millennium later, in the time of Moses, the Hebrews were again living under another absolutist regime - this time, Pharaonic Egypt. And God again called them out of the despotism - this time, through Moses. He called them to leave Egypt and return to the promised land.

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 as such it can be called a theocracy.

However, pure theocracy is an extreme rarity and cannot in practice be sustained for long: the only true theocracy in history has been the Church of Christ – which is not, and cannot be, a State like other States, since its essence and heart is not of this world, being in essence the kingdom that is not of this world. If, therefore, the people of God are to have a State organization, a system of government that comes as close as possible to rule by God must be devised. The form of government that is closest to theocracy is what Lev Alexandrovich Tikhomirov called “delegated theocracy” – 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. As Joseph himself said: “God has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and ruler throughout all the land of Egypt” (Genesis 45.8). The Egyptians also, following Joseph’s example, showed great honour to his father, Jacob. This honour was particularly manifest at the burial of Jacob, when “all Pharaoh’s servants and the palace dignitaries, joined by all the dignitaries of the land of Egypt” (Genesis 50.7), went up with Joseph and his family to bury the patriarch in Canaan.

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

---

94 Menaion, September 14, Exaltation of the Cross, Mattins, Canon, Canticle 7, troparion.
It follows, according to St. Ignaty Brianchaninov, that it was the Hebrew Joseph, and not any of the pagan Pharaohs, who was “the founder of autocratic (or monarchical) rule in Egypt”\textsuperscript{95}, transforming it from patriarchal simplicity to a fully organized state with permanent citizenship and a land tax, which Joseph instituted to prepare for the years of famine, and which lasted, essentially, for hundreds of years. Records show that there were dramatic fluctuations in the level of Nile flooding, and therefore of the harvest yield, during the reigns of the 19\textsuperscript{th}- and early 18\textsuperscript{th}-century BC Pharaohs. One of those Pharaohs was Senwosret III, in whose time, as Ian Wilson writes, “uniquely in all Egyptian history, the great estates formerly owned by Egypt’s nobles passed to the monarchy. They did so in circumstances that are far from clear, unless the Biblical Joseph story might just happen to hold the key: ‘So Joseph gained possession of all the farmland in Egypt for Pharaoh, every Egyptian having sold his field because the famine was too much for them; thus the land passed over to Pharaoh’ (\textit{Genesis} 47.20). So could Senwosret III or Amenemhet III, or both, have had an Asiatic chancellor called Joseph, who manipulated the circumstances of a prolonged national famine to centralise power in the monarchy’s favour?’\textsuperscript{96}

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” (\textit{Exodus} 1.8) and hated Israel. It was in the fire of conflict with this absolutist ruler that the first real autocracy based on a symphony with the One True God, Israel, came into being.


\textsuperscript{96}Wilson, \textit{The Bible is History}, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999, p. 37.
7. FROM THEOCRACY TO AUTOCRACY: (2) MOSES

The new, God-pleasing kind of kingdom, which we have called autocracy, would emerge after a long process lasting hundreds of years. Its embryonic beginning was created under the leadership of Moses, of whom the Church sings: “Thou, O Moses, didst preserve the order of sacrifice precious to God, and the kingdom and the priesthood.”

This embryonic state finally acquired a territorial base and stability under Kings Saul and David…

The first battle between Church and State in history was Abraham’s battle with the Babylonian kings. The second took place between the people of God led by Moses, on the one hand, and the Egyptian Pharaoh, on the other. For Egypt was another totalitarian society that rose up against the True God; its apex was the cult of the Pharaoh, the god-king who was identified with one or another of the gods associated with the sun. The book of Exodus tells us how he was defeated in the first “war of national liberation” in history. (However, the Egyptians did not record the fact of his defeat, since gods, according to the Egyptian conception, could not fail.)

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

“Although Egypt had a pantheon of gods,” writes Phillips, “the principal deity was the sun god Re (also called Ra), for whose worship a massive religious centre had grown up at Heliopolis, some fifty kilometres to the north of Memphis. It was believed that Re had once ruled over Egypt personally but, wearied by the affairs of mankind, had retired to the heavens, leaving the pharaohs to rule in his stead. Called ‘the son of Re’, the pharaoh was considered a half-human, half-divine being, through whose body Re himself could manifest. However, as the falcon god Horus was the protector of Egypt, the king was also seen as his personification. By the Third Dynasty, therefore, Re and Horus had been assimilated as one god: Re-Herakhte. Depicted as a human male with a falcon’s head, this composite deity was considered both the god of the sun and the god of Egypt, and his

---

97 Menaion, September 4, Mattins, canon, Ode 7, troparion.
98 Graham Phillips has recently claimed to have discovered traces of this defeat in Egyptian archaeology. According to his theory, the Pharaoh of Moses’ time was Smenkhkare, whose tomb was plundered and desecrated by his brother and successor, the famous Tutankhamun, in punishment for his failure to avert the catastrophe of the ten plagues of Egypt (Act of God, London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1998).
99 Quoted in Eusebius, Preparation for the Gospel, II, 1.
incarnation on earth was the pharaoh himself. Only the king could expect an individual eternity with the gods, everyone else could only hope to participate in this vicariously, through their contribution to his well-being.”

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

Pharaoh was the mediator between heaven and earth. Without him, it was believed, there would be no order and the world would descend into chaos; he guaranteed that the sun shone, the Nile inundated the land and the crops grew. As Silverman writes: “The king’s identification with the supreme earthly and solar deities of the Egyptian pantheon suggests that the king in death embodied the duality that characterized the ancient Egyptian cosmos. The deified ruler represented both continuous regeneration (Osiris) and the daily cycle of rebirth (as Re). In their understanding of the cosmos, the ancient Egyptians were accustomed to each of their deities possessing a multiplicity of associations and roles. It was a natural extension of this concept for them to view the deified Pharaoh in a similar way”. All the dead Pharaohs (with the exception of the “disgraced” Hatshepsut and the “heretic” Akhenaton) were worshipped in rites involving food offerings and prayers. Even some non-royal ancestors were worshipped; they were called “able spirits of Re” because it was thought that they interceded for the living with the sun god.

Rohl has theorized that Egypt was conquered in pre-dynastic times by Hamites arriving from Mesopotamia by sea around the Arabian peninsula, who left a profound mark on Egyptian religion and civilization. Thus Cush, the son of Ham and father of Nimrod, arrived in Ethiopia, giving that country its ancient name. Another son of Ham, Put, gave his name to Eritrea and the south-west corner of Arabia; while a third son, Mizraim, gave his name to Egypt, becoming the first of the Egyptian falcon kings, the descendants of Horus, “the Far Distant One”. Now the name “Mizraim” means “follower of Asar” – in other words, according to Rohl’s theory, follower of the Babylonian god Marduk insofar as Marduk is to be identified with Ashur (Asar), the grandson of Noah! This places the Egyptian god-kings in the closest spiritual

---

103 Bright, op. cit., pp. 39, 40.
relationship with the Babylonian god-kings, being all deified followers or reincarnations of Marduk-Osiris-Ashur. Noah himself seems to have been deified by the Sumerians, according to Rohl. Thus in the Sumerian Gilgamesh epic, Utnapishtim, the Akkadian name for Noah, is elevated to divine status by the gods after leaving the ark and sacrificing to the gods. “Hitherto Utnapishtim has been but a man, but now Utnapishtim shall be as the gods.”

Now the original supreme deity of Egypt was Atum, later Re-Atum, which means “the all”. “Atum,” writes Rohl, “was both man and god. He was the first being on earth who brought himself into the world – the self-created one... Atum as the first being – and therefore the first ruler on earth – was regarded as the patron deity of royalty – the personal protector of the pharaoh and all kingship rituals... The name Atum is written A-t-m with the loaf-of-bread sign for the letter ‘t’. However, it is recognised by linguists that the letters ‘t’ and ‘d’ are often interchangeable within the different language groups of the ancient Near East... The Sumerian Adama becomes Atamu in Akkadian. So I believe we are justified in substituting the Egyptian ‘t’ in A-t-m with a ‘d’ – giving us Adam!”

This theory, if true, sheds a very interesting light on the early Biblical account. Thus if the Babylonian cult of the god-king goes back to the self-deification of Nimrod, which is in turn based on the deification of his ancestors Ashur (Marduk) and Noah (Utnapishtim), then the Egyptian cult of the god-king, while receiving its first impetus from Babylonian Marduk-worship, went one step further back in deifying the ancestor of the whole human race, Adam, and placing him at the peak of their religious pantheon. Eve fell through believing the word of the serpent that they would be “as gods”. The descendants of Noah and Ham fell through believing that Adam and Eve succeeded in their impious ambition...

* * *

Now during the life of Moses, a fourth element besides faith, sacrifices and circumcision was added to the life of Israel: the law. The law was necessary for several reasons. First, by the time of Moses, the Israelites were no longer an extended family of a few hundred people, as in the time of Abraham and the Patriarchs, which could be governed by the father of the family without the need of any written instructions or governmental bureaucracy. Since their migration to Egypt in the time of Joseph, they had multiplied and become a nation of four hundred thousand people, which no one man could rule unaided. Secondly, the sojourn of the Israelites in Egypt had introduced them again to the lures of the pagan world, and a law was required to protect them from these lures. And thirdly, in order to escape from Egypt, pass through the desert and conquer the Promised Land in the face of many enemies, a quasi-military organization and discipline was required.

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

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

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

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

---

"But the converse is also true, as a result of the same axiom. Whereas other codes provided the death penalty for offences against property, such as looting during a fire, breaking into a house, serious trespass by night, or theft of a wife, in the Mosaic law no property offence is capital. Human life is too sacred where the rights of property alone are violated. It also repudiates vicarious punishment: the offences of parents must not be punished by the execution of sons or daughters, or the husband’s crime by the surrender of the wife to prostitution… Moreover, not only is human life sacred, the human person (being in God’s image) is precious… Physical cruelty [in punishment] is kept to the minimum."108

A major part of the Mosaic law concerned a priesthood and what we would now call the Church with its rites and festivals. The priesthood was entrusted to Moses' brother Aaron and one of the twelve tribes of Israel, that of the Levites. As St. Cyril of Alexandria writes: “Moses and Aaron… were for the ancients a fine forefigure of Christ… Emmanuel, Who, by a most wise dispensation, is in one and the same Person both Law-Giver and First Priest… In Moses we should see Christ as Law-Giver, and in Aaron – as First Priest.”109

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

That the Levites constituted the beginnings of what we would now call the clergy of the Church was indicated by Patriarch Nikon of Moscow in his polemic against the attempts of the tsar to confiscate church lands: “Have you not heard that God said that any outsider who comes close to the sacred things will be given up to death? By outsider here is understood not only he who is a stranger to Israel from the pagans, but everyone who is not of the tribe of Levi, like Kore, Dathan and Abiram, whom God did not choose, and whom, the impious ones, a flame devoured; and King Uzziah laid his hand on the ark to support it, and God struck him and he died (II Kings 6.6,7).”110

However, it is important to realize that there was no radical separation of powers in the modern sense. Israel was a theocratic state ruled directly by God, Who revealed His will through His chosen servants Moses and Aaron. The Church, the State and the People were not three different entities or organizations, but three different aspects of a single organism, the whole of which was subject to God alone. That is why it was so important that the leader should be chosen by God. In the time of the judges, this seems always to have been the case; for when an emergency arose God sent His Spirit upon a man chosen by Him (cf. Judges 6.34), and the people, recognizing this, then

108 Johnson, op. cit., pp. 33, 34.
110 Nikon, in M.V. Zyzykin, Patriarkh Nikon (Patriarch Nikon), Warsaw: Synodal Typography, 1931, part II, p. 36.
elected him as their judge (cf. Judges 11.11). And if there was no emergency, or if the people were not worthy of a God-chosen leader, then God did not send His Spirit and no judge was elected. In those circumstances "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21.25) - in other words, there was anarchy. The lesson was clear: if theocracy is removed, then sooner or later there will be anarchy - that is, no government at all.

The unity of Israel was therefore religious, not political - or rather, it was religio-political. It was created by the history of deliverance from the satanocracies of Babylon and Egypt and maintained by a continuing allegiance and obedience to God - the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God Who appeared to Moses and Joshua, - as their only King. Neither Abraham nor Moses was a king. Rather it was said to Abraham by God: "Kings will come from you" (Genesis 17.6; cf. 17.16, 35.2). And Moses was a lawgiver, a priest and prophet rather than a king. Early Israel was therefore not a kingdom - or rather, it was a kingdom whose king was God alone. As Tikhomirov writes: “According to the law of Moses, no State was established at that time, but the nation was just organized on tribal principles, with a common worship of God. The Lord was recognized as the Master of Israel in a moral sense, as of a spiritual union, that is, as a Church.”

Ancient Israel, in other words, was a Theocracy, ruled not by a king or priest, but by God Himself. And strictly speaking the People of God remained a Theocracy, without a formal State structure, until the time of the Prophet Samuel, who anointed the first King of Israel, Saul. Early Israel before the kings had rulers, but these rulers were neither hereditary monarchs nor were they elected to serve the will of the people. They were charismatic leaders, called judges, who were elected because they served the will of God alone.

And they were elected by God, not the people, who simply had to follow the man God had elected, as when He said to Gideon: “Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the Midianites: have I not sent thee?” (Judges 6.14). That is why, when the people offered to make Gideon and his descendants kings in a kind of hereditary dynasty, he refused, saying: "I shall not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the Lord shall rule over you" (Judges 8.23).

---

111 Tikhomirov, Monarkhitcheskaia Gosudarstvennost’ (Monarchical Statehood), p. 126.
Nevertheless, it was God’s plan that Israel should have a “delegated theocracy”, a king who would be in all things obedient to Himself. But the fulfillment of that plan would have to wait until the Israelites had permanently settled a land. For "a king is an advantage to a land with cultivated fields" (Ecclesiastes 5.8).

However, to ensure that such a king would be a true autocrat, and not a pagan-style despot, the Lord laid down certain conditions to the people through Moses: “When thou shalt come unto the land which the Lord thy God shall choose, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, ‘I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me’, thou shalt surely set a king over thee whom the Lord thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother... And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests, the Levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them: that his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left: to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel” (Deuteronomy 17.14-15,18-20).

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

In the period from Moses to Saul, the people were ruled by the Judges, many of whom, like Joshua, Jephtha and Gideon, were truly God-fearing, 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 give them a king. God fulfilled their request, but 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, he persecuted true piety, as represented by the future King David and the prophet Gad, and he disobeyed the Church, as represented by the Judge and Prophet Samuel and the high priests Abiathar and Ahimelech.
Some democrats have argued that the Holy Scriptures do not approve of kingship. This is not true: kingship as such is never condemned in Holy Scripture. Rather, it is considered the norm of political leadership, as we see in the following passages: “Blessed are thou, O land, when thou hast a king from a noble family” (Ecclesiastes 10.17); "The heart of the king is in the hand of God: He turns it wherever He wills (Proverbs 21.1); “He sends kings upon thrones, and girds their loins with a girdle” (Job 12.18); "He appoints kings and removes them" (Daniel 2.21); "Thou, O king, art a king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given a powerful and honourable and strong kingdom in every place where the children of men dwell" (Daniel 2.37-38); "Listen, therefore, O kings, and understand...; for your dominion was given you from the Lord, and your sovereignty from the Most High" (Wisdom 6.1,3).

The tragedy of the story of the first Israelite king, Saul, did not consist in the fact that the Israelites sought a king for themselves - as we have seen, God did not condemn kingship as such. After all, the sacrament of kingly anointing, which was performed for the first time by the Prophet Samuel on Saul, gave the earthly king the grace to serve the Heavenly King as his true Sovereign. The tragedy consisted in the fact that the Israelites sought a king "like [those of] the other nations around" them (Deuteronomy 17.14), - in other words, a pagan-style 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.

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 (I Samuel) 8.4-9). And then Samuel painted for them the image of a harsh, totalitarian ruler of the kind that was common in the Ancient World. These kings, as well as having total political control over their subjects, were often worshipped by them as gods; so that "kingship" as understood in the Ancient World meant both the loss of political freedom and alienation from the true and living God.

God allowed the introduction of this despotic kind of kingship into Israel because the religious principle had grown weak. For the history of the kings begins with the corruption of the priests, the sons of Eli, who were in possession of the ark at the time of its capture. Thus for the kings' subsequent oppression of the people both the priests and the people bore responsibility.

However, 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 secondary, 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 grew impatient when Samuel the priest delayed his coming to perform a sacrifice. So he performed the sacrifice himself without waiting for Samuel. For this sin, the sin of the invasion of the Church’s sphere by the State, Samuel prophesied that the kingdom — a Kingdom that would last forever - would be taken away from Saul and given to a man after God’s heart. “For now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart” (I Kings 13.13-14). That man, of course, was David, who, by becoming the ancestor of Christ, would become the founder of an eternal Kingdom.

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

Saul’s second sin was to spare 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)... It was no accident therefore, that it was an Amalekite who killed Saul at Mount Gilboa and brought his crown to David...

---

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

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

* 

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

The greatness of David lay in the fact that he represented the true autocrat, who both closed the political schism that had opened between north and south, and closed the schism that was just beginning to open up between the sacred and the profane, the Church and the State. Indeed, according to the author of the two books of Chronicles, it was David's solicitude for the Church and her liturgical worship that was the most important fact about him. As Patrick Henry Reardon points out, nineteen chapters are devoted to David, and of these nineteen "the Chronicler allotted no fewer than 11 – over half – to describe the king's solicitude for Israel's proper worship (I Chronicles 13; 15-16 and 22-29). This material includes the transfer of the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem, the organization of the priestly and Levitical ministries, preparations for the sacred music, and David's lengthy instructions to Solomon with respect to the temple.

“According to the Chronicler, David not only made all the arrangements for the consecration of the temple and the organization of the worship (I Chronicles 28.19), he did so by the Lord’s own command (II Chronicles 29.15). Even the musical instruments used in the worship are credited to David (II Chronicles 29.17; cf. Nehemiah 12.36).”

“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.

“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?”

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).

Thus there were two spheres, “the king’s matters” and “the Lord’s matters”. If the king ventured to enter “the Lord’s matters”, that is, the sphere of Divine worship in the temple, he would be punished. We see this clearly 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

---

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

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, 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.

9. FROM THEOCRACY TO AUTOCRACY: (4) SOLOMON

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

First, in them the Israelite kingdom attained its greatest strength, subduing its enemies and reaching its geographical integrity as that had been promised to Abraham: "from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates" (Genesis 15.18). Secondly, the covenant which the Lord had sworn to the Family Church in the persons of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and to the Pilgrim Church in the persons of Moses and Joshua, He now renewed with the State Church in the persons of David and Solomon. The unconditional element of this covenant - the part which the Lord promised to fulfil whatever happened - was the promise of the Coming of Christ: the Seed seen by Abraham, the Prophet seen by Moses, and now the King seen by David; for "thine house and thy kingdom," He said to David, "shall be established for ever before thee; thy throne shall be established for ever" (II Samuel 7.16; cf. Luke 1.32-33). And thirdly, the worship of the Old Testament Church reached its maturity and most magnificent development in the building of the Temple and the establishment of all the Temple services.

The importance of Solomon's Temple as a figure of the New Testament Church can be seen in the many resemblances between the two, from the details of the priests' vestments and the use of the Psalter to the offering of incense and the frescoes on the walls. Even the structure of the Temple building, with its sanctuary, nave and narthex and two aisles, recalls the structure of the Christian basilica. But there is this very important difference, that whereas the nave of the Temple was entered only by the priests, and the sanctuary only by the high-priest once a year, while all the services were conducted in the courtyard, the New Testament Church allows all Christians to enter the Church, inasmuch as they are "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people" (I Peter 2.9), for whom Christ the Great High-Priest has made "a new and living way" into the holy of holies (Hebrews 10.19-22).

The consecration of the Temple by Solomon may be seen the high point of the Old Testament, from which the rest of the Old Testament is a long and uneven, but inexorable fall until the Coming of Christ at its lowest point. The union of the kingship with the priesthood in the only major city of Israel not belonging to any of the tribes - for Jerusalem had been a Jebusite city until David and his men conquered it, - represented that ideal symphony of Church and State which was not to be recovered in its full glory until the Emperor Justinian consecrated the Great Church of the Holy Wisdom (Hagia Sophia) in Constantinople over 1500 years later. And when the Jews looked forward to the Messiah-King who was to restore their fortunes and usher in the Kingdom of God on earth, the image they conceived was compounded of the warlike prowess of David and the peaceful splendour of Solomon.
But in Solomon himself lay the seeds of that corruption which was to bring everything down in ruins. For this lover of wisdom whom God loved was not wise enough to heed the words inscribed in the Mosaic law: "When thou art come unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, 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 set him as king over thee, whom the Lord thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set over thee; thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother. But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the Lord hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way. Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away; neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold." (Deuteronomy 17.14-17).

Now Solomon was, of course, a legitimate king, a "brother" and not a "stranger" - that is, a member of the household of the faith. He was a king, moreover, whom God had chosen, giving him the great gift of wisdom. However, he "multiplied horses to himself", many of whom came from Egypt. (Archaeologists have discovered the remains of his huge stables.) And he "multiplied wives to himself", many of whom again came from Egypt and "turned his heart away" from the living God to idolatry. Finally, he "multiplied to himself silver and gold" on a vast scale. Thus with uncanny precision did the prophecy pinpoint the weaknesses of Solomon.

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

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” (Psalm 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).
The anointing of Saul, David and Solomon raises the important 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!”

As St. Philaret 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’ (Psalm 21.29). ‘The power of the earth is in the hand of the Lord, and in due time He will set over it one that is profitable’ (Sirach 10.4).’

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

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

---

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

The political schism immediately engendered a religious schism. For Jeroboam reasoned that if the people of his kingdom continued to go up to the Temple in Jerusalem to pray, as the Law commanded, they would soon kill him and go over to Rehoboam. So he set up two golden calves, one in Bethel and the other in Dan, and said: "behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt" (I Kings 12.28). "And this thing became a sin: for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan. And he made an house of high places, and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi" (I Kings 12.30-31).

With astonishing speed, therefore, the glorious kingdom of Solomon, the forerunner of the Kingdom of Christ, became the apostate kingdom of Jeroboam, the forerunner of the kingdom of the Antichrist - even to the extent that Jeroboam set up his false god in Dan, which, according to tradition, will be the tribe of the Antichrist. 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.

There were faithful worshippers left in the northern kingdom; for as the Lord said to Elijah: "Yet I have left Me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him" (I Kings 19.18). However, the believers (like the Prophet Obadiah) lived in a catacomb situation; and the great miracles of Elijah, whereby he stopped the heavens from raining for three and a half years, and showed Baal to be powerless at the sacrifice on Mount Carmel, and resurrected the son of the widow of Zarephath, and sent down fire on the messengers of King Ahaziah, did not bring about a lasting religious reformation.
For this reason, this period - and especially the three-and-a-half years of drought brought about by the prayers of Elijah - is regarded as an image of the period of the Antichrist's rule, when the Church will be in a similarly desperate situation, and the Prophet Elijah will again come to earth to rebuke the evil ruler and "turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I [the Lord] come and smite the earth with a curse" (Malachi 4.5). This last verse is a simultaneous prophecy of the conversion of the Gentiles to the faith of the Christian Jews and of the conversion of the last generation of Jews to the faith of the Christians. For as St. Jerome writes, Elijah "will turn the heart of the fathers to the sons', that is, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and all the patriarchs, that their descendants should believe in the Lord and Saviour, in Whom they also believed: 'for Abraham saw My day, and was glad' (John 8.56): or the heart of the father to the son, that is, the heart of God to everyone who receives the Spirit of adoption. 'And the heart of the sons to the fathers', so that Jews and Christians, who now disagree amongst themselves, may agree by an equal faith in Christ. Whence it is said to the apostles, who passed on the teaching of the Gospel throughout the world: 'Instead of your fathers sons were born unto you' (Psalm 44.17)."

After Elijah's ascension his disciple Elisha continued the struggle. Although, like Elijah, he lived and worked mainly in the northern kingdom, he made clear his loyalty to the right-believing king of the southern kingdom 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)...

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 Zebediah the son of Ismael, the ruler of the house of Judah, for all the king's matters" (II Chronicles 19.11). 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 the autocracy is conditional on its loyalty to the true faith.

The sickness of the northern kingdom was never healed. In spite of the admonitions of the prophets, the people, led by kings of whom the Lord said: "They have made kings for themselves, but not by Me" (Hosea 8.4), went from bad to worse. Finally, in 722 BC, in the reign of King Hoshea, after a vain attempt to win Egyptian support, the kingdom was conquered by the Assyrian King Shalmaneser, the people were deported and they lost their religious and national identity for ever (II Kings 17).
While the northern kingdom of Israel perished, the southern kingdom of Judah continued to exist, though little better than the northerners from a moral point of view.

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

The idea of "the remnant", a faithful core in an age of apostasy, now becomes more and more important in the writings of the prophets. Just as the Lord in Abraham's time was prepared to spare Sodom and Gomorrah as long as righteous Lot remained in it, so he was prepared to spare Judah as long as a faithful remnant was preserved in it. Thus King Hezekiah, though a vassal of Assyria, reversed the syncretistic policies of Ahaz, 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 (Psalm 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), being conquered by the Babylonians to the south.

In this period, as the people and priesthood became weaker in faith, the kingship became stronger. The strength and piety of the king might have compensated for the weakness of the Church, at least in part. But if the king worshipped idols, then, like Ahaz, he might reign during his lifetime, but after his death "they did not bring him into the sepulchres of the kings of Israel" (II Chronicles 28.27). And if he did not understand his role, and was not kept in his place by a good high priest, then the results could be catastrophic.
Thus in the reign of King Ozias (Uzziah) the kingship began to encroach on the altar. 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’ (Psalm 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.”

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).

Josiah was a great king, who found a lost book of the Law in the Temple and instituted a thorough reformation of the people's religious life. He “removed the idolatrous priests whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense on the high places in the cities of Judah and in the places all around Jerusalem, and those who burned incense to Baal, to the sun, to the moon, to the constellations, and to all the hosts of heaven” (II Kings 23.5) – that is, the angels.

However, Josiah 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 he was killed… The mourning over the death of King Josiah was unprecedented in its length and depth of feeling.

More commonly, however, the kings led the people in apostasy. Such was King Manasseh, who ordered the execution of Isaiah and built many shrines to the false gods. However, he repented before his end...

Sometimes the remnant included diligent priests and truly inspired prophets. But more often "the priests said not, Where is the Lord? and they that handle the law knew Me not: the pastors also transgressed against Me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after things that do not profit" (Jeremiah 2.8). Gradually the remnant of God's faithful was being squeezed out, and a Pharisaic establishment was taking its place. Soon that establishment would reject the very Messiah the preparation of Whose Coming was their own raison d'être...

In the days of Jeremiah, not only did the kings refuse to heed his warnings not to rebel against Babylon and enter into alliance with Egypt, but also the "priests" and "prophets" ganged up to cast him into the stocks (Jeremiah 20). The people continued to believe that, whatever their sins, the grace and the protection of God would never be taken away from them, saying: "Come, and let us devise devices against Jeremiah; for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet" (Jeremiah 18.18). But all of these things happened, and in the end the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem with great slaughter, destroyed the Temple, and deported most of the remaining people with the Temple treasures.

Betrayal did not only come from the kings: it could also come from the high priesthood. Thus Jewish tradition relates that Somnas, the high priest and temple treasurer in the time of King Hezekiah, wished to betray the people of God and flee to the Assyrian King Sennacherib; and St. Cyril of Alexandria says of him: "On receiving the dignity of the high-priesthood, he abused it, going to the extent of imprisoning everybody who contradicted him." Betrayal did not only come from the kings: it could also come from the high priesthood. Thus Jewish tradition relates that Somnas, the high priest and temple treasurer in the time of King Hezekiah, wished to betray the people of God and flee to the Assyrian King Sennacherib; and St. Cyril of Alexandria says of him: "On receiving the dignity of the high-priesthood, he abused it, going to the extent of imprisoning everybody who contradicted him." Betrayal did not only come from the kings: it could also come from the high priesthood. Thus Jewish tradition relates that Somnas, the high priest and temple treasurer in the time of King Hezekiah, wished to betray the people of God and flee to the Assyrian King Sennacherib; and St. Cyril of Alexandria says of him: "On receiving the dignity of the high-priesthood, he abused it, going to the extent of imprisoning everybody who contradicted him."

St. Cyril, P.G. 70, 516B.
11. THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY

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

* 

One night in 539 BC, Belshazzar the son of Nebuchadnezzar, was feasting with his lords, wives and concubines, drinking in the very same holy cups that had been taken by his father from the Temple in Jerusalem. At that point a mysterious hand appeared writing on the wall. The Prophet Daniel was summoned and said: “This is the interpretation of each word. MENE: God has numbered your kingdom and finish it; TEKEL: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting. PERES: Your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and Persians.” (Daniel 5.26-29) That very night Babylon was conquered, and Belshazzar killed, by one of the greatest rulers of history, Cyrus the Great, King of the Medes and Persians, whom the Lord even called “My anointed” (Isaiah 45.1), although he was a pagan. Cyrus extended the Persian empire to the east and the west, and practiced a remarkable degree of national and religious toleration for his time.123 immediately freed the Jews and allowed them to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple – the Lord has saved His people through His anointed king...

Moreover, according to Yuval Noah Harari, it was Cyrus who introduced one of the most important political ideas in history: the idea that an empire can exist for the benefit of all its subject peoples, not just the dominant nation.

“For the kings of Assyria always remained the kings of Assyria. Even when they claimed to rule the entire world, it was obvious that they were doing it for the greater glory of Assyria, and they were not apologetic about it. Cyrus, on the other hand, claimed not merely to rule the whole world, but to do so for the sake of all people. ‘We are conquering you for your own benefit,’ said the Persians. Cyrus wanted the peoples he subjected to love him and to count themselves lucky to be Persian vassals. The most famous example of Cyrus’ innovative efforts to gain the approbation of a nation living under the thumb of his empire was his command that the Jewish exiles in Babylonia be allowed to return to their Judaean homeland and rebuild their temple. He even offered them financial assistance. Cyrus did not see himself as a Persian king ruling over Jews – he was also the king of the Jews, and thus responsible for their welfare…

“In contrast with ethnic exclusiveness, imperial ideology from Cyrus onward has tended to be inclusive and all-encompassing. Even though it has often emphasized racial and cultural differences between rulers and ruled, it has still recognized the basic unity of the entire world, the existence of a single set of principles governing all places and times, and the mutual responsibilities of all human beings. Humankind is seen as a large family: the privileges of the parents go hand in hand with responsibility for the children.”124

Of course, the word “empire” has become associated with evil institutions that were ethnically exclusive – Hitler’s empire is the most famous example. Nevertheless, multi-national empires have in general been more universalist in their ideology than smaller groupings centred on the power and glory of a single nation. And this remains the abiding glory of Cyrus the Great, the first non-Jewish “anointed of the Lord”. His imperial ideology was to be inherited by Rome. And from there it descended to the Second Rome of Constantinople and the Third Rome of Russia…

12. THE ORIGINS OF GRECO-ROMAN CIVILIZATION

“The first millennium BC,” writes Harari, “witnessed the appearance of three potential universal orders, whose devotees could for the first time imagine the entire world and the entire human race as a single unit governed by a single set of laws. Everyone was ‘us’, at least potentially. There was no longer ‘them’. The first universal order to appear was economic: the monetary order. The second universal order to appear was political: the imperial order. The third universal order was religious: the order of universal religions such as Buddhism, Christianity and Islam.

“Merchants, conquerors and prophets were the first people who managed to transcend the binary division, ‘us vs them’, and foresee the potential unity of mankind. For the merchants, the entire world was a single market and all humans were potential customers. They tried to establish an economic order that would apply to all, everywhere. For the conquerors, the entire world was a single empire and all humans were potential subjects, and for prophets, the entire world held a single truth and all humans were potential believers. They too tried to establish an order that would be applicable for everyone everywhere.

“During the last three millennia, people made more and more ambitious attempts to realize that global vision…”125

The first state that realized this global vision – that is, provided a potentially global economic, political and religious order – was the Roman empire in the time of St. Constantine, when the vast empire was united economically by the Roman denarius, politically by the Roman emperor, and religiously by the faith of Christ. The fact that this empire did not in fact rule over the whole world is less important than the fact that it aspired to that in these three ways, thereby containing within itself the potential for a godly globalization, the real unity of mankind. Let us look at the origins of Rome, the most important politico-religious venture in human history…

According to Larry Siedentop, following Fustel de Coulanges, the origins of religious, social and political organization in Greece and Italy lay in the absolute power of the head of the family, the paterfamilias, in his own domain. Each family was centred around worship of the gods of the hearth, who were deceased males of the family. The head of the family was both the family’s king and priest; it was his duty to keep the hearth fire alight at all times and to carry out the prescribed rituals and prayers in honour of the family’s gods. Slaves and foreigners were not members of the family. The supreme value of the family was its own immortality - the worship of the past generations, the defence of the family’s members and property in the present, and the provision for future generations. For any son of the family not to take a bride was considered dereliction of duty and impiety, for it threatened that

125 Harari, op. cit., p. 191.
familial immortality. As for a bride who married into the family, she was expected to abandon the worship of her former family’s gods and transfer all her loyalty and worship to her husband’s family and his gods.

“Other domestic practices in Greece and Rome – the subordinate role of women, the nature of marriage, property rights and inheritance rules – were also direct consequences of religious belief. Let us take the role of women first. Women could participate in the worship of the dead only through their father or husband. For descent was traced exclusively through the male line. But even then religion governed the definition of relationships so entirely that an adopted son, once he was admitted to the family worship, shared its ancestors, while a son who abandoned the family worship ceased altogether to be a relation, becoming unknown...

“... The father exercised his authority on the basis of beliefs shared by the family. His was not an arbitrary power. The overwhelming imperative was to preserve family worship, and so to prevent his ancestors, unintended, being cast into oblivion. This restriction of affection to the family circle gave it an extraordinary intensity. Charity, concern for humans as such, was not deemed a virtue, and would probably have been unintelligible. But fulfilling obligations attached to a role in the family was everything. ‘The sense of duty, natural affection, the religious idea – all these were confounded, were considered as one, and were expressed by the same word.’ That word was piety (pietas).”

As families came together into larger units, clans, tribes and cities, the exclusive, atomistic nature of each family’s worship was not destroyed. However, every new association of families required the worship of a new common divinity that was superior to the domestic divinities. A gradual movement from the more particular to the less particular, if not yet the universal, took place as the unit of social organization grew larger.

“Religious ideas expanded with the increased scale of association. Fustel does not argue that religious progress brought about social progress in any simple way, but he does emphasize the intimate connection between the two. Thus, as the scale of association increased, the gods of nature or polytheism became more important – for these were gods who could more easily be shared, gods less exclusively domestic than ancestors, gods associated with the forces of nature rather than with divine ancestors. These were gods who represented the sea, the wind, fertility, light, love, hunting, with familiar names such as Apollo, Neptune, Venus, Diana and Jupiter. The building of civic temples to these gods offered physical evidence of the enlargement of religious ideas. Still, the gods of each city remained exclusive, so that while two cities might both adore ‘Jupiter’, he had different attributes in each city.

---

'Particularism was the rule. Even after a city was founded, it was inconceivable for the city not to respect the divine ancestors, the sacred rites and magistrates of the different groups that had attended its foundation. For the souls of the dead were deemed to live under the ground of the cities they had helped to create. The statesman Solon, who in the sixth century BC endowed Athens with laws, was given the following advice by the oracle of Delphi: ‘Honour with worship the chiefs of the country, the dead who live under the earth.’ The city had to respect their authority in matters concerning their descendants. For the city’s authority was all of a piece with theirs. Gods and groups marched hand in hand.

“This corporate, sacramental character of the ancient city dominated its formal organization. Whether it was a question of procedures for voting, military organization or religious sacrifices, care was taken to represent tribes, curiae and families – and to conduct civic life through them. It was deemed important that men should be associated most closely with others who sacrificed at the same altars. Altars were the bonds of human association. That emerged in the Greek and Roman conception of warfare. In one of Euripides’ plays, a soldier asserts that ‘the gods who fight with us are more powerful that those who fight on the side of the enemy…

“Kingship was the highest priesthood, presiding over the cult established with the city itself. The king was hereditary high priest of that association of associations that was the ancient city. The king’s other functions, as magistrate and military leader, were simply the adjuncts of his religious authority. Who better to lead the city in war than the priest whose knowledge of the sacred formulas and prayers ‘saved’ the city every day? And, later, when kingship gave way to republican regimes, the chief magistrate of the city - the archon in Athens, the consul in Rome - remained a priest whose first duty was to offer sacrifices to the city’s gods. In fact, the circlet of leaves worn on the head of archons when conducting such sacrifices became a universal symbol of authority: the crown…”127

* 

Just as devotion to the family had been the supreme value in the original form of social organization, so devotion to the city - civic patriotism - now became the supreme value in the Greek and Italian city-states. Religion and politics were inextricably entangled. For “in devoting himself to the city before everything else, the citizen was serving his gods. No abstract principle of justice could give him pause. Piety and patriotism were one and the same thing. For the Greeks, to be without patriotism, to be anything less than an active citizen, was to be an ‘idiot’. That, indeed, is what the word originally meant, referring to anyone who retreated from the life of the city.”128

127 Siedentop, op. cit., p. 21-22, 23.
128 Siedentop, op. cit., p. 25. “Idiotis” in Greek literally means a man “belonging to himself”, what we would now call a private citizen – that is, one who plays no part in public life.
The Latin saying, *Dulce est pro patria mori*, “Sweet it is to die for one’s country”, illustrates how important the city, the homeland, was for the early Greeks and Romans. It encompassed much more than the modern concept of homeland. It included everything associated with the homeland, too.

Pope John Paul II (Karol Woytila) put it as follows: “The Latin word *patria* is associated with the idea of 'father' (*pater*). The native land (or fatherland) can in some ways be identified with patrimony, that is, the totality of goods bequeathed to us by our forefathers. ... Our native land is thus our heritage and it is also the whole patrimony derived from that heritage. It refers to the land, the territory, but more importantly, the concept of *patria* includes the values and the spiritual content that go to make up the culture of a given nation.

“... From this it can be seen that the very idea of 'native land' presupposes a deep bond between the spiritual and the material, between culture and territory. Territory seized by force from a nation somehow becomes a plea crying out to the 'spirit' of the nation itself. The spirit of the nation awakens, takes on fresh vitality and struggles to restore the rights of the land.

“... [T]he concept of *patria* and its link with paternity and with generation points towards the moral value of patriotism.... it is covered by the fourth commandment, which obliges us to honour our father and mother. ... Patriotism includes this sentiment inasmuch as the *patria* truly resembles a mother. ... Patriotism is a love for everything to do with our native land: its history, its traditions, its language, its natural features. ... Every danger that threatens the overall good of our native land becomes an occasion to demonstrate this love.”

Nevertheless, both Greeks and Romans understood that piety – devotion to the gods – was not always the same as patriotism – devotion to homeland. In Sophocles’ *Antigone*, for example, we see a direct conflict between the two, in which patriotism had to yield ultimately to the higher claims of religious piety. And this contrast became much sharper when the Greco-Roman world became Christian...

Returning to the theme of kingship, we may note the fact that kingship in Greece and Rome was not their original form of organization meant that it had shallower roots than in Babylon or Egypt; it was less absolute, less divine. And from the sixth century BC not only kingship, but even the aristocratic power of the heads of families and clans began to decline. “The first major change took place within the patriarchal families. Primogeniture came under attack and gradually gave way, with the consequence not only that younger sons inherited and became full citizens, but also that junior branches of the ancient families or *gentes* became independent. These developments greatly increased the number of citizens, and reduced the power of the ancient family heads as priests.
“A second major change followed. The clients of the family were gradually liberated, becoming free men. At the outset the clients could not own property. They did not even have any security of tenure on land they worked for the paterfamilias. They were little better than slaves. ‘Possible the same series of social changes took place in antiquity which Europe saw in the middle ages, when the slaves in the country became serfs of the glebe, when the latter from serfs, taxable at will, were changed to serfs with a fixed rent, and when finally they were transformed... into peasant proprietors.’

“Fundamental to these changes was a rise in expectations. That rise was, in turn, due to the comparisons that became possible once the patriarchal family was merely part of a larger association, the polis or city-state. No longer was the paterfamilias, the magistrate and priest, the only representative of authority in sight, the only spokesman of the gods. The paterfamilias gradually lost his semi-sacred status through being immersed in civic life. His inferiors now ‘could see each other, could confer together, could make an exchange of their desires and griefs, compare their masters, and obtain a glimpse of a better fate.’

“Obtaining the right of property was their first and strongest desire, preceding any claim for the full privileges of citizenship. But the latter was bound to follow, for obtaining greater equality on one front only increased a sense of exclusion on the other. Citizenship, in turn, unleashed a process of abstraction which could and did threaten inherited inequalities.

“No one understood this better than a series of rulers called tyrants. Tyranny was acceptable to the previously underprivileged classes because it was a means of undermining the old aristocracy. Tyrants were so called because ‘kingship’ evoked a religious role, a role that recalled the subordinations based on the ancient family and its worship. The lower classes supported tyrants in order to combat their former superiors. Tyranny was an instrument that could be discarded when it had served it purpose, unlike the sacred authority claimed by the original kings. It was an instrument serving a sense of relative deprivation...”

Here we find the first manifestation of that distinction that was to become so important in later European history: the distinction between the sacred, God-established power of the true king, and the impious, unlawful power of the usurper, or tyrant. Of course, such a distinction was implicit in the schism between the kingdom of Judah under Rehoboam and the kingdom of Israel under Jeroboam. But here it is associated, not so much with a schism within the higher leadership of the kingdom as with revolution from below, from the dispossessed plebs – that is, with class war.

Civic society remained intensely religious, and no serious steps were taken without determining the will of gods through religious rites and sacrifices. But the broadening of the membership of the citizen body, and the gradual “plebicization” of public life had profound consequences. Thus “in Athens, the move from aristocratic to democratic government altered the nature of the tribes. They became, in a sense, offshoots of the public assembly, reflecting the claims of citizenship and voting rather than of the sacerdotal family. A similar symptom of social change in Rome appeared when the army was no longer organized simply according to family and gens. Instead, centuries – that is, numbers – became the basis of its organization. Former clients and plebeians had often become rich (the introduction of money facilitating the circulation of property) and they played an increasingly important military role. The original aristocratic means of making war, the cavalry, had declined as compared to expensive, heavily armoured infantry: Greek hoplites and Roman legionaries. Thus numbers and money – introducing a touch of abstraction – came to count for more within the privileged citizen class, supplementing its religious foundation...”

130 Siedentop, op. cit., p. 34.
Each of the main political systems is the reflection of a particular religious (or anti-religious) outlook on the world. Classical Greek democracy was no exception to this rule. 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.”

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. For if in religion the universe was seen as “one great City of gods and men”, differing from each other not in nature but in power, why should there be any greater differences in the city of man? Just as gods can be punished by other gods, and men like Heracles can become gods themselves, so in the politics of the city-state rulers can be removed from power. There is no “divine right” of kings because even the gods do not have such unambiguous rights over men.

As we pass from Homer to the fifth-century poets and dramatists, the same religious humanism, tending to place men on a par with the gods, is evident. Thus the conservative poet Pindar writes: “Single is the race, single / of men and gods: / From a single mother we both draw breath. / But a difference of power in everything / Keeps us apart.” 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 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.”

We see the same secularizing and humanizing tendency in the fifth-century historian Herodotus. As Simon Sebag Montefiore writes, “For Herodotus, pride always comes before a fall, but he emphasizes that such failures are not the punishment of the gods, but rather result from human mistakes. This rational approach, in which the gods did not intervene in the affairs of men, was a major innovation and formed the basis for the tradition of Western history.”

In about 415 BC the Sicilian writer Euhemerus developed the theory that the gods originated from the elaboration of actual historical persons. This humanist tendency led, in Euripides, to open scepticism about the gods. Thus Queen Hecabe in The Trojan Women expresses scepticism about Zeus in very modern, almost Freudian tones: “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.”

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. Thus he did not take the final step in the democratic argument, which consists in cutting the bond between human institutions (νομος), on the one hand, and the Divine order of things (φυσις), on the other – 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.

---

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

This diversity of state forms naturally led to a debate on which 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.”

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.”

This to a western ear paradoxical argument that monarchy actually delivers freedom – freedom from 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. Augustus, the first Roman emperor, freed the Romans from civil war. So did St. Constantine, the first Christian Roman emperor, who also granted them religious freedom. Riurik, the first Russian king, was summoned from abroad to deliver the Russians from the misery and oppression that their “freedom” had subjected them to. Tsar Nicolas II died trying to save his people from the worst of all despotisms, Communism...

Of course, these men were exceptional: it is easier to find examples of monarchs who enslaved their subjects rather than liberating them. So the problem of finding the good monarch – or, at any rate, of finding a monarchical type of government which is good for the people even if the monarch himself is bad – remains. 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, especially after the defeat of Athens in the Peloponnesian war, and the many negative phenomena that the war threw up, which led not only to a slackening in the creative impulse that had created Periclean Athens, but also, eventually, to a questioning of the superiority of democracy over other forms of government.

*  

138 Herodotus, History, III, 81, 82.
The first and most obvious defect that the war revealed was that democracy tends to divide rather than unite men – at any rate so long as there are no stronger bonds uniting them than were to be found in Athens. 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, the Greek city-states were almost continually at war with each other. Nor was this disunity manifest only between city-states: within them traitors were also frequent (the Athenian Alcibiades, for example).

Evidently, attachment to democracy does not necessarily go together with attachment to 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 destructive individualism is described by Roberts: “Greek democracy… cheerfully paid a larger price in destructiveness than would be welcomed today. There was a blatant competitiveness in Greek life apparent from the Homeric poems onwards. Greeks admired men who won and thought men should strive to win. The consequent release of human power was colossal, but also dangerous. The ideal expressed in the much-used word [αρετή] 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.”

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

---

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

Athenian democracy was not notably humane... The Athenians could be as cruel and imperialistic as any despot. Thus they slaughtered the inhabitants of the little island of Melos simply because they did not want to become part of the Athenian empire. All the Melian males of military age were slaughtered, and all the women and children were driven into slavery. Thus in the end the ideal of freedom that had given birth to Athenian Democracy proved weaker than Realpolitik and the concrete examples provided by the Olympian gods and the Dionysian frenzies. The Melian episode demonstrates that even the most just and democratic of constitutions are powerless to prevent their citizens from descending to the depths of barbarism unless the egoism of human nature itself is overcome, which in turn depends on the truth of the religion that the citizens profess...

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

141 Peter Jones, BBC World Histories, N 3, April/May, 2017, p. 34.
142 Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, II, 37. London: Penguin books, V, 89, 91-97. Paradoxically, the Spartans were more merciful to fallen enemies, as Thucydides writes: “[The Spartans] fought long and stubbornly until the rout of their enemy, but, that achieved, pursuing them only for a short time, and not far” (in Antonio Penades, “Sparta’s Military Machine”, National Geographic History, November/December, 2016, p. 37).
The nobility of Socrates’ character, and his determination to put God and the truth above all things, was a clear premonition of the Christianity of the Apostles. It is no wonder that Church writers such as St. Justin the Philosopher saw in him a “seed” of the Divine Word. The tragedy of Socrates’ death, combined with the fact of the defeat of democratic Athens at the hands of Sparta in the Peloponnesian war, decisively influenced Plato against democracy and in favour of that ideal state which would place the most just of its citizens, not in the place of execution and dishonour, but at the head of the corner of the whole state system.
14. PLATO AND ARISTOTLE ON THE STATE

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”.144

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 his relationship of politics to religion. And his and his pupil Aristotle’s 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. Democracy was not only not the ideal form of government according to this criterion: it was a long way from the ideal, being the penultimate stage in the degeneration of the state from the ideal to a meritocracy to an oligarchy to a democracy, and finally to a tyranny.

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

This leads to a sharp division between the rich and the poor, as a result of which the poor rise up against the rich and bring in democracy, which is “feeble in every respect, and unable to do either any great good or any great evil.”145 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.”146 “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 is 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

---

144 Clement of Alexandria, Stromateis.
146 Plato, The Republic, 557.
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?”

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.”

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

---

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

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

---

149 “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).

150 Plato, The Republic, 473.


152 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.”
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…”

As Metropolitan Anastasy 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.”

To be fair to Plato, he was quite aware of the difficulty of finding a man fit to be philosopher-king. He emphasised training in character as well as intellect, and acknowledged, as we have seen, that such a man, if found and elevated to power, could still be corrupted by his position. What his philosophy lacked was the idea that the Good Itself could come down to the human level and inspire Its chosen one with wisdom and justice.

The problem here was that the scepticism engendered by the all-too-human antics of the Olympian gods revealed its corrosive effect on Plato, as on all subsequent Greek philosophers. Greek religion recognised that the gods could come down to men and inspire them, but the gods who did this, like Dionysius, were hardly the wise, sober and rational beings who alone could inspire wise and sober statecraft. As for the enthusiasms of the Orphic rites, these took place only in a condition that was the exact opposite of sobriety and rationality. So Wisdom could not come from the lechers and buffoons that the Greeks called gods.

But what if there was another divinity higher than they, a divinity that would incarnate the eternal ideas of the Good, the True and the Beautiful? Now Plato did indeed come to some such conception of the One God. But this was an impersonal God who did not interfere in the affairs of men. Man may attempt to reach the eternal ideas and God through a rigorous programme of intellectual training and ascetic endeavour. But that Divine Wisdom should Himself bow down the heavens and manifest Himself to men was an idea that had to await the coming of Christianity... So Plato turned to the most successful State known to him, Sparta, and constructed his utopia at least partly in its likeness. Thus society was to be divided into the common people,
the soldiers and the guardians. All life, including personal and religious life, was to be subordinated to the needs of the State. In economics there was to be a thoroughgoing communism, with no private property. Women and children were to be held in common, marriages arranged on eugenic lines with compulsory abortion and infanticide of the unfit. There was to be a rigorous censorship of 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.” This myth would reconcile each class to its place in society.

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

Plato’s political ideal was put forward for the sake of “justice” – that is, 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 failed, like all such rationalist systems, fully to take into account the reality of *sin*, and therefore became the model for that supremely utopian and unjust system that we see in Soviet and Chinese communism. Moreover, it anticipated communism in its subordination of truth and religion to expediency, and in its approval of the lie for the sake of the survival of the State.

Justice is indeed the ideal of statecraft. But political justice must be understood in a religious context, as the nearest approximation on earth to *Divine* Justice. Thus St. Dionysius the Areopagite writes: “God is named Justice because He satisfies the needs of all things, dispensing due proportion, beauty and order, and defines the bounds of all orders and places each thing under its appropriate laws and orders according to that rule which is most truly just, and because he is the Cause of the independent activity of each. For the Divine Justice orders and assigns limits to all things and keeps all things distinct from and unmixed with one another and give to all beings that which belongs to each according to the dignity of each. And, to speak truly, all who censure the Divine Justice unknowingly confess themselves to be manifestly unjust. For they say that immortality should be in mortal creatures and perfection in the imperfect and self-motivation in the alter-motivated and sameness in the changeable and perfect power in the weak, and that the temporal should be eternal, things which naturally move immutable,”

---

temporal pleasures eternal, and to sum up, they assign the properties of one
thing to another. They should know, however, that the Divine justice is
essentially true Justice in that it gives to all things that which befits the
particular dignity of each and preserves the nature of each in its own proper
order and power.”¹⁵⁶

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”).¹⁵⁷

Aristotle appears to have favoured aristocracy, but at the age of forty-two
he returned from Athens to his Macedonian homeland to teach King Philip’s
thirteen-year-old son, Alexander, who became the most powerful monarch of
the ancient world. Observing Macedonian politics may have influenced him
to believe that there could be a good kind of monarchy. For King Philip had
taken advantage of the perennial disunity of the Greek city-states to assume a
de facto dominion over them. So monarchy at least had the advantage of
creating a certain unity out of chaos... “Monarchy, as the word implies,”
wrote Aristotle, “is the constitution in which one man has authority over all.
There are two forms of monarchy: kingship, which is limited by prescribed
conditions, and tyranny, which is not limited by anything.”¹⁵⁸ This distinction
is similar to the later Christian distinction between autocracy that submits to
God and His laws and despotism that submits to nobody...

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.”

¹⁵⁶ St. Dionysius the Areopagite, On the Divine Names, VIII.
¹⁵⁷ McClelland, op. cit., p. 57.
¹⁵⁸ Aristotle, Rhetoric, 1366a.
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.”\(^{159}\) 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.”\(^{160}\)

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.”\(^{161}\) 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?\(^{162}\)

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.”\(^{163}\)

\(^{162}\) Plato, *The Republic*, 544.
\(^{163}\) 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.\textsuperscript{164}

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.”\textsuperscript{165} 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.”\textsuperscript{166}

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, however, that Aristotle’s politics was irreligious in a general sense. As M.V. Zyzykin points out, when Aristotle wrote that “the first duty of the State is concern over the gods”, he recognised that politics cannot be divorced from religion.\textsuperscript{167} Other ancient writers said the same, for example Lactantius in his work On the Wrath of God: “Only the fear of God keeps men together in society... With the removal of religion and justice we descend to the level of mute cattle deprived of reason, or to the savagery of wild beasts.” 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 religion 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.

\textsuperscript{164} McClelland, op. cit., p. 57.
\textsuperscript{165} McClelland, op. cit., p. 117.
\textsuperscript{166} Aristotle, Politics, 1.
\textsuperscript{167} Zyzykin, Patriarch Nikon, Warsaw, 1931, part I, p. 7.
Classical Greek democracy, though less religious than the earlier, monarchical period of Greek history, was not as irreligious or individualistic as modern democracy, which, as Hugh Bowden writes, “is seen as a secular form of government and is an alternative to religious fundamentalism, taking its authority from the will of the human majority, not the word of god or gods. In Ancient Greece matters were very different... Within the city-state religious rituals entered into all areas of life... There was no emphasis in the Greek world on the freedom of the individual, if that conflicted with obligations to larger groups... Religion was bound up with the political process. High political offices carried religious as well as civic and military duties. Thus the two kings of Sparta were generals and also priests of Zeus...

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

“Greek city-states took oracles seriously, and saw them as the mouthpieces of the gods who supported order and civilisation. Although it was the citizen assemblies that made decisions, they accepted the authority of the gods, and saw the working of the divine hand where we might see the action of chance...”168

15. 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 world – first, the “Greek barbarism” of Macedon, and then the iron-clad savagery of Rome. And if the glittering civilization 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 civilized 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, 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. (A third, the idea of a universal empire ruling for the benefit of all its subjects, was introduced, as we have seen, by Cyrus the Great.) 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.”

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 underpins the whole universe. Moreover, virtue should be practised for its own sake, and not for any benefits it might bring, because fate may thwart our calculations. This attitude led to a more passive, obedient and dutiful approach to politics than had been fashionable in the Classical Greek period.

169 Held, op. cit., p. 21.
170 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’.”

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. Moreover, according to Arrian, “he would not have remained content with any of his conquests, not even if he had added the British Isles to Europe; he would always have reached beyond for something unknown, and if there had been no other competition, he would have competed against himself.”

In spreading Greek civilisation throughout the East, Alexander 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. 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. 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-kings, the Ptolemies of Egypt and the Seleucids of Syria, went still further in an orientalising direction. Thus Roberts writes: “‘Soter’, as Ptolemy I was called, means ‘Saviour’. The Seleucids allowed themselves to be worshipped, but the Ptolemies outdid them; they took over the divine status and prestige of the Pharaohs (and practice, too, to the extent of marrying their sisters).”

Classical Greek civilisation began with the experience of liberation from Persian despotism; it ended with the admission that political liberation without spiritual liberation cannot last. It was born in the matrix of a religion whose gods were little more than super-powerful human beings, with all the

---

172 Arrian, Anabasis, 7.1.
173 “Only sex and sleep,” he said, “make me conscious that I am mortal”.
174 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.
175 Roberts, op. cit., p. 173.
176 Roberts, op. cit., p. 175.
vices and frailty of fallen humanity; it died as its philosophers sought to free themselves entirely from the bonds of the flesh and enter a heaven of eternal, incorruptible ideas, stoically doing their duty in the world of men but knowing that their true nature lay in the world of ideas. It was born in the conviction that despotism is hubris which is bound to be struck down by fate; it died as the result of its own hubris, swallowed up in the kind of despotism it had itself despised and in opposition to which it had defined itself.

And yet this death only went to demonstrate the truth of the scripture that unless a seed falls into the earth and dies it cannot bring forth good fruit (John 12.24). For, in the new political circumstances of empire, and through the new religious prism, first of Stoicism and then of Christianity, Greek political thought did bring forth fruit. 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 is by no means clear that the ancient Greeks had a ‘bad conscience’ about slavery, as some have claimed. From
time to time, they may have felt badly about enslaving fellow Greeks, and that was probably the reason why thinkers like Aristotle troubled themselves with questions about who was most suitable for slavery and who the least. Low-born barbarians born into slavery were always at the top of the list of good slave material. Most Greeks probably believed that without ever thinking about it much.

“The Macedonians may have lacked the subtlety of the Hellenes, but Alexander was no fool. Whatever the Macedonians may have thought to themselves about the races of the East, Alexander would have been asking for trouble if he had arrogantly proclaimed Macedonian racial superiority over conquered peoples, and it would have caused a snigger or two back in Hellas. What better way for the conqueror of a multi-racial empire to conduct himself than in the name of human brotherhood? Imperialism then becomes a gathering-in of the nations rather than the imposition of one nation’s will upon another and this thought follows from the empire-builder’s real desire: secretly, he expects to be obeyed for love. This was Alexander’s way of showing that he was not a tyrant...”177

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 civilization of the Greeks to the universal community of all mankind (or, at any rate, of the oikoumene, the civilized world as they knew it), and from the worship of Athene of Athens or Diana of the Ephesians to the One God Who created all men, gave them all reason and freewill and brought them all together under one single dominion.

And so, writes McClelland, “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...”178

177 McClelland, op. cit., pp. 76-77.
178 McClelland, op. cit., p. 82.
Indeed, as Rolf Strootman writes, the empires of Alexander and his successors were the channel through which the idea of universal empire entered the Mediterranean world. “The conception of the whole (civilized) world as a single empire was continually propagated by Middle Eastern monarchies from the third millennium BCE. Undoubtedly it appealed to some common belief. People living in the Achaemenid, Seleucid, or Sasanian Middle East adhered to a certain kind of belief in a legitimate Great King whose existence was in some way connected with the divinely ordained order of the world. The presence of a world ruler at the center of civilization was believed to be an essential condition for peace, order, and prosperity.

“Essentially a religious concept already in pagan times, the ideal of world unity became extremely forceful when imperialism and monotheism joined hands. After Constantine, the Roman imperator, Byzantine basileus, or Arab caliph could claim to be the exclusive earthly representative of a sole universal deity. Thus, what had formerly been a somewhat indefinite distinction between a civilized, ordered world and a chaotic, barbaric periphery now became a clear-cut dualism of believers and unbelievers.

“Universalistic pretensions are a defining aspect of premodern tributary empires from China to the Americas... The significance of the Hellenistic empires lies in their intermediate position, in both time and space, between the ancient Near East and the Roman Mediterranean. The Macedonian rulers of the Hellenistic Age adopted and transformed the age-old traditions of empire of the Ancient Near East to create their own ideologies of empire. Alexander the Great and his principal successors, the Seleucids and Ptolemies, ‘Hellenized’ Eastern universalistic pretensions; they did so for the sake of their Greek subjects, on whose loyalty and cooperation their power for a large part rested. By converting Near Eastern royal ideology into Greek forms, adding Greek notions of belonging and unity, and actively encouraging current universalistic tendencies among the Greeks – Panhellenism, Stoic philosophy, religious syncretism – what was previously looked upon by the Greeks as oriental despotism became an intrinsic part of Hellenic polis culture. Macedonian imperialism thus shaped the ways in which the Greek and Hellenized poleis of the eastern Mediterranean later conceptualized and formalized their relationships with imperial authority under the Roman Empire. Conversely, the Hellenized variant of an empire characterized by an ideal of universal dominion provided the Roman Empire with an acceptable model for imperial unification in a world characterized by a multitude of city-states.”179

And so the Ancient Greek political odyssey prepared the way, ultimately, for the reception by the whole Mediterranean world of Christ, in Whom “is

neither Greek nor Jew, neither circumcised nor uncircumcised, neither barbarian nor Scythian, neither slave nor freeman, but Christ is all, and in all” (Colossians 3.11).
16. FROM ZERUBBABEL TO THE HASMONAEANS

As we have seen, God punished the northern kingdom of Israel for its impiety by sending the Assyrians to destroy it before destroying the instrument of His wrath (Isaiah 10.15) - a pattern that we find throughout history. In 586 He punished the southern kingdom of Judah for similar impiety by destroying the Temple and exiling the people to Babylon. 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.

Chapter 6 provides a striking messianic prophecy. For as crowns are placed on the head of Joshua, the Lord says: “Behold the Man whose name is the Branch; and He shall grow up out of His place; and He shall build the Temple of Jehovah; even He shall build the Temple of Jehovah; and He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon His throne; and He shall be a priest upon His throne; and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.” That this refers to Jesus the Messiah rather than Joshua the high priest is evident from several facts. First, the phrase “Behold the man” was later to be used by Pilate of Christ, and the name “Jesus” is in fact the same as “Joshua”. Secondly, the “Branch” is a name for the Messiah in several Old Testament prophecies (cf. Isaiah 4.2, 11.1; Jeremiah 23.5, 33.15). Earlier, the Lord had said to Joshua that He would bring forth His servant, the Branch (3.8), so Joshua and the Branch are not in fact the same person. It is the Branch, not Joshua, Who will build the Temple, 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 of the Temple of His Body, offering the Sacrifice of His Body and Blood. He is the only Person (except for Melchizedek) ever rightfully to combine the two roles in one Person. Normally, the attempt to combine the two roles leads to war between God and man; but Christ, being the rightful King and Priest, brings “the counsel of peace” between them…
The rebuilding of the Second Temple under Zerubbabel was a very small-scale, inglorious affair by comparison with the building of the First Temple under Solomon (Haggai 2.3). David Baron writes that “Rabbi Samuel Bar Juni, in the Talmud (Yoma, f.21, c.2), and Rabbis Solomon and Kinchi, in their comment on Haggai 1.8, all agree that five things that were in the first Temple were wanting in the second – i.e., the ark, wherein were the tables of the Covenant, and the cherubim that covered it; the fire used to come down from heaven to devour the sacrifices; the Shekinah Glory; the gift of prophecy, or the Holy Ghost; and the miraculous Urim and Thummim.”

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.

180 Baron, Zechariah, Grand Rapids: Kriegel, 1918, 1988, p. 197.
“It was these nationalists who at that decisive moment of history determined the destinies of Israel…”

In spite of the attempt to revive observance of the law under Ezra and Nehemiah, piety declined. And little is recorded about Israel until 332, when the Persian empire was conquered by Alexander the Great.

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

Then comes one of the most striking encounters between the God of Israel, His people and the rulers of the pagan world. 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’.”

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.

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 (or Judaized Greeks?) of Alexandria. The resultant Septuagint (meaning “70”) translation became the basis both for the transmission of the Old Testament to the Greek-speaking world; it was this translation of the Scriptures that the Evangelists and Apostles used.

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

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

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.”

Johnson has developed this distinction, one of the most important in the history of ideas: “The Jews drew an absolute distinction between human and divine. The Greeks constantly elevated the human – they were Promethean –

---

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

With the agreement of King Antiochus, the Hellenizing 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, known to history as the Maccabees, succeeded in inflicted a series of crushing defeats on the better-equipped and far more numerous Greeks. “Within three years,” writes Montefiore, “the Maccabees had taken Jerusalem, and in 164 BC the now more accommodating Antiochus died and his successor sued for peace (albeit a temporary one). Vitally, Jewish freedom of worship was restored. The Temple was cleansed and rededicated in December 164 BC. Even though the oil for the Temple lamp had run out, the lamp remained alight for eight days, a miracle that inspired the joyful Hanukkah Festival of Lights, in which Jews still celebrate religious freedom from tyranny.

---

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

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…”

Nevertheless, Simon Maccabeus was no Solomon; for in his person 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). And so a true autocracy on the Davidic model was not re-established in Judah, for 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. This may be why five of the great signs of God’s presence and favour that were in Solomon’s temple, but not in Zerubbabel’s. For God’s

186 Schama, op. cit., pp. 120-121.
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. 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.

*

It was in the Hasmonean period that we see the beginning of a remarkable phenomenon that was to lay a solid foundation for the preaching of Christianity throughout the Roman empire: Jewish proselytism. As Alfred M. Lilienthal writes: "Judaism became a tremendous proselytizing force in the pagan world. Those who carried the religion of Yahweh to other parts of the globe were hardly more than a drop in the ocean of foreign peoples who had never possessed any racial, lingual, or cultural affinity with Israel and nevertheless became members of the Judaic monotheistic faith. These converts included such diverse peoples as Yemenites and Greeks, the Queen of Sheba, the people of Adiabene, the Hellenistic state on the Tigris. Judean traders carried their faith eastward as far as India and China. Conversions to Yahweh in Rome carried Judaism through Italy into France, the Rhone Valley, and the Rhine Basin. Mass conversions of Germanic tribes spread Judaism into Central and Eastern Europe, particularly Poland and western Russia. Frederick Hertz in Race and Civilization noted, ‘in the Middle Ages and in modern times, notwithstanding all obstacles,’ there have been occasional conversions in Slavic countries, which accounts for unmistakable Slavic facial characteristics of Polish and Russian Jews. There were even conversions in Hungary as late as 1229. Whole peoples of varying ethnic strains became proselyte Judaists, especially during the two centuries before the birth of Christ. Judeans migrated to the Arabian desert and converted Semitic peoples in Yemen. Pagans as distant as those of the Kerch Strait and the Crimea accepted Yahweh, the Hebrew God.

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

“With the advent of Christianity, the parent faith ceased proselyting. Monotheism was now carried to the pagan world by the disciples of Jesus...”

Now several of the prophets, as well as David in the Psalms, had hinted that the true faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was not destined

---

for the Jews alone. But until the second century BC the emphasis had been on preserving the faith untainted from foreign elements rather than on spreading it to the rest of the world. Hence, for example, Ezra’s insistence that the Jews divorce their foreign wives in case they be infected by their paganism.

However, elements of Hellenistic and pagan culture began to creep into Judah quite soon after the Maccabees’ triumph over the Greek King Antiochus. One of these was the typically pagan combination of kingship and priesthood in one person. 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. Those who were occupied with this and guided the people, that is, the Pharisees and Scribes, 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.”

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

There was a positive aspect to this Hellenizing process: the universalist elements in Judaism came more to the fore, competing with the cosmopolitanism of the Greek stoic philosophers. Thus the Eastern Mediterranean became the arena for a contest for hearts and minds between Greek paganism and philosophy, on the one hand, and Jewish monotheism, on the other. In the environs of Judaea, the contest was settled by force. Thus in 125 BC Yohanan Hyrcanus conquered Edom as far as Beersheba and forced the Edomites to accept circumcision and the law. He also destroyed the Samaritans’ capital of Shechem with their temple on Mount Gerizim. In 104–103 Hyrcanus’ son Judas Aristobulus annexed Galilee, and similarly forced its Iturean inhabitants to convert. His brother and successor, Alexander Jannaeus, was less successful in getting the Hellenistic coastal cities to

188 Tikhomirov, op. cit.
convert. And “according to Josephus, Alexander destroyed the city of Pella in Transjordan ‘because the inhabitants would not bear to change their religious rites for those peculiar to the Jews’. We know that he totally destroyed other Hellenistic cities: Samaria, Gaza, Gederah and many others…”

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

“This was a historical phase in which the distinctive nature of the spreading monotheism began, under the influence of Hellenism, to undermine earlier identities. In the traditional identities, the pagan cults corresponded more or less to the cultural linguistic communities – the ‘peoples’, the ‘commonalities’, the cities or tribes. From this time on, the ancient association between religious boundaries and everyday cultural and language characteristics began to fail. For example, Philo himself, for all his extensive knowledge, knew neither Hebrew nor Aramaic, yet this did not diminish his devout attachment to the Mosaic religion, which he, like many of his fellow believers, knew in its famous translation. Some of his writing was probably also intended to persuade gentiles to change their ways and abandon ‘their own individual customs’.

“The Septuagint was the hesitant start of Jewish religious missionizing also realized in the form of the works known as the books of the Apocrypha. The Letter of Aristeas that mentions the translation was written in Greek before 200BCE by a Jewish believer in Alexandria. Aristeas may have been the author’s real name, though perhaps he took the typical Greek name – that of a bodyguard of Ptolemy II Philadelphus – to appeal to Hellenistic readers. As well as relating the legendary history of the translation, the letter attacks idolatry and praises the Jewish faith, though it does so in an allegorical manner. For example, it says nothing about circumcision, to avoid discouraging the gentiles, but launches into an idyllic, even utopian, description of Jerusalem and its temple. It describes Jewish scholars as wiser than the pagan Greek philosophers, though paradoxically their superiority is demonstrated via the principles of Greek philosophy, giving the impression that the anonymous author was more familiar with the latter than with the Torah.

190 Sand, op. cit., p. 160.
“Similar rhetoric is found in the third book of an ancient collection known as the *Sibylline Oracles*, a book that most scholars date to the second century BCE, namely the Hasmonean period. It too was translated in Alexandria and, like the *Letter of Aristeas*, denounces the Egyptian animal cults. Jewish sermonizing in the form of verses supposedly uttered by a Greek-style female prophet addresses all the children of men who were created in God’s image, and prophesies that in future the people of the great God will again serve all mortals as brave teachers. Idolatry was low and debauched, it is declared, whereas the Jewish faith was a religion of justice, fraternity and charity. The idolatrous were infected with homosexuality, whereas the Jews were far from committing any abomination. Therefore the worshippers of wood and stone should convert to the true faith or be chastised by a wrathful God.

“The obvious Jewish confidence of this work paralleled the success and rising power of the Hasmonean kingdom. The *Wisdom of Solomon*, written probably in the first century BCE, also links the proselytizing impulse in the Jewish communities in Egypt with the Judean rulers’ drive for converts. The first, visionary part of this work is in Hebrew and comes from Judea; the second, more philosophical part is in Greek and is Alexandrian in character. This work also derides the cult of animals and revolves around the disdain for the worship of images. Like the third Sibylline oracle, the *Wisdom of Solomon* associates the worship of many gods with licentiousness and immorality, dooming one to punishment. Here, too, the objects of persuasion are gentiles, chiefly rulers and kings, and the rhetoric is entirely derived from Greek heritage. The Stoic logos is put into the mouth of King Solomon, who utters well known Platonic statements…”

“Damascus was a flourishing Hellenistic center second only to Alexandria, and conversion to Judaism there was even greater than in Egypt…

“The popularity of Judaism before and after the Common Era spread beyond the Mediterranean region. In *Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus tells the fabulous story of the conversion to Judaism in the first century CE of the rulers of Adiabene (Hadyab) [in today’s Kurdistan]. As this conversion is described in other sources, there is no reason to doubt its broad outline…”

---

191 For example, he says of Wisdom: “In her there is a spirit that is intelligent, holy, unique, manifold, subtle, mobile, clear, unpolluted, distinct, invulnerable, loving the good, keen, irresistible, beneficent, humane, steadfast, sure, free from anxiety, all-powerful, overseeing all, and penetrating through all spirits that are intelligent and pure and most subtle. For wisdom is more mobile than any motion; For she is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her. For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness. Though she is but one, she can do all things, and while remaining in herself, she renews all things; in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God, and prophets; for God loves nothing so much as the man who lives with wisdom. For she is more beautiful than the sun, and excels every constellation of the stars. Compared with the light she is found to be superior, for it is succeeded by the night, but against wisdom evil does not prevail.” (*Wisdom of Solomon* 7:22-30) (V.M.)

“If Alexander’s conquests created an open Hellenistic sphere,” writes Sand, “Rome’s expansion and her enormous empire completed the process. Henceforth, all the cultural centers around the Mediterranean basin would undergo the dynamism of blending and the forging of new phenomena. The littorals grew closer, and the passage from the eastern to the western end became easier and faster. This emerging world opened a fresh perspective for the spread of Judaism; at its high point there, Judaism was professed by 7 to 8 percent of all the empire’s inhabitants. The word ‘Jew’ ceased to denote the people of Judea, and now included the masses of proselytes and their descendants.”
In the first century BC the shadow of Roman power, with which Judas Maccabaeus had maintained friendly relations, and Simon Maccabeus sought an alliance, began to fall across the Middle East, taking the place of the weakened Greek Kings of Syria and Egypt, the Seleucids and Ptolemys. In 64 the Roman general Pompey arrived in Antioch and deposed the last of the Seleucid kings. At this time the two sons of the Jewish King Alexander Jannaeus, Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II, were fighting each other for the kingship and high priesthood, 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 took the side of Hyrcanus, appointing him ethnarch; he captured Jerusalem and, to the horror of the Jews, entered the Holy of Holies.

Hyrcanus proved to be a weak ruler, and his power was effectively usurped by Antipater, an Idumeaen (Edomite) from the other side of the Jordan, who made himself indispensable to Pompey and Rome. As a reward, he was placed in charge of Judaea, with special responsibility for controlling disturbances and collecting taxes. In 47, after Julius Caesar had killed Pompey in Egypt, Antipater hastened to ingratiate himself with Caesar. As a reward, he was given Roman citizenship and was later appointed the first Roman Procurator of Judaea. Having secured friendship with Rome and peace within Judaea, Antipater appointed his son Phasael as governor of Judaea and his other son, Herod, as governor of Galilee.

After the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44, Antipater sided with Cassius in the civil war with Mark Antony. This gave an opportunity to the anti-Roman Pharisees, who were always on the guard against contamination of the faith by Greek paganism and deeply resented Roman domination of the homeland. In 43 BC, Antipater was poisoned by this party, and his son Herod was forced by the Sanhedrin to flee to Rome.

Meanwhile, Mark Antony had won his war against Cassius, and in 41 he confirmed Antipater’s sons Herod and Phasael in their positions. Civil war then broke out in Judaea. The nominal Hasmonaean king of the country, Hyrcanus, was overthrown by his nephew Antigonus with the help of the Parthians. Herod promptly fled to Rome. Thus when the Parthians were conquering Jerusalem in 37, Herod was in Rome being fêted by Antony and Octavian. In a triumphant procession they led him to the Capitol. “And there,” as A. Paryaev 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.”

194 See I Maccabees 8, which contains a largely approbatory portrait of the Roman republic.
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 Herod was not only not of the line of David, but was not even a Jew by race. Tom Mueller writes: “His mother was an ethnic Arab [from Nabataea], and his father was an Edomite, and though Herod was raised as a Jew, he lacked the social status of the powerful old families in Jerusalem who were eligible to serve as high priest, as the Hasmonaean kings had traditionally done. Many of his subjects considered Herod an outsider – a ‘half Jew’, as his early biographer, the Jewish soldier and aristocrat Flavius Josephus later wrote – and continued to fight for a Hasmonaean theocracy.”

Pious Jews inevitably wondered how the promises made by God to David about the eternity of his dynasty (Psalm 131.11-15) could be fulfilled now that the Davidic line appeared to have died out. Perhaps the time had come for the appearance of the Messiah, whose kingdom would be eternal... After all, the “seventy times seven” prophecy of Daniel (9.24-27) indicated that his coming would be in the first half of the first century AD. Moreover, had not the Patriarch Jacob, declared: “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto Him shall the gathering of the people be” (Genesis 49.10)? Now that the sceptre, in the form of the Jewish kingship, appeared to have departed from Judah, was it not time for the appearance of Shiloh?

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. But his Jewish faith was superficial at best, if not completely feigned.

Pinero writes that “Herod carefully cultivated his image as a sophisticate steeped in Greco-Roman culture. If the writers of the New Testament saw him as a tyrant, Herod saw himself as the paragon of refinement. He befriended leading Roman figures, showering them with invitations to his palaces in Jerusalem and Jericho. The succession of gentile nobles, philosophers, historians, poets, and playwrights flowing through the royal court rankled...”

---


\[\text{197} \text{ Bishop Alexander (Mileant) of Argentina (“On the Threshold”, Orthodox America, vol. XVIII, N 5 (161), January, 2000, p. 12) writes: “Daniel’s prophecy so explicitly and synonymously points to Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah, that the Gemaric rabbi forbids his compatriots to calculate the dates of the Daniel septenaries, saying, ‘Those who calculate the times will hear their bones rattle’ (Sanhedrin 97).”}\]

\[\text{198} \text{ Bishop Alexander recounts a tradition from the Midrash “that when the members of the Sanhedrin learned that they had been deprived of the right to try criminal cases (in AD 30), they put on sackcloth and, tearing their hair, gathered and began to cry out: ‘Woe to us, woe to us: it has been a great while since we had a king from Judah, and the promised Messiah is not yet come!’ This occurred at the very beginning of Jesus Christ’s ministry” (ibid).}\]
with the Pharisees and the Essenes, the principal Jewish sects concentrated in and around Jerusalem. In some ways, both groups were very different: The Pharisees represented the establishment, holding high religious office in the Temple, while the Essenes were an apocalyptic sect who wanted to see Judaism purified and reformed. Even so, both believed that the king was intentionally corrupting Jewish customs within his court.

“According to the historian Nicholas of Damascus, one of Herod’s closest friends, the king neglected affairs of state and the study of Jewish law to spend his time studying philosophy, rhetoric, and the history of Greece and Rome. State affairs were delegated to those officials with a Greek education. When the king did carry out religious acts, his pious critics remained unconvinced. Herod knew that ruling Judaea was impossible without the consent of the influential Pharisees, whom he carefully courted with various concessions. He was able to keep them just about on side, but he would never win their total trust or loyalty.

“According to the historian Josephus, Herod’s new cities irked the Jewish priestly class because their pagan monuments were insultingly close to Jerusalem. Built between 22 and 10 BC, Herod named Caesarea Maritima for his patron, Caesar Augustus. It was... the base of the Herodian fleet, which he placed entirely at the disposal of Rome.

“Caesarea’s temples were dedicated to the goddess Roma, and to Augustus himself. Every five years, Herod organized gladiatorial fights, dedicated to Augustus and his wife Livia, and where foreign dancers almost outnumbered the guests. Magnificent prizes were awarded to the winners, and rumors of wild, orgiastic parties circulated. The Jewish authorities looked on the excess with deep disapproval. They saw gladiatorial fighting as fundamentally immoral, believing that all human life belonged to the Most High.

“If Caesarea – officially the Judaean capital from 6 BC – could be written off as a city for pagans, the holy city of Jerusalem was also threatened by the Romanizing instincts of their ruler. Tension focused on the Second Temple there, a building that symbolizes Herod’s complex relationship with his faith.

“Begun in 20 BC, Herod’s restoration program refaced the structure in white stone, and doubled the courtyard around it. Herod sought to exalt the Jewish faith, yet did so using Hellenic architects. The grandiose court was soon filled with moneylenders – an affront to pious Jews, who, according to Josephus and other Jewish writers of the time, were angered at the corrupt management of the Temple, an anger felt later by one Jesus of Nazareth: ‘My house shall be called the house of prayer,’ Jesus cries in the Gospel of Matthew, ‘but ye have made it a den of thieves’.

---

199 He also built a temple to Augustus at Sebaste, which is a Greek translation of “Augustus”. (V.M.)
“Perhaps the most spectacular religious scandal Herod the Great unleashed was the breaching of King David’s tomb in Bethlehem. Rumors had long circulated that the tomb believed to be David’s resting place held treasure. Having spent large sums of money on the building of Caesarea, and perhaps seeing himself as the descendant of King David, Herod, it was said, secretly accompanied workmen to rob the tomb. The historian Joseph recounts how, on entering, they found that nothing remained of the riches. According to his account, Herod’s two guards were killed by ‘a flame that burst out upon those that went in’, and Herod fled the scene.”200

Nevertheless, Palestine under Herod (Augustus made him procurator of Syria, too) became the most powerful Jewish kingdom since Solomon and the wonder of the East. Under Herod, the Jews, though under Roman dominion, reached the peak of their influence in the ancient world. 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.”201

But of course the essence of the kingdom was quite different from that of David and Solomon. Apart from the fact that the real earthly ruler was Rome, and that outside Jerusalem itself Herod showed himself to be a thorough-going pagan (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.

Herod introduced confusion into the line of the high-priesthood. Eusebius writes: "Hyrcanus, who was the last of the regular line of high priests, was very soon afterward taken prisoner by the Parthians, and Herod, the first foreigner, as I have already said, was made King of the Jewish nation by the Roman senate and by Augustus. Under him Christ appeared in bodily shape, and the expected Salvation of the nations and their calling followed in accordance with prophecy. From this time the princes and rulers of Judah, I mean of the Jewish nation, came to an end, and as a natural consequence the order of the high priesthood, which from ancient times had proceeded regularly in closest succession from generation to generation, was immediately thrown into confusion. Of these things Josephus is also a

201 Johnson, op. cit., p. 112.
witness, who shows that when Herod was made King by the Romans he no longer appointed the high priests from the ancient line, but gave the honor to certain obscure persons. A course similar to that of Herod in the appointment of the priests was pursued by his son Archelaus, and after him by the Romans, who took the government into their own hands.²⁰²

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 Hasmonean dynasty and a legitimate choice for high priest. For this reason he was extremely popular with the Jews and fearing his popularity, the tyrant Herod had him drowned in an ‘accident.’ From this point on, the high priests were not of the legitimate lineage and were put in place by the tyrant Herod, i.e., not according to the proper order.

“Shapiro, a modern Rabbi comments, ‘As a result of Herod’s interference and the ever-spreading Hellenistic influences among the Jewish upper classes, the Temple hierarchy became very corrupt. The Sadducees, a religious group of the wealthy, who collaborated with the Romans in order to keep their power base, now controlled the Temple, much to the chagrin of the mainstream Jewish majority, the Pharisees, and of the extreme religious minority, the Zealots.’

“This was the state of things ‘in the fullness of time’ when our Creator fulfilled His promises. These events were prophesied to take place when ‘a ruler failed from the house and lineage of Judah.’”²⁰³

The Pharisees, who had led the movement against Hellenism in the first century BC, and were zealots of the purity of the law, supported Herod, and degenerated sharply under his rule. They even once sent a delegation to Rome asking for the establishment of a republic in Judaea under the sovereignty of Rome – a clear betrayal of the Israeli autocratic tradition.²⁰⁴ Like Herod, they persecuted Christ, the True King of the Jews, leading to the abandonment of the Jewish people by God.

“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 Hasmonaeans, and conscious that his life, in spite of all its external successes and superficial splendour, was just a series of horrors. Herod finally lost his mental stability and was seized by some kind of furious madness.”²⁰⁵

²⁰² Eusebius, History of the Church, Bk. I, Chapter 6, 7-9.
²⁰³ Metropolitan Moses, Sermon on the Feast of the Entry of the Theotokos into the Temple, 2013.
²⁰⁴ Paryaev, op. cit., p. 34.
²⁰⁵ Paryaev, op. cit., p. 33.
The final, most notorious product of his madness was his attempt to kill the Lord Jesus Christ and his slaughter of the 14,000 innocents of Bethlehem (it was his son, Herod Antipas, who killed John the Baptist).

* 

The history of Israel culminating in the Coming of her true King and God, the Lord Jesus Christ, provides us with the answer to a question which neither the despot of the east nor the democrats of the west could answer - the question, namely: what is the end of the State?

This question can be divided into two further questions. First, what is the end, that is, purpose of the State? And second, what is the end, that is, destroyer of the State, that which brings the State to an end?

The two questions are logically related. For that which brings the State to an end is its failure to carry out the end or purpose for which it was created by God.

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”.

However, for Aristotle, the State had a positive as well as a negative purpose. It was not distinguished from the smaller units of the family or the village simply because it was better able to guarantee survival: it was qualitatively as well as quantitatively distinct from them insofar as it enabled man to fulfill his potential as a human being. Hence his famous definition of man as “a political animal”, that is, an animal who reaches his full potential only by living in “polities”, “cities” (for city states were the dominant form of political organization in the Greece of Aristotle’s time).

For it is only in city-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 such 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

206 Aristotle, Politics, 1252 b 28.
defeated by, and absorbed into, Alexander the Great’s despotic empire, a kind of political organization which the Greek philosophers agreed was the worst and most irrational of all – although the multi-racialism of the empire, and the spread of Greek philosophical ideas, prepared the way for something new and better.

Israel was a completely different kind of state: the first and only autocracy of the ancient world. The distinguishing mark of this state was that its origin was not the need to survive physically, but spiritually, in union with God, in accordance with the meaning of the word “Israel”, “he who sees God”. It achieved this in the first place by 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 was actually more difficult than before, but the prize was far greater - spiritual survival, life with God. Thus we may say that the negative end of Israelite autocracy was the avoidance of spiritual death (Babylon, Egypt, the kingdom of sin and death), and its positive end was the attainment of spiritual life (the Promised Land, Israel, the Kingdom of righteousness and life).

It follows that since neither spiritual life nor spiritual death are political categories attainable by purely political means, the end of the Israelite autocracy was not in fact political at all as the word “political” is usually understood, but religious. Its aim was not happiness in this life, the peace and prosperity of its citizens in this world, but the blessedness of its citizens in the world to come, in which there will be no politics and no states, but only Christ and the Church, the Kingdom of God. Thus the end of the state lies beyond itself, in serving 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 it was punished 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...

However, since, as the Archangel Gabriel said to the Holy Virgin Mary, Christ “will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His Kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1.33), and since the purpose of God remains unchanging, the salvation of all men for eternity, the Israelite autocracy was re-established on a still firmer and wider base, the Church of Christ, “the Israel of God” (Galatians 6.16), while in its political aspect it was re-established in the very state that had destroyed the old Israel – Rome...
III. CHRIST, THE JEWS AND THE ROMAN EMPIRE
18. CHRIST, ISRAEL AND THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

In the fullness of time, in accordance with the plan that He had indicated to Adam and Eve immediately after the Fall, and in accordance with the sayings of the Old Testament prophets, God, the Creator of the universe, became a man in the womb of the Holy Virgin Mary. The faith which justified the Old Testament righteous (Hebrews 11) was exemplified to the highest degree by the Holy Virgin. For by her words of faith, "Be it unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1.38), she brought God Himself into the world. "Thus let us stand in awe," writes Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow, "at the immeasurably lofty faith of the All-holy Virgin, before which the faith of Abraham, the father of the faithful, who believed in the prophecy of the birth of Isaac despite the barrenness of old age, is less than a mustard seed before the cedar of Lebanon…"

Having lived a life of perfect virtue, Christ offered a perfect Sacrifice for the sins of all mankind on the Cross. He died, and descended into Hades, destroying the power of the devil and leading all the dead who believed in Him into Paradise. Then, on the third day, He rose from the dead, appeared to His disciples in His resurrected Body, and on the fortieth day ascended in glory into heaven. Ten days later, at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples, creating the New Testament Church.

The events recounted in the Gospel constitute the most important series of events in the history of the world, the turning-point in the whole history of mankind. By His Resurrection from the dead, the central and completely decisive event in the history of the world, Christ proved the truth of all His claims and thereby gave hope to all men who believed in Him of receiving remission of sins and eternal life. For He was truly “The Word of God and God” (John 1.1), “the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world” (John 1.29) and “the Son of God, the King of Israel” (John 1.49). He was truly the pre-eternal God, Who had created the heavens and the earth and Who had “all authority in heaven and on earth”, over all creatures, both angelic and human (Matthew 28.18). Through His Incarnation as a man, His blameless life and Sacrificial Death on the Cross and Resurrection from the dead, He had truly given all men who believe in Him the possibility of remission of their sins, deliverance from hell after death, and eternal life with God in the age to come. The rest of history to this day has consisted in the self-determination of every nation and every individual in relation to this central, supremely important fact… The eternal destiny of every man in every age depends on his sincerely believing this good news and fulfilling the commandments of Christ.

Now Christ was also “the Son of David”, that is, a descendant of the old royal dynastic line of Israel; He came to restore that line and make it eternal. For, as the Archangel Gabriel said to the Holy Virgin at the Annunciation: “He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His Kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1.32-33).
What kind of Kingdom was meant here, and what kind of kingdom did the Jews have in mind for themselves?

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.”

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, worldly ambition, and their anti-Gentilism. Though He is “the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (Matthew 16.18), He came as the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53, not the ferocious war-lord of the apocalypses. And He came to restore Israel, not as a State ruling over all the nations by the power of the sword, but as the kernel of the Universal Church ruling by the power of the Spirit. His Kingdom was not of this world; it was the inner Kingdom of Grace.

---

The question was: would the Jews accept Him as the Messiah, as the true King of Israel, together with the spiritual, not the nationalist image of Messiahship? On this would depend the salvation of both the people and their State... Tragically, in their great majority the Jews failed this test; they both crucified their True King and God, and said to Pilate: "We have no other king but Caesar" (John 19.15).

At that moment they became no different spiritually from the other pagan peoples; for, like the pagans, they had come to recognize a mere man, the Roman emperor, as higher than God Himself. As St. John Chrysostom writes: “Here they declined the Kingdom of Christ and called to themselves that of Caesar.”

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”.

But the positive result was that the Kingdom, with all its ineffable and inestimable benefits, was passed to other peoples. As the Lord Himself had prophesied: “The Kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits thereof” (Matthew 21.43). Or as St. Paul put it: “What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect [from the Gentiles] have obtained it, and the rest were blinded” (Romans 11.7). Thus all the other peoples of the world were now given the opportunity of joining God’s Kingdom in the Church, “the Israel of God” (Galatians 6.16).

But for the Jews who rejected Him it was another matter. After their killing of Christ – which was not only regicide, but also Deicide, an act unparalleled in evil in the history of the world – there came upon them the punishment prophesied by Christ: “great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be” (Matthew 24.21). “That on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Assuredly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation...” (Matthew 23.35-36).

---

This prophecy was fulfilled in 66-70 AD, when the Jews, incited by the Zealots, rose up in armed rebellion against Rome. The Roman Emperors Titus and Vespasian crushed the rebellion, destroyed the Temple and killed very many of the Jews. The extent of the slaughter is a matter of controversy\textsuperscript{209}, but the depth of the horror and suffering is beyond dispute.

The message of the revolutionaries was strikingly similar to that of another Jewish-inspired revolution – Russia in 1917. As Neil Faulkner writes, it was a message “of sectarian radicals and messiahs… addressed, above all, to the poor. Josephus was explicit about the class basis of the conflict: it was, for him, a struggle between \textit{dunatoi} – men of rank and power, the property-owning upper classes – and \textit{stasiastai} – subversives, revolutionaries, popular leaders whose appeal was to ‘the scum of the districts’. The Dead Sea Scrolls were equally explicit, though from the other side of the barricades: whereas ‘the princes of Judah… wallowed in the ways of whoredom and wicked wealth’ and ‘acted arrogantly for the sake of riches and gain’, the Lord would in due time deliver them ‘into the hands of the poor’, so as to ‘humble the mighty of the peoples by the hand of those bent to the dust’, and bring them ‘the reward of the wicked’…

“The popular movement of 66 CE amounted to a fusion of Apocalypse and Jubilee, the radical minority’s vision of a revolutionary war to destroy corruption having become inextricably linked with the peasant majority’s traditional aspiration for land redistribution and the removal of burdens…”\textsuperscript{210}

But these earthly motives were secondary to the primary cause and crime: the rejection and murder by God’s people of their only King and God.

“In this striking way,” writes St. John of Kronstadt, “did the people chosen in accordance with the merits of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob stumble against the inheritance of these merits, which were being received as their own impersonal virtue; they stumbled on their preference for the earthly kingdom over the Kingdom of Heaven, on their preference for a political messiah over the Messiah Whose Kingdom is not of this world.

“Let us look at the consequences to which this mistake led. First of all, this bitter error of the chosen people was bewailed by the Messiah Himself. In His triumphant procession into Jerusalem, when Christ came close to the city, then, looking at it, He wept over it and said: ‘If you had known, even you, especially in

\textsuperscript{209} The revisionist case has been presented by the Israeli historian Shlomo Sand. Josephus, our only source for these events, writes Sand “estimated that 1.1 million people died in the siege of Jerusalem and the great massacre that followed, that 97,000 were taken captive, and that a few thousand more were killed in other cities”. However, Sand argues that these figures were grossly exaggerated, and that “a cautious estimate suggests that Jerusalem at that time could have had a population of sixty thousand or seventy thousand inhabitants” (\textit{The Invention of the Jewish People}, London: Verso, 2009, p. 131).

this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground, because you did not know the time of your visitation’ (Luke 19.42-44). As He ascended onto Golgotha, Christ the Saviour sorrowed, not over the torments that were facing Him, but about the torments that awaited Jerusalem. He expressed this to the women who were sympathetic to His sufferings, who wept and sobbed over Him: ‘Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for your selves and for your children. For indeed the days are coming in which they will say, “Blessed are the barren, wombs that never bore, and breasts which never nursed!” Then they will begin to say to the mountains: “Fall on us!”’ (Luke 23.28-30).

“Already in ancient times the prophets were pointing to the woes that would strike the Jewish people for its betrayal of God – the people that was nevertheless chosen for the salvation of the world, for the foreseen fall of Israel had to being salvation to the Gentiles (Romans 11.11).

“1500 years before, the Prophet and God-Seer Moses foretold the siege, the scattering of the Jews across the whole face of the earth and the terrible trials that followed: ‘The Lord will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flew, a nation whose language you will not understand, a nation of fierce countenance, which does not respect the elderly nor show favour to the young. And they shall eat the increase of your livestock, and the produce of your land, until you are destroyed; they shall not leave you grain or new wine or oil, or the increase of your cattle or the offspring of your flocks, until they have destroyed you. They shall besiege you at all your gates until your high and fortified walls, in which you trust, come down throughout all your land, and they shall besiege you at all your gates throughout all your land which the Lord your God has given you. You shall eat of the fruit of your own body, the flesh of your sons and your daughters whom the Lord your God has given you, in the siege and desperate straits in which your enemy shall distress you… Then the Lord will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other… And among those nations you will find no rest… Your life shall hang in doubt before you; you shall fear day and night, and have no assurance of life’ (Deuteronomy 28.49-53, 64-65, 66)…

“All this took place in Jerusalem, which did not understand what served for its peace.

“The holy Prophet Ezekiel points to the siege of Jerusalem as the consequence of the multiplication of lawlessnesses which attained a greater development than among the neighbouring people.

“‘Therefore thus says the Lord God: Because you have multiplied disobedience more than the nations that are all around you, have not walked in My statutes nor kept My judgements, nor even done according to the judgements
of the nations that are all around you. Therefore thus says the Lord God, Indeed I, even I, am against you and will execute judgements in your midst in the sight of the nations. And I will do among you what I have never done, and the like of which I will never do again, because of all your abominations. Therefore fathers shall eat their sons in your midst, and sons shall eat their fathers, and I will execute judgements among you, and all of you who remain I will scatter to all the winds. Therefore as I live, says the Lord God, surely, because you have defiled My sanctuary with all your detestable things and with all your abominations therefore I will also diminish you. My eye will not spare, nor will I have any pity. One third of you shall die of the pestilence, and be consumed with famine in your midst, and one third shall fall by the sword all around you, and I will scatter another third to all the winds, and I will draw out a sword after them’ (5.7-12).

“In this way the prophets of God clearly announce the causes of the destruction of Jerusalem and what had once been the chosen people, as they were called in antiquity, according to the merits of their forefathers. What became of them with their dreams of an earthly kingdom of Israel? Their destinies serve as a vivid example for the Christian peoples, of what awaits them, too, for abandoning the ways of the commandments of God and for accepting principles that contradict the truth.”

In 135 there was another rebellion of the Jews under Bar Kokhba. It was crushed by the Emperor Hadrian with the deaths, according to Dio Cassius, of 580,000 Jewish soldiers. The city was renamed Aelia Capitolina, Judaea was renamed Syria Palaestina and Jews were barred from entering it. Finally, the city and ruins were ploughed over and a completely Hellenic city built in its place; a temple to Jupiter was planned for the site of the Temple, while Golgotha was covered by a temple to Venus...

The ploughing up of the Temple site took place on August 9, the day on which all the major catastrophes of Jewish history took place. Thus David Baron writes: “The fast of the fifth month, which is the month of Ab, answering to August, is still observed by the Jews on the ninth day, in celebration of the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar; but, according to the Talmud and Jewish historians, the following list of calamities all happened on the same day, namely: (1) On that day the decree went forth from God in the wilderness that the people should not enter the land because of their unbelief; (2) on the very same day of the destruction of the First Temple by the Chaldeans, the Second Temple also was destroyed by the Romans; (4) on that day, after the rising under Bar Kochba,

212 Again, Sand disputes these figures. He claims that the population of Palestine “in the second century DE remained predominantly Judeans and Samaritans, and it started to flourish again for one or two generations after the end of the revolt” (op. cit., p. 133). He also denies that there was any significant exile from the land after the destruction of the Second Temple, arguing that it was only the conquest of Palestine by the Arabs early in the seventh century that “put an end to the presence of the Jewish people in its land” (p. 141).
the city of Bethar was taken, ‘in which were thousands and myriads of Israel, and they had a great king whom all Israel and the greatest of the wise men thought was King Messiah’; but (4) he fell into the hands of the Gentiles, and they were all put to death, and the affliction was great, like as it was in the desolation of the Sanctuary; (5) and lastly, on that day ‘the wicked Turnus Rufus, who is devoted to punishment, ploughed up the (hill of the ) Sanctuary, and the parts round about it, to fulfill that which was said by Micah, “Zion shall be ploughed as a field”’.213

Paradoxically, the Jews’ last stand in both their rebellions took place in the hilltop fortresses built at Herodium and Masada by that arch-Hellenist and Romanist, Herod the Great.214 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 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’.”

215 Tikhomirov, Religiozno-Filosofskie Osnovy Istorii, p. 142.
19. CHRIST AND THE ROMAN EMPIRE

In chapter 2 of Daniel the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar had a vision: he saw a metal statue in four parts: gold, silver, bronze and iron, which was crushed to pieces by a great stone. The Prophet Daniel interpreted the vision to be a summary of world history: the four parts of the statue refer to four world-empires, beginning with Nebuchadnezzar’s own, which are crushed by the Kingdom of God, which fills the whole earth and lasts forever.

The Holy Fathers completed the prophet’s interpretation by identifying the four world-empires as those of pagan Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. The iron part of the statue is said to crush all the other parts – which is precisely what Rome did in the centuries before the Coming of Christ. The statue is said to have ten toes made of a mixture of iron and clay. This refers to the flawed nature of ten successors of Roman power, which are divided, forming a mixture of strength and weakness - firm one-man rule and anarchic democracy. “The diminishing value of metals from gold to iron represent the decreasing grandeur of the rulers of the successive empire [for their kingdoms were inferior to yours, said the Prophet to Nebuchadnezzar], from the absolute despotism of Nebuchadnezzar to the democratic system of checks and balances that characterized the Roman senates and assemblies.”

Nevertheless, it was the iron power of one-man rule that gained the upper hand over democratic elements in Roman history from the time of Julius Caesar; 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 by a single man, Caesar’s heir, the Emperor Augustus.

As Bishop Nikolai Velimirovich writes: “In those days, Caesar Augustus was ruling the land. His supreme rule over the whole earth is an image of God’s supreme rule over both worlds: the spiritual and the material. The many-headed dragon of power, that had, from the beginning of sin, brought decay to the peoples of the earth, was left with only one head. All known nations and tribes on earth were subject to Augustus’ power, directly or indirectly, whether only by sending him their tribute or by acknowledging Roman gods and Roman officials. The struggle for power had died down for a time, and the sole power over the whole world was entirely in the hands of Caesar Augustus. There was neither man nor god over him; he himself was proclaimed a god, and men made sacrifices to his image: slaughtered animals

---


and unclean things. From the foundation of the world, no mortal man had rise to greater power than Caesar Augustus, who ruled without rival over the whole world; and indeed, from the foundation of the world, man, created by the living God, had never fallen to such a depth of nothingness and despair as then, when the Roman Emperor began to be deified – and he a man with all man’s frailties and weaknesses, with the life-span of a willow tree, with a stomach, intestines, liver and kidneys that were, after a few decades, to turn into a worm-infested stench and lifeless dust; a man, the statues of whom, raised during his reign, were to outlast his life, his power and his reign.

“In this time of external peace and internal despair, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the human race and Renower of all creation, was born…” 218

This coincidence of the birth of the King of kings with the birth of the Roman empire pointed, for many of the Holy Fathers and Church writers, to a certain special mission of the Roman empire, as if the Empire, being born at the same time as Christ, was Divinely established to be a vehicle for the spreading of the Gospel to all nations, coming into existence precisely for the sake of the Christian Church, and creating a political unity that would help and protect the spiritual unity created by the Church.

Thus Melitus, Bishop of Sardis wrote to the Emperor Marcus Aurelius: “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…” 219

Again, in the third century Origen wrote: “Jesus was born during the reign of Augustus, the one who reduced to uniformity, so to speak, the many kingdoms on earth so that He had a single empire. It would have hindered Jesus’ teaching from being spread throughout the world if there had been many kingdoms... Everyone would have been forced to fight in defence of their own country.” 220

---

219 St. Melito, in Eusebius, Church History, IV, 26, 7-8.
220 Origen, Against Celsus II, 30.
Origen considered that the peace of Augustus 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), and that it prefigured the spiritual peace of Christ. Moreover, under the reigns of Augustus’ successors, the differences between the peoples had been reduced, so that by the time of Christ’s Second Coming they would all call on the name of the Lord with one voice and serve Him under one yoke.\textsuperscript{221}

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 monarchial perfection.”\textsuperscript{222} And in the fifth century the Spanish priest Orosius, claimed that the Emperor Augustus had paid a kind of compliment to Christ by refusing to call himself Lord at a time when the true Lord of all was becoming man. Christ returned the compliment by having himself enrolled in Augustus’ census. In this way He foreshadowed Rome’s historical mission.\textsuperscript{223} 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."\textsuperscript{224} 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” \textsuperscript{225}

The Church sums up this teaching 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 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."\textsuperscript{226}

\textsuperscript{222} St. Gregory, Sermon 4, P.G. 47, col. 564B.
\textsuperscript{223} Orosius, Seven Books of History against the Pagans; in Jenkyns, op. cit., pp. 72-74.
\textsuperscript{224} St. Leo, Sermon 32, P.L. 54, col. 423.
\textsuperscript{226} Festal Menaion, Great Vespers for the Nativity of Christ, "Lord, I have cried", Glory... Both now...
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 such fearsome tyrants as Nero and Titus and Caligula 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…”

And indeed, the Lord accepted neither Satan’s lordship over the world, nor the satanism so closely associated with the pagan states of the ancient world. He came to restore true Statehood, which recognises the ultimate supremacy only of the one true God, and which demands veneration of the earthly ruler, but worship only of the Heavenly King. And since, by the time of the Nativity of Christ, all the major pagan kingdoms had been swallowed up in Rome, it was to the transformation of Roman Statehood that the Lord came.

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. 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).228

Thus Christ is the true King, granting a qualified authority to earthly kings. Therefore Christians owe a qualified loyalty to the empire without full integration into it. Full integration was impossible, for, as Fr. Georges Florovsky writes, “in ‘this world’ Christians could be but pilgrims and strangers. Their true ‘citizenship’, politeuma, was ‘in heaven’ (Philippians 3.20). The Church herself was peregrinating through this world (paroikousa). ‘The Christian fellowship was a bit of extra-territorial jurisdiction on earth of the world above’ (Frank Gavin). The Church was an outpost of heaven on earth, or a ‘colony of heaven’. It may be true that this attitude of radical detachment had originally an ‘apocalyptic’ connotation, and was inspired by the expectation of an imminent parousia. 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).

Let us now turn to Christ’s second confrontation with a ruler of this world – His trial before Pilate. While acknowledging that his power was lawful, the Lord insists that Pilate’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

228 Glazkov, “Zashchita ot Liberalizma” ("A Defence from Liberalism"), Pravoslavnaia Rus’ (Orthodox Russia), N 15 (1636), August 1/14, 1999, p. 10.
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’.  

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 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…”

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. 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.

* 

Since the Christians had not taken part in the Jewish revolution, 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 (in general) they treated the Jews.

229 Bl. Theophylact, On John 18.36.
But the matter was not as simple as that...

Dvorkin writes: “The Roman government in practice was tolerant to any cult if only it did not incite to rebellion and did not undermine morality. Moreover, the Romans thought that one of the reasons for their military successes was the fact that while other peoples worshipped only their own local gods, the Romans showed marks of honour to all the gods without exception and for that were rewarded for their special piety. All cults not established by the state were allowed, but theoretically did not have the right to propagandize in Rome, although their gods also entered into the Roman pantheon. In the first century after Christ religions already known to the contemporary Roman were not, as a rule, persecuted for propagandizing. However, the law retained its prior force and theoretically the possibility of applying it remained. The permitted religions had to satisfy two criteria: place and time. Religion was always a local matter – that is, it was linked to a definite people living in a definite locality, - and also an ancient matter, linked to the history of this people. It was more complicated to assimilate the God of the Jews, Who had no representation and did not accept sacrifices in any place except Jerusalem, into their pantheon. The Jews themselves did not allow His representation to be placed anywhere and stubbornly declined to worship the Roman gods. The Jews were monotheists and theoretically understood that their faith in principle excluded all other forms of religion. Nevertheless, in spite of all the complications with the Jews and the strangeness of their religion, it was still tolerated: the religion of the Jews was a national one and, besides, ancient, and it was considered sacrilege to encroach on it. Moreover, the Jews occupied an important political niche that was for the Romans a stronghold of their eastern conquests. In view of all these considerations, the Romans gritted their teeth and recognized the Jewish religion to be permitted. Privileges were given to the Jewish people also because their rites seemed strange and dirty. The Romans thought that the Jews simply could not have proselytes among other peoples and would rather repel the haughty Roman aristocrat. Therefore the Jews were given the right to confess their belief in one God. Until the rebellion of 66-70 the Roman authorities treated them with studied tolerance. Augustus gave the Jews significant privileges, which, after the crisis under Caligula, who wanted to put his statue in the Jerusalem Temple (cf. Mark 13.14 and II Thessalonians 2.3-4), were again renewed by Claudius.

“The circumstances changed when Christianity appeared. Having examined it, the Romans classified the Christians as apostates from the Jewish faith. It was precisely the traits that distinguished the Christians from the Jews that made them still lower in the eyes of the Romans even than the Judaism they had little sympathy for. Christianity did not have the right of belonging to historical antiquity - it was the ‘new religion’ so displeasing to the Roman 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. Celsius, for example, saw in Christians a party that had separated from Judaism and inherited from it its inclination for disputes.

“The Christians could demand tolerance either in the name of the truth or in the name of freedom of conscience. But since for the Romans one of the criteria of truth was antiquity, Christianity, a new religion, automatically became a false religion. The right of freedom of conscience that is so important for contemporary man was not even mentioned at that time. Only the state, and not individuals, had the right to establish and legalize religious cults. In rising up against state religion, the Christians became guilty of a state crime – they became in principle enemies of the state. And with such a view of Christianity it was possible to interpret a series of features of their life in a particular way: their nocturnal gatherings, their waiting for a certain king that was to come, the declining of some of them from military service and above all their refusal to offer sacrifices to the emperor.

“The Christians refused to carry out this self-evident, most simple of state duties. Beginning with the Apostle Paul, they affirmed their loyalty, referring to the prayers they said for the emperor, for the authorities and for the homeland. But they refused to recognize the emperor as ‘Lord’ and to carry out even an external worship of the idols, for they knew only one Lord, Jesus Christ. The Christians accepted both the state and society, but only to the degree that they did not limit the Lordship of Christ, did not drown out the confession of the Kingdom.

“The Kingdom of God had come and been revealed in the world, and from now on became the single measure of history and human life. In essence, the Christians by their refusal showed that they – almost alone in the whole of what was then an exceptionally religious world – believed in the reality of the idols. Honouring the idols meant recognizing the power of the devil, who had torn the world away from the knowledge of the only true god and forced it to worship statues. But Christ had come to free the world from this power. Paganism came to life in its true religious significance as the kingdom of evil, as a demonic invasion, with which the Christians had entered into a duel to the death.

“Christianity came as a revolution in the history of the world: it was the appearance in it of the Lord for the struggle with that which had usurped His power. The Church had become the witness of His coming and presence. It was precisely this witness that it proclaimed to the whole world…”232

*  

The first persecution against the Christians was that of Nero in 64, in which the Apostles Peter and Paul were killed. It was a local persecution in Rome, and was not directly related to religion. The real reason was that Nero needed scapegoats for the fire he himself had caused which destroyed a large part of the city.

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.²³³

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 Diocletian’s persecution, 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.²³⁴ 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).²³⁵ So at first the Romans, far from being persecutors of the Christians, were their chief protectors against the Jews – the former people of God...

²³³ Domitian was seen in antiquity as the worst of the Roman emperors, worse even than Nero and Caligula (Peter Heather, The Restoration of Rome, London: Pan Books, 2013, p. 114).
²³⁴ Bishop Nikolai, The Prologue from Ochrid, part III, July 22, p. 94. Annas and Caiaphas also came to bad ends.
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).

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

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)
there grounds for asserting that some authorities are not established by God, but only *allowed to exist* by Him, and that these “authorities” should not be obeyed as being in fact established by Satan?

The consensus of the Holy Fathers is that the apostle was not saying that everything that calls itself an authority is blessed by God, but that political authority is *in principle* good and God-established and therefore should be obeyed – because, as he goes on to say, political power is in general wielded in order to punish evil-doers and protect public order. Roman power, he says, is established by God, and therefore is a true political authority that must be obeyed in all its commands that do not directly contradict the commandments of God Himself. Hence the veneration and obedience that the early Christians displayed towards it.

Thus St. Clement 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.”

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…”

The holy Martyr Apollonius (+c. 185) expressed the classic Christian attitude towards the emperor thus: “With all Christians I offer a pure and unbloody sacrifice to almighty God, the Lord of heaven and earth and of all that breathes, a sacrifice of prayer especially on behalf of the spiritual and rational images that have been disposed by God’s providence to rule over the earth. Wherefore obeying a just precept we pray daily to God, Who dwells in the heavens, on behalf of [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.”

Again, 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

---

237 St. Clement of Rome, *To the Corinthians*, 60.
238 St. Justin the Martyr, *First Apology*, 17.
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 Autolycus)

Tertullian (+ c. 240) employed a similar argument. “Anticipating Eusebius, he insisted that Christians rendered ‘such reverential homage as is lawful for us and good for him; regarding him as the human being next to God who from God has received all his power, and is less than God alone.’ Christians, Tertullian argued, were even perfectly willing to offer sacrifice on behalf of the emperor, though it had to be a Christian sacrifice: ‘We therefore sacrifice for the emperor’s safety, but to our God and his, and after the manner God has enjoined, in simple prayer.’ Pagan sacrifices are useless, the ‘food of devils’. Christians appeal to God, praying ‘for the imperial well-being, as those who seek it at the hands of Him who is able to bestow it.’… Christians do just what the imperial cult demands, though in his own way.”

In other words, the only legitimate sacrifice a Christian can make to the emperor is the sacrifice of prayer on his behalf; for he rules, not as a god, but “by the will of God”. So the Christians by no means refused to give to Caesar what was his. Indeed, the emperor was, in Tertullian’s words, “more truly ours (than yours) because he was put into power by our God”, which is why the Christians prayed that he should have “a long life, a safe empire, a quiet home, strong armies, a faithful senate, honest subjects, a world at peace”.

As for the pagan sacrifice to the emperor himself, Hieromartyr Hippolytus of Rome (+235) wrote: “Believers in God must not be hypocritical, nor fear people invested in authority, with the exception of those cases when some evil deed is committed [Romans 13.1-4]. On the contrary, if the leaders, having in mind their faith in God, force them to do something contrary to this faith, then it is better for them to die than to carry out the command of the leaders. After all, when the apostle teaches submission to ‘all the powers that be’ (Romans 13.1), he was not saying that we should renounce our faith and the Divine commandments, and indifferently carry out everything that people tell us to do; but that we, while fearing the authorities, should do nothing evil and that we should not deserve punishment from them as some evildoers (Romans 13.4). That is why he says: ‘The servant of God is an avenger of [those who do] evil’ (I Peter 2.14-20; Romans 13.4). And so? ‘Do you not want to fear the authorities? Do good and you will have praise from him; but if you do evil, fear, for he does not bear the sword without reason’ (Romans 13.4). 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

241 Tertullian, Apologeticum 33.1.
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).”

This attitude was well exemplified by St. Maurice and his Christian legion in Agaunum. Like many martyrs before them, they did not refuse to fight in the armies of the pagan Roman emperors against the pagans. But they refused to destroy a village composed of fellow-Christians. For “we are your soldiers, yes,” said Maurice, “but we are also the soldiers of God. To you, we owe the dues of military service – but to Him the purity of our souls.”

So even the persecuting emperors were recognized as having legitimate authority: it was only when their commands contradicted the Law of God that they were defied. And even then, there is no hint of physical rebellion against the powers that be among pre-Constantinian Christians. Their attitude to Diocletian was like that of the Prophet Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar: his power is from God, even if he sometimes uses it against God.

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”

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)...

---

243 Eucherius of Lyons, The Passion of the Martyrs.
244 Festal Menaion, The Nativity of Christ, Mattins, Canon, Canticle Seven, second irmos.
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.”

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 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.” 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.

This tradition became more popular as the history of pagan Rome reached its bloody climax in the early fourth century. For the Church was now threatened, not with a merely local persecution by local madmen, but with a determined attempt to destroy it completely at the hands of men who considered themselves gods and whose personal lives were often extraordinarily corrupt. The empire concentrated in itself, and especially in its capital city, all the demons of all the pagan cults together with all the moral depravity and cruelty and rabid antichristianity which those cults encouraged. How could such a kingdom be established by God? Was it not that tyrannical beast of which Scripture said that it was established by the devil (Revelation 13.2)?

And so the image of the Empire was ambiguous for the early Christians: it was both a true kingdom, an anti-type of God’s Kingdom, and a tyranny, a forerunner of the kingdom of the Antichrist that would be wiped out at the Second Coming of Christ Himself...

---

245 Aristotle, Politics, IV, 10.
246 Hieromartyr Victorinus, Commentary on the Apocalypse.
247 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.
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…248

---

20. CHRIST AND THE SYNAGOGUE

The Apostles were all Jews, and in spite of persecution from the Jewish authorities they did not immediately break definitively with the Jewish community in Jerusalem, continuing to worship in the Temple and to read the Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament, which they saw as fulfilled in Jesus Christ. True, the first Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) established that pagan converts to Christianity did not have to practise Mosaic 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 all bonds with the Synagogue, hoping that as many Jews as possible could be converted.

The Jews were not deprived of signs that they were losing the Grace of God. Even the fiercely anti-Christian Talmud preserves a record of some of these signs. Thus Dr. Seraphim Steger writes, commenting on Gemara, 39b, that during the last 40 years of the Temple’s existence, from 30 to 70, “a bad omen occurred on Yom Kippur every year because:

“(1) The Lot for the LORD came up in the left hand, not the right hand of the High Priest of Israel on Yom Kippur. What happened in 30 CE that might have caused this? Could it have been the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, Yeshua Ha-Maschiach? Could it have been that the High Priest of Israel had lost his authority because now there was a new High Priest in town, Yeshua Ha-Maschiach? In his Letter to the Hebrews the Apostle Paul speaks of Yeshua Ha-Maschiach as a High Priest after the Order of Melchezadek sitting at the right hand of the Father in the Heavens.

“Because the crimson ribbon tied between the horns of the bullock did not miraculously turn white for the last 40 years the Temple stood when the scapegoat was thrown over the cliff in the wilderness, we can say that the LORD did not accept the Temple sacrifice of the scapegoat for the nation of Israel on Yom Kippur. Why? Could it be because Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, our Passover (Pesach) Sacrifice has been slain for us once and for all had been accepted by the Father on our behalf? Consequently, there was no more need for a scapegoat because Christ not only was a propitiation for our sins, but has carried our sins away from us as far as the East is from the West.
“(2). We can say that for the last 40 years the Temple stood neither did the westernmost Menorah lamp miraculously shine longer than the others as it had once done now indicating that the Presence of the Lord, the Shikinah glory, had deserted the Temple all those last 40 years. Was the Shikinah, the glory of the Lord, now to be found outside the Temple? Could it be that it was now to be found in the Church, having descended upon the Church at Pentecost some 50 days after the crucifixion and resurrection of Yeshua?

“(3). We can say that during those last 40 years the Temple stood, the doors to the Hekel/Hekhal, the Holy Place/sanctuary, opened repetitively during those last 40 years by themselves, when they should have been closed, showing that access to the LORD in the Holy Place was not limited to the priests in their daily service, or the Holy of Holies to the High Priest but once a year. Could it be that through the risen Yesua Ha-Mashiach, Jesus the Messiah, “the Door” as He is sometimes called in the New Testament Gospels, that worship in the “Holy Place” was now open not just to the priests but to all who wished to enter in and to draw close to the Holy God of Israel, through faith in Yeshua, in the Church?

“Now, this testimony of the last 40 years that the Temple stood, is juxtaposed to the passages about a Simeon the Righteous who ministered in the Temple for 40 years [so presumably a priest, or levite at a minimum], during whose time the Temple was blessed.

“Reading this gemara again we can see that during the 40 years Simeon ministered, the sacrifices for the Israel were blessed and the scapegoat accepted, (removing the sins of the entire nation) because the lot for the Lord would always come up in the right hand. I.e., the people of Israel were being blessed by the LORD. Interestingly, after those 40 years, sometimes the sacrifices were accepted, sometimes not. Also, the priests suffered from the curse on the omer, two loaves, and shewbread--i.e., they were not nourished by the bread of the Temple as they were before.

“Who is Simeon the Righteous?

“... There is controversy over who this “Righteous Simeon” may have been since there are 4 that have born this name in traditional Jewish history and there is some question of later Rabbinical fabrication of their tradition to favor their views at that later time. Perhaps this Simeon was none of the four major candidates. Could this Simeon possibly be Simeon the Just and Pious mentioned in the Gospel of Luke 2:25-36, the Simeon the Orthodox Church remembers as “Righteous Simeon” who held in his arms infant Jesus Christ at His presentation in the temple? Let’s look into this a bit further.

“We can see that during the 40 years Simeon ministered the Lord forgave the sins of the nation of Israel because the crimson-coloured strap [tied between the bullocks horns] would become white after the scapegoat was sent into the wilderness. As part of the blessing of the nation of Israel the
Lord was forgiving the sins of the Israelites, sanctifying and preparing them for the enfleshment of the Logos.

“We can see that during the 40 years Simeon ministered the Shekhinah Glory/Holy Spirit remained present in the Holy of Holies blessing the nation [in preparation for the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God] because throughout those forty years the westernmost light was shining, having been lighted first and burning longer that the other lights. The Lord was blessing and preparing the Temple and its priests for receiving God in the flesh.

‘Lastly, we can see that during the 40 years Simeon ministered the fire of the pile of wood kept burning strong on the altar showing that the Lord was accepting of all the animal, meal, grain, oil, and wine sacrifices commanded in the Torah, the Law of Moses, under the Old Covenant, further underscoring the sanctifying the Temple, the priests, the nation, and all the people by the various offerings.”249

* 

Although the Apostles did not immediately break completely with the Synagogue, nevertheless they rejected the possibility of salvation through the Mosaic Law and declared that salvation was only in Christ. Nor, as St. Peter, the apostle to the Jews, added, “is there salvation in any other, but there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4.12). St. Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, was particularly clear on this point, writing his Epistle to the Galatians precisely in order to refute the Judaizing Christians. Already in his earliest Epistle he wrote that the Jews “killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us and do not please God and are contrary to all me, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the uttermost...” (I Thessalonians 2.15-16).

The final break between the Jews and the Christians took place after the condemnation and execution of St. James, the rebellion of the Jews against Rome and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. The situation for the Christians now changed – 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. And the Jewish religion was changed in order that the Jews should set themselves apart finally and irrevocably from Christ...

Dr. Steger writes: “Just before the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple by the Roman army led by Vespasian, one of the leading sages of the Pharisees in Jerusalem, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai, was captured by the Romans according to one early Palestinian tradition and taken against his will to the town of Yavne’el / Jamnia (modern Yavne on the Mediterranean coast) which served as a place of detention for those who had surrendered to the Romans. In Jamnia Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai reconstituted the Sanhedrin, proclaimed New Moons and leap-years, and proceeded to construct a new religion for the war torn nation: ‘Rabbinical Judaism’ which was centered around the beliefs of the Pharisees as well as the practices of the Synagogue [the priests having become superfluous since the destruction of the Temple and the discontinuance of its services and sacrifices]. He preserved the oral traditions of the schools of the Pharisees encompassing the years 536 BC to AD 70. Jamnia subsequently became the new spiritual center for those Jews who survived the war.

“Some 150 years later Rabbi Yehudah haNasi set to writing a broad and comprehensive redaction of the Oral Law known as the Mishnah. Subsequent rabbinical commentaries, the Gamara, were added to each of the individual tractates forming two authoritative collections known as the Babylonian and the Jerusalem Talmudim. These contained 700 years worth of the oral tradition of the rabbinical schools. Their final forms were completed around AD 600.”

Norman Cantor writes: “This withdrawal of the rabbis from the political fate of the homeland was the end result of what was already clear in the first century B.C. Pharisaic Judaism was a self-subsisting culture and a kind of mobile religious and moral tabernacle that could function autonomously and perpetually almost anywhere that the Jews had a modicum of physical security and economic opportunity. This was to be the single most continuous and important theme in Jewish history until modern times, the sacred chain that binds the generations together…”

Now the Jews constituted a large and important part of the population of the Empire.

“Jewish colonies,” writes Alexander Dvorkin, “could be found in any corner of the Mediterranean world – from Cadiz to the Crimea. In all there lived up to 4 million Jews in the diaspora out of a general population of the Roman Empire of 50 million, while the Jewish population of Palestine consisted of not more than one million people.

---

250 Steger, op. cit.
"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. Everywhere that they lived they refused to be merged into the life of their pagan surroundings, but unfailingly kept to their own religion and customs. Every Saturday they gathered to chant psalms and to read the Scriptures, after which there followed a sermon on the subject of the Biblical extract read and common prayers.

"Although scattered throughout the world, the Jews preserved the feeling of unity with the land of their fathers: they carried out private pilgrimages to the holy city of Zion and every year sent contributions to the Temple. Sometimes this export of currency from the provinces with its numerous Jewish population created definite difficulties for the Roman tax authorities. However, the Romans understood that in this question – as, however, in all questions connected with the basic principles of Judaism, - it was much more peaceful not to stop the Jews from acting in their own way. The Jews were not excluded from a single sphere of public life in which they themselves wanted to take part. But, of course, not all Jews observed their native customs as strictly as their religious leaders would have liked, and many of them experienced a powerful temptation to give in to seduction and live no differently from their neighbours.

"But the Jews for their part also exerted a noticeable influence on the inhabitants of the Empire. Although both the Greeks and the Romans saw circumcision as a disgusting anti-aesthetic custom, very many of the pagans were attracted to Judaism by its strict monotheism, the purity of its moral life and the antiquity (if not the style) of its Sacred Scriptures. There was no teaching on asceticism in Judaism (if you don’t count some marginal groups), but it spoke out for chastity, constancy and faithfulness in family life. In their communities the Jews constantly practised charity, visiting the sick and giving alms to the poor.

"Around many of the synagogues in the diaspora there formed groups of pious pagans whom the Jews usually called ‘God-fearers’ (in general this term was applied to every pious member of the synagogue). A pagan could pass through circumcision and ritual washing (immersion from the head down in a basin of water, which was required for the reception of converts into Judaism), but this did not often take place. As a rule, the Hellenized Jews of the diaspora, who were much more open to the external world than their rigorist Palestinian brethren, to the chagrin of the latter accepted converts from the pagans into their circle without insisting that circumcision was necessary for their salvation.

252 Contrast this with the power of the Jewish lobby in the United States today (V.M.).
“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.”

Or they were already converted to Judaism, and from there converted naturally again to Christianity. Indeed, we find that many of the Christian converts, especially among the women, came from precisely the same social strata as the Gentile converts to Judaism – and these strata could be very lofty. Thus “Poppaea Sabina, the emperor Nero’s second wife, made no secret of her tendency to Judaism” – while St. Paul wrote from Rome that he had made converts among the Praetorian Guard (Philippians 1.13).

However, “as the rate of conversion to Judaism intensified, so did the government’s disquiet and the resentment on the part of many Latin intellectuals”. The first recorded expulsion of Jewish converts from Rome was in 139 BC. A second was in 19 AD, when the Emperor Tiberius exiled four thousand converts to Sardinia.

In 49-50 the Emperor Claudius expelled the Jews again. For they were constantly “making disturbances”, according to Suetonius, “at the instigation of Chrestus [Christ]”. Of course, it was not Christ Who instigated the Jewish riots – it was rather the Jews who instigated riots against the Christians, as we see several times in the Acts of the Apostles, and continued after the Fall of Jerusalem. The confusion arose because in the beginning the Romans made no clear distinction between Jews and Christians, who lived “under the cover of Judaism”, as Tertullian put it. However, in the reign of Nero the distinction had become clear, and it was the Christians, not the Jews, who were put to the torch for supposedly burning down Rome...

---

253 Dvorkin, Ocherki po Istorii Vselenskoj Pravoslavnoj Tserkvi (Sketches on the History of the Universal Orthodox Church), Nizhni-Novgorod, 2006, pp. 41-42.
254 Sand, op. cit., p. 171.
255 Sand, op. cit., p. 169.
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. Secondly, and especially after the Romans’ destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, they could never reconcile themselves with their conquered status, or delight in the achievements of the pax Romana like most of the other conquered nations. And thirdly, they were unique in that, although their homeland was Palestine, most Jews lived abroad, in the diaspora, which providentially allowed them to exert an important influence on the whole of the Roman Empire. Nevertheless, the Jewish religion, unlike Christianity, was a licit cult that was given a certain leeway by the Roman authorities. It was only when they openly rebelled against Rome in Judea in 66-70 and 135, and again in Libya in 115-117, that they were suppressed...

*  

We have seen that the Jews were powerful and successful proselytizers in the Greco-Roman world before and after the Coming of Christ. However, as Alfred Lilienthal writes, “it was in the face of growing competition from the new Christian faith that the rabbinate and other Jewish leaders ceased proselytization.”256 Instead they formed an inner ghetto around themselves, whose laws were their religion, whose lawmakers were the rabbis, and whose sacred text was not the Sacred Scriptures of the Old Testament, but the Talmud...

The Talmud, which is without doubt the most abhorrent and anti-Christian book ever written, purports to record a secret oral tradition going back to Moses and representing the true interpretation of the Torah, the first five books of the Bible. In fact, it bears only the most strained and perverse relation to the Torah, often completely corrupting the true meaning of the Holy Scriptures. It even asserts its own superiority over the Scriptures. For it declares: “The Law is water, but the Mishna [the first form of the Talmud] is wine.” And again: “The words of the elders are more important than the words of the Prophets.” Pharisaic-Talmudic Judaism is therefore a different religion from that of the Old Testament. It does not contain a formal creed in the manner of Christianity. But it does contain 613 commandments that all Jews are expected to fulfill and which constitute the essence of their religion.

As we have seen, it was the Pharisees who incited Christ’s death because He preached a spiritual, universalist Kingdom that was opposed to their nationalist dreams. This opposition between the God-inspired Tradition of the Holy Scriptures and the man-made traditions of the Pharisees was pointed out to them by Christ when He said: “Thus have ye made the commandment of no effect by your tradition” (Matthew 15.6). And again He said: “Ye blind guides, who strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel” (Matthew 23.24). It was the

Talmud that gathered together these man-made traditions, adherence to which was so strongly condemned by Christ.

Douglas Reed wrote: “The Talmudic Law governed every imaginable action of a Jew’s life anywhere in the world: marriage, divorce, property settlements, commercial transactions, down to the pettiest details of dress and toilet. As unforeseen things frequently crop up in daily life, the question of what is legal or illegal (not what is right or wrong) in all manner of novel circumstances had incessantly to be debated, and this produced the immense records of rabbinical dispute and decisions in which the Talmud abounds.

“Was it much a crime to crush a flea as to kill a camel on a sacred day? One learned rabbi allowed that the flea might be gently squeezed, and another thought its feet might even be cut off. How many white hairs might a sacrificial red cow have and yet remain a red cow? What sort of scabs required this or that ritual of purification? At which end of an animal should the operation of slaughter be performed? Ought the high priest to put on his shirt or his hose first? Methods of putting apostates to death were debated; they must be strangled, said the elders, until they opened their mouths, into which boiling lead must be poured. Thereon a pious rabbi urged that the victim’s mouth be held open with pincers so that he not suffocate before the molten lead enter and consume his soul with his body. The word ‘pious’ is here not sardonically used; this scholar sought to discover the precise intention of ‘the Law’.”

A dominant feature of these Jewish “holy” books was their hatred of Christ and Christianity. “The Jewish Encyclopaedia says: ‘It is the tendency of Jewish legends in the Talmud, the Midrash… and in the Life of Jesus (Toledoth Jeshua) that originated in the Middle Ages to belittle the person of Jesus by ascribing to him an illegitimate birth, magic and a shameful death’. He is generally alluded to as ‘that anonymous one’, ‘liar’, ‘imposter’ or ‘bastard’ (the attribution of bastardy is intended to bring him under the Law as stated in Deuteronomy 23.3: ‘A bastard shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord’). Mention of the name, Jesus, is prohibited in Jewish households.

“The work cited by the Jewish Encyclopaedia as having ‘originated in the Middle Ages’ is not merely a discreditable memory of an ancient past, as that allusion might suggest; it is used in Hebrew schools today. It was a rabbinical production of the Talmudic era and repeated all the ritual of mockery of Calvary itself in a different form. Jesus is depicted as the illegitimate son of Mary, a hairdresser’s wife, and of a Roman soldier called Panthera. Jesus himself is referred to by a name which might be translated ‘Joey Virgo’. He is shown as being taken by his stepfather to Egypt and there learning sorcery.

“The significant thing about this bogus life-story (the only information about Jesus which Jews were supposed to read) is that in it Jesus is not

crucified by Romans. After his appearance in Jerusalem and his arrest there as an agitator and a sorcerer he is turned over to the Sanhedrin and spends forty days in the pillory before being stoned and hanged at the Feast of Passover; this form of death exactly fulfils the Law laid down in Deuteronomy 21.22 and 17.5, whereas crucifixion would not have been in compliance with that Judaic law. The book then states that in hell he suffers the torture of boiling mud.

“The Talmud also refers to Jesus as ‘Fool’, ‘sorcerer’, ‘profane person’, ‘idolator’, ‘dog’, ‘child of lust’ and the like more; the effect of this teaching over a period of centuries, is shown by the book of the Spanish Jew Mose de Leon, republished in 1880, which speaks of Jesus as a ‘dead dog’ that lies ‘buried in a dunghill’. The original Hebrew texts of these Talmudic allusions appear in Laible’s Jesus Christus im Talmud. This scholar says that during the period of the Talmudists hatred of Jesus became ‘the most national trait of Judaism’, that ‘at the approach of Christianity the Jews were seized over and again with a fury and hatred that were akin to madness’, that ‘the hatred and scorn of the Jews was always directed in the first place against the person of Jesus’ and that ‘the Jesus-hatred of the Jews is a firmly-established fact, but they want to show it as little as possible’.

“This wish to conceal from the outer world that which was taught behind the Talmudic hedge led to the censoring of the above-quoted passages during the seventeenth century. Knowledge of the Talmud became fairly widespread then (it was frequently denounced by remonstrant Jews) and the embarrassment thus caused to the Talmudic elders led to the following edict (quoted in the original Hebrew and in translation by P.L.B. Drach, who was brought up in a Talmudic school and later became converted to Christianity):

“‘This is why we enjoin you, under pain of excommunication major, to print nothing in future editions, whether of the Mishna or of the Gemara, which relates whether for good or for evil to the acts of Jesus the Nazarene, and to substitute instead a circle like this: O, which will warn the rabbis and schoolmasters to teach the young these passages only *viva voce*. By means of this precaution the savants among the Nazarenes will have no further pretext to attack us on this subject’ (decree of the Judaist Synod which sat in Poland in 1631). At the present time, when public enquiry into such matters, or objection to them, has been virtually forbidden by Gentile governments, these passages, according to report, have been restored in the Hebrew editions of the Talmud…

“The Talmud sets out to widen and heighten the barrier between the Jews and others. An example of the different language which the Torah spoke, for Jews and for Gentiles, has previously been given: the obscure and apparently harmless allusion to ‘a foolish nation’ (Deuteronomy 32.21). According to the article on *Discrimination against Gentiles* in the *Jewish Encyclopaedia* the allusion in the original Hebrew is to ‘vile and vicious Gentiles’, so that Jew and Gentile received very different meanings from the same passage in the original and in the translation. The Talmud, however, which was to reach only Jewish eyes,
removed any doubt that might have been caused in Jewish minds by perusal of the milder translation; it specifically related the passage in Deuteronomy to one in Ezekiel 23.20, and by so doing defined Gentiles as those ‘whose flesh is as the flesh of asses and whose issue is like the issue of horses’! In this spirit was the ‘interpretation’ of the Law continued by the Talmudites.

“The Talmudic edicts were all to similar effect. The Law (the Talmud laid down) allowed the restoration of a lost article to its owner if ‘a brother or neighbour’, but not if a Gentile. Book-burning (of Gentile books) was recommended… The benediction, ‘Blessed be Thou… who hast not made me a goi [Gentile]’ was to be recited daily. Eclipses were of bad augury for Gentiles only. Rabbi Lei laid down that the injunction not to take revenge (Leviticus 19.18) did not apply to Gentiles, and apparently invoked Ecclesiastes 8.4 in support of his ruling (a discriminatory interpretation then being given to a passage in which the Gentile could not suspect any such intention).

“The Jews who sells to a Gentile landed property bordering on the land of another Jew is to be excommunicated. A Gentile cannot be trusted as witness in a criminal or civil suit because he could not be depended on to keep his word like a Jew. A Jew testifying in a petty Gentile civil court as a single witness against a Jew must be excommunicated. Adultery committed with a non-Jewish woman is not adultery ‘for the heathen have no lawfully wedded wife, they are not really their wives’. The Gentiles are as such precluded from admission to a future world…”

Of particular importance for the future history of the Jews was their attitude towards usury. Now the Old Testament forbids the lending of money for interest to brothers, but allows it to strangers (Exodus 22.25; Leviticus 25.36; Deuteronomy 23.24). The Talmud exploited the letter of this law to justify outright exploitation of the Christians.

According to Oleg Platonov, it “teaches the Jew to consider the property of all non-Jews as ‘gefker’, which means free, belonging to no one. ‘The property of all non-Jews has the same significance as if it had been found in the desert: it belongs to the first who seizes it’. In the Talmud there is a decree according to which open theft and stealing are forbidden, but anything can be acquired by deceit or cunning…

“From this it follows that all the resources and wealth of the non-Jews must belong to representatives of the ‘chosen people’. ‘According to the Talmud,’ wrote the Russian historian S.S. Gromeka, “God gave all the peoples into the hands of the Jews” (Baba-Katta, 38); “the whole of Israel are children of kings; those who offend a Jew offend God himself” (Sikhāb 67, 1) and “are subject to

258 Reed, op. cit., pp. 89-91. The Zohar also says: “Tradition tells us that the best of the Gentiles deserves death” (Section Vaiqra, folio 14b). For a more detailed exposé of the Talmud and the religion founded upon it, see Michael Hoffman, Judaism Discovered, Independent History and Research, 2008.
execution, as for lèse-majesté” (Sanhedrin 58, 2); pious people of other nations, who are counted worthy of participating in the kingdom of the Messiah, will take the role of slaves to the Jews’ (Sanhedrin 91, 21, 1051). From this point of view, ... all the property in the world belongs to the Jews, and the Christians who possess it are only temporary, ‘unlawful’ possessors, usurpers, and this property will be confiscated by the Jews from them sooner or later. When the Jews are exalted above all the other peoples, God will hand over all the nations to the Jews for final extermination.’

“The historian of Judaism I. Lyutostansky cites examples from the ancient editions of the Talmud, which teaches the Jews that it is pleasing to God that they appropriate the property of the goyim [Gentiles]. In particular, he expounds the teaching of Samuel that deceiving a goy is not a sin...

“Rabbi Moses said: ‘If a goy makes a mistake in counting, then the Jew, noticing this, must say that he knows nothing about it.’ Rabbi Brentz says: ‘If some Jews, after exhausting themselves by running around all week to deceive Christians in various places, come together at the Sabbath and boast of their deceptions to each other, they say: “We must take the hearts out of the goyim and kill even the best of them.” – of course, if they succeed in doing this.’ Rabbi Moses teaches: ‘Jews sin when they return lost things to apostates and pagans, or anyone who doesn’t reverence the Sabbath.’...

“To attain the final goal laid down in the Talmud for Jews – to become masters of the property of the goyim – one of the best means, in the rabbis’ opinion, is usury. According to the Talmud, ‘God ordered that money be lent to the goyim, but only on interest; so instead of helping them in this way, we must harm them, even if they can be useful for us.’ The tract Baba Metsiya insists on the necessity of lending money on interest and advises Jews to teach their children to lend money on interest, ‘so that they can from childhood taste the sweetness of usury and learn to use it in good time.’”^{259}
21. 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 time of St. Constantine in the fourth century, Christianitas came to be closely linked 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.”

Christianity is a truly universal religion in which “there is neither male nor female, …neither Greek nor Jew, neither circumcised nor uncircumcis[ed], 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 civilization.

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.” The classical Greek concepts of citizenship and equality before the law were now given a vastly deeper connotation and wider denotation through Roman writers like Cicero and his legions of imitators.

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.

---

260 Sordi, op. cit., p. 147.
261 Polybius, in Sordi, op. cit., p. 169.
“Romans alone were given a sense of historical development, fluidity, and complexity. The ethnogenesis of the Roman people, as enshrined in the works of Virgil and Livy, created a populus out of disparate gentes. For Livy, Roman identity was the result of a continuous process of political amalgamation. First, Aeneas united the Trojans and the Aborigines ‘under one law and one name’. Likewise, Romulus called together the ‘multitude’ and gave them laws by which they could coalesce into a single body of people. Thus the populus Romanus alone, unlike foreign ‘peoples’, had a history. That history was the story of how the Roman people, as a body of individuals who lived according to a single law, came into being. Here was no question of putative ancestry, geography, culture, language, or tradition. Throughout its long history, membership in the populus Romanus was a question of constitutional law, not natural law, and, thus theoretically accessible to all.”

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…”

In 212 the Emperor Caracalla offered citizenship to all free men in the empire, so that they could both identify with the empire as their own country and rise to the highest positions within it. “Though fiscally motivated,” writes Leithart, “the constitution [of 212] had a profound effect on the character of the empire. The empire was transformed from a patchwork of cities with their own local cults, customs and laws into a single civitas, all its residents cives. Around the same time (223), Ulpian’s treatise De officiis proconsulis was distributed to provincial governors as ‘the first standard collection of laws and their underlying principles that provincial governors had ever received.’ By the middle of the third century, the empire was theoretically a single city, with one law and one worship uniting its citizens.”

264 Leithart, *Defending Constantine*, Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2010, p. 35. The flip side of this situation, however, was that “deviation from Roman religion was by definition treason…” (ibid.). Hence the persecution of Decius…
Already in the first century we hear that “Hebrew of Hebrews”, St. Paul, saying without shame or sense of contradiction: “Civis romanus sum”, “I am a Roman citizen”. And already from the beginning of the second century, we find non-Roman emperors of Rome; they came from as far afield as Spain and Arabia, Dacia and Africa.

For, as Rutilius Namatianus said of Rome: “You have made out of diverse races one patria”.

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:

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.

“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.”

* * *

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…” 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.”

265 Charles Davis, op. cit., p. 68.  
267 Orosius, Seven Books of History against the Pagans, 5.2.  
268 Sordi, op. cit., p. 147.  
269 Sordi, op. cit., p. 148.
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 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…”

The real redeemer of Rome, of course, was not Augustus, but Christ, Who was born in Augustus’ reign and within the bounds of his empire. He truly expiated the original sin, not only of Rome, but of all mankind, and brought the enmity between man and God to an end. And the Roman conception of history undoubtedly made the reception of Christ’s Gospel easier; it was a “schoolteacher to Christ” just as the Jewish law was…

---

270 Thus the poet Horace wrote of the “original sin” of Remus’ murder that “bitter doom pursues the Romans: a crime, a murdered brother, once Remus’s guiltless blood flowed on the ground, a curse upon his children.” (Jorge Martinez-Pinna, “The Founding of Rome”, National Geographic History, June-July, 2015, pp. 62-63) (V.M.)
271 Sordi, op. cit., p. 148.
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.”

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 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...

272 McClelland, op. cit., pp. 84, 85.
As we have seen, Rome encompassed all the major kingdoms of Europe and the Middle East except Persia, and claimed to be the one, universal empire. However, there was another contemporary kingdom that also claimed universality and would seem to have had at least an equal claim to greatness – China. Moreover, the Chinese empire lasted much longer than Old Rome, expiring at almost the same time, the early twentieth century, as the Third Rome, Russia; it even eventually succumbed to the same enemy – communism. But China not only was not destined to become the cradle for the growth of Christian civilization, 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.273

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
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.”

This last judgement is doubtful. While the Chinese State is as impressive in its own way as the Roman, it embodies what we may call the negative imperial idea as opposed to the more complex, but positive imperial idea of Rome. Chinese imperialism could only be despotic, having no way out, as it were, of the worship of the state; whereas Roman imperialism was able to develop into the unique – and uniquely God-pleasing – polity that is the Orthodox Autocracy.

Both universal empires of Rome and China proclaimed their exclusion of the northern barbarians who did not share in their civilization by building a wall. This was Hadrian’s wall in the Roman West, and the far longer and more massive Great Wall of China. But there the similarities end.

Let us begin with the walls. Hadrian’s wall was built by Roman professional soldiers, at no significant cost in lives. But the Great Wall of China, according to legend, cost a million lives. And this was only one of the empire’s vast public works, such as the system of canals linking the Yangtse River with the Yellow River to the north and Hangchow to the south. J.M. Roberts writes: “Millions of labourers were employed on this and on other great irrigation schemes. Such works are comparable in scale with the Pyramids and surpass the great cathedrals of medieval Europe. They imposed equally heavy social costs, too, and there were revolts against conscription for building and guard duties.”

In other words, China was essentially the same kind of despotism as the pagan empires of Egypt and Babylon, whereas Rome, as we have seen, had evolved a unique system composed of republican, aristocratic and despotic elements. This meant that the vitally important combination of freedom and discipline that characterized Roman statehood was lacking in China.

character of government at any time or in any place of the world.” (Empire, London: John Murray, 2000, pp. 33-34).

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 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’.”

“According to traditional Chinese political theory,” writes Yuval Noah Harari, “Heaven (Tian) is the source of all legitimate authority on earth. Heaven chooses the most worthy person or family and gives them the Mandate of Heaven. This person or family then rules over All Under Heaven (Tianxia) for the benefit of all its inhabitants. Thus, a legitimate authority is – by definition – universal. If a ruler lacks the Mandate of Heaven, then he lacks legitimacy to rule even a single city. If a ruler enjoys the mandate, he is obliged to spread justice and harmony to the entire world. The Mandate of Heaven could not be given to several candidates simultaneously, and consequently one could not legitimize the existence of more than one independent state.”

The concept of the will or mandate of heaven explained dynastic changes, as when the Shang dynasty was overcome by the Chou in 1027 BC. For, as Roberts writes, “the Chou displacement of the Shang was religious as well as military. The idea was introduced that there existed a god superior to the ancestral god of the dynasty and that from him there was derived a mandate to rule. Now, it was claimed, he had decreed that the mandate should pass to other hands.”

Already in the Shang dynasty the king, according to Gernet, was both “head of the armies and chief priest”. Igor Shafarevich writes that the kings even in this very early period ruled in a despotic, quasi-socialist manner: they

276 Tikhomirov, op. cit., pp. 79-80.
278 Roberts, op. cit., p. 111.
called their subjects “cattle”, their graves were surrounded by thousands of corpses of those killed to accompany them into the next life, agriculture was controlled by the king, even the time of marriages was determined by him.\textsuperscript{280}

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.

“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.”\textsuperscript{281}

In many ways, Shihuang represents the archetypal despot: his rise to power as a warrior, drive for uniformity, cruelty, megalomania and paranoia, building projects, militarization of society, mass displacement of vast numbers of people, distrust of thinkers and book-learning, fear of death and search for immortality. It is not, therefore, surprising that the modern despot Mao Tse-tung – who, like Shihuang, seized control over the whole of China from the north-west - should have looked to him as a role model.

“In 1958 at a meeting of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party Chairman Mao remarked that Qin Shihuang was a ruler who advocated the extermination of those who ‘used the past to criticize the present.’ Mao


went on to say, ‘What does he amount to anyway? He buried only 460 scholars, while we have buried 46,000 counter revolutionary scholars alive.’”

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”.

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, “‘secretes’ 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…”

“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…”

*  

However, the most extraordinary thing about the First Emperor was not the vastness of his domain, but its permanence. True, his personal dynasty collapsed only four years after his death, plunging China into civil war. However, as Montefiore writes, he “created the reality and the idea of a Chinese empire, a similar territory to today’s People’s Republic of China.” 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, Persians, 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 China 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.

---

283 The Economist Review, March 18, 2000, p. 4.
284 Gernet, op. cit., p. 97.
286 Montefiore, op. cit., p. 48.
“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,” 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.

However, this seeming strength of Chinese civilization contained within itself one major weakness – racial pride. The Romans followed the universalist tradition first exemplified by Cyrus the Great; they were able to see the superiority of the Greek civilization which they absorbed, and to learn from it. And their adoption from the Christians of the religion of the True God under St. Constantine probably extended the life of the empire for another eleven hundred years. The Chinese, on the other hand, were so convinced of their infinite superiority over all non-Chinese that, as Lieven writes, “from the Han era until today few Chinese have ever doubted the absolute superiority of their culture to all others in the region. One contemporary expert on China’s minority peoples speaks of ‘an innate, almost visceral Han sense of superiority.’”

This conception was reinforced by the servile attitude of other eastern peoples to them. And so when the first western embassies came to them in the eighteenth century they thought that they must be bringing tribute, and could not understand the westerners’ refusal to kow-tow to them. That arrogance cost them dear, and led to the final collapse of the Chinese empire in 1911 and its surrender to communism in 1949.

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” – suppressed the striving for higher things.

---

287 Lieven, op. cit., p. 28.
289 Lieven, op. cit., p. 28.
It might have been different if the other Chinese religion, Taoism, with its amazing foreshadowings of Christianity, had triumphed. 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.” And so, as Roberts writes: “Over a social ocean in which families were the fish that mattered [there] presided one Leviathan, the state. To it and to the family the Confucians looked for authority; those institutions were unchallenged by others, for in China there were no entities such as Church or communes which confused questions of right and government so fruitfully in Europe”.

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.”

This is not to say that Confucianism never countenanced any rebellion against the state. But rebellion was rationalized in terms of a new “mandate from heaven” in 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.”

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

---

293 Roberts, op. cit., p. 355.
294 Fukuyama, op. cit., p. 152.
295 Roberts, op. cit., p. 360.
'the highest form of objective morality', than which there is nothing higher". 296
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.” 297

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.” 298

296 Alexeyev, "Khristianstvo i Idea Monarkhii" (“Christianity and the Idea of the Monarchy),
Put' (The Way), N 6, January, 1927, p. 660.
297 Lieven, op. cit., p. 30.
298 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
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
Interestingly, the Chinese and Roman empires (in their successive incarnations) have tended to mirror each other, with the peaks of the Chinese empire coinciding with the troughs in that of the Roman empire, and vice-versa. Thus in the seventh century, when Rome was at one of its lowest points, the Tang empire under the Emperor Wu (China's only female emperor) was at its peak. However, in the nineteenth century, when the Third Rome of Russia was at its peak, China was being torn apart by western imperialists. Again, today China is perhaps the most powerful country in the world, while Russia has declined terribly. There must be a lesson in this from the Divine Wisdom…
23. THE LAST TEMPTATION: EMPEROR-WORSHIP

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, the reconciliation of Romanitas with Christianitas…

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.”

“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…”

The gods in question were not only the specifically Roman gods, but all the gods of the various peoples of the empire. The tolerant, ecumenist attitude of the Romans to the different religions of the empire was thought to be one of the causes of its survival. None of the pagan cults excluded the others: in the minds of some of the sophisticated intellectuals who studied Greek philosophy they were all different expressions of a single Divinity…

299 M.V. Zyzykin writes: “In the beginning the priestly functions, being a constituent part of the imperium, had been carried out by State officials and only later were transferred to the particular duty of the priests…

“[Religion] without the State did not have that independent life and task, distinguishing it from the task of the State, that the Christian religion has. Its task was to guard the material interests of the State. Each god was in charge of some aspect of earthly life and State life; prayers to the gods included only requests for material good things; each god was besought in accordance with his speciality, but the Roman gods did not touch the moral side of life…

“Not one single god was concerned with questions of morality. None of the gods inspired or laid down moral rules. Care for the morality of the people lay on the family and the State; philosophical morality also appeared without the gods… It worked out that it was not the gods who ruled the will of the Romans, but the Romans – the will of the gods…

“The priesthood among the Romans was not a special form of service established from on high. Among the Romans the right and duty to carry out sacrifices was indissolubly bound up with the imperium. In private life the priest was a representative of authority – the head of the family, of the tribe, of the college, of the brotherhood. In State life the natural priest was the head of the State… [Thus] the highest official of the State was the guardian of religion, and not only of State order…” (Patriarkh Nikon, Warsaw, 1931, pt. I, pp. 37, 38, 42, 43) (V.M.)

300 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”.

180
It was a natural step from the empire tolerating the worship of all the gods to its worshipping itself. For if the gods were worshipped for the sake of the empire, then the empire was the supreme value. Thus, as Alexander Dvorkin writes, “The most capable emperors tried to... attach to the ancient popular cults the character of the worship of the state and its head. This patriotic deification of the Roman state began already in the time of the republic. The cult of Dea Roma was 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...”

Emperor-worship seems to have begun with Julius Caesar. On the Ides of March, 44 BC, Caesar was killed by a group of senators determined to preserve the republic from a return to one-man rule; and almost immediately a cult grew up. As Montefiore writes, “he turned down the throne but received the titles Father of the Country, imperator, dictator for life and consul for ten years, and he was declared to be sacred...” Again, Jonathan Hill writes: “A number of inscriptions in the east, dating from late in his lifetime, hail him as a living god. Caesar himself clearly approved of the development, since he had a month named after himself, built a temple to himself, and appointed his friend Mark Antony as his own chief priest.

“Caesar’s nephew, Augustus, the first true Roman emperor, developed some aspects of this idea and abandoned others. He did not have temples and priests dedicated to himself, but since he was Caesar’s adopted son, he was known as ‘the divine son’. 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...”

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 civilization he found there - and by its queen, Cleopatra. (He brought back an obelisk to Rome and named himself, it is said, after the month in which Cleopatra died, August...) There is even a

---

301 Dvorkin, Ocherki po Istorii Vselenskoj Pravoslavnoj Tserkvi (Sketches on the History of the Universal Orthodox Church), Nizhni-Novgorod, 2006, p. 29.
302 Montefiore, op. cit., p. 59.
303 Hill, Christianity. The First 400 Years, London: Lion Hudson, 2013, p. 130.
theory that Plutarch’s story of Cleopatra’s suicide by snake-bite was a rewriting of history ordered by Augustus, and that Cleopatra was in fact killed on Augustus’ orders in order to remove a dangerous contender to the throne of Rome. For Cleopatra had made her son, Caesarion, her co-ruler, and he, being the natural son of Julius Caesar, was a more direct heir to Caesar than Augustus himself. If Caesarion had become the emperor in Rome, then not only would eastern ideas of divine kingship been introduced still more directly into Rome, but Rome itself may have become an oriental despotism…

Dio Cassius writes that Augustus “gave permission for sacred precincts to be set up in both Ephesus and Nicaea, dedicated to Rome and his father [Julius] Caesar, to whom he had given the title, the Divine Julius. These cities at that time held pre-eminent positions in Asia and Bithynia respectively. The Romans who lived there he bade pay honour to these two divinities, but he allowed the provincials, whom he styled Greeks, to consecrate precincts to himself, the Asians in Pergamum, the Bithynians in Nicomedia. From such a beginning this practice has also occurred under other emperors, and not only in the Greek provinces but also in the others that are subject to Rome. In the city of Rome itself and the rest of Italy, however, no emperor, no matter how deserving of praise, has dared to do this (i.e. style himself a god). Yet even there divine honours are accorded and shrines set up to emperors who have ruled well, after their demise.”

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 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.

“After Augustus,” writes Roberts, “emperors always held the office of chief priest (pontifex maximus) and political and religious primacy were thus combined in the same person. This began the increasing importance and definition of the imperial cult itself. It fitted well with the Roman’s innate conservatism, his respect for the ways and customs of his ancestors. The imperial cult linked respect for traditional patrons, the placating or invoking of familiar deities and the commemoration of great men and events, to the ideas of divine kingship that came from the East, from Asia. It was there that altars were first raised to Rome or the Senate, and there that they were soon reattributed to the emperor. The cult spread through the whole empire, though it was not until the third century AD that the practice was wholly respectable at Rome itself, so strong was the republican sentiment. But even there the strains of empire had already favoured a revival of official piety which benefited the imperial cult.”

Sometimes the emperors deified their favourites. Thus early in the second century the Emperor Hadrian deified his favourite Antinous, of whom St. Athanasius the Great writes: “Although they knew he was a man, and not an honourable man but one filled with wantonness, yet they worshipped him through fear of the ruler... So do not be surprised or think that what we have said is improbable, for quite recently, and perhaps even up to now, the Roman senate decrees that their emperors who reigned from the beginning – either all of them or whomever they choose and decide upon – are among the gods, and prescribes that they be worshipped as gods.”

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,

305 Roberts, op. cit, p. 203.
306 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?”
the emperor Hadrian told the proconsul of Asia that Christians needed to be shown to have done something illegal before being punished, and that people making groundless accusations should themselves be punished severely. Most governors during the second and early third centuries seem to have taken this approach, and many Christian communities seem to have been quite open about their faith.”

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. 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.”

308 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.
309 Sordi, op. cit., p. 117. And yet he caused the martyrdom of the Holy Martyr Eugenia and her family, who are commemorated on December 24.
An important change in the relationship between the Church and the Empire was signaled when, in 270, the Christians of Antioch appealed to the Emperor Aurelian to remove the heretical bishop Paul of Samosata… It was 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 epoch-making change from the monotheistic cult of the Unconquered Sun to the monotheistic cult of the Unconquerable Sun of Righteousness, the Lord Jesus Christ…

In a sense this would mark the passing of Rome herself. For we read in the Life of Saints Cyril and Methodius that once the Jewish teachers of the Khazars asked “the Philosopher” (St. Cyril): “If we accept that He [Christ] has already come, as you claim on the basis of the Prophets and other arguments, then how is it that the Roman Empire is still in power?” The Philosopher replied: “It is no longer in power, for it has passed away, like all empires in its likeness, for our Empire is not of Rome, but of Christ…”

310 Life of SS. Cyril and Methodius, chapter 10.
IV. NEW ROME AND THE NATIONS
24. THE TRIUMPH OF THE CROSS

“It would be no exaggeration,” writes Protopresbyter James Thornton, “to call the reign of Saint Constantine a genuine revolution, particularly from the standpoint of religion. The Synaxarion for May 21, the day of his commemoration, states that the Church was ‘able to inspire governors and profoundly transform the lives of men and states with the inbreathing of evangelical principles’. However, the Christian revolution was a peaceful revolution, a revolution from above, one that retained all that was wholesome from pagan antiquity – for example art, architecture, literature, and law – while slowly extinguishing that which was spiritually noxious, unworthy, or morally debilitating. It wisely left essentially untouched the Roman societal structure and the economic system, anticipating their gradual evolution towards the good, under the influence of Christian teaching. Yet, it was a revolution that imbued the Empire with renewed life…” 311

It was indeed a renewal, a Renovatio Imperii. 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 particular theory, was the decisive factor in his policy, and in his actual mode of ruling.” 312

The renewal of the Roman Empire by the first Christian Emperor was surely a vindication of the Christians’ loyal and patient attitude to the pagan Roman empire. Tertullian had said in the third century, “The world may need its Caesars. But the Emperor can never be a Christian, nor a Christian ever be an Emperor.” 313 However, 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).

311 Thornton, Pious Kings and Right-Believing Queens, Belmont, Mass.: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 2013, p. 97.
Paradoxically, in spite of his vast – indeed, unprecedented - achievements, St. Constantine has received a remarkably bad press, not only from pagans and heretics in his own time but also from medieval and modern Christians. He has been accused of being the originator of “Caesaropapism”, of causing the fall of the very Church that he saved from destruction, even of a supposed “heresy of Constantinianism”...314

Let us now examine the real essence of the Constantinian revolution, beginning with a brief description of his path to power... In 285 the Emperor Diocletian came to the throne. He promptly decided to divide his power into four, into a “tetrarchy” of emperors consisting of two Augusti, one for the East and the other for the West, together with their deputies, the Caesars. The four emperors were bound together through intermarriage and through the supposed descent of the Augusti from Jupiter and of the Caesars from Hercules, “gods by birth and creators of gods”.

At first the reorganization worked well; peace and prosperity was restored to the empire. But then, in 299, an ominous event took place in Antioch. The priests repeatedly failed to get any responses to their questions through the entrails of their sacrificial victims. This seemed to indicate that the gods were displeased, and Diocletian was worried... In 302 the same thing happened, again at Antioch. Diocletian conferred with his fellow Augustus, Galerius, who advised him to persecute the Christians. Diocletian hesitated... Then he consulted the oracle of Apollo at Didyma. The oracle replied that “the just ones” had silenced the prophecy. “The just ones” were interpreted to mean the Christians, and on February 23, the feast of the Terminalia, the persecution began. Later, the tetrarchy assembled in Rome to celebrate their joint rule and to establish the old religions and their morals and “exterminate completely” the new ones.315 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?”316

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 (it had in any case been very mild there). Then, after Constantinus’ 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, confirming his words with an oath: “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.”

“Earlier than Eusebius, though,” writes Peter Leithart, “Lactantius, who as the tutor to Constantine’s sons was closer to the emperor than was Eusebius, recorded a similar story. According to his account, ‘Constantine was directed in a dream to cause the heavenly sign to be delineated on the shields of his soldiers, and so to proceed to battle.’ Following the directive, he had their shields marked with the Greek letter chi (an ‘X’ shape), through which a perpendicular line was drawn and then curved around the top. The result was a chi-rho combination (which looks like the English letters XP), the first letters of the name of Christ.” Although the two accounts differ, Leithart has convincingly shown that they can both be accepted as true, referring as they probably did to two different events...

Constantine had the pagan standards removed and the Christian one with the chi-rho, the so-called Labarum, put in their place. The result was an easy victory over the much larger army of Maxentius. The next day, October 29, Constantine entered Rome and was hailed as Emperor of the West.

Breaking with tradition, Constantine refused to offer sacrifice to the pagan gods, and in particular to Jupiter in the Capitol. “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.”

---


319 Leithart, *op. cit.*, chapter 4.


Moreover, he was not slow to ascribe his victory to Christ and the Cross: “In the royal city he raised this sacred standard and inscribed definitely and indelibly that this saving sign is the preserver of the Roman Empire and the whole kingdom. But when in the most crowded place of Rome they raised a statue to him, he immediately ordered that a long spear in the shape of a cross be put in the hand of his representation and that the following inscription be written word for word in Latin: ‘By this saving and famous sign, the true witness of courage, I saved and liberated your city from the yoke of tyranny, and on liberating it, returned to the Roman senate and people its freedom, its former glory and its celebrity.’”322

He continued to experience the power of the Cross 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.”323

In the West the persecution of the Christians was now over. However, in the East the persecution continued 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”.324

As Fr. Alexis Nikolin writes: “The Edict of Milan decisively rejected many traditions of antiquity. St. Constantine clearly proclaimed that Christianity is not the property of any particular people, but is a universal religion, the religion of the whole of humanity. If formerly it was thought that a given religion belongs to a given people and for that reason it is sacred and untouchable, now the lawgiver affirmed a new principle: that the sacred and untouchable religion was that religion which belonged to all peoples – Christianity. It was obviously not an attempt to bring Christianity under the usual (pagan) juridical forms, but a principled change in those forms.”325

As a result, as Eusebius of Caesarea wrote: “Divine joy blossomed in all hearts as we saw that every place which a little whole 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

---

322 Eusebius, On the Life of Constantine, I, 40.
323 Eusebius, On the Life of Constantine, II, 7.
324 Lactantius, On the Deaths of the Persecutors, 48. 2-12.
325 Nikolin, Tserkov’ i Gosudarstvo (Church and State), Moscow, 1997, p. 27.
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 kingdom that was theirs was preserved securely and without question for Constantine and his sons alone.”

Constantine’s triumphal progress continued: when Licinius turned from toleration to persecution of Christians, Constantine defeated him at Chrysopolis in 324. The whole of the East now came within his dominion... And yet the Triumph of the Cross under St. Constantine proved, paradoxically, that God does not need Christian kings in order to save the world. They help – they help greatly. But for almost three centuries from the Resurrection of Christ the Church had survived and grown in the teeth of everything that Jewish and pagan fury could hurl against her, and without the help of any earthly forces.

For, as Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow wrote: “there is benefit in the union of the altar and the throne, but it is not mutual benefit that is the first foundation of their union, but independent truth, which supports both the one and the other. May the king, the protector of the altar, be blessed; but the altar does not fear the fall of this protection. The priest is right who preaches that the king should be honoured, but not by right of mutuality, but by pure obligation, even if this took place without the hope of mutuality... Constantine the Great came to the altar of Christ when it already stood on the expanses of Asia, Europe and Africa: he came, not in order to support it with his strength, but in order to submit himself with his majesty before its Holiness. He Who dwells in the heavens laughed at those who later thought of lowering His Divine religion to dependence on human assistance. In order to make their sophistry laughable, He waited for three centuries before calling the wise king to the altar of Christ. Meanwhile, from day to day king, peoples, wise men, power, art, cupidity, cunning and rage rose up to destroy this altar. And what happened in the end? All this has disappeared, while the Church of Christ stands – but not because it is supported by human power...”

---

326 Eusebius, Church History, X, 2, 10.
25. THE CONSTANTINIAN REVOLUTION: (1) THE HIERARCHICAL PRINCIPLE

With regard to internal statehood, the Constantinian revolution was only partial. The hierarchical principle, for example, remained unchanged – Constantine was no democrat, and by abolishing the tetrarchy he reasserted one-man-rule. 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 were no longer the highest values. For above the State was the Church, and the State existed in order to serve the Church, not vice-versa.

The hierarchical principle remained unchanged because it was fully in accordance with Christian teaching. For the Apostles did not only preach obedience to the emperor: they extended the hierarchical principle to every level of society. Thus "be subject for the Lord's sake," says St. Peter, "to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and praise those who do right..." (I Peter 2.13). This included even the institution of slavery: “Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and 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 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”.

328 Eusebius, Oration in Honour of Constantine.
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.”

Again, St. Basil the Great wrote: “Even the king of the birds is not elected by the majority because the temerity of the people often nomi nates 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.” And St. Gregory the Theologian wrote: “The three most ancient opinions about God are atheism (or anarchy), polytheism (or polyarchy), and monotheism (or monarchy). The children of Greece played with the first two; let us leave them to their games. For anarchy is disorder: and polyarchy implies factious division, and therefore anarchy and disorder. Both these lead in the same direction – to disorder; and disorder leads to disintegration; for disorder is the prelude to disintegration. What we honour is monarchy…”

Later generations of Byzantines remained faithful to the hierarchical principle. Thus St. John Chrysostom wrote: “Equality is known to produce strife. Therefore God allowed the human race to be a monarchy, not a democracy. But the family is constructed in a similar way to an army, with the husband holding the rank of monarch, the wife as general and the children also given stations of command.” 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.’” And over four centuries later St. Theodore the Studite generalized the principle as follows: "There is one Lord and Giver of the Law, as it is written: one

---

329 Eusebius, Oration in Honour of Constantine.
330 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.
332 St. John Chrysostom, Homily 34 on I Corinthians, 7.
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.\textsuperscript{334}

The principle of one-man rule in politics was greatly strengthened in Byzantium by the idea that the fount of all secular law in the empire was the emperor himself. This did not mean, however, that the emperor’s rule was completely arbitrary. He had to obey the Church, on the one hand, and his own laws, on the other. Thus St. Ambrose of Milan wrote to the Emperor St. Theodosius the Great that the emperor must respect and bind himself by the laws he promulgates, or he risks great dangers in the civil sphere: "And how, O Emperor, are we to settle a matter on which you have already declared your judgment, and have even promulgated laws, so that it is not open to any one to judge otherwise? But when you laid down this law for others, you laid it down for yourself as well. For the Emperor is the first to keep the laws which he passes. Do you, then, wish me to try how those who are chosen as judges will either come, contrary to your decision, or at least excuse themselves, saying that they cannot act against so severe and so stringent a law of the Emperor?\textsuperscript{335}

From the time of Justinian in the sixth century we come across the idea that the emperor is “the living law”, the law personified. As Tom Holland writes: “If it was true, as Justinian ringingly declared, that ‘what medicine is to disease, so laws are to public affairs’, then there was much that first needed to be done before the emperor’s prescription could be applied to the sickening world. The sheer scale and antiquity of the Roman people’s achievements in the field of law had resulted in a legacy that was intimidatingly chequered. Justinian, however, was hardly the man to duck such a challenge. His first step, only a few months into his reign, was the appointment of a commission to harmonise the various unwieldy collections of laws used by previous emperors, then, a year and a half late, he charged a second commission with the even more daunting task of collecting the entire stupendous body of private writings on Roman law. Complete constitutions had to be revised, almost two thousand individual books called in and minutely sifted; tens of

\textsuperscript{334} St. Theodore, The Philokalia, volume IV, p. 93; in Archbishop Seraphim (Sobolev), Russkaia Ideologia (The Russian Ideology), St. Petersburg, 1992, pp. 46-47.

\textsuperscript{335} St. Ambrose, Epistle 21, 9.
thousands of excerpts made. The resulting codification, achieved in record time, was so staggering that it appeared to many something more than human. Justinian himself presented it proudly as a process of restoration; but there was something about it as well of a revolution. ‘We have by means of old laws not only brought matters into a better condition, but we have also promulgated new laws.’ The emperor saw no need to conceal the fact. He was himself, as he declared, nomos empsychos – the ‘living law’. Here, in this self-promotion, was the ultimate refinement of what generations of emperors had been working to achieve. Henceforward, the rules by which the Roman people lived and were bound were to have just the single fountainhead: the emperor himself, enthroned in his palatial citadel. No wonder, then, that Justinian should have sought, not merely to impose his stamp upon the long centuries of Roman legal achievement, but also prescribe where and how that achievement should be taught. Private law schools were definitively banned. No teachers were to be licensed, save for those directly sanctioned by the state. Now, more than ever, the whole world was to be administered from the centre, from the palace of Constantinople.”

This, as we shall see, did not mean that the emperor was also to govern the Church. But it did mean that in Greco-Roman antiquity and the Middle Ages, right down to the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the idea was firmly established that all true power, whether in Church or State, came from above, from God, being mediated through the one-man leader of the Empire or the collegial leadership of the Church. And this idea was passed down without distortion to the Third Rome, Russia.

Thus Professor I.M. Andreyev has characterized the three forms of statehood as follows: “Of the three forms of state power – monarchy, democracy and despotism – strictly speaking, only the first (monarchy) is based on a religious-ethical principle, the second (democracy) is based on an a-religious-ethical principle, and the third (despotism) is based on an anti-religious (satanic) principle.”

The Holy Apostles and Martyrs in the time of the pagan Roman empire believed, on the one hand, that the emperor’s power was established by God and should be obeyed whenever possible, and on the other hand, that he should be disobeyed if he commanded something contrary to God’s commandments. No authority, whether political or ecclesiastical, should be listened to if it contradicted the supreme authority, which is God. As the Apostles said to the Jewish Sanhedrin: “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge” (Acts 4.19).

According to Protestant writers, 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, according to the Protestants, the triumph of the Church under St. Constantine was at the same time the end of the Church as an independent institution. Worse than that: according to some Protestants, as Fr. Irenaeos Plac writes, “the Church apostasized with the legalization of Christianity under Constantine, around 311-313 AD. The argument goes that with actual tolerance and later acceptance by the government, Church affairs became about power and worldly things, leading to the apostasy of the Church. This argument is rather easily disposed of, as many of the conventions these Protestants name as evidences of the apostasy are historically established to have been practiced well before the legalization of the Church. Whether it is icons, veneration of the Virgin mother, authority of bishops or most any other practice, the historical evidence for the universal practice of these marks of the faith are numerous. From the writings of St. Ignatius on bishops, to the excavation of 3rd century church buildings replete with icons, to ancient papyrus scrolls with hymns to the Theotokos, the idea that ‘everything changed in the Church with the edicts of Constantine is simply historically disprovable.”

As regards the Church’s relationship to the State, the Protestants are also wrong: the fourth-century Fathers showed a heroic independence even in relation to 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 in the 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.

---

338 Plac, Facebook, July 3, 2016.
Thus when St. Constantine’s son Constantius apostatized 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.\footnote{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”.} 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 liyingly 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.”\footnote{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 Shapur started to kill the Christian clergy, confiscate church property and raze the churches to the ground. He told St. Simeon, Bishop of Seleucia and Ctesiphon, that if he worshipped the sun, he would receive every honour and gift. But if he refused, Christianity in Persia would be utterly destroyed. In reply, St. Simeon not only refused to worship the sun but also refused to recognize the king by bowing to him. This omission of his previous respect for the king’s authority was noticed and questioned by the King, St. Simeon replied: "Before I bowed down to you, giving you honour as a king, but now I come being brought to deny my God and Faith. It is not good for me to bow before an enemy of my God!” The King then threatened to destroy the Church in his kingdom… He brought in about one hundred priests and about one thousand other Christians and killed them before the saint’s eyes. The saint encouraged them to hope in eternal life. And after everyone had been killed, he himself was martyred.\footnote{St. Demetrius of Rostov, *Lives of the Saints*, April 17.}
This shows that the Fathers and Martyrs of the Church recognized the authority of kings and emperors only so long as they did not persecute the Church of God. At the same time, non-recognition – that is, recognition of the power as tyrannical - did not necessarily mean rebellion. Thus the Fathers did not counsel 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. A baptized Christian who had studied together with Saints Basil the Great and Gregory the Theologian in Athens, he tried to destroy the Orthodox Church and turn the empire back to paganism.

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.”

But if Julian had succeeded, then, wondered the Christians, what would have prevented him from sitting in the Temple as God – that is, from becoming the Antichrist himself? And so it is from this time, as Gilbert Dagron points out, “that the face of each emperor or empress is scrutinized to try and recognize in it the characteristic traits of the Antichrist or of the sovereigns, good or bad, who precede his coming…”

It is instructive to consider how Julian died... Julian had killed the envoy of the Persian king Manuel, Savel and Ishmael for their refusal to worship idols. The Persian king Alamundar prepared an army against Julian to avenge their death. So Julian set off for Mesopotamia to meet him.

---

344 St. Demetrius of Rostov, Lives of the Saints, June 17.
On his way, he stopped in Ancyra, where St. Basil (not Basil the Great) defied him. “Basil was brought before him and the emperor tried to persuade him to abandon his faith in Christ, promising him honors and riches. Basil answered the emperor; "I believe in my Christ, Whom you denied and Who gave you this earthly kingdom; but, that will be taken away from you, shortly. Have you no shame of the sacred altar under which you were saved when they sought to kill you as an eight year old child? That is why this temporary kingdom will be taken from you shortly and your body will not be buried when your soul is violently wrested from you in bitter pains." Basil was tortured and killed for Christ.345

Julian went on to Antioch, where he reinstituted paganism and killed more Christians. Then, as we read in the Life of St. Julian the Hermit of Mesopotamia (October 18), the believers asked St. Julian to pray that he should be overthrown. St. Julian prayed for this for ten days, and then heard a voice from heaven: “The unclean and abominable beast has perished.” And it was true: the Apostate had perished in the war.346

But it was not only St. Julian’s prayers that effected it. The Mother of God, St. Basil the Great and St. Mercurius the Great Martyr were also involved in this critical moment of Church history. Thus when St. Basil heard that Julian’s army was returning from the expedition against the Persians, “he gathered together the multitude of Christians, with women and children, and commanded them that they should keep a fast of three days. Afterward, with the faithful, he ascended the summit of the mountain of Caesarea [in Cappadocia] that is named Didymon (Twin), because it has two peaks. On that mountain was also the Church of the Most Holy Theotokos. It was there that the Christians betook themselves, entreating and beseeching with a contrite heart the only compassionate God and His most pure Mother, that the will of the impious emperor [Julian the Apostate] might be changed. While the saint stood with the people in prayer, he was counted worthy of a vision. He beheld a multitude of heavenly host encircling the mountain. In the midst of them, he beheld a certain Woman enthroned with great glory. She uttered to the angels standing by, ‘Call Mercurius to me, so that he might go and slay Julian, the enemy of my Son.’ It then was made manifest to Saint Basil that the Martyr Mercurius came. After he had taken up his weapons, he received his order from the Woman, who was the most holy Theotokos, and he quickly took leave…

“After he beheld the vision, straightway, the saint descended with certain of the clergy into the city, where the Church of the holy Great Martyr Mercurius is situated. Within the church were to be found the precious relics of the martyr and his weapons, which were honored by the Christians. One hundred years had passed since the reigns of Decius, Gallus, Aemilianus, and

345 St. Demetrius of Rostov, Lives of the Saints, March 22.
346 St. Demetrius of Rostov, Lives of the Saints, October 18.
Valerian, when the martyr lived and contested for Christ by his martyrdom in Caesarea. Upon entering those sacred precincts, Saint Basil could find neither the relics nor the martyr's weapons. He questioned the skevophylax [warden and keeper of the vessels] of the church to learn what happened to them. But he, not knowing the matter, solemnly replied that he knew nothing. The saint then came to know both that the vision was true, and that during that same night, the 26th of June, in the year 363, the ungodly emperor was slain.”

It turned out that a mysterious warrior had appeared to the Apostate in the desert and thrust him through; last words were: “Galilean [Christ], you have conquered!” St. Basil’s friend, St. Gregory the Theologian, rejoiced at the news of the Apostate’s 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).”

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. 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”. (One of the Christians whom he killed was St. Eusignius, who had served in Constantine’s army at the Milvian Bridge.) 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

347 The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, January 1, Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista, CO, 2003; Theodoret, Ecclesiastical History, III, 19.
348 St. Gregory, First Word against Julian, 35; Second Word against Julian, 26.
founder of Constantinople,” 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.” Jovian’s being a “new Constantine” was a guarantee that he represented a return to the old order and true, Christian Romanity (Romanitas, Ῥωμαίος). From this time new Byzantine emperors were often hailed as new Constantines, as were the Christian kings of the junior members of the Christian commonwealth of nations from England to Georgia. After Julian, nobody believed that all emperors were established by God. The principle of monarchical power was good and from God – that was what St. Paul meant when he said that “all authority is from God” in Romans 13.1. But St. Paul had specified what he meant by “power” by saying that the king was “a servant of God for good”, to reward the good and punish the evildoers. This could not apply to rulers such as Julian. They were not kings or authorities, but rebels and tyrants.

St. Basil 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.” This definition 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 that they maintained and incarnated, on the other. And the second is between the status of the pagan emperors before Constantine, on the one hand, and the status of the pagan or heretical emperors after Constantine, on the other.

As St. John Chrysostom said, commenting on Romans 13.1: “Is every ruler, then, elected by God? This I do not say, he [Paul] answers. Nor am I now speaking about individual rulers, but about the thing in itself. For that there should be rulers, and some rule and others be ruled, and that all things

350 Magdalino, op. cit., pp. 3-4.
351 St. Basil, quoted in Fomin, S. & Fomina, T. Rossia pered Vtorym Prishestviem (Russia before the Second Coming), Moscow, 1994, pp. 66, 102.
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’.”

And again he writes: “Is every ruler elected by God to the throne he occupies? Is every emperor, king, and prince chosen by rule? If so, is every law and decree promulgated by a ruler to be regarded as good, and thus to be obeyed without question? The answer to all these questions is, no. God has ordained that every society should have rulers, whose task it is to maintain order, so that people may live in peace. God allows rulers to employ soldiers, whose task it is to capture and imprison those who violate social order. Thus God will bless and guide any ruler and any soldier who acts according to these principles. But many rulers abuse their authority by amassing huge wealth for themselves at the expense of their people, by unjustly punishing those who dare to speak against their evil, and by making unjust wars against neighbors. Such rulers have not been elected by God, but rather have usurped the position that a righteous ruler should occupy. And if their laws are wrong, we should not obey them. The supreme authority in all matters is not the law of the land, but the law of God; and if one conflicts with the other, we must obey God’s law.”

Rulers like Julian, according to the Fathers, were not established by God, but were allowed to ascend the throne by Him in order to punish the people. As St. Isidore of Pelusium wrote: “If some evildoer unlawfully seizes power, we do not say that he is established by God, but we say that he is permitted, either in order to spit out all his craftiness, or in order to chasten those for whom cruelty is necessary, as the king of Babylon chastened the Jews.” And again St. Jerome said: “He often permits wicked kings to arise in order that they may in their wickedness punish the wicked.”

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.” Again, Blessed Theodoret of Cyr wrote: “Paul does not incite us to obey even if we are being constrained to impiety…”

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

---

354 St. Isidore, *Letter 6 to Dionysius*.
Scholasticus, “John regarded as an insult offered to the Church, and having regained his ordinary freedom and keenness of tongue [after his first exile], he employed his tongue against those who did these things... The empress once more applied his expression to herself as indicating marked contempt towards her own person: she therefore endeavoured to procure the convocation of another council of bishops against him. When John became aware of this, he delivered in the church that celebrated oration beginning with: ‘Again Herodias raves, again she is troubled, again she dances, and again she desires to receive John’s head on a platter’.”

Not only apostate or heretical emperors were opposed by 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”. 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?”

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.” “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.”

This teaching came to be embodied in the canon law of the Church, as in the 30th Apostolic Canon, which defrocked any cleric who had obtained his post with the help of the secular authorities. Again, in the Apostolic Constitutions we read: “The king occupies himself only with military matters, worrying about war and peace, so as to preserve the body, while the bishop covers the priesthood of God, protecting both body and soul from danger. Thus the priesthood surpasses the kingdom as much as the soul surpasses the body, for it binds and looses those worthy of punishment and forgiveness.”

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.

358 Socrates, Ecclesiastical History, VI, 18.
360 St. Gregory, Sermon 17.
361 St. Chrysostom, On the Priesthood.
362 St. John Chrysostom, quoted in M.V. Zyzykin, Patriarkh Nikon, Warsaw, 1931, p. 68.
363 Apostolic Constitutions, XI, 34.
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.”

Now in 390, a riot took place in Thessalonica that led to the murder of several magistrates. In his anger on hearing the news, the Emperor Theodosius ordered the execution of the perpetrators. But there was no trial, and many innocents were killed, perhaps as many as seven thousand.

“News of this lamentable calamity,” writes Theodoret, “reached Ambrose. The emperor on his arrival at Milan wished according to custom to enter the church. Ambrose met him outside the outer porch and forbade him to step over the sacred threshold. ‘You seem, sir, not to know,’ said he, ‘the magnitude of the bloody deed that has been done. Your rage has subsided, but your reason has not yet recognized the character of the deed. Peradventure your Imperial power prevents your recognizing the sin, and power stands in the light of reason. We must however know how our nature passes away and is subject to death; we must know the ancestral dust from which we sprang, and to which we are swiftly returning. We must not because we are dazzled by the sheen of the purple fail to see the weakness of the body that it robes. You are a sovereign, sir; of men of like nature with your own, and who are in truth your fellow slaves; for there is one Lord and Sovereign of mankind, Creator of the universe. With what eyes then will you look on the temple of our common Lord – with what feet will you tread that holy threshold, how will you stretch forth your hands still dripping with the blood of unjust slaughter? How in such hands will you receive the all-holy Body of the Lord? How will you who in rage unrighteously poured forth so much blood lift to your lips the precious Blood? Begone. Attempt not to add another crime to that which you have committed. Submit to the restriction to which God the Lord of all agrees that you be sentenced. He will be your physician, He will give you health.’

“Educated as he had been in the sacred oracles, Theodosius knew clearly what belonged to priests and what to emperors. He therefore bowed to the rebuke of Ambrose, and retired sighing and weeping to the palace. After a considerable time, when eight months had passed away, the festival of our Saviour’s birth came round and the emperor sat in his palace shedding a storm of tears…”

In 324, Constantine defeated Licinius and imposed his rule on the East, thereby delivering the Christians from persecution. Rome was now, not the persecutor, but the protector, of the Christian people. Indeed, already years before 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).”

The decree on absolving the clergy from holding civic office is particularly interesting: “[The clergy] shall not be drawn away by any deviation and sacrifice from the worship that is due to the Divinity, but shall devote themselves without interference to their own law... for it seems that rendering the greatest possible service to the Deity, they most benefit the state.” 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 he was already feeling his way to a doctrine of the symphony of powers, in which the emperor helps the Church as her defender and “the bishop of those outside the Church”, while the Church helps the emperor through her prayers.

“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.”

---

Constantine 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; for it was the Body of the God-Man Himself, and therefore higher 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 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 fully established, and on the whole so scrupulously observed, as they were by the first Christian Emperor.”

This was most clearly illustrated at the First Ecumenical Council in 325, when the emperor took part in the proceedings only at the request of the bishops (318 in number, the same number as the servants of Abraham in his battle against the Babylonian kings), and did not sit on a royal throne, but on a little stool somewhat apart from the bishops. He did not vote with the bishops, let alone impose his will on them. As Leithart writes, “Constantine did not dominate the council. He did not formulate the final creed, nor did he sign off on it – being, again, an unbaptized nonbishop. It is difficult, however, to believe that the bishops could have come to such a thoroughgoing conclusion [the defeat of Arianism, with only two bishops rejecting the agreement] without his political skill and strength of personality…”

When he addressed the Council Constantine demonstrated his sincere belief that the internal peace and prosperity of the Church was even more important that the external peace and prosperity of the Empire: “Now that we, with the help of God the Saviour, have destroyed the tyranny of the

---

371 Leithart, op. cit., p. 170.
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.”

372 Again, to the Fathers who did not attend the Council he wrote: “That which has been established in accordance with the God-inspired decision of so many and such holy Bishops we shall accept with joy as the command of God; for everything that is established at the Holy Councils of Bishops must be ascribed to the Divine will.”

Indeed, so obedient was he to the Church that, as I.I. Sokolov writes, “at the First Ecumenical Council, according to the witness of the historian Rufinus, the Emperor Constantine said: ‘God has made you priests and given you the power 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.’”

Constantine saw himself as the instrument whereby God replaced the false religions with the true: “With such impiety pervading the human race, and the State threatened with destruction, what relief did God devise?... I myself was the instrument He chose... Thus, beginning at the remote Ocean of Britain, where the sun sinks beneath the horizon in obedience to the law of nature, with God’s help I banished and eliminated every form of evil then prevailing, in the hope that the human race, enlightened through me, might be recalled to a proper observance of God’s holy laws.”

Although Arianism was not finally defeated at this Council, and the Arians continued to stir up persecutions against the Church for decades, and even centuries to come, the Creed drawn up at Nicaea and completed by the addition of articles on the Divinity of the Holy Spirit and the Church at the Second Ecumenical Council at Constantinople in 381, became the official statement of faith of the True Church from henceforth; and the Third Ecumenical Council at Ephesus in 431 forbade any addition to, or subtraction from, its wording. The later Councils did not change the Creed, but made further definitions to combat further heretical interpretations of its articles. Thus the Third Ecumenical Council anathematized Nestorianism, which alleged that the Divine and Human natures of Christ were united only by a moral, and not by a personal, bond, so that the Virgin Mary could be called the Mother of Christ only, and not the Mother of God as the Church maintains. Again, the Fourth and Fifth Ecumenical Councils of 451 and 553 condemned various manifestations of Monophysitism, which alleged that Christ was not fully man (the opposite error to Arianism). The Sixth Ecumenical Council of

372 St. Constantine, in Archbishop Seraphim (Sobolev), Russkaja Ideologia (The Russian Ideology), St. Petersburg, 1992, p. 71.
373 Sokolov, Lekcii po Istoriyi Greko-Vostochnoi cerkvi (Lectures on the History of the Greek-Eastern Church), St. Petersburg, 1914, p. 15.
374 Eusebius, On the Life of Constantine, II, 28.
680-81 condemned Monothelitism, which alleged that Christ had only one will. And the Seventh Ecumenical Council of 787 condemned Iconoclasm, which forbade the veneration of icons as if they were idols. The Seventh Council forms a fitting conclusion to the series of Councils concerned with Christological and Trinitarian heresies insofar as Iconoclasm attacked the Incarnation of Christ by denying the ability of Spirit to penetrate and sanctify matter (specifically, the matter of icons, but by inference also the matter of Christ’s Body).

The Seven Ecumenical Councils (325-787) are the seven pillars upon which the Orthodox Church is built (Proverbs 9.1), and every Orthodox Christian is obliged to accept their Divine authority. In them, and in the Local Councils held until the fall of the Empire in 1453, all the main dogmas of the Church – on the Holy Trinity, on the two Natures and Wills of Christ, on the Holy Spirit, and on the Divine Energies – were elaborated with the active participation of the emperors. Their significance was indicated by the Encyclical of the Eastern Patriarchs in 1848: “Our faith received its beginning not from men or through a man, but through the revelation of Jesus Christ (Galatians 1.12), which the divine Apostles preached, which the Ecumenical Councils confirmed, which great and wise teachers passed on by succession to the whole inhabited world, and which the martyrs sealed with their own blood. We will hold to this confession, which we have received in purity from so many men, and will reject every innovation as an inspiration of the devil.”

The very hands-on approach to religion of St. Constantine was inherited by all of his successors. This participation was not always helpful, as during the reigns of the Arian and Iconoclast emperors; but in general the Emperors played a vital role in supporting the Church to uphold the true faith and eliminate heresy. They accepted the principle, most clearly expounded by the French saint Vincent of Lerins, that the truth is “that which has always, everywhere and by all [Christians] been believed” since apostolic times; in other words, all innovations in faith or morality must be false and must be rejected in council. The emperors, being sons of the Church, accepted this principle, and in general upheld it in their relations with the Church.

In this they were following the example first provided by St. Constantine. However, it is necessary to emphasize that whatever Constantine did for the Church he did, not as arbitrary expressions of his imperial will, but in obedience to the commission of the Church. Thus the Fathers of the First Council welcomed the Emperor as follows: “Blessed is God, Who has chosen you as king of the earth, having by your hand destroyed the worship of idols and through you bestowed peace upon the hearts of the faithful... On this teaching of the Trinity, your Majesty, is established the greatness of your piety. Preserve it for us whole and unshaken, so that none of the heretics, having penetrated into the Church, might subject our faith to mockery... Your Majesty, command that Arius should depart from his error and rise no longer against the apostolic teaching. Or if he remains obstinate in his impiety, drive him out of the Orthodox Church.”
As Bishop Dionysius (Alferov) writes, "this is a clear recognition of the divine election of Constantine as the external defender of the Church, who is obliged to work with her in preserving the right faith, and in correspondence with the conciliar sentence is empowered to drive heretics out of the Church."\(^{375}\)

The most famous definition of the relationship between Constantine and the Church is to be found in two passages from Eusebius’ Life, which speak of him as “like a common bishop” and “like a bishop of those outside”. The first passage is as follows: “[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…” 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.\(^{376}\) The word translated “overseeing” [ἐπισκοπεῖ] here has the same root as the word for “bishop” [ἐπίσκοπος], thereby underlining the commonality of functions. So the emperor was not really a bishop, but only like a bishop - in both his missionary and in his supervisory roles. And he excelled in both. Thus, on the one hand, he responded vigorously to St. Nina’s request that he send bishops and priests to help her missionary work in Georgia. Again, on hearing that the Christians were being persecuted in Persia he threatened to go to war with that state. On the other hand, he convened numerous councils of bishops to settle doctrinal disputes throughout the empire – in particular, those caused by the Donatists in Africa and the Meletians in Egypt and, above all, the empire-wide contagion caused by Arius.

In this way he acted as the focus of unity for the Church on earth. Nor did this role within the Church mean that he thought himself to have power over the Church. Thus 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.”\(^{377}\) And on

---

\(^{375}\) A. Tuskarev, *Tserkov’ o Gosudarstve* (The Church on the State), Staritsa, 1992, p. 75.


\(^{377}\) Having failed in their petition, the Donatists then decided that they didn’t need Constantine anyway. For “what have Christians to do with kings? Or what have bishops to do with the palace?” (Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, I, 22).
the decision of the Council of Arles (314) he said: “The bishops’ decision should be looked upon as though the Lord Himself had been sitting in judgement.”

Constantine cared desperately that the bishops should achieve unity, and was deeply frustrated at every sign of disunity. Thus on hearing of the Donatist heresy he said: “Until now I cannot be completely calm until all my subjects are united in brotherly unity and offer to the All-holy God the true worship that is prescribed by the Catholic Church”. And at the opening of the First Ecumenical Council, convened to judge the heresy of Arius, he said: “I hold any sedition within the Church of Christ to be as formidable as any war or battle, and even more difficult to bring to an end. I am consequently more opposed to it than to anything else…”

The bishops understood Constantine’s sincere veneration for the Church; so when St. Athanasius was condemned by a council at Tyre, and appealed to the emperor, he was not asking the secular power to overthrow the decision of the ecclesiastical power, as the Donatists thought earlier in the reign, but was rather calling on a son of the Church (albeit not yet baptized) to defend the decision of the Holy Fathers against heretics. Even his most important and valuable contribution to the Council of Nicaea, his suggestion of the term homoousios, “consubstantial”, to describe the relationship between the Father and the Son was probably made in collaboration with Bishops Ossius and Alexander.  

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…

The emperor as focus of unity was especially needed when the Church was afflicted by problems affecting the whole Church. Such, for example, were the problems of Arianism and the Church calendar, both of which were resolved at the First Ecumenical Council. 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 coordinating function. He alone could 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 were put into practice…

The pagan absolutist system of government had concentrated power in both the political and the religious spheres in the hands of one man. Thus in Rome the emperor was also the first priest, the pontifex maximus. Constantine did not renounce this title (the Emperor Gratian did that towards the end of the century.) As we have seen, however, he 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,

378 Leithart, op. cit., p. 170.
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 for that 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. Nor did the Church have any objection to this – so long as the
Emperor was Orthodox. Some “interference” by them was even sanctioned by
Canon 93 (96) of the Council of Carthage in the year 419: “It behoves the
gracious clemency of their Majesties to take measures that the Catholic
Church, which has begotten them as worshippers of Christ in her womb, and
has nourished them with the strong meat of the faith, should by their
forethought be defended, lest violent men, taking advantage of the times of
religious excitement, should by fear overcome a weak people, whom by
arguments they were not able to pervert”. As an ancient epitome of this canon
puts it: “The Emperors who were born in the true religion and were educated
in the faith, ought to stretch forth a helping hand to the Churches. For the
military band overthrew the dire conspiracy which was threatening Paul.”379

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...”380

380 Holy Transfiguration Monastery, “The Seat of Moses”, quoted in The Life of our Holy Father
Maximus the Confessor, Boston, 1982, p. 65.
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”. 381

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.” 382 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”. 383

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”. 384 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”. 385 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

381 St. Marcian, quoted in Archbishop Seraphim, op. cit., p. 71.
385 St. Leo, in Fomin and Fomina, op. cit., p. 73.
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 Gilbert Dagron points out, “the emperor could not remain neutral. He was the guarantor and often the principal architect of the unity of the Church. Thus the Orthodox or heretical council unanimously celebrated the sovereign ‘guarded by God’ by giving him without niggardliness the title of ‘teacher of the faith’, ‘new Paul’, ‘equal to the apostles, illumined like the bishops by the Holy Spirit’. At the end of the fourth session of the council held in Constantinople in 536, the bishops expressed the 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 highly rhetorical expressions applied to the rulers. “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 βισολαει).’ The whole world is equally agreed, a little later at the Council of Chalcedon, in acclaiming Marcian as ‘priest and emperor’, at the same time as ‘restorer of the Church, teacher of the faith, New Constantine, New Paul and New David’. At the same time Pope Leo congratulated Theodosius II, and then Marcian, on the sacerdotalis industria, on the sacerdotalis anima, and on the sacerdotalis palma with which God had rewarded them, and he declared to Leo I that he was inspired by the Holy Spirit in matters of the faith. Except during periods of tension, the adjective sacerdotalis was part of the formula of the pontifical chancellery for letters addressed to the emperors of Constantinople. The composers of elegies were not behindhand, in the West as in the East. Procopius of Gaza underlined that Anastasius had been elected to be a bishop before being named emperor, and that he reunited in himself ‘that which is most precious among men, the apparatus of an emperor and the thought of a priest’; Ennodius of Pavia (473-521) proclaimed Theodoric to be ‘prince and priest’; Venantius Fortunatus, in the second half of the 6th century, called Childebert I

---

‘Melchisedech noster, merito rex atque sacerdos’; towards 645 an anonymous panegyric characterised Clotaire I as quasi sacerdos; Paulinus, bishop of Aquilea, 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.”\(^{387}\)

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\(^{388}\); 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 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…”\(^{389}\)

Nevertheless, the Empire and the Priesthood remained separate principles in the Byzantine understanding. They were both from God, and were meant to work in “symphony” to the glory of God, as the Emperor Justinian

---

\(^{387}\) Dagron, op. cit., pp. 314-315.

\(^{388}\) According to Alexander Dvorkin, the crowning of Marcian and Pulcheria “was the first in history to be carried out in church” (Ocherki po Istorii Vselenskoj Pravoslavnoj Tserkvi (Sketches on the History of the Universal Orthodox Church), Nizhni-Novgorod, 2006, p. 292).

proclaimed in his famous *Novella 6*. But they remained 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 Empire must herald his coming and the end of the world....
28. THE CONSTANTINIAN REVOLUTION: (4) RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Contrary to what is often thought, the pagan Roman emperors had been in general tolerant of religion. This was for reasons of political expediency – a multi-ethnic and multi-faith population is more easily controlled if all its faiths are respected and legalized. Another motive was superstition. After all, calculated the ruler, the god of this people is more likely to help me if I do not persecute his people... And so in Imperial Rome before Constantine periods of persecution were intermittent and generally short-lived, and directed exclusively at Christians. As Perez Zagorin writes, Rome “was tolerant in practice in permitting the existence of many diverse religious cults, provided their votaries also complied with the worship of the divine emperor as part of the state religion. Unlike Christianity and Judaism, Roman religion had no sacred scriptures and did not depend on any creed, dogmas, or ethical principles. It consisted very largely of participation in cult acts connected with the worship of various deities and spirits that protected the Roman state and were associated with public, family, and domestic life. At nearly all stages of their history the Romans were willing to accept foreign cults and practices; this de facto religious pluralism is entirely attributable to the polytheistic character of Roman religion and had nothing to do with principles of values sanctioning religious toleration, a concept unknown to Roman society or law and never debated by Roman philosophers or political writers.”390

Christianity introduced a new depth and a new complexity to the question of religious toleration. On the one hand, the Christians, like the Jews, rejected the idea of a multiplicity of gods, and insisted that there was only one name by which men could be saved – that of the One True God, Jesus Christ. This position did not logically imply that Christians wanted to persecute people of other faiths. But the “exclusivism” of Christianity, then as now, was perceived by the pagan-ecumenist majority, whether sincerely or insincerely, as a threat to themselves. On the other hand, the Christians set no value on the forcible conversion of people to the Faith: man, being in the image of God, was free, and could come to God only by his own free will. As the Christian lawyer Tertullian put it: “It does not belong to religion to force people to religion, since it must be accepted voluntarily.”391 In his Barring of Heretics (ca. 200) Tertullian insisted on the truth of Christianity and declared that heretics could not be called Christians. Nevertheless, he was “opposed to compulsion in religion and stated in other works that ‘to do away with freedom of religion [libertas religionis]’ was wrong. While Christians, he said, worship the one God and pagans worship demons, both ‘human and natural law’ ordain that ‘each person may worship whatever he wishes’.392

391 Tertullian, Ad Scapulam, 2.
392 Zagorin, op. cit., p. 21.
However, Tertullian was writing at a time when the Church, as a persecuted minority, clearly benefited from religious toleration. What if the Church herself were to gain political power? After all, the Old Testament Kings were required by God to defend the faith of the people as their first duty, and the prophets constantly reminded them that they would be judged by God in accordance with their fulfilment or non-fulfilment of this duty. This same duty was taken very seriously by the Byzantine emperors Constantine I, Theodosius I and Justinian I. Constantine is often accused of introducing religious intolerance into the State. However, in accordance with the Edict of Milan and the teaching of his tutor Lactantius, he professed and practiced a policy of religious toleration. For, as he declared: “It is one thing to undertake the contest for immortality voluntarily, another to compel others to do it likewise through fear of punishment.” While not hiding his Christianity, and characterizing paganism as “superstition”, he allowed the pagans to practise their faith. Thus in 324, just after defeating Licinius and taking control of the Eastern provinces, he wrote: “I wish, for the common good of the empire and of all men, that Thy people should be in peace and remain exempt from troubles. May those who are in error joyfully receive the enjoyment of the same peace and tranquillity as the believers, for the sweetness of concord will have the power to correct them also and lead them on the right path.” In addition to allowing the pagans to practise their religion, Constantine never excluded them “from the administration of the State: one finds them among the praetorian prefects, the prefects of Rome, the ministers and even the entourage of the Emperor.”

Timothy Barnes writes: “Constantine allowed pagans to retain their beliefs, even to build new sacred edifices. But he allowed them to worship their traditional gods only in the Christian sense of that word, not according to the traditional forms hallowed by antiquity. The emperor made the distinction underlying his policy explicit when he answered a petition from the Umbrian town of Hispellum requesting permission to build a temple of the Gens Flavia. Constantine granted the request but specified that the shrine dedicated to the imperial family must never be ‘polluted by the deceits of any contagious superstition’. From 324 onwards Constantine constantly evinced official disapproval of the sacrifices and other cultic acts which constituted the essence of Greco-Roman paganism: Christianity was now the established religion of the Roman Empire and its ruler, and paganism should now conform to Christian patterns of religious observance.”

---

395 Barnes, op. cit, pp. 212-213.
Constantine steadily went about his goal of Christianizing the empire, preaching and legislat ing against the enemies of the faith: by 324 pagan sacrifices had been banned, heresy was illegal, and the official religion of the Empire was Orthodoxy. Constantine also defended the Christians against the Jews. He released all slaves whom the Jews had dared to circumcise, and those Jews who killed their co-religionists for converting to Christianity were executed.\textsuperscript{396}

And if his bark was worse than his bite, and many of his decrees were not executed by local governors, they nevertheless had a long-term effect. By the 350s pagan sacrifices were rare. “Heretics were exiled, and Arius’s books were burned, just as the anti-Christian treatise of Porphyry was destroyed by imperial order. Constantine’s religious policy created an ‘atmosphere’ of hostility to heresy as much as to paganism.”\textsuperscript{397}

This raises the question, as Leithart writes: “If religion was a matter of free will, why did Constantine so vigorously oppose paganism in his decrees, letters and speeches, and how could he justify any restrictions on religion at all? If Constantine thought that religion should be free, what was he doing forbidding sacrifice?

“Elizabeth Digeser offers terminology and categories that help make sense of Constantine’s policies. She distinguishes forbearance from toleration, and tolerance from ‘concord’. Forbearance is a pragmatic policy, not guided by moral or political principle. Forbearance might change to persecution if political conditions change. The periods of Roman acceptance of Christianity were periods of forbearance. Toleration is ‘disapproval or disagreement coupled with an unwillingness to take action against those viewed with disfavor in the interest of some moral or political principle.’ This principle could arise, as for Lactantius, from a theory concerning the nature of religion, or, alternatively, from a theory about human nature or about the limits of state power. By this definition, toleration does not involve an idea of the equality of all viewpoints but the opposite. Toleration assumes disapproval of certain religious expressions but refrains for principled reasons from using state power to suppress the disapproved religion. Beyond toleration, Digeser introduces the category of ‘concord’: ‘(1) its attitude of forbearance is dictated by some moral, political, or even religious principle and (2) it expects that by treating its dissenters with forbearance it is creating conditions under which they will ultimately change their behavior to conform to what the state accepts.’ These three strategies of religious policy build on one another: toleration assumes forbearance on principle, it expects that the forbearance will have the ultimate outcome of unity if not complete uniformity.”\textsuperscript{398}

\textsuperscript{397} Leithart, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 130.
\textsuperscript{398} Liethart, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 139-140.
After Constantine, his hostility towards paganism and heresy was redirected against Orthodoxy. Thus the Emperor Constantius, an Arian, was also a persecutor of Orthodox Christians. And in the late 340s the Donatist Marculus was executed. Julian the Apostate was a pagan and persecuted pagans, killing the holy Martyrs Eusignius and Artemius. It was during the reign of Theodosius I (379-395) that the question of religious freedom was confronted directly for the first time, and in 384 Bishop Priscillian of Avila was executed on a charge of sorcery.\footnote{Jonathan Hill, \textit{Christianity: The First 400 Years}, Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2013, pp. 233, 294.}

The Holy Fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries rejected the idea of killing people for their faith. Thus the Church historian Socrates said: “It is not the custom of the Orthodox Church to persecute.”\footnote{Socrates, \textit{Ecclesiastical History}, VII, 3.} And St. Athanasius the Great said: “It is a characteristic of [true] religion not to force but to persuade.”\footnote{St. Athanasius, \textit{Against the Arians}, 67; P.G. 25, p. 773.} As S.V. Troitsky writes: “Christians are called to freedom (\textit{Galatians} 5.13), and every religious act of conscious Christians must bear on itself the mark of freedom. The ancient Christian writer Lactantius demonstrated that religion exists only where there is freedom, and disappears where freedom has disappeared, and that it is necessary to defend the truth with words and not with blows (\textit{verbis, non verberibus}).”\footnote{Lactantius, \textit{Divine Institutes}, 19.} “The mystery of salvation,’ writes St. Gregory the Theologian, ‘is for those who desire it, not for those who are compelled’. The 108th canon of the Council of Carthage cites the law of Honorius that ‘everyone accepts the exploit of Christianity by his free choice’, and Zonaras in his interpretation of this canon writes: ‘Virtue must be chosen, and not forced, not involuntary, but voluntary... for that which exists by necessity and violence is not firm and constant’.\footnote{Troitsky, \textit{Khristianskaia Philosophia Braka} (The Christian Philosophy of Marriage), Paris: YMCA Press, p. 207.}

At the same time, extending the boundaries of the empire could be justified on the grounds of facilitating Christian missionary work. Thus according to St. Gregory the Great, following Augustine, war could be waged “for the sake of enlarging the res publica within which we see God worshipped... so that the name of Christ will travel among the subject people through the preaching of the faith.”\footnote{St. Gregory the Great, \textit{Registrum}, 1.73.}

St. John Chrysostom (+407) preached non-violence to heretics: “Christians above all men are forbidden to correct the stumblings of sinners by force... It is necessary to make a man better not by force but by persuasion. We neither have authority granted us by law to restrain sinners, nor, if it were, should we know how to use it, since God gives the crown to those who are kept from evil, not by force, but by choice.”\footnote{St. John Chrysostom, quoted by Fr. Antonious Henein, orthodox-tradition@egroups.com, 8 August, 2000.}
St. John interpreted the parable of the wheat and the tares to mean that the heretics (the tares) should not be killed. But they were to be resisted in other ways. “As we can see from the many occurrences of the phrase ‘stop the mouths of the heretics’ in his writings, St. John showed not the slightest indulgence towards false teachings; indeed, much of his life as a preacher was devoted to combating such heretics as the Eunomians, the Judaizers, and the Manichaeans. However, he was resolutely opposed to the use of violence by the authorities to subdue heretics. And it is this reservation of his that must be carefully understood, if one is to grasp what may seem to be a contradictory view of heretics. He knew from pastoral experience that heretics were far more likely to be turned aside from their errors by prayer: ‘And if you pray for the Heathens, you ought of course to pray for Heretics also, for we are to pray for all men, and not to persecute. And this is good also for another reason, as we are partakers of the same nature, and God commands and accepts benevolence towards one another’ (Homilies on the First Epistle to St. Timothy, 7). Near the end of this homily on the dangers of anathematizing others, he says that ‘we must anathematize heretical doctrines and refute impious teachings, from whomsoever we have received them, but show mercy to the men who advocate them and pray for their salvation.’ In other words, we must love the heretic, but hate the heresy.”

However, it may be wondered whether St. John’s words should be interpreted as an absolute ban on any kind of coercion in any circumstances. For there were other prominent and holy Christians contemporary with him who did approve of some measure of coercion in some circumstances. In particular, there was the question of the rights of the Christian emperor. If the Church as an institution or individual Christians could only persuade, not coerce, was it not the task of the emperor to coerce, or at any rate limit the activity of those who refused to be persuaded?

It is significant that no prominent churchman denounced the undoubtedly coercive laws passed against pagans and heretics by the Emperor Theodosius I (379-395). Theodosius decreed, writes John Julius Norwich, “that only those who professed the consubstantiality of the Trinity (in other words the Nicene Creed) could be considered Catholic Christians – a designation that appears here for the first time. ‘All others,’ the edict continues, ‘we pronounce to be mad and foolish, and we order that they shall bear the ignominious name of heretics, and shall not presume to bestow on their conventicles the title of churches: these are to be visited first by divine vengeance, and secondly by the stroke of our own authority, which we have received in accordance with the will of heaven.’”

---

As Perez Zagorin writes, Theodosius “proscribed various heresies by name, ordered the confiscation of churches and private houses where heretics met for worship, and deprived them of the right to make wills or receive inheritances. In the case of certain heretical sects [the Manichaeans] he commanded that their members be hunted down and executed. In his attempt to enforce uniformity of belief he also instituted legislation against paganism, including a comprehensive enactment in 395 forbidding anyone of whatever rank of dignity to sacrifice to or worship ‘senseless images’ constructed ‘by human hands’, on pain of heavy fines and other penalties. He was likewise the first emperor to impose penalties on Christians who profaned their baptism by reverting to paganism.

“… All subjects were expected to be worshippers in this [the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic] Church; and in addition to the spiritual and political authority its bishops wielded, it had the power of the state at its disposal to enforce its faith against heretics. The practical toleration and religious pluralism that had formerly been the Roman custom no longer existed. The change that took place is epitomised in an appeal made in 384 by Quintus Aurelius Symmachus – a Roman senator, orator, and prefect of Rome, and a defender of paganism – to the emperors Theodosius I and Valentinian II to restore the altar of the goddess victory to the Senate House (it had been removed by imperial decree after standing there for over 350 years, since the reign of the emperor Augustus at the beginning of the first century). Speaking in the name of the proscribed ancient religion of Rome, Symmachus declared that ‘each nation has its own gods and peculiar rites. The Great Mystery cannot be approached by one avenue alone… Leave us the symbol on which our oaths of allegiance have been sworn for so many generations. Leave us the system which has given prosperity to the State.’ His plea was of no avail, however, for the cross of Christ had conquered the Roman Empire, and the altar of Victory remained banished and abandoned.”

Zeal against heretics was, of course, not the exclusive preserve of the emperors. The Christians of Alexandria and the monks of Egypt were famous (or, in some cases, notorious) for their zeal. And when in 388 some Christians burned down the synagogue in Callinicum on the Euphrates, the Emperor Theodosius ordered its rebuilding at the Christians’ expense.

However, St. Ambrose, the famous Bishop of Milan, wrote to him: “When a report was made by the military Count of the East that a synagogue had been burnt down, and that this was done at the instigation of the bishop, you gave command that the others should be punished, and the synagogue be rebuilt by the bishop himself… The bishop’s account ought to have been waited for, for priests are the calmers of disturbances, and anxious for peace,

---

408 Zagorin, op. cit., pp. 23, 24. However, Hill argues that it was not Theodosius’ measures but Justinian’s persecution in the sixth century that was “the first really thorough attempt on the part of the Roman authorities to stamp out paganism, and the first time that the various laws against paganism were seriously enforced” (op. cit., p. 301).
except when even they are moved by some offence against God, or insult to the Church. Let us suppose that the bishop burned down the synagogue... It will evidently be necessary for him to take back his act or become a martyr. Both the one and the other are foreign to your rule: if he turns out to be a hero, then fear lest he end his life in martyrdom; but if he turns out to be unworthy, then fear lest you become the cause of his fall, for the seducer bears the greater responsibility. And what if others are cowardly and agree to construct the synagogue? Then... you can write on the front of the building: 'This temple of impiety was built on contributions taken from Christians'.

You are motivated by considerations of public order. But what is the order from on high? Religion was always bound to have the main significance in the State, which is why the severity of the laws must be modified here. Remember Julian, who wanted to rebuild the temple of Jerusalem: the builders were then burned by the fire of God. Do you not take fright at what happened then?... And how many temples did the Jews not burn down under Julian at Gaza, Askalon, Beirut and other places? You did not take revenge for the churches, but now you take revenge for the synagogue!" 409

“What is more important,” he asked, “the parade of discipline or the cause of religion? The maintenance of civil law is secondary to religious interest.” 410 Ambrose refused to celebrate the Liturgy until the imperial decree had been revoked. Theodosius backed down...

The “Ambrosean” position may be tentatively formulated as follows. On the one hand, in relation to those outside her the Church can herself adopt no coercive measures; she can do no more than reason, plead and threaten with God’s justice at the Last Judgement. Her only means of “coercion”, if it can be called that, is the excommunication of unrepentant Christians from her fold. On the other hand, the Church blesses the Christian State to use other, more physical means of coercion against those over whom she has no more influence. The purpose of this is not to convert; for only persuasion can convert, and as St. Basil the Great says, “by violence you can frighten me, but cannot persuade me”. But there are other legitimate and Christian purposes for coercion: justice against evildoers, the restriction of their influence, and the protection of the young and weak in mind...

But even St. Ambrose never advocated the execution of heretics or Jews simply because they believed wrongly. This aversion against the execution of heretics is found in other saints. Thus when St. Martin of Tours (+397) signed the decision of a Synod condemning the Spanish heretic Priscillian and handing him over to the Emperor for execution, he felt the reproaches of his conscience, and never again attended a Synod of Bishops. 411

However, we cannot say that the execution of heretics is absolutely forbidden by Orthodoxy... In the *Lives of the Saints* we find a few instances of saints blessing the execution of heretics, even of saints who were not secular rulers executing evildoers themselves. Thus in *The Acts of the Apostles* we read how the Apostle Peter in effect executed Ananias and Sapphira. Again, the Apostles Peter and Paul by their prayers brought about the death of Simon Magus. Again, St. Basil the Great prayed for, and obtained, the death of Julian the Apostate (by the sword of St. Mercurius the Great Martyr). And the holy hierarchs Patrick of Ireland and Leo of Catania in effect executed particularly stubborn perverters of the people.

Probably none of the early Fathers exercised himself more over the question of religious freedom than St. Augustine of Hippo. Zagorin writes: “Augustine carried on a long theological combat with three formidable heresies, Manichaeanism, Pelagianism, and Donatism. Among his writings against the last of these and its followers, the Donatists, he left an invaluable record of his reflections on the justification of coercion against heretics to enforce religious truth. At the time he became bishop of Hippo, Donatism, which took its name from one of its first leaders, Donatus, bishop of Carthage, had already existed in North Africa for more than eighty years and had undergone considerable persecution. Originating in the early fourth century in an ecclesiastical controversy over a bishop who had [allegedly] compromised with paganism during the persecution by the emperor Diocletian and was therefore considered a betrayer of the faith, the Donatists formed a schismatic and rival church with its own clergy. Rigorists who believed in a church composed exclusively of the holy, they maintained that an unworthy priest could not perform a valid sacrament. By insisting on the rebaptism of converts, the Donatist church declared its rejection of the sacramental character of Catholic baptism. To some extent Donatism represented an expression of social protest against the profane world as a domain ruled by Satan. Its more extreme advocates, a fanatical fringe of zealots and ascetics known as Circumcellions, sought a martyr’s death by any means, including suicide; they gathered as bands of marauding peasants who attacked estates and committed other acts of violence. As a self-described church of martyrs, the Donatists condemned the alliance between Catholicism and the Roman authorities as a renunciation of Christ in favour of Caesar, and their bishop Donatus was reported to have said, ‘What has the Emperor to do with the Church?’ In the course of its history Donatism became a considerable movement, although it remained largely confined to North Africa.

“In his numerous writings against this heresy, one of Augustine’s constant aims was to persuade its followers by means of reason and arguments to abandon their errors and return to the Catholic Church. He did his best to refute its doctrines in a number of treatises and at first opposed any use of coercion against these heretics. A lost work of 397 repudiated coercion, and in an undated letter to a Donatist churchman he wrote: ‘I do not intend that anyone should be forced into the Catholic communion against his will. On the contrary, it is my aim that the truth may be revealed to all who are in error
and that... with the help of God, it may be made manifest so as to induce all to follow and embrace it of their own accord.’ To several Donatists he wrote in around 398 that those who maintain a false and perverted opinion but without ‘obstinate ill will’ – and especially those ‘who have not originated their error by bold presumption’ but received it from their parents or others, and who see truth with a readiness to be corrected when they have found it – are not to be included among heretics. The heretic himself, however, ‘swollen with hateful pride and with the assertion of evil contradiction, is to be avoided like a mad man’.

“Nevertheless, Augustine eventually reversed his position and decided to endorse coercion. Looking back at this development some years later, he said that at first he had believed that no one should be forced into the unity of Christ, and that the Church should rely only on speaking, reasoning, and persuasion ‘for fear of making pretended Catholics out of those whom we knew as open heretics’. But then proven facts caused him to give up this opinion when he saw Donatists in his own city ‘converted to Catholic unity by the fear of imperial laws’ and those in other cities recalled by the same means. Reclaimed Donatists, he contended, were now grateful that ‘fear of the laws promulgated by temporal rulers who serve the Lord in fear has been so beneficial’ to them.

“We first learn of Augustine’s change of mind in the treatise he wrote (ca. 400) as a reply to a letter by the Donatist bishop Parmenian, a leading spokesman of the movement. In this work he justified the intervention of the imperial government against the Donatists by making Saint Paul’s theology of the state, as the apostle outlined it in the thirteenth chapter of his letter to the Romans (Romans 13.1-7). There Paul instructed Christians to be obedient to the higher powers as the minister ordained by God and armed with the sword for the repression of evildoers. In the light of this apostolic teaching, Augustine insisted that the emperors and the political authorities had the God-given right and duty to crush the sacrilege and schism of the Donatists, since they were as obligated to repress a false and evil religion as to prevent the crime of pagan idolatry. He further pointed out that the Donatists were guilty of many cruelties and had themselves appealed to the emperors in the past against the dissidents in their own church. Denying that those of them condemned to death were martyrs, he described them instead as killers of souls and, because of their violence, often killers of bodies.

“One of the arguments he put forward in defense of force in this work was his interpretation of Jesus’ parable of the tares in the Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 13.24-30). This famous text was destined to be cited often during subsequent centuries in discussions of toleration and persecution, and to occupy a prominent place in the tolerationist controversies of the era of the Protestant Reformation. The parable first likens the kingdom of heaven to a good see and then relates how a man sowed good seed in the ground, whereupon his enemy came in the night and planted tares, or weeds, there as well. When the wheat appeared, so did the tares. The man’s servants asked
their master if they should pull up the tares, but he forbade them lest they also uproot the wheat. He ordered that both should be left to grow until the harvest, and then the reapers would remove and burn the tares and gather the wheat into the barn. The parable’s point would seem to be that good people and sinners alike should be allowed to await the Last Judgement to receive their due, when God would reward the good with the kingdom of heaven and punish the bad with the flames of hell. Augustine, however, drew from it a very different lesson: if the bad seed is known, it should be uprooted. According to his explanation, the only reason the master left the tares to grow until the harvest was the fear that uprooting them sooner would harm the grain. When this fear does not exist because it is evident which is the good seed, and when someone’s crime is notorious and so execrable that it is indefensible, then it is right to use severe discipline against it, for the more perversity is corrected, the more carefully charity is safeguarded. With the help of this interpretation, which reversed the parable’s meaning, Augustine was able not only to justify the Roman government’s repression of the Donatists but to provide a wider reason for religious persecution by the civil authorities.

“Augustine elaborated his position in favour of coercion in religion in a number of letters. In a lengthy epistle to the Donatist Vincent, he argued for the utility of coercion in inducing fear that can bring those who are subject to it to the right way of thinking. Maintaining that people could be changed for the better through the influence of fear, he concluded that ‘when the saving doctrine is added to useful fear’, then ‘the light of truth’ can drive out ‘the darkness of error’. To reinforce this view, he quoted the parable of the feast in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 14. 21-23), another of the texts that was to figure prominently in future tolerationist controversy. In this parable, a man prepared a great feast to which he invited many guests who failed to appear. After summoning from the city the poor, blind, and lame to come and eat, he found that room still remained, so he ordered his servants to ‘go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in [compelle intrare in the Latin Vulgate], that My house may be filled’. ‘Do you think,’ Augustine asked in a comment on this passage, ‘that no one should be forced to do right, when you read that the master of the house said to his servants, “Whomever you find, compel them to come in”’. He referred also to the example of the conversion of the apostle Paul, who ‘was forced by the great violence of Christ’s compulsion to acknowledge and hold the truth’ (Acts 9.3-18). The main point, he claimed, was not whether anyone was forced to do something, but whether the purpose of doing so was right or wrong. While no one could be made good against his will, the fear of punishment could persuade a person to repudiate a false doctrine and embrace the truth he had previously denied, as had happened to many Donatists who had thankfully become Catholics and now detested their diabolical separation.

“In dealing with heresy, Augustine thus laid great stress on what might be called the pedagogy of fear to effect a change of heart. He did not see coercion and free will as opposites in religious choice but claimed that fear plays a part
in spontaneous acts of the will and may serve a good end. In one of his most important statements on the subject, contained in a letter of 417 to Boniface, the Roman governor of Africa, he propounded a distinction between two kinds of persecution. ‘[T]here is an unjust persecution,’ he said, ‘which the wicked inflict on the Church of Christ, and ... a just persecution which the Church of Christ inflicts on the wicked.’ The Church persecutes from love, the Donatists from hatred; the Church in order to correct error, the Donatists to hurl men into error. While the Church strives to save the Donatists from perdition, the latter in their fury kill Catholics to feed their passion for cruelty. Augustine was convinced that the coercion of heretics was therefore a great mercy because it rescued them from lying demons so that they could be healed in the Catholic fold. He rejected the objection of those who said that the apostles had never called upon the kings of the earth to enforce religion, since in the apostles’ time there had been no Christian emperor to whom they could appeal. It was necessary and right, however, for kings to forbid and restrain with religious severity actions contrary to God’s commandments, and to serve God by sanctioning laws that commanded goodness and prohibited its opposite.

“While admitting that it was better to lead people to the worship of God by teaching than to force them through fear of suffering, Augustine nevertheless averred that the latter way could not be neglected. Experience proved, he claimed, that for many heretics it had been a blessing to be driven out by fear of bodily pain to undergo instruction in the truth and then follow up with actions what they had learned in words. Schismatics, he noted, protested that men have freedom to believe or not to believe, and that Christ never used force on anyone. To this objection he countered with his previous argument that Christ had first compelled Paul to cease his persecution of the Christian Church by striking him blind at his conversion and only then taught him. ‘It is a wonderful thing,’ he said, ‘how he [Paul] who came to the gospel under the compulsion of bodily suffering labored more in the gospel than all the others who were called by words alone.’ Once again he drew on the injunction compelle intrare in the Gospel of Luke to affirm that the Catholic Church was in accord with God when it compelled heretics and schismatics to come in. In other letters he denied that the ‘evil will’ should be left to its freedom, and cited not only this same parable and the example of Christ’s compulsion of Paul, but also God’s restraint of the Israelites from doing evil and compelling them to enter the land of promise (Exodus 15.22-27), as proof of the Church’s justice in using coercion.

“Although after his change of mind Augustine consistently approved the policy of subjecting heretics to coercion, he never desired that they should be killed. In writing to Donatists, he often stated that he and his brethren loved them and acted for their good, and that if they hated the Catholic Church, it was because ‘we do not allow you to go astray and be lost’. Donatists had been subject to previous imperial legislation against heresy, but between 405 and 410 the emperor Honorius decreed a number of heavy penalties against them that put them outside the protection of the law for their seditious
actions; he ordered their heresy to be put down in ‘blood and proscription’. Augustine frequently interceded with the Roman authorities to spare their lives. In 408 he wrote to the proconsul of Africa urging Christian clemency and praying that though heretics [should] be made to feel the effect of the laws against them, they should not be put to death, despite deserving the extreme punishment, in the hope that they might be converted. To another high official he pleaded in behalf of some Donatists tried for murder and other violent acts that they should be deprived of their freedom but not executed that they might have the chance to repent.

“Although repression weakened Donatism, it failed to eliminate this deeply rooted heresy, which survived until the later seventh century when the Islamic conquest of North Africa destroyed every form of Christianity in this region. In the course of his career, Augustine, who was not only an outstanding thinker but a man of keen and sensitive conscience, wrestled strenuously with the problem of heresy and the achievement of Catholic unity by the use of coercion... ‘Pride’, he once wrote, ‘is the mother of all heretics,’ and fear could break down this pride and thus act as an auxiliary in the process of conversion. Whether the heretic was really sincere in professing a change of mind under the threat of bodily pain was a question that could best be left to God. Augustine certainly did not recommend the death penalty for heretics but strove tirelessly to save their souls from eternal perdition. He supported their repression by the Roman imperial government in the hope of restoring them to the Catholic Church, and because, as he said in a letter to some Donatists, ‘nothing can cause more complete death to the soul than freedom to disseminate error’.”

But if freedom to disseminate error should be restricted, this did not mean that the truth could be known in any other mode than in freedom. For, as St. Maximus the Confessor said, “the mystery of salvation is for those who desire it, not for those who are being coerced”.

---

413 St. Maximus, P.G. 90.880.
29. THE CONSTANTINIAN REVOLUTION: (5) STATEHOOD, MONASTICISM AND CULTURE

A.N. Wilson writes: “Edmund Gibbon’s Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire caused dismay to eighteenth-century churchmen with its controversial and primary contention that European civilization was undermined, less by the advance of the barbarian hordes without, than by the growth of Christianity within, its borders. What was it about Christianity, according to this diagnosis, which was so corrosive of the civilized idea? It was, surely, that the fanatical early Christians, zealous for a holy death, and fervently credulous about the greater reality of the life beyond than life before it, made civilization itself seemed superfluous. What use are the skills of statesmanship, of civil planning, of architecture, of laws, if at any moment, as the early Church taught and believed, the very edifice of worldly existence was going to be wound up, if the Maker was to bring the pageant of human history to a close, taking to Himself His few chosen ones in robes of white to sing perpetual hymnody before His throne, and hurling the rest, the huge majority, into pits and lakes of everlasting fire and destruction?”

Of course, this is a parody of the true Christian teaching. If we take the very earliest writings of the New Testament, St. Paul’s epistles to the Thessalonians, we see that, while the early Christians certainly longed for the Second Coming of Christ, and thought it might be very soon, St. Paul warned against extreme apocalypticism: “Do not be shaken or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as thought the Day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means, for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself to be God” (II Thessalonians 2.2-4).

In other words, the Day of Christ is not just around the corner. Some important events have to take place first – specifically, the coming of the Antichrist.

Moreover, the Antichrist will not come before another very important event takes place – the fall of the Roman empire, or monarchical power in general. For this is how the Holy Fathers interpret the words: “He who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His Coming” (II Thessalonians 2.7-8).

Roman, or monarchical power is that which “restrains” the coming of the Antichrist. When that is “removed”, then the Antichrist will appear – and only then will Christ come in glory to judge the living and the dead.

---

“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.”\textsuperscript{415}

“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 \textit{Ad Scapulam} 2) the early Christians actually renewed and appropriated as their own the concept of \textit{Roma aeterna}. ‘While we pray to delay the end’ - it is Tertullian speaking (\textit{Apologeticum} 32.1) - ‘we are helping Rome to last forever’.\textsuperscript{416}

\textsuperscript{415} Tertullian, \textit{Apologeticum}, 32.1.
\textsuperscript{416} Sordi, \textit{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 (\textit{Ad Scapulam} 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 parcelled 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” (\textit{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, \textit{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 to 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. 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.”

It follows that the early Christians, far from believing that political power and the fabric of Roman civilization was superfluous, were highly motivated to preserve it in being. For when that fabric collapsed, the Antichrist would come... So, while it was true that the Christians placed no ultimate, permanent value on Roman civilization, they were by no means its enemies.

Fr. Georges Florovsky has described this antimony well. “The Early Christians,” he writes, “were often suspected and accused of civic indifference, and even of morbid ‘misanthropy’, odium generis humani, - which should probably be contrasted with the alleged ‘philanthropy’ of the Roman Empire. The charge was not without substance. In his famous reply to Celsus, Origen was ready to admit the charge. Yet, what else could Christians have done, he asked. In every city, he explained, ‘we have another system of allegiance’, allo systema tes patridos (Contra Celsum, VIII.75). Along with the

417 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).

418 St. Chrysostom, Homily 4 on II Thessalonians.
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.…”

So the Christians were “in” the world of Roman statehood, culture civilization, but not “of” it. The question is: how, if at all, did this attitude change when the Empire became Christian under Constantine?

In fundamentals, not at all. Thus it was precisely in the fourth century, the century of the Christianization of the Empire, that monasticism arose as an institution that defied worldly conventions, choosing the uncultivated desert over Roman city life. However, though supremely unworldly, the monks were not revolutionaries in a political sense. They remained loyal to the Roman Empire and its Orthodox Christian emperors. And holy monks such as St. Anthony the Great or St. Isaac of the Dalmatian monastery, or St. Sabbas the Sanctified, would leave their deserts in order to defend the faith or give counsel to the emperors when the Empire was in spiritual or material danger.

The basic principles of monasticism were not new, being simply the practice of the Gospel commandments in their most uncompromising form. From the beginning, during the apostolic period as during the pagan persecutions, there had been Christian men and women living essentially monastic lives. But as a large-scale, semi-institutionalized movement involving flight from the main inhabited centres into the desert, monasticism may be said to date from the fourth century, and in particular from the lives of the first well-known hermit, St. Anthony, and the first organizer of coenobia, St. Pachomius.

The major centre of fourth-century monasticism was Egypt, and this location in itself tells us much about the nature of the movement. First, Egypt was, with Babylon, the world-centre of pagan religions and demonic enchantment of all kinds. However, there was a tradition that when Christ as a child had entered Egypt all the idols of the nation had fallen down, and the monks saw themselves as following in Christ's footsteps. Therefore they deliberately set out for the desert and the graveyards where the demons were thought to dwell in the greatest numbers, and there they exorcised them by mighty feats of prayer and fasting.

Secondly, the climate and ecology of the Egyptian desert was extremely severe, and life was hard even for those who had no other purpose than to earn their living. But the monks drastically limited themselves even in those material consolations which were available. In this way they practised the Gospel commandments relating to poverty, chastity, obedience and self-denial in all things, translating them into the terse philosophy of the desert: "Give your blood, and receive the Spirit."

Thirdly, with a few exceptions (such as the Roman St. Arsenius), the Egyptian monks were of Coptic peasant stock, usually illiterate, with no part in that rich Greco-Roman civilization which the conversion of St. Constantine was opening up to Christian influence. And yet so striking were their spiritual attainments that well-educated Christians from the West, such as Saints John Cassian, Jerome and Melanie, as well as from the East, such as Saints Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom, came to them as to their teachers in Christian philosophy. In this way the Egyptian monks demonstrated both the possibilities of the royal priesthood of the laity (monasticism was essentially a lay movement), and reasserted a truth which was in danger of being lost as many wise and mighty men of the world entered the Church - the truth, namely, that lack of formal education is no barrier to the attainment of Christian wisdom, and that "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty,... that no flesh should glory in His presence" (I Corinthians 1.27-29).

Fourthly, these visitors from abroad took back with them the lessons they had learned in Egypt and applied them with astonishing success in their homelands, so that monasticism spread into the deserts of Palestine, Syria and Cappadocia, Gaul, Wales and Ireland. The Egyptian monks themselves rarely left their desert (although the names of seven of them are found in the Irish martyrologies), but the reports of their exploits (especially St. Athanasius' Life of Antony) fired the imaginations of Christians with the desire to imitate them. Thus long after Egyptian monasticism had succumbed to Monophysitism and Islam, its principles were still being practised far to the west and north. Moreover, by the second half of the millennium the spiritual wisdom of the Egyptian monks had been combined in an exceedingly fruitful union with the more secular wisdom of the Greco-Roman world, so that the English monks in Germany and Scandinavia, or the Greek monks in the Balkans and Russia, brought with them not only the
Faith but also the rudiments of education (in the case of Saints Cyril and Methodius' mission to the Slavs, even the alphabet). Thus monasticism became the major missionary and civilizing force throughout the rural areas of Europe and the Middle East, and even the urban households of the bishops were as often as not monastic communities.

Fifthly, the Egyptian monks took a leading part in the doctrinal disputes of the day, the most famous example being St. Anthony's expedition to Alexandria to support St. Athanasius against the Arians. This demonstrated the important truth that the Faith was the concern not only of bishops and kings, but also of the humblest layman. This was a truth that towards the end of the first millennium was beginning to be lost in the West, where the sacramental hierarchy of the clergy, led by the increasingly despotic papacy, was tending to replace completely the royal priesthood of the laity and the charismatic authority of the Spirit-bearimg monks...

* 

So how did the Church relate to “culture” in the narrower sense of the material trappings of civilization? For the triumph of Constantine entailed not only a change of regime, nor even a change of religion, but also, in consequence of the latter, a change of culture. This was the high culture of Byzantium, its art and music and architecture, whose imprint has not been erased even now, especially in Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

Now the Lord says nothing directly about culture. Indirectly, however, He makes it clear that high culture does not constitute part of “the one thing necessary” for salvation. For He was incarnate in one of the least cultured regions of the Roman empire, and deliberately chose uneducated fishermen to be His apostles. The Jews looked down on uncultured Galilee: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1.46). And yet it was from the fishermen of Galilee that true enlightenment came to the world...

The most educated of the apostles was St. Paul, who came from the Greek city of Tarsus and was trained in the law by great rabbinic teachers such as Gamaliel. And yet, while freely acknowledging his debt to Greek philosophy, he, too, says nothing directly about culture. Evidently, he felt that it was not essential for salvation, noting that not many highly cultured, educated or powerful people were being saved. “For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise,... that no flesh should glory in His presence” (I Corinthians 1.26-27, 29).

But of course, insofar as the roots of culture lie in religion, - the word “culture” comes from cultus, “religious worship”, - and insofar as the religion of the Greco-Roman world was pagan, and linked with such immoral activities as temple prostitution, the preachers of the Christian faith could not be simply indifferent to the culture around them. And as Fr. Georges
Florovsky writes, we find a definitely negative attitude towards the music, painting and especially the rhetorical art of their time in such early Christian writers as Tertullian and Origen. For “the whole of the culture of that time was built, defined and penetrated by a false faith. One has to recognize that some historical forms of culture are incompatible with the Christian attitude to life, and must be avoided or cast out.”\textsuperscript{420} In accordance with this attitude, Tertullian said: “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?”, and the martyrs destroyed idols and pagan temples because they were not just what we would call cultural monuments but witnessed to false religion. The modern attitude of valuing them for their aesthetic beauty or “cultural value” was unknown to them.

Not that it is impossible, or always wrong, to dissociate a work of art’s original religious meaning from its aesthetic value. Indeed, this is part of what was involved in the fusion of Christianity and Hellenism that began in the fourth century: the forms of ancient Hellenistic culture – its philosophical concepts, artistic conventions and architectural shapes – were dissociated from their original content and context in the worship of false gods and turned and transformed into the service of the true God. Thus ancient Egyptian portraiture was transformed into the iconography that we see today in St. Catherine’s monastery in Sinai, while the architecture of the Pantheon in Old Rome was transfigured out of all recognition into the cathedral of Hagia Sophia in New Rome. The resulting synthesis was the glorious civilization of Byzantium, the core or cradle civilization and culture of the whole of Christendom, East and West, for the first millennium of Christian history, and of the Orthodox East until the eighteenth century.

This creation of a Christian culture to replace the pagan culture of the pre-Christian Greco-Roman world, was not only not a matter of indifference or little importance to the Church, but a task of the greatest importance for her. For whether we understand “culture” in the narrow sense of “a position or orientation of individual people or human groups whereby we distinguish ‘civilized’ from ‘primitive’ society”, or in the broader sense of “a system of values”\textsuperscript{421}, all men living in society – and even monks living in the desert – live in a culture of some kind, and this culture inescapably influences their thoughts and feelings for better or for worse. Culture counts because it influences faith – as faith influences culture. So the formation of the culture of Christian Byzantium was not, as Fr. George Florovsky writes, “what historians of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century usually called ‘the Hellenization of Christianity’, but rather the conversion of Hellenism. And why should Hellenism not be converted? After all, the acceptance of Hellenism by Christians was not simply a servile perception of an undigested pagan heritage. It was the conversion of the Hellenistic mind and heart.

\textsuperscript{420} Florovsky, “Vera i Kul’tura” (Faith and Culture) in Vera i Kul’tura, St. Petersburg, 2002, p. 664.
\textsuperscript{421} Florovsky, op. cit., p. 652.
“In fact, this is what happened: Hellenism was cut through with the sword of the Christian Revelation and thereby completely polarized. We must call Origen and Augustine Hellenists. But it is completely obvious that this is another type of Hellenism than we find in Plotinus or Julian. Of all Julian’s directives the Christians hated most of all the one that forbade their preaching of the arts and sciences. This was in reality a belated attempt to exclude Christians from the building up of civilization, to separate ancient culture from Christian influence. In the eyes of the Cappadocian Fathers this was the main question. St. Gregory the Theologian lingered on it for a long time in his sermons against Julian. St. Basil the Great considered it necessary to write an address ‘to young people about how they could draw benefit from Hellenistic literature’. Two centuries later, Justinian excluded all non-Christians from scholarly and educational activity and closed the pagan schools. There was no hostility to ‘Hellenism’ in this measure. Nor was it an interruption of tradition. The traditions were preserved, and even with love, but they were being drawn into a process of Christian reinterpretation. This is the essence of Byzantine culture. It was the acceptance of the postulates of culture and their re-evaluation. The majestic church of the Holy Wisdom, the pre-eternal Word, the great church of the Constantinopolitan Sophia, remains forever a living symbol of this cultural achievement.”

There is no obvious correlation between culture and sanctity. Most of the early Christians and martyrs were uneducated slaves, and there was very little specifically Christian art before the fourth century. Nevertheless, it is clear that the great culture of Byzantium was necessary for the survival of Christianity down the ages. In this sense Christian culture was necessary in the same way that Christian statehood was: as a bulwark defending the Church from the outside. We see this most clearly in theology: the theological achievements of the Ecumenical Councils, and the refutation of the heresies that arose at that time, would have been unthinkable outside the sophisticated philosophical language and culture that the Greeks inherited from Plato and Aristotle. But nobody suggested that mastery of Byzantine art and philosophy was necessary to salvation. In a general way, we can see that a decline in piety is accompanied by a decline in culture. This is particularly clear in Western culture, which declines sharply from the Carolingian period in the late eighth century. However, this is by no means a universal rule: some of the greatest products of Byzantine culture were produced in what Sir Steven Runciman called “the Last Byzantine Renaissance” - the period from 1261 to 1453 that was in general (and in spite of the hesychast saints) a period of religious decline.

---

Constantine not only renewed the empire from within: he transformed the very ideology of empire, and the relationship of Rome to other kingdoms and empires.

The pagan Roman empire was founded on the familiar fallen passions of love of glory and love of power. Excuses were found for invading neighbouring territories; many innocent “barbarians” were killed, and their lands and property plundered. Nations that resisted Roman power, such as the Carthaginians and the Jews, were treated with vengeful cruelty. Julius Caesar’s extraordinarily bloody conquest of Gaul may serve as an example of how the Roman empire was typically expanded.

Constantine tried to change this bloody tradition. Although an experienced and highly successful soldier himself, who did not flinch from extreme measures when he considered them necessary, he glorified peace rather than war, Christ rather than himself or Rome, and while defending the boundaries of the empire, undertook no offensive campaigns beyond them. The one apparent exception to this rule only goes to prove that the imperial ideology really had changed.

The apparent exception was Persia, the age-old rival of Rome in the East, which had deeply humiliated Rome by defeating and capturing the Emperor Valerius in 260, and against which Constantine was preparing an expedition when he died in 337.

“Constantine’s abortive Persian conquest,” writes Leithart, “looks like another Roman adventure driven by sacrificial frenzy, vengeance and a desire to keep enemies in their subordinate place. Yet there are hints that between 306 and the 330s something had changed. Sometime before, Constantine had written a ‘tactful, allusive, and indirect’ letter in his own hand to Shapur. Addressing the Persian king as a ‘brother’, he summarized the ‘most holy religion’ that had given him ‘deeper acquaintance with the most holy God’. Finding common ground with nonsacrificial Persian Zoroastrian practice, Constantine emphasized that the ‘God I invoke with bended knees’ is horrified by ‘the blood of sacrifices’ and recoils from ‘their foul and detestable odors’. The sacrifice he craves is ‘purity of mind and an undefiled spirit’ that manifests itself in ‘works of moderation and gentleness’. ‘He loves the meek,’ Constantine continued, ‘and hates the turbulent spirit…. While the arrogant and haughty are utterly overthrown, he requites the humble and forgiving with deserved rewards.’
“The purpose of the letter was to advise Shapur about how to deal with the sizable Christian community in his own realm. Constantine was an eyewitness of ‘the end of those who lately harassed the worshippers of God by their impious edicts,’ and he warned Shapur not to follow their example. Everything is ‘best and safest’ when men follow God’s laws and recognize that God is at work through the church, endeavouring to ‘gather all men to himself’. He expressed his joy at hearing that Persia was full of Christians, and he closed the letter with a prayer that ‘you and they may enjoy abundant prosperity, and that your blessings and theirs may be in equal measure,’ so that ‘you will experience the mercy and favor of that God who is the Lord and Father of all.’

“Constantine’s letter has been called a ‘veiled warning’ and has been interpreted as a provocation, a threat and a sign of his belief that as Roman emperor he had responsibility for all Christians. Constantine’s Persian policies certainly backfired. He initiated his final campaign when a delegation from Armenia visited Constantinople in 336 to ask him for assistance against a Persian coup. Since the conversion of the Armenian king Trdat (Tiridates) in 314, Armenia had been officially Christian, more explicitly so than was the Roman Empire under Constantine. In the 330s, Persians under Shapur II had invaded, captured and blinded the Armenian King Tirhan, and placed Shapur’s brother Narseh on the Armenian throne. Constantine responded swiftly. He designated his nephew Hannibalianus as ‘king of kings’ and gave him authority over Armenia and Pontus. Like his letter, his preparations for war with Persia were intended, among other things, to defend a Christian people. When Constantine died before the campaign could be launched, Shapur, apparently suspicious that the Christians of Persia were allied with Rome, initiated a violent persecution. Persian Christians, in response, kept themselves aloof from the dominant orthodoxy of the West.

“Yet I cannot agree that the letter to Shapur was intended as a provocation. Constantine warned Shapur, but he warned him of divine judgement, not that he would personally take vengeance if Shapur were to attack Christians. In the closing section Constantine issued an altar call, inviting Shapur to protect Christians and to join him in worship of the high God, the God of the Christians. Hermann Dorries summarizes the message of the letter as an invitation to share in the blessing of Christianization: ‘what the true faith had done for the Roman Empire,’ Constantine urged, ‘it would do also for the Persian.’ It was an unprecedented diplomatic move – a Roman emperor who ‘attributed his success to heavenly assistance... invited his only formidable enemy to share in this aid.’ More broadly, the letter reveals how far Constantine had moved from tetrarchic political theology. For Diocletian ‘religion and nation meant the same thing,’ but for Constantine there was a potential unity, even between East and West, even between Persia and Rome, that transcended boundaries and national interests…”

This is an insightful and true remark, and if anything underestimates the revolutionary character of Constantine’s new imperial ideology. Pagan religion and politics was irredeemably particularist. The pagan gods protected particular men and cities or states against other men, cities and states that were protected by other gods. And if pagan Rome had a policy of including as many local gods as possible into its “pantheon” (which means “all gods”), this did not alter the fundamentally particularist nature of its religion. Christianity was difficult to absorb within this structure not only because the Christians refused to sacrifice to the pagan gods, but also because their God was of a totally different kind – universal, completely all-encompassing, and infinitely above everything that can be called “god”, “far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come” (Ephesians 1.21). Moreover, this God claimed dominion not only over Rome but also over all the kingdoms of men...

When Constantine came to power, being a sincere, determined and deeply thoughtful Christian, he sought to adapt the Roman political theology to its new God, making it truly universalist. Scornfully rejecting all divine honours for himself, he sought to subdue himself and all his subjects to the true King of kings. But this also transformed his relationship with other kings, such as Shapur of Persia. For Shapur, too, had been given his dominion by God, making him and Constantine no longer rivals, but “brothers”, as Constantine himself put it – if not in Christ, at any rate in kingship, as political rulers established by God. But this had the further consequence that extension of the empire by the former rapacious methods was no longer acceptable. Only if Shapur maltreated his Christian subjects or other Christians, such as the Armenians, could Constantine intervene to defend his brothers in Christ on the assumption that Shapur had now ceased to be his brother in kingship, having “disestablished” himself from God.

But where did this leave the Roman Empire? No longer unique, but just one kingdom among many?

Not quite. If all legitimate political authorities have been established as such by God, and there is no genuine authority that has not been thus established (Romans 13.1), this would appear to place all authorities essentially on the same level. But the Roman Empire remained unique in that Christ had been born in it and God had chosen the empire also to be the birthplace and seed-plot of His Church. This gave it a certain uniqueness, seniority and prestige in the eyes of all Christians, even those who lived in other polities and therefore owed obedience to other authorities, thereby making it in this sense the universal empire. But this did not mean that the empire was destined to become the universal ruler of all nations, as some later Byzantines tended to think; it meant that the Roman Empire would be, as long as it lasted, the “first among equals” among Christian states, and therefore the object of universal veneration by the Christians of all nations.
Another consequence of this theology was that the Roman Empire had a special obligation to spread the Gospel to other kingdoms and nations, to be missionary. And Constantine, as always, was fully alive to this consequence. As Leithart writes, he “had a deep sense of historical destiny, and as a result his foreign policy was guided in part by the desire to extend the church’s reach. He envisioned a universal empire united in confession of the Nicene Creed, an empire that would have a symbolic center in the Church on Golgotha in Jerusalem and that would stretch to India and Ethiopia and someday include even Persia. But Constantine did not necessarily regard annexation into the Roman empire as an essential element of that vision. He seems instead to have envisioned a Christian commonwealth. Perhaps the empire would have remained dominant, but in Constantine’s cosmopolitan mind it would not have been coextensive with ‘Christ’s dominion’.

“Though he probably did not impose Christianity on conquered Goths, his triumphs among the Goths assisted the spread of Christianity. After his victory in 332, Bishop Ulfila was consecrated and sent as a missionary in Gothic territory. Churches were also established in the ‘Mountain Arena’, the Arab territories that served as a buffer between the empire and Persia. Eusebius mentions Arab Christian communities, and there was an Arab bishop at the council of Nicaea. Further east in Iberia (Georgia) [where St. Nina evangelized] there were Christians, and to the south Ethiopia (Aksum) also became Christian under Ezana. As already noted, Armenia became officially Christian shortly after Constantine defeated Maxentius. By the time he died, Constantine had left behind a ‘universal Christian commonwealth embracing Armenians, Iberians, Arabs, and Aksumites’ that continued to take form under his Byzantine successors. This was not, it should be noted, an extension of Roman governance; it is rather that Roman imperial order had been reshaped, to some degree, by the demands of Christian mission...”

Although Constantine never received a visible anointing to the kingdom, the Church has always believed that he received the invisible anointing of the Holy Spirit: “Thou wast the image of a new David, receiving the horn of royal anointing over thy head; for with the oil of the Spirit hath the transcendent Word and Lord anointed thee, O glorious one. Wherefore, thou hast also received a royal sceptre, O all-wise one, asking great mercy for us.”

St. Constantine died at midday on Pentecost, 337 shortly after receiving Holy Baptism, and was buried in the church of the Holy Apostles amidst the sepulchres of the twelve apostles. For in his person the Church had indeed found an “equal to the apostles”; Rome and the whole of what the Romans called “the inhabited world” had been baptized through him, receiving true renewal of spirit in the Holy Spirit. In his reign the process of converting the world that began at Pentecost reached its first climax...

424 Leithart, op. cit., p. 288.
425 Menaion, May 21, Mattins for the feast of St. Constantine, sedalen.
Why did he leave his baptism so late? Was it because ruling the empire involved committing so much violence that he had to put off baptism until as late as possible? Possibly…

However, Constantine’s actions at the very end can be seen as a kind of final sermon and testament in symbolical language. Thus after his baptism he put off the imperial purple, never to put it on again – for the kingdoms of this world pass away, never to return. But then he put on the shining white baptismal robe, never to take it off again – for the Kingdom of God, which is not of this world, abides forever…

---

426 Florovsky writes that one of the reasons why he delayed his baptism “was precisely his dim feeling that it was inconvenient to be ‘Christian’ and ‘Caesar’ at the same time. Constantine’s personal conversion constituted no problem. But as Emperor he was committed. He had to carry the burden of his exalted position in the Empire. He was still a ‘Divine Caesar’. As Emperor, he was heavily involved in the traditions of the Empire, as much as he actually endeavoured to disentangle himself. The transfer of the Imperial residence to a new City, away from the memories of the old pagan Rome, was a spectacular symbol of this noble effort” (op. cit., p. 73).
31. THE FALL OF OLD ROME

St. Constantine’s transfer of his capital from Old Rome to the New Rome of Constantinople 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.”

Hoping in this way to make a fresh start for the Christian empire, St. Constantine implicitly admitted that the old capital was irredeemable. The symbolism of his act was clear: if the state, like the individual man, was to be redeemed and enjoy a long and spiritually fruitful life, it, too, had to make a complete break with the past, renounce the demonic sacrifices and pagan gods and philosophies that it had loved, and receive a new birth by water and the Spirit. (The fact that New Rome quickly filled up with the statues and monuments of paganism did not change the aim and the symbol.)

For Old Rome, in contrast to many of her individual citizens, had never been baptized. There was a pagan rottenness at the heart of the western empire that even its Christian head, the Emperor, was not able to cut out. And so its doom was sealed.

“As the Oxford historians Peter Heather and Bryan Ward-Perkins have argued, the final breakdown in the Western Roman Empire began in 406, when Germanic invaders poured across the Rhine into Gaul and then Italy. Rome itself was sacked by the Goths in 410. Co-opted by an enfeebled emperor, the Goths then fought the Vandals for control of Spain, but this merely shifted the problem south. Between 429 and 439, Genseric led the Vandals to victory after victory in North Africa, culminating in the fall of Carthage. Rome lost its southern Mediterranean bread-basket and, along with it, a huge source of tax revenue. Roman soldiers were just barely able to defeat Attila’s Huns as they swept west from the Balkans. By 452, the Western Roman Empire had lost all of Britain, most of Spain, the richest provinces of North Africa, and southwestern and southeastern Gaul. Not much was left besides Italy. Basiliscus, brother-in-law of [the Eastern] Emperor Leo I, tried and failed to recapture Carthage in 468. Byzantium lived on, but the Western Roman Empire was dead. By 476, Rome was the fiefdom of Odoacer, king of the Goths.

“What is most striking about this history,” writes Niall Ferguson, “is the speed of the Roman Empire’s collapse. In just five decades, the population of Rome itself fell by three-quarters. Archaeological evidence from the late fifth century – inferior housing, more primitive pottery, fewer coins, smaller cattle – shows that the benign influence of Rome diminished rapidly in the rest of western Europe. What Ward-Perkins calls ‘the end of civilization’ came within the span of a single generation.”

The fall of the city itself took seventy years, from Alaric’s invasion in 406 to the deposition of the last emperor, Romulus Augustulus, in 476, when a barbarian officer in the Roman army, Odovacar, killed the father and uncle of Romulus and sent Romulus himself into retirement. But then, instead of taking the imperial crown himself, he did a remarkable thing: he declared that “there was no need of a divided rule and that one, shared emperor was sufficient for both [Eastern and Western imperial] territories”. And then he sent the imperial cloak and diadem to the Eastern Emperor Zeno… The old empire of Old Rome was dead, long live the old empire of New Rome...

When Rome fell for the first time, Blessed Jerome wrote from Bethlehem: “At the news my speech failed me, and sobs choked the words that I was dictating. She has been captured – the City by whom the whole world had once been taken captive. She dies of hunger before dying by the sword – scarcely do any men survive to be led off into captivity. The fury of the starving fastens on to nourishment unspeakable; they tear each other to pieces, the mother not sparing even the infant at her own breast.”

Cannibalism had taken place also during the Fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD. It was a characteristic sign of God’s turning away from His people. Therefore a theological and historiosophical explanation that reflected the spiritual, no less than the political and social gravity of the situation was required…

Tertullian had said: “In the Emperor we reverence the judgement of God, Who has set him over the nations”. It followed that the fall of the last western emperor had to express the reversal of God’s judgement, His guilty verdict against the Romans, perhaps the whole oikoumene. Indeed, for patriotic Romans like Jerome, the fall of the City of Old Rome was equivalent to the fall of the whole of humanity: “The flame of the world has been extinguished and in the destruction of a single city, the whole human race has perished!”

---

The emphasis was somewhat different among the Holy Fathers in the eastern half of the empire. They emphasised heavenly patriotism, the patriotism of the City who “Builder and Maker is God” (Hebrews 10.10) over any earthly patriotism, even Roman patriotism; for “here we have no continuing city, but seek one to come” (Hebrews 13.14). Thus St. John Chrysostom wrote: “If you are a Christian, no earthly city is yours....

“Though we may gain possession of the whole world, we are withal but strangers and sojourners in it all.

“We are enrolled in heaven: our citizenship is there! Let us not, after the manner of little children, despise things that are great, and admire those which are little!

“But that City above is not of this kind; for it is impossible that he can be a partaker of it, who has not exhibited every virtue.”

The pagans were quick to come forward with their own explanation of the tragedy of the fall of Rome: Rome had fallen because she had deserted her gods. They pointed out that it was precisely since the ban on pagan practices imposed by Theodosius the Great in 380 that the barbarians had begun to overwhelm the empire. Augustine wrote the first five books of his City of God, written shortly after Alaric’s sack of Rome, to refute this notion, and to show that the disasters suffered by the empire were allowed by God to chasten and purify His people. For “God’s providence,” he wrote, “constantly uses war to correct and chasten the corrupt morals of mankind, as it also uses such afflictions to train men in a righteous and laudable way of life. It removes to a better state those whose life is approved, or keeps them in this world for further service.”

In the second part of the work, he describes the origin, history and final destiny of two Cities - the City of God, which is holy and destined for eternal bliss, and the City of Man, which is sinful and destined for the eternal fire. The Roman Empire, like the Church herself of which it is the ally, contains citizens of both Cities, both wheat and tares. When the state is ruled by a truly Christian ruler, like Theodosius, one can see “a faint shadowy resemblance between the Roman Empire and the Heavenly City”; which is why one must obey the law and render one’s patriotic and civic duty to the State.

436 St. Augustine, The City of God, I, 1.
However, this view was juxtaposed, in Augustine’s thought, with a more radical, apolitical and even anti-political view. Thus at one point he calls Rome a “second Babylon”.437 He points out that there was always a demonic element at the heart of the Roman state, which has not been eliminated even now. Sin, fratricide – Romulus’ murder of Remus – lie at the very root of the Roman state, just as sin and fratricide – Cain’s murder of Abel – lie at the beginning of the history of fallen humanity.

Therefore it should not surprise us that the Roman Empire should decline and fall. “If heaven and earth are to pass away, why is it surprising if at some time the state is going to come to an end? If what God has made will one day vanish, then surely what Romulus made will disappear much sooner.” “As for this mortal life, which ends after a few days’ course, what does it matter under whose rule a man lives, being so soon to die, provided that the rulers do not force him to impious and wicked acts?”438 For it is the Jerusalem above that is our real Fatherland, not Rome here below.

Augustine’s purpose was to wean men away from trust in political institutions, whether pagan or Christian, and to trust in God alone. Christian rulers were, of course, better than pagan ones. But politics in general was suspect. The empire had been built up through a multitude of wars, many of them quite unjust. And yet “without justice what are governments but bands of brigands?”439 It was not that Augustine was not a loyal Roman citizen, but the fall of Old Rome contributed to an atmosphere of introspection and self-criticism that sought explanations for the fall in sin, both at the individual and at the collective level. Thus Augustine distanced himself from a too close identification of Romanitas (Romanness) and Christianitas (Christianity). As F. van der Meer interprets his thought: “Compared with Christianity, what significance was there in things, admittedly good in themselves, like the order, unity and authority of the Roman Empire?”…440

However, “the order, unity and authority of the Roman Empire” was of value. Even the barbarian conquerors of Rome recognized that. Thus Ataulf, the son of the famous Alaric, said: “To begin with, I ardently desired to efface the very name of the Romans and to transform the Roman Empire into a Gothic Empire. Romania, as it is commonly called, would have become Gothia; Ataulf would have replaced Caesar Augustus. But long experience taught me that the unruly barbarism of the Goths was incompatible with the laws. Now, without laws there is no state. I therefore decided rather to aspire to the glory of restoring the fame of Rome in all its integrity, and of increasing it by means of the Gothic strength. I hope to go down to posterity as the restorer of Rome, since it is not possible that I should be its supplanter.”441

437 St. Augustine, The City of God, XVIII, 2.
438 St. Augustine, The City of God, V, 17.
439 St. Augustine, The City of God, IV, 4.
441 Ataulf, in Grant, op. cit., p. 127.
The Romans attached enormous importance to law. As Peter Heather writes, “Roman imperial state ideology had long since identified the existence of written law as the single factor which distinguished the Roman world as a higher order of divinely inspired human society, far superior to that of any known or conceivable neighbour.”

Thus in the second preface to his Judicial Code the Emperor Justinian wrote: “The maintenance of the integrity of the government depends upon two things, namely, the force of arms and the observance of the laws: and, for this reason, the fortunate race of the Romans obtained power and precedence over all other nations in former times, and will do so forever, if God should be propitious; since each of these has ever required the aid of the other, for, as military affairs are rendered secure by the laws, so also are the laws preserved by force of arms.”

The Goths (not only Ataulf, but also the Ostrogothic King Theoderic later in the century) bought into this vision, to the extent of seeing themselves as restorers, rather than supplacers, of Rome and the upholders of her laws. Even the Huns, who were still more barbaric than the Goths, respected the greatness of Rome. Thus Attila was turned back from sacking Rome in 452 by the eloquent embassy of Pope Leo I and a vision of Saints Peter and Paul, who appeared in a vision with St. Leo and threatened the Hun with death.

Augustine believed Rome had not been destroyed, but chastized. By this tribulation God was purifying the Roman nation, as He had purified Israel in Old Testament times. Rome would emerge from this period of affliction cleansed and better able to carry out her civilising mission in the world… But the catastrophe of 410 did not produce the regeneration of Rome that Augustine had hoped for. If it was still true at the beginning of the century that Rome was being chastized, not destroyed, by the end it had to be admitted that the disease was more serious and chronic, and the treatment more radical, than Augustine had recognised…

For the sad fact was that Old Rome was still not profiting from the opportunity presented by the conversion of St. Constantine to regenerate herself. She remained throughout the fifth century in a situation of spiritual and political crisis not dissimilar to that in the time of Diocletian. As Christopher Dawson writes: “It was literally Rome that killed Rome. The great cosmopolitan city of gold and marble, the successor of Alexandria and Antioch, had nothing in common with the old capital and rural Latin state. It served no social function, it was an end in itself, and its population drawn from every nation under heaven existed mainly to draw their Government doles, and to attend the free spectacles with which the Government provided them. It was a vast useless burden on the back of the empire which broke at last under the increasing strain.”

---

442 Heather, op. cit., p. 118.
444 Dawson, Progress and Decay.
The real rulers of the later western empire when the emperor was campaigning against the barbarians, were the senators. Snobbish and immensely rich, they had much to lose from the empire’s fall. However, as a visitor to Rome remarked, they did not want to serve the State, “preferring to enjoy their property at leisure”.

“In spite of frequent lip-service to the romantic concept of Eternal Rome,” writes Grant, “many noblemen were not prepared to lift a finger to save it... They also undermined the state in a very active fashion. For of all the obstacles to efficient and honest administration, they were the worst. They forcibly ejected collectors of taxes, harboured deserters and brigands, and repeatedly took the law into their own hands... They often remained hostile to the Emperor, and estranged from his advisers. For a long time many were pagans while their ruler was Christian.”

The free poor of Rome did not come far behind the senators in corruption. Although the Christian Emperor Honorius had supposedly abolished the circuses in 404, Grant writes that “a hundred and seventy-five days of the year were given up to public shows, as opposed to a mere hundred and thirty-five two centuries earlier; moreover the fabric of the Colosseum was restored as late as 438. It is also true that in the mid-fourth century 300,000 Romans held bread tickets which entitled them to draw free rations from the government; and even a century later, when the population of the city had greatly diminished, there were still 120,000 recipients of these free supplies. Certainly the population of Rome was largely parasitic. However, the city proletariat played little active part in guiding the course of events which brought the later Roman Empire to a halt.

“It was, on the other hand, the ‘free’ poor of the rural countryside upon whom the government, struggling to raise money for the army, imposed the full rigours and terrors of taxation. Although technically still distinguishable from slaves, they were no better off and perhaps worse off, since they often found themselves driven into total destitution. Between these rustic poor and the government, the relationship was that of oppressed and oppressor, of foe and foe.

“This is perhaps the greatest of all the disunities that afflicted the Western Empire. The state and the unprivileged bulk of its rural subjects were set against each other in a destructive and suicidal disharmony, which played a very large and direct part in the downfall that followed. It was because of this rift that the taxes that were needed to pay the army could not be raised. And because they could not be raised, the Empire failed to find defenders, and collapsed.”

---

445 Grant, op. cit., p. 74.
446 Grant, op. cit., pp. 75, 76, 78.
447 Grant, op. cit., p. 60. Another reason that enough taxes could not be raised was that more and more barbarian groups occupied more and more of the taxable agricultural land.
But there was a still greater disunity... Professor Mary Beard has argued that the main cause of the rise of Rome to mastery over the ancient world was its ability to co-opt the conquered peoples as fellow citizens and then send them out to fight for an empire in which they now had a big stake. In other words, it was “boots on the ground” that won Rome her empire; she was simply able to put more men in the field than any of her rivals.448

If we accept this thesis, then we can put forward an analogous thesis for the fall of the empire – namely, that Rome fell when she began to fail to co-opt her conquered peoples. One of the greatest and most enduring legacies of Roman civilization was the principle – enshrined in law in 222 - that every citizen is equal before the law, whatever his nationality or faith. This was no empty principle, as we see as early as the career of St. Paul, who, though a member of the despised race of the Jews, was able to win a trial in Rome because he was a Roman citizen. But by the fifth century this principle was no longer being applied; universalism had given way to a new kind of tribalism. And this in spite of the fact that the official religion of Rome was now Christianity, the most universalist of faiths.

It was not the Emperors that were to blame: although there were no really distinguished Emperors after Theodosius I, they remained Orthodox. The burdens they imposed on the people were not imposed willingly, but because of the desperate situation of the empire. They failed because Roman society was divided both against itself and against her non-Roman subjects and foederati - and a divided house cannot stand...

In the past Rome had not been too proud to learn from, and unite with, the nations whom she conquered. The classic example was the Classical Greeks who conquered Rome culturally while submitting to her politically. Nor, centuries later, had she despised the humble fishermen who preached a Jewish God Whom they themselves had crucified. The success of the apostles even among the emperor’s own family was witnessed by St. Paul, who declared: “My bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace [of the emperor]” (Philippians 1.13), and came to fruition with the conversion of St. Constantine. Even when the last pagan Roman emperor, Julian the apostate, tried to reverse the Constantinian revolution, the momentum proved unstoppable. Like all the previous persecutors of the Christians, he perished in agony, crying, “You have triumphed, Galilean!” And when the last Emperor to unite East and West, Theodosius the Great, bowed in penitence before a Christian bishop, Ambrose of Milan, it seemed as if Ambrose’s dream of a Rome purged of its pagan vices and uniting its traditional virtues to the Cross of Christ – a Rome truly invicta and aeterna because united to the invincible and eternal God - had been realized.

For, as St. Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, said in the next century, addressing Rome: “[The Apostles] promoted thee to such glory, that being made a holy nation, a chosen people, a priestly and royal state, and the head of the world through the blessed Peter's holy See thou didst attain a wider sway by the worship of God than by earthly government. For although thou wast increased by many victories, and didst extend thy rule on land and sea, yet what thy toils in war subdued is less than what the peace of Christ has conquered... That state, in ignorance of the Author of its aggrandisement, though it ruled almost all nations, was enthralled by the errors of them all, and seemed to itself to have fostered religion greatly, because it rejected no falsehood [an excellent definition of ecumenism]. And hence its emancipation through Christ was the more wondrous in that it had been so fast bound by Satan.”

Of course, there is a big difference between conquering a nation and then magnanimously giving the conquered people certain privileges, on the one hand, and being invaded by a nation and having to suffer various atrocities and indignities at their hands, on the other. Nevertheless, even among the pagans there were those who understood that magnanimity pays – even if you are now the invaded people. Thus the senator and philosopher Themistius, writing in about 370, said that “it is the task of kings – those who have a right to that title – rather than rooting out completely this surfeit of human temperament whenever they restrain the insurgent barbarians, to safeguard and protect them as an integral part of the empire. For this is how things are: he who harries the barbarians to no good purpose sets himself up as king of the Romans alone, while he who shows compassion in his triumph knows himself to be king of all men, especially over those whom he protected and watched over when he had the chance to destroy them utterly.”

However, after the first sack of Rome, the gulf between the Romans and the barbarians was becoming too great. Not that the barbarians, who settled in the empire through necessity to escape the hordes that pressed on them from the east, were always resolved to destroy it. On the contrary, as we have seen, they came to admire and emulate it. But the Romans themselves were not interested in converting or integrating them. Empire had gone to their heads; they despised the German hordes. Thus the Christian poet Prudentius, who had once declared that the peoples of the empire were “equals and bound by a single name”, now despised the barbarians:

\[
\text{As beasts from men, as dumb from those who speak,} \\
\text{As from the good who God’s commandments seek,} \\
\text{Differ the foolish heathen, so Rome stands} \\
\text{Alone in pride above barbarian lands.}
\]

449 St. Leo, Sermon LXXXII, on the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul.
450 Themistius, Oration 10; in M.J. Cohen and John Major, History in Quotations, London: Cassel, 2004, p. 113
451 Prudentius, in Grant, op. cit., p. 132.
In the last analysis it was this pride, more than any purely political or economic factors, that destroyed Old Rome. Rome ceased to be the universal ruler when she abandoned her own tradition of universalism, transmuted now into Christian universalism. By refusing to come to terms with Alaric because he was a Goth (albeit a Christian Goth), although he was not seeking to destroy Rome but only find a place for his people within her empire, the Romans provoked the first sack of Rome in 410, which weakened the State and made later, still more catastrophic sacks inevitable.

Not all Romans were so proud, of course: churchmen such as the Italian St. Paulinus, Bishop of Nola, the Spanish priest Orosius and the Gallic priest Salvian of Marseilles, were hopeful that a new Romano-Germanic order could be constructed. After all, the fall of Rome could be seen, not just as God’s wrath against the Romans, but also His mercy towards the barbarians, by creating an unprecedented opportunity to bring them to the Christian Faith. For as Orosius, a priest from Braga who fled to Hippo from the Vandals, wrote: “It would seem that the mercy of God ought to be praised and glorified in that so many [barbarian] nations are receiving, even at the cost of our own weakening, a knowledge of the truth which they never could have had but for this opportunity.” Moreover, they had the example of the Gothic Martyrs Sabbas (+372) and Nicetas (+378), and the very early translation of the Bible into the Gothic language, to show that a real conversion of the barbarians was possible.

And so, while the Western Empire died, Christian Romanitas itself did not die. Although the Antichrist took its place temporarily in the sense that pagan and heretical rulers took the place of Orthodox ones, under the rubble of the old empire new kingdoms were arising that were to restore Orthodoxy and reincarnate the spirit of Christian Rome, uniting both Romans and barbarians in the One, Holy and Catholic Church. As Peter Heather writes, “new rulers at the head of politically reasonably coherent bodies of military manpower, which had within living memory originated from beyond the imperial frontier, were now masters of the bulk of the old Roman west. Alongside Odovacar, Anglo-Saxon kings controlled most of central and southern Britain, their Frankish counterparts ran northern and eastern Gaul, Visigothic monarchs controlled south-western Gaul and Spain, Burgundian dynasts the Rhone valley, and the richest lands of Roman North Africa were in the hands of the Vandalic Hasding dynasty. Groups from the old north-central zone of Europe as it had stood at the birth of Christ thus generated a huge revolution on Roman soil, replacing the old monolithic empire with a series of successor states.”

452 Orosius, Seven Books of History against the Pagans, VII, 41.
453 Unfortunately, most of the Goths were converted to Arianism rather than Orthodox Christianity, in spite of the intense efforts of St. John Chrysostom (+407) to draw them to the truth faith... See J.W.C. Wand, A History of the Early Church to A.D.500, London: Methuen, 1982, pp. 181-184.
454 Heather, op. cit., p. xvii.
Moreover, the memory of Old Rome and her achievement did not die; it was to remain profoundly influential for centuries to come. And there continued to be great native Romans, such as St. Gregory the Great, who remained passionately attached to bringing the glorious traditions of Rome — both Old and New — to the unenlightened barbarians. Even the twentieth-century atheist philosopher Bertrand Russell concluded: “The problem of a durable and satisfactory social order can only be solved by combining the solidity of the Roman Empire with the idealism of St. Augustine’s City of God…”455

---

When Justinian the Great ascended the throne in 527, he set about trying to reunite the Christian world. For his great dream, as Protopresbyter James Thornton writes, “was to restore the Empire’s lost Western provinces. Previous rulers had sacrificed these territories, when they became threatened by the onslaughts of barbarian tribes, for the sake of the defense of the far more important and far wealthier East. But Saint Justinian’s thoughts hearkened back to the time of Saint Constantine I and Theodosius I, when the Empire stretched from the British Isles to the Euphrates... That Roman lands should have fallen into the hands of heretics and barbarians was, to the Saint’s mind, an affront to God’s will. It is also true, as the historian Charles Diehl (1859-1944) writes, that in principle Byzantine Emperors never admitted to any loss of territory. It is true that lands were lost to various barbarian incursions; but, to the Byzantine way of thinking, these lands were simply being temporarily administered by another local ruler on behalf of the Emperor. It was Constantinople’s right to reassert outright control when it served the sovereign’s pleasure.”

Now large parts of the Christian world had seceded from the Empire for religious as well as political or military reasons. Thus Old Rome was in schism from Constantinople because of the Monophysitism of the Emperor Anastasius; while most of the Semitic and Coptic parts of the Eastern Empire had fallen into Monophysitism or Nestorianism. And so Justinian pursued his aim in two ways: in the West, through war and a mixture of concessions and pressure on the papacy, and in the East, by intensive theological negotiations with the heretics (led by himself).

In relation to Old Rome he was largely successful: in relation to the Monophysites in the East - less so. Nevertheless, the union, however fleeting, of the five ancient patriarchates of Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem in one Church under one right-believing Emperor, was a great achievement. And there could be little doubt that the single person most instrumental in achieving this union was the emperor himself: if the five patriarchates represented the five senses of the Body of Christ on earth, then the head in which they all adhered on earth was the emperor.

This unity was not achieved without some pressure, especially on the Roman patriarchate. Thus when the Orthodox Pope Agapetus arrived in Constantinople, Justinian said to him: “I shall either force you to agree with us, or else I shall send you into exile.” Whereupon the Pope replied: “I wished to come to the most Christian of all emperors, Justinian, and I have found now a Diocletian; however, I fear not your threats.”

---


However, writes Fr. John Meyendorff, “without denying the dangers and the abuses of imperial power, which occurred in particular instances, the system as such, which been created by Theodosius I and Justinian, did not deprive the Church of its ability to define dogma through conciliarity. But conciliarity presupposed the existence of a mechanism, making consensus possible and effective. Local churches needed to be grouped into provinces and patriarchates, and patriarchates were to act together to reach an agreement valid for all. The empire provided the universal Church with such a mechanism…” Again, Alexander Dvorkin writes: “Even if abuses of power by this or that emperor were accepted by some weak-willed patriarch, sooner or later they were nevertheless rejected by the people of God and the church authorities.”

Thus, as in Constantine’s time, the emperor acted as the focus of unity of quarrelling Christians. The importance of this function was recognized by all – even by the heretics. In consequence, as L.A. Tikhomirov points out, even when a Byzantine emperor tried to impose heresy on the Church, “this was a struggle that did not besmirch the Church and State power as institutions. In this struggle he acted as a member of the Church, in the name of Church truth, albeit mistakenly understood. This battle was not about the relationship between the Church and the State and did not lead to its interruption, nor to the seeking of any other kind of principles of mutual relationship. As regards the direct conflicts between Church and State power, they arose only for particular reasons, only between given persons, and also did not relate to the principle of the mutual relationship itself.”

As if to symbolize the unity he had achieved, Justinian built Hagia Sophia, the greatest church in Christendom and without a peer to this day. The other, no less enduring expression of this unity was Justinian’s codification of Roman law, which united the old and new in one coherent body.

These laws included the famous Sixth Novella (535), which contained the most famous formulation of the principle of the symphony of powers: "The greatest gifts given by God to men by His supreme kindness are the priesthood and the empire, of which the first serves the things of God and the second rules the things of men and assumes the burden of care for them. Both proceed from one source and adorn the life of man. Nothing therefore will be so greatly desired by the emperors than the honour of the priests, since they always pray to God about both these very things. For if the first is without reproach and adorned with faithfulness to God, and the other adorns the state

---

459 Dvorkin, Ocherki po Istorii Vseenskoj Pravoslavnoj Tserkvi (Sketches on the History of the Universal Orthodox Church), Nizhni-Novgorod, 2006, p. 178.
460 L.A. Tikhomirov, Monarkhiceskaia Gosudarstvennost’ (Monarchical Statehood), St. Petersburg, 1992, p. 162.
entrusted to it rightly and competently, a good symphony will exist, which will offer everything that is useful for the human race. We therefore have the greatest care concerning the true dogmas of God and concerning the honour of the priests..., because through this the greatest good things will be given by God – both those things that we already have will be made firm and those things which we do not have yet we shall acquire. Everything will go well if the principle of the matter is right and pleasing to God. We believe that this will come to pass if the holy canons are observed, which have been handed down to us by the apostles, those inspectors and ministers of God worthy of praise and veneration, and which have been preserved and explained."

Several points in Justinian’s Sixth Novella need to be emphasized. First, both the priesthood and the empire “proceed from the same source”, that is, God. This has the very important consequence that the normal and natural relationship between the two powers is one of harmony, not rivalry and division. If some of the early Fathers, in both East and West, tended to emphasize the separation and distinctness of the powers rather than their unity from and under God, this was a natural result of the friction between the Church and the pagan and heretical emperors in the early centuries. However, now that unity in Orthodoxy had been achieved the emphasis had to return to the common source and common end of the two institutions. The unity of the Christian world under the Christian emperor had as its foundation-stone this “symphony” between the emperor and the patriarch, this symphony being grounded in their common origin in God. The unity of the two powers is emphasized in the Seventh Novella (2, 1), where it was admitted that the goods of the Church, though in principle inalienable, could be the object of transactions with the emperor, “for the difference between the priesthood (ιερωμονη) and the empire (βασιλεια) is small, as it is between the sacred goods and the goods that are common to the community.”462

Secondly, however, insofar as the symphony of powers existed, not only between two men, but between two institutions, the priesthood and the empire, it went beyond the relationship between emperor and patriarch. As Bishop Dionysius (Alferov) writes: “Symphonicity in Church administration only began at the level of the Emperor and Patriarch, and continued at the level of the bishop and eparch (who also received the blessing of the Church for his service) and was completed at the level of the parish priest and its founder. With such a deep ‘enchurchment’ from all sides of the life of the Orthodox Empire, and the symphonicity of all levels of the Church-State pyramid, the violations of symphony at the highest level were, while annoying, not especially dangerous. The most important thing still remained the service of ‘him who restrains’, which was carried out by the Orthodox Emperor in symphony with the whole Church, and not only personally with the Patriarch. The decisive factor was the personal self-consciousness of the Emperor and the activity based on that. Thus Justinian conceived of himself

completely as a Christian sovereign, and strove throughout the whole of his life to make the whole world Christian. His symphony with the Patriarch was desirable as a useful means towards that end, but it was not an end-in-itself. During Justinian’s time five Patriarchates entered into the Empire, including the Roman, and the Emperor did not establish ‘symphonic’ relations with all of them personally (as, for example, with Pope Vigilius, who did not want to accept the decisions of the 5th Ecumenical Council). But symphony with the whole Church did exist, and a proof of this is provided by the 5th Ecumenical Council, which was convened through the efforts of Justinian and accepted the dogmatic definitions against the heresies that he presented; and by the multitude of saints who shone forth during his reign and who related completely ‘symphonically’ to him (for example, St. Sabbas the Sanctified); and by the general flourishing of Christian culture.”

Thirdly, Justinian had in mind not any kind of harmony, but only a true symphony that comes from God. As I.N. Andrushkevich points out, the word "symphony" [consonantia] here denotes much more than simple agreement or concord. Church and State can agree in an evil way, for evil ends. True symphony is possible only where both the Church “is without reproach and adorned with faithfulness to God” and the State is ruled “rightly and competently” - that is, in accordance with the commandments of God. Where these conditions are not met, what we have, as A.V. Kartashev, the minister of religion under the Russian Provisional Government, pointed out, “is no longer symphony, but cacophony”. Or, preserving the Latin root of the words, we should call it the dissonance of powers...

Justinian himself, in his preface to the Novella, pointed out that, although he was an Autocrat, he could not exercise dominion over the priesthood; he was obliged to allow the priests to follow their own law, the Gospel and the Holy Canons. Thus he qualified the absolutist principle of Roman power, namely, that whatever is pleasing to the emperor has the force of law with the words: unless it contradicts the holy canons.

Again, in his Novella 131 he decreed: “The Church canons have the same force in the State as the State laws: what is permitted or forbidden by the former is permitted or forbidden by the latter. Therefore crimes against the former cannot be tolerated in the State according to State legislation.” These Canons include those that forbid resort to the secular power in Church matters: Canon 12, Fourth Ecumenical Council; Canons 11 and 12 of Antioch; and (later) Canon 3 of the Seventh Ecumenical Council. Nevertheless, it needs to be pointed out that, as we have seen, Justinian did not always observe this restriction on his own power...

---

465 Kartashev, Vossozdanie Soyatoj Rusi (The Recreation of Holy Russia), Moscow, 1991, p. 83.
“As regards the judicial branch,” writes Fr. Alexis Nikolin, “coordinated action presupposed not simply mutual complementation of the spheres of administration of the ecclesiastical and secular courts, but, which is especially important, the introduction into the activity of the latter of the moral-educational content inherent in Christianity.

“In a single service to the work of God both the Church and the State constitute as it were one whole, one organism – ‘unconfused’, but also ‘undivided’. In this lay the fundamental difference between Orthodox ‘symphony’ and Latin ‘papocaesarism’ and Protestant ‘caesaropapism’.”

Of course, the principle that the Church canons should automatically be considered as State laws was not always carried out in practice, even in Justinian’s reign; and in some spheres, as Nikolin points out, “in becoming [State] law, the [Church] canon lost its isolation, and the all-powerful Emperor, in commenting on the canon that had become law, was able thereby to raise himself above the canon. The Christian Emperor received the ability to reveal the content of the canon in his own way (in the interests of the State). Justinian’s rule provides several confirmations of this. The rules for the election, conduct and inter-relations of bishops, clergy and monks, for the punishment of clergy, and for Church property were subjected to his reglamentation. Bishops received broad powers in State affairs (more exactly, numerous State duties were imputed to them)”.

For example, in episcopal elections there was a contradiction between Justinian’s laws, which included the leading laymen of the locality in the electoral body – an enactment that gave an avenue for imperial influence on the elections through these laymen - and the custom of the Church, according to which only bishops took part in the election. In practice, the Church’s laws prevailed in this sphere, but Justinian’s laws remained in force. The recruitment of bishops to undertake secular duties was contrary to Apostolic Canon 81 insofar as it led to a secularization of the Episcopal calling. In general, however, this did not take place, and the enormous benefits of the symphony of powers continued to be felt throughout Byzantine history.

As Nikolin writes, “Justinian’s rule was a rule in which the mutual relations of Church and State were inbuilt, and which later lasted in Byzantium right up to the days of her fall, and which were borrowed in the 10th century by Rus’. In the first place this related to the principle: ‘Ecclesiastical canons are State laws’. Moreover, the Christian direction of

---

466 Nikolin, Tserkov’ i Gosudarstvo (Church and State), Moscow, 1997, p. 17.
467 Nikolin, op. cit., p. 32.
468 According to later Byzantine practice, and the practice in many Orthodox kingdoms, there was one layman who could take part in the election of bishops – the emperor or king.
Justinian’s reforms told on the content of the majority of juridical norms. This was most vividly revealed in the resolutions of questions concerning the regulation of individual spheres of Church life. Church communities were now provided with the rights of a juridical person. In property questions they were given various privileges...

“A particular feature of Justinian’s reforms was that as a result of them State power was transformed into a defender of the faith. This was most clearly revealed in the establishment of restrictions on the juridical rights of citizens of the empire linked with their confession of faith:

- Pagans and Jews were deprived of the right to occupy posts in state or societal service, and were not able to possess Christian slaves.
- Apostates, that is, people going over from Christianity to paganism or Judaism were deprived of the right to compose wills and inherit, and likewise were not able to be witnesses at trials;
- Heretics were not able to occupy posts in state or societal service; they were deprived of the right of inheritance; they could make bequests...only to Orthodox. There were even stricter measures adopted in relation to certain sects.”

Bishop Dionysius (Alferov) writes: “After the holy Emperor Justinian any Christian monarch must confess, and reverently and unhypocritically believe that ‘Christian piety is the foundation of the strength of the empire’. For greater clarity let us indicate an example. The Emperor Justinian himself, while paying great attention to theology, Divine services and the building of churches, completely neglected the army and the navy, which under him came to a state of decline. But for his unfeigned piety and faith the Lord protected the empire from invasions and subjected to Justinian a part of the barbarians. After him the iconoclast emperors Leo the Isaurian and Constantine Copronymus were outstanding military commanders who reorganized the army and repelled opponents (the Arabs and Bulgars) far from the empire. But the heresy they introduced and their general impiety shook the foundations of Byzantium from within and brought it to the verge of extinction. Therefore amongst the qualities of an exemplary ruler his faith and piety occupy the first place. For the sake of these the Lord protects his kingdom from many woes. His practical capabilities in raising national life are already in the second place.”

470 Nikolin, op. cit., pp. 32-33, 34.
33. THE POSITION OF THE ROMAN PAPACY

The question facing the Old Rome of the West after the collapse of the Western empire was: to what extent was she able, and willing, to integrate herself into the New Rome of the East? Odovacar had appeared to want that. But his Ostrogothic kingdom remained independent, and had to be subdued by force during the reign of Justinian in the next century. Was the destruction of the ancient institutions too thorough, and the dominance of the Germanic kings too great, to permit Old Rome to continue in a real, and not merely nominal union with New Rome? Or, even if the answer to that question was: no, would the jealousy of the old capital towards her younger supplanter hinder her, as the jealousy of the Jews towards the Christians had prevented their integration into the New Testament Church?

In order to answer these questions, let us return to the era of St. Leo the Great, Pope of Rome (440-461), who, as we have seen, was completely “eastern” in his respect for the East Roman Emperor. Following the teaching of St. Ambrose of Milan, that there is “one God, one empire, one emperor”⁴⁷², he was both loyal to the Emperor and encouraged him to take a major part in Church affairs. While the prerogatives of the Church of Old Rome were jealously guarded, there was no jealousy in relation to the Emperor that ruled from New Rome, no attempt to exalt the weak western emperors in his place. Later Popes such as Gregory the Great (like Leo, the scion of an Old Roman aristocratic family) continued this tradition. They maintained close relations with the Empire of New Rome, and understood Church-State relations in essentially the same, “symphonic”, almost symbiotic way as in the East, with the Emperor being expected to play an important part in Church affairs, and the Pope – in political affairs. In fact, until at least the eighth century, the Popes were the most consistent upholders of Romanitas, the politico-ecclesiastical unity of Orthodox Christendom, in both East and West...

However, towards the end of the fifth century, and after the fall of the last western emperor, we see the beginnings of a characteristically “western” understanding of Church-State relations that placed particular emphasis on the independence of the Church from the State, and was reflected in a rejection of the comparison, common in the East, between the Emperor and Melchizedek. This comparison might be valid in some respects, said the Popes, but not if it meant that a mortal man could combine the roles of king and priest in the manner of Melchizedek. Thus “before the coming of Christ,” wrote Pope Gelasius (492-496), “there existed people... who were, according to what sacred history tells us, at the same time both kings and priests, such as Melchizedek. This example was followed in his domain by the devil, who always, in a tyrannical spirit, claims for his own that which is fitting for divine worship, to the extent that the pagan emperors were also called

pontiffs. But when there came He Who was in truth both King and Priest, from that time the emperor ceased to give himself the name of pontiff and the pontiff to lay claim to the royal pomp. For, although we say that the members of Christ, the true King and Priest, have, by reason of their participation in the glorious nature, received both the one and the other dignity through the sacred generosity [of Christ], so that they are at the same time ‘a royal and a priestly race’, nevertheless Christ, remembering the weakness of men,... has divided the spheres of the two powers by means of a distinction of duties and callings,... desiring that His own [children] should be guarded by grace-filled humility and should not once again become victims of human pride. So that the Christian emperors need the pontiffs for eternal life and the pontiffs conform to the imperial laws as regards the course of temporal things. Thus spiritual activities have been separated from carnal activities.... He who is entrusted with secular matters should not appear to preside over divine things, so that the modesty of the two orders should be respected....”473

And so, as he wrote to the Emperor Anastasius, “there are two powers which for the most part control this world, the sacred authority of priests and the might of kings. Of these two the office of the priests is the greater inasmuch as they must give account even for kings to the Lord at the Divine Judgement. You know that although by your rank you stand at the head of the human race, you nevertheless bend your will before the leaders of Divine affairs, you turn to them in matters relating to your salvation, and you receive the heavenly sacraments from them. You know, consequently, that in matters of the faith you must submit to their lawful decisions and must not lord it over them - not submit them to your will, but be yourself guided by their judgements.” But “in matters touching public order, the Church hierarchs know that the emperor’s power has been sent down on you from above, and are themselves obedient to your laws, for they fear to be shown as opponents of your will in worldly affairs.”474

However, as Dagron points out, this was very much a western perspective: the easterners continued to attach a quasi-priestly character to the figure of the emperor - but without the sacramental functions of the priesthood. The difference in perspective is explained partly by the fact that in the fifth century Rome had little support from Byzantium in her struggle with the barbarians, and the popes were often forced to fill the political vacuum themselves, as when Pope Leo the Great went to Attila and succeeded in turning him away from Rome.475 The fall of Old Rome had created a vacuum

473 Gelasius, Tractatus IV; translated from Dagron, op. cit., pp. 190-191.
475 This was achieved through the miraculous intervention of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul. After St. Leo had obtained all his requests from Attila, the Hun’s followers asked him why he had surrendered to “a single, unarmed Roman”. “Apparently, you could not see the two men from heaven, one standing to the right of the Pope, the other to the left. They held bared swords and threatened to kill me if I disobeyed God’s prelate,” replied Attila (in St.
in political authority which the Eastern Emperors before Justinian were unable to fill and which the Germanic Arian kings only partially filled. Into this vacuum stepped the Popes, as a result of which, when the Popes argued for the independence of the Church from the State, they were speaking from the position of the first authority in both Church and State in the West.

The rejection of the comparison with Melchizedek was also influenced, as Dagron points out, by St. Augustine’s *The City of God*, “in which, during his exegesis of Melchisedek, Augustine affirms that from now on Christ is the only Mediator between God and men, the only One to have put on the eternal priesthood. In the time of Israel, the earthly kingdom ‘was a type of’ the spiritual kingdom, but since the Incarnation the City of God has found its King once and for all. The break is a sharp one: before the coming of Christ a royal priesthood is possible whether by Divine economy (Melchisedek) or by diabolical counterfeit (the Roman imperator-pontifex maximus); after the coming of Christ this very notion is lanced with illegitimacy; the regale sacerdotium has devolved to the Son of God and by extension to the Christians as a whole... A true Christian emperor is not a Roman emperor converted or faithful to Christianity, or an emperor who could draw a new legitimacy from Old Testament models, but an emperor whose power has been in part confiscated by Christ and whose competence has been modified by the installation of Christianity, who will have to adopt the pose of humility before the new wielders of spiritual power, who will be constantly suspected of belonging to ‘the earthly City’, of remaining pagan or of identifying himself through pride with the Antichrist.”

And so Augustinian scepticism with regard to secular authority, together with the unparalleled prestige of the Popes in the West, combined to introduce a new, specifically western exaltation of ecclesiastical power.

* *

There was another source of this specifically western exaltation of ecclesiastical, and especial papal, power: the quasi-mystical belief of the Popes that the Apostle Peter lived and spoke through them in a completely unique way simply as a result of the fact that he had died in Rome; so that just as the Apostle Peter had bestowed the episcopate on the Roman Church, so the Roman Popes, acting as the reincarnation, as it were, of Peter, were the source of the episcopate of the whole of the rest of the Church.

The Eastern bishops understood the phrase “the see of Peter” in a quite different way. For them, apostolic succession came, not from Peter alone, but from all the apostles. In any case, the Church of Antioch was also founded by SS. Peter and Paul, and the Church of Jerusalem – by the Lord Himself. So


there was nothing extraordinary about the Church of Rome. “The remaining apostles,” wrote St. Cyprian of Carthage, a western bishop, “were necessarily also that which Peter was, endowed with an equal partnership both of honour and of power... The episcopate is one, an individual share in which individual bishops hold as owners of a common property.”

By the middle of the fifth century, the mystical attitude towards the papal see was entrenched even in the minds of the western emperors. Thus in 445 Emperor Valentinian III declared in his Constitution: “We are convinced that the only defence for us and for our Empire is in the favour of the God of heaven: and in order to deserve this favour it is our first care to support the Christian faith and its venerable religion. Therefore, inasmuch as the pre-eminence of the Apostolic See is assured by the merit of S. Peter, the first of the bishops, by the leading position of the city of Rome and also by the authority of the Holy Synod, let not presumption strive to attempt anything contrary to the authority of that See.”

Undoubtedly the man who gave this idea the most impetus was Pope Leo the Great. He believed that, just as the Empire was universal and ruled by a single man, so the Church, as a parallel institution to the Empire, was universal and should be ruled by a single man, which man had to be the Pope since he represented St. Peter. Thus St. Leo gave his legates to the Fourth Ecumenical Council in Chalcedon strict instructions that, as legates of the see of St. Peter, they should preside over the Council, and that his Tome should be read at the beginning and presented as the fully sufficient expression of the Orthodox position, without the need for any further discussion or debate. (In fact, Leo’s legates did not preside, and his Tome was read only at the end, when it was subjected to searching scrutiny.) Again, at the fourth session of the Council the Roman legate Paschalius spoke of Pope Leo as “the bishop of all the churches”. And the legates refused to accept Canon 28 of the Council, which gave Constantinople second place after Old Rome on account of her position as the imperial city of the Empire. The legates considered this a “humiliation” of “the apostolic see” in their presence.

---

477 St. Cyprian, On the Unity of the Church, 4, 5.
479 This is not as arrogant as it sounds. According to his Life, St. Leo wrote his Tome and then “put it on the tomb of Peter, the chief Apostle. Then he fasted, prayed, and kept vigil, begging the preeminent Apostle, ‘if I, as a man, have in this letter erred in any way or failed to explain the truth fully, do thou, to whom this Church and episcopal throne were entrusted, set it right.’ Forty days later the Apostle appeared while Leo was praying. He said, ‘I have read your letter and corrected it.’ The Pope took the epistle from the blessed Peter’s tomb, opened it, and found that it had been amended by the Apostle’s hand” (St. Demetrius of Rostov, The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints, vol. 6: February, House Springs, Mo.: Chrysostom Press, 2003, p. 207).
480 See Dvorkin, op. cit., pp. 299, 309.
St. Leo was too tactful, too Orthodox and too genuinely concerned for the welfare of the Church to make an issue of this.\(^{481}\) However, as the see of Constantinople grew in power and influence, the Popes renewed their attacks on Canon 28. Thus Pope Gelasius saw no reason why Constantinople should be exalted in this way. After all, he wrote to the bishops of Dardania, it was “not even a metropolis”!\(^{482}\) Rome’s jealousy went so far as to break communion with Archbishop Acacius of Constantinople, although the East accepted him as Orthodox. The “Acacian schism” was finally overcome, but not before Pope Hormisdas had again anathematized Acacius. Moreover, he insisted that “the apostolic see has always kept the Orthodox faith unharmed”, and that “those who do not agree in everything with the apostolic see” should not be commemorated.

Patriarch John of Constantinople signed the libellicus, but only after cunningly adding the phrase: “I proclaim that the see of the Apostle Peter and the see of this imperial city are one”, thereby witnessing to the truth of St. Cyprian’s words that “the episcopate is one”…\(^{483}\)

Rome’s pretensions were dealt a further blow by the Emperor Justinian nearly forty years later, when he forced Pope Vigilius to accept the condemnation, enshrined in the Fifth Ecumenical Council in 553, of the so-called “Three Chapters”, although this led to some western councils – in Africa and Northern Italy (the so-called “Aquilean schism”) – breaking communion with Vigilius. However, the fact that these western councils, and some individual saints\(^{484}\), felt able to break with the Pope shows that they did not consider him to be infallible. Moreover, Vigilius’ penitential letter to Patriarch Eutyches of Constantinople was an admission of his fallibility…

\(^{*}\)

\(^{481}\) However, we should not forget his harsh treatment of St. Hilary, Archbishop of Arles, who disputed his jurisdiction over the Gallican see of Besançon and was thrown into prison in Rome for his protest. He died in 449 out of communion with Rome (Dvorkin, op. cit., p. 369).
\(^{482}\) Abbé Vladimir Guettée, The Papacy, New York: Minos, 1866, p. 198.
\(^{483}\) Dvorkin, op. cit., pp. 398, 399.
\(^{484}\) The Irish St. Columbanus of Luxeuil wrote to Pope Vigilius and suggested that he may have fallen into heresy. In that case, he continued, those “who have always kept the Orthodox Faith, whoever these may be, even if they seem to be your subordinates,… shall be your judges… And thus, even as your honour is great in proportion to the dignity of your see, so great care is mindful for you, lest you lose your dignity through some mistake. For power will be in your hands just so long as your principles remain sound; for he is the appointed keybearer of the Kingdom of Heaven, who opens by true knowledge to the worthy and shuts to the unworthy; otherwise if he does the opposite, he shall be able neither to open nor to shut.” “For all we Irish,” as he said to another Pope, “inhabitants of the world’s edge, are disciples of Saints Peter and Paul and of all the disciples who wrote the sacred canon by the Holy Spirit, and we accept nothing outside the evangelical and apostolic teaching; none has been a heretic, none a Judaizer, none a schismatic; but the Catholic Faith, as it was delivered by you first, who are the successors of the holy apostles, has been maintained unbroken.” (G.S.M. Walker, Sancti Columbani Opera, Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1970, pp. 47, 49, 51, 39)
The tendency to papism was not only checked but crushed under perhaps the greatest of the Popes, Gregory I, towards the end of the sixth century. An Old Roman aristocrat and patriot, he believed in the primacy, but not universal sovereignty, of “the apostolic see”. He never tried to override the rights of Local Churches, still less proclaim an infallible headship over them.

Indeed, in his vehement opposition (following the example of his predecessor, Pelagius II) to the title of “universal bishop” first offered by the Emperor Maurice to St. John the Faster, Patriarch of Constantinople, St. Gregory provided an invaluable lesson to all subsequent Popes of the limits of their power and jurisdiction. For he accused St. John of pride, and wrote to him that in accepting this title he was “at enmity with that grace which was given to all [bishops] in common”. He reminded him that the Fourth Ecumenical Council had offered the title of “universal” to the Roman Pope as a mark of honour to St. Peter, but that none of the Popes had accepted it, “lest by assuming a special distinction in the dignity of the episcopate, we should seem to refuse it to all the brethren”. 485

In a letter to the Emperor, St. Gregory wrote of St. Peter: “He received the keys of the celestial Kingdom; the power to bind and to loose was given to him; the care of all the Church and the primacy were committed to him; and yet he did not call himself universal Apostle. But that most holy man, John, my brother in the priesthood, would fain assume the title of universal bishop. I can but exclaim, O tempora! O mores!” 486 In another letter to Patriarchs Eulogius of Alexandria and Anastasius of Antioch, St. Gregory makes the point that “if a Patriarch be called universal, this takes from all the others the title of Patriarch”. 487

After St. John the Faster’s death, St. Gregory wrote to his successor at Constantinople, Cyriacus: “You must not consider this same affair as unimportant; for, if we tolerate it, we corrupt the faith of the whole Church. You know how many, not heretics only but heresiarchs, have arisen in the Church of Constantinople. Not to speak of the injury done to your dignity, it cannot be denied that if any one bishop be called universal, all the Church crumbles if that universal one fall!!” 488

Finally, in another letter to the Emperor, St. Gregory wrote: “I pray your Imperial Piety to observe that there are some frivolous things that are inoffensive, but also some others that are very hurtful. When Antichrist shall come and call himself God, it will be in itself a perfectly frivolous thing, but a very pernicious one. If we only choose to consider the number of syllables in this word, we find but two (De-us); but if we conceive the weight of iniquity of this title, we shall find it enormous. I say it without the least hesitation:

---

485 Guettée, op. cit., pp. 208, 211.
486 Guettée, op. cit., p. 213.
488 Guettée, op. cit., p. 223.
whoever calls himself the universal bishop, or desires this title, is, by his pride, THE PRECURSOR OF ANTICHRIST, because he thus attempts to raise himself above the others. The error into which he falls springs from pride equal to that of Antichrist; for as that wicked one wished to be regarded as exalted above other men, like a god, so likewise whoever would be called sole bishop exalteth himself above the other.”

And so we find the heresy of papism thoroughly refuted by one of the greatest of the Popes. St. Gregory reaffirms the doctrine taught by St. Cyprian and the Orthodox East, that all bishops are essentially equal in grace, because the grace of the episcopate is one, and the bishops receive their grace, not from one man or one see, but from the episcopate as a whole. Consequently, the heresy that attempts to create, as it were, a fourth level of the priesthood above that of bishop, in the form of a universal bishop having sovereignty over all the others, undermines the ecclesiology of the Church, and is like the heresy of the Antichrist, who will also exalt himself above all other men...

With the heresy of papism suppressed, at least temporarily, the West flourished and the papacy herself rose to the peak of its real and not vain glory and power.

The six centuries or so from the papacy of St. Gregory the Great to that of Gregory VII and the emergence of the new Papist Empire of the medieval Popes constitute a fascinating period in which the Orthodox Christian forms of political and ecclesiastical life gradually succumbed to the new, heretical forms – but only after a fierce struggle during which the Orthodox staged several “comebacks”.

In this struggle two forces were especially prominent: the papacy, and the new national kingdoms of Western Europe. Until the reign of Charlemagne at least, the relationship between these two forces was one of mutual respect and benefit. The Popes, with rare exceptions, were by no means “papist” and dictatorial in relation to the national kingdoms and their national synods of bishops, but provided a vital source of unity, stability and enlightenment for the embryonic new nation-states and Churches. In their turn, the kings and their bishops frequently travelled to Rome and worked closely with the Popes, receiving instruction, books, relics, icons, chanters and moral and spiritual support. It was a different matter, however, when it came to relations between the Popes and the Eastern Emperors, of whom they were the secular subjects for approximately two hundred years after Justinian’s reconquest of Rome in 540. On the one hand, as the first see in Christendom the papacy sought to be in “symphony” with the Emperor in Constantinople, and always saw herself as the “Imperial Church” (to the extent that her rival patriarchate in the New Rome allowed it). On the other hand, relations were often strained, especially when the Emperor tried to impose a heretical confession on the papacy.

34. THE SYMPHONY OF NATIONS

To what extent can we speak of nations in the modern sense in this period?

Francis Fukuyama has put forward the important thesis that the Church had a “devastating impact on tribal organization throughout Western Europe. The German, Norse, Magyar, and Slavic tribes saw their kinship structures dissolve within two or three generations of their conversion to Christianity.”490 This was in sharp contrast to China, India and the Middle East, where tribal bonds continued to be strong, and it made possible the emergence of the larger and more heterogeneous unit of the nation.

How did the Church effect this change? In the first place, of course, membership of the Church creates a higher and deeper unity than any ties based on kinship; and so to the extent that the Western peoples became truly Christian, the family of the Church replaced the family of the tribe, while the family of the nation became an intermediate link.

However, there were more specific ways in which Church law broke up the old bonds. Thus Larry Siedentop points out that “by transferring religious authority from the father to a separate priesthood, the Christian church removed the religious basis of the paterfamilias. It curtailed the claims to authority of the family head, relaxing the ties of subordination that had previously bound its members.”491

Again, building on the work of the social anthropologist Jack Goody, Fukuyama points out that the Church “took a strong stand against four practices: marriages between close kin, marriages to the widows of dead relatives (the so-called levirate), the adoption of children, and divorce. The Venerable Bede, reporting on the efforts of Pope Gregory I to convert the pagan Anglo-Saxons to Christianity in the sixth century, notes how Gregory explicitly condemned the tribe’s practices of marriage to close relatives and the levirate. Later church edicts forbade concubinage, and promoted an indissoluble, monogamous lifetime marriage bond between men and women…”

These practices that were banned by the Church were what Goody calls “‘strategies of heirship’ whereby kinship groups are able to keep property under the group’s control as it passed down from one generation to another. Life expectancy in Europe and the Mediterranean world of the time was less than thirty-five. The probability of a couple’s producing a male heir who survived into adulthood and who could carry on the ancestral line was quite low. As a result, societies legitimated a wide range of practices that allowed individuals to produce heirs. Concubinage has already been discussed…; divorce can be seen as a form of serial concubinage in monogamous societies.

The levirate was practiced when a brother died before he produced children; his wife’s marriage to a younger brother ensured that his property would remain consolidated with that of his siblings. Cross-cousin marriage ensured that property would remain in the hands of close family members.”

The Church’s rules also enhanced the status of women, who were now allowed to own property in their own names and dispose of it as they wished. We see the change in Gaul, in the transition from Salic law (c. 510) to the Lex Ribuaria (c. 600). “Famously, the former prohibits any female inheritance of ancestral land, while the latter relaxes such restrictions.”

Fukuyama expresses the somewhat cynical thought that the Church thereby profited materially from these rules, because widows and property-owning Christians who died without heirs often gave their land to the Church. However, it made sense that a believing society should look to the Church rather than the tribe as its agent of social security and endow it accordingly. And the Church certainly carried out this role impressively in this period.

Not only at the social level, but also at the political level, the level of relationships between states, the impact of Christianization was profound… The pagan Roman empire had introduced the important idea that all Roman citizens, of whatever nationality, were in some sense equal under the law. Building on that, the Church proclaimed that all baptized Christians, of whatever nationality, were equal under the law of Christ. Similarly, just as the pagan Roman empire had proclaimed that Rome encompassed the whole oikoumene or “inhabited world”, so Christian Rome now saw herself as encompassing the whole family of Christian nations under her paternal leadership. As Sir Steven Runciman writes, “Ideally, it [the Empire] should embrace all the peoples of the earth, who, ideally, should all be members of the one true Christian Church, its own Orthodox Church.”

“In Roman eyes,” as Dominic Lieven writes, “the Roman Empire was a universal monarchy: it encompassed the whole globe, or at least all of it that was worth bothering about. The barbarians beyond the empire’s wall they regarded in terms somewhat similar to nineteenth-century European colonists’ view of ‘natives’. Their only imperial neighbour, the Parthian empire, was considered by the Romans to be ‘an oriental despotism, a barbarian, braggart and motley nation’. As in every other aspect of their culture, the Roman sense of universalism owed much to the Greeks. Alexander had conquered virtually the whole of the known world and although his empire was very short-lived the spread of Hellenistic culture was not. ‘The Greek philosophers, in particular the Stoics, stressed the notion that all mankind formed one community, partaking of universal reason… it

493 Siedentop, op. cit., p. 142.
was, indeed, the Greeks who from the second century BC had regarded the Roman Empire and the universe (oikoumene) as one... Ideas such as these made a deep impression on the minds of the political and intellectual elite of Rome, and through their influence the two notions of orbis terrarum and imperium came to be regarded in the first century as identical: from then on no distinction was ever made between them.'

“The adoption in the fourth century of Christianity, a world religion which recognized no ethnic or cultural borders, could only increase the Roman imperial sense of universalism. In time Christian clergy undertook evangelizing missions outside their polities’ borders, converting whole peoples to their religion and therefore, in the end, to a great extent to their culture. This the rulers of imperial [pagan] Rome had never conceived of...”

And so, parallel to the concept of the symphony of powers, whose model was the relationship between the two natures of Christ, there emerged the concept of the symphony of nations, modeled on the father-son relationship. The Roman Emperor was the head and father of a family of Christian rulers united, not by a single political or ecclesiastical jurisdiction, but by common membership of the civilization of Christian Rome. If we restrict ourselves to speaking only of the Orthodox Christian States and peoples, then within this single commonwealth there was, strictly speaking, only one Christian people, the people of the Romans; and Greeks and Latins, Celts and Germans, Semites and Slavs were all equally Romans, all equally members of the Roman commonwealth of nations and sons of the Roman Emperor.

As it was developed in succeeding centuries, writes I.P. Medvedev, “this doctrine found practical expression in... a hierarchical system of States...The place of each sovereign in this official, hierarchical gradation of all the princes of the world in relation to the Byzantine Emperor was defined by kinship terms borrowed from the terminology of family law: father-son-brother, but also friend... The use of kinship terms by the Byzantine Emperor in addressing a foreign Sovereign was not a simple metaphor or rhetoric, but a definite title which was given on the basis of a mutual agreement, that is, bestowed by the Emperor... And so at the head of the oikoumene was the Basileus Romanon, the Byzantine Emperor, the father of ‘the family of sovereigns and peoples’. Closest of all ‘by kinship’ among the politically independent sovereigns were certain Christian rulers of countries bordering on the Empire, for example Armenia, Alania and Bulgaria; they were spiritual sons of the Byzantine Emperor. Less close were the Christian masters of the Germans and French, who were included in this ‘family of sovereigns and peoples’ with the rights of spiritual brothers of the Emperor. After them came the friends, that is, independent sovereigns and peoples who received this title by dint of a special agreement – the emir of Egypt and the ruler of India, and later the Venetians, the king of England, etc. Finally, we must name a

large group of princes who were ranked, not according to degree of ‘kinship’, but by dint of particularities of address and protocol – the small appanage principalities of Armenia, Iberia, Abkhazia, the Italian cities, Moravia and Serbia (group 1), and the appanage princes of Hungary and Rus’, the Khazar and Pecheneg khans, etc. (group 2)…” 496

And so from Britain in the West to Georgia in the East to Ethiopia in the south "a great number of peoples made up the autocracy but without any 'ethnic' differentiation between them. The whole racial amalgam lived and moved in a single civilization (apart from some particularities) - the Greek, and it had a single cohesive spiritual power – Orthodoxy, which was at the same time the ideology of the oikoumene - autocracy. The citizens of the autocracy were Romans politically, Greeks culturally and Orthodox Christians spiritually. Through Orthodoxy the old relationship of rulers and ruled was replaced by the sovereign bond of brotherhood. Thus the 'holy race' of the New Testament (I Peter 2.9) became a reality as the 'race of the Romans', that is, of the Orthodox citizens of the autocracy of the New Rome."497 This internationalism was underlined by the Emperors’ diverse nationalities. Thus Constantine was a Roman, Theodosius I - a Spaniard, Justinian I - an Illyrian or Thracian, Maurice and Heraclius - Armenians and Leo the iconoclast - a Syrian.

“Much suggests that for many centuries after the fall of the Western Roman empire, there persisted within the western consciousness a sentiment that just as Christians knew unity in the one body of Christ which was the universal ecclesia, so ideally they should know it also in one body politic, a universal res publica. If one reason why this did not find expression was the concrete reality of western political multiplicity, another was the impossibility of conceiving any polity but the Roman empire as having a legitimate claim to universality yet the impossibility also of recognizing in the empire as it actually existed the universal res publica of the western vision. This was a deadlock which could be broken only if the Roman empire were recast in a satisfactory western mould. The speed and strength with which the imperial idea came to be reasserted once western circumstances were propitious to such a recasting [in the time of Charlemagne] are themselves the strongest argument that it had never been banished but had simply lain dormant. Two things were necessary for its reinvigoration and realization: first, the emergence of a western Grossreich … without which its entertainment would have been wholly utopian; second, the inclusion within this polity of Rome…” 498

* 

In the seventh century all of the patriarchates fell, temporarily, into the heresy of Monothelitism, and in the eighth century the East fell into iconoclasm. But while Orthodoxy faltered – although never in all places at the same time – the underlying unity of Orthodox Christian civilization throughout the Mediterranean area enabled unity of faith to be recovered before long. It was only in the first half of seventh century, with the rise of Islam in the East, and towards the end of the eighth century, with the rise of the Carolingian empire in the West, that the first more or less permanent cracks in the unity both of faith and civilization began to appear.

And so the idea of a symphony of nations, of a single Christian Roman Empire extending from the Atlantic to the Caspian, was a living spiritual reality, and one that endured also in the West until at least the reign of Charlemagne at the end of the eighth century. Indeed, so widely accepted was the ideal of “One Faith, One Church, One Empire” that when Charlemagne came to create his western rival to the Empire, he also spoke of "the Christian people of the Romans" without ethnic differentiation, and tried to introduce a single Roman law for all the constituent nations of his empire. As Agobard, Archbishop of Lyons, put it: "There is now neither Gentile nor Jew, Scythian nor Aquitanian, nor Lombard, nor Burgundian, nor Alaman, nor bond, nor free. All are one in Christ... Can it be accepted that, opposed to this unity which is the work of God, there should be an obstacle in the diversity of laws [used] in one and the same country, in one and the same city, and in one and the same house? It constantly happens that of five men walking or sitting side by side, no two have the same territorial law, although at root - on the eternal plan - they belong to Christ."499

However, it was only to be expected that such a wonderful ideal would be attacked by the enemy of mankind. His main weapons in the West as in the East were political dissonance (war, rebellion) and ecclesiastical division (schism, heresy). So let us look at how the ideal fared in reality in each of the major Christian nations that emerged in the West after the fall of Old Rome.

The Western Roman empire began unraveling after the Emperor Honorius withdrew the legions from Britain in 410. This process continued unabated throughout the fifth century, until the final fall of the empire in 476. But out of its ruins several barbarian kingdoms composed of amalgamations of various Germanic tribes gradually came into existence.

The questions that arose in relation to these kingdoms were: What would be their relationship with the Roman Empire that still existed in the East, in Constantinople? Was the Eastern Roman Empire now the only legitimate political authority for those of Roman descent living on its former territories in the West? Or were the western barbarian kings also legitimate powers, the legal successors of Rome in some sense?

Now North Africa, being since its subjection in the third century BC the bread-basket of Rome, was a highly Romanized and Christianized province, as is proved by the numerous archaeological remains that survive to this day. Moreover, it gave birth to some of the most influential writers of Western Christendom, such as Tertullian, St. Cyprian of Carthage and St. Augustine of Hippo. At the same time, it was the birthplace of the most stubborn, violent and long-lasting schismatic movement in the Early Church, the Donatists. It was therefore perhaps no surprise that shortly after the death of St. Augustine in 430, North Africa became the object of the wrath of God. In 439, after eight years of war, the capital, Carthage, fell to the Vandals, the most anti-Roman and anti-Christian of all the barbarian tribes, under their king, Gaiseric. St. Quodvultdeus, Metropolitan of Carthage, and many of his flock, were exiled to the Neapolitan coastline, where Quodvultdeus died in about 450. Gaiseric was a rigorous Arian; he banished Orthodox priests who refused to perform the Arian services and even sacked Rome in 455. In 484 Huneric, not without some irony, used a Roman law of 412 directed against the Donatists to embark on a savage persecution against the Orthodox Christians.

The defection of such an important province could not be looked on with indifference by the Emperor of New Rome, the ambitious and western-oriented Justinian I, especially when, in 530, the pro-Roman and pro-Orthodox King Hilderic was overthrown by the anti-Roman and anti-Orthodox Gelimer. This gave Justinian the excuse he needed, and in a short six-month campaign (533-34) his general Belisarius, supported by the local population, destroyed the Vandal kingdom and placed all the heretical assemblies under ban. As he himself put it, God “deemed it proper that the injuries of the Church should be avenged through me”.

---

501 Cod. Just. 1.27.1.1-2; in Heather, op. cit., p. 137.
The Vandal kingdom of North Africa could never have been considered a legitimate successor of Roman power because it was not only not Orthodox, but a persecutor of the Orthodox. Its aggression can be explained in part, as Heather writes, by the fact that it “had been carved out of the living body of a still very vital Western Empire by the Vandal conquest of Carthage in 439, whereas all the other Western successor states emerged both more slowly and more consensually, a generation or so later, as the central Roman state gradually ran out of revenues and the capacity to direct events. And since Catholicism [Orthodoxy] was unambiguously the religion of the empire, Vandal monarchs tended to be highly hostile towards it, deliberately fostering an alternate Christianity among the warriors who had put them in power.”

Nevertheless, its political philosophy was closely modeled on Rome – except in its tendency to persecute the Orthodox. Thus in Vandal North Africa we find, as P.D. King writes, “a sovereign monarchy, Roman and Christian in its bases,” in which “there is no trace of a popular assembly, of any other constitutional curb on the exercise of the king’s will, of any area of activity exempt from royal control. As the emperor wielded authority in religious matters, calling councils, deciding which creed his subjects should follow, persecuting dissidents – for what could be more germane to the public welfare than God’s propitiation by correct worship? – so did the Arian Vandal king. Generic (d. 477) even established a permanent rule of succession, vesting the crown in his house; here he went further than any emperor chose, or dared, to do. A throne and the purple, witnessed for the 530s, will assuredly have appeared earlier, as had the diadem. The king described himself in traditional imperial nomenclature, as ‘Our Piety’ and ‘Our Clemency’, held himself to possess ‘majesty’ and was addressed in reverential language customarily employed of the emperor. Instances of imitatio imperii could easily be multiplied. Most significant, the ruler considered heavenly authority to be the source of his own. God Himself had conceded his dominions to him, said Huneric (d. 484); he held them ‘by divine favour’.

“The Vandal picture anticipates that eventually yielded by all the [western] regna in numerous respects. But Huneric’s statements merit especial note as the vanguard of a formidable army of testimony to the currency in the kingdoms of the belief that the ruler was such by God’s fiat. At its roots lay the most fundamental of principles, that all that existed or occurred terrestrially was ultimately traceable to the celestial will, not to the intrinsic merits or unaided efforts of men… Like anything else, political power existed by God’s will; and those who wielded it occupied their positions by His favour. By Christ’s own witness (John 19.11), Pilate’s power against Him derived ‘from above’, and Paul’s statement in Romans 13.1 was unequivocal: ‘There is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God’. When orthodox bishops declared that ‘divine favour’ had ‘provided’

---

Theoderic (d. 526) – an Arian! – to govern Italy, or a seventh-century Frankish formula attributed elevation to kingship to ‘divine mercy’, or Ine of Wessex (d. 725) called himself king ‘mid Godes gifé’, they were operating with precisely the same notion expressed in the celebrated formula ‘king by the grace of God’ which was to become part of the Carolingian royal intitulatio, for gratia, ‘grace’, meant simply ‘favour’. Indeed, already the Lombard, Agilulf (590-616), was ‘king by the grace of God’ and the Visigoth, Svinthila (621-31), brought to kingship ‘by divine grace’. Nicely illustrative of the root-concept was Boniface’s designation of Aethelbald of Mercia (d. 757) as ‘you whom not your own merits but God’s abundant mercy constituted king and prince of many’...

503 King, op. cit., pp. 127-128.
For the Romans of North Africa, it was clear where their loyalties lay: with Rome, and not with their barbarian and heretical rulers. But for the Romans of Italy and Spain the matter was less clear-cut. On the one hand, they remained socially and legally separate from their Gothic rulers (“Ostrogothic”, that is, Eastern Gothic in Italy, and “Visigothic”, that is, Western Gothic in Spain). But on the other hand, unlike the Vandals the Goths did not, in general, persecute the Faith, fostered Roman culture, and allowed the Romans to follow their own laws.

As John Julius Norwich writes, the situation in south-western Europe from Spain through Southern France to Italy was that of “a Roman land-owning aristocracy living comfortably on its estates, perfectly satisfied with the status quo and doubtless grateful that the immense distance separating them from Constantinople reduced imperial interference [expressed especially in the form of heavy taxation] to the point of imperceptibility.”504

The barbarian rulers of Italy had a healthy respect for Rome and her traditions of law and education. We have seen how much Ataulf, the son of the fearsome Alaric, had respected Romanitas. And after the last Western Emperor, Romulus, was deposed by the Ostrogothic King Odoacer, he was not killed but given a respectable pension.

Odoacer’s murderer and successor, Theodoric, was equally respectful. Thus in about 507 he wrote to the Emperor Anastasius in Constantinople: “You are the fairest ornament of all realms; you are the healthful defence of the whole world, to which all other rulers rightfully look up with reverence, because they know that there is in you something which is unlike all others: we above all, who by Divine help learned in your Republic [Constantinople: Theoderic had spent ten years in the city as a child] the art of governing Romans with equity. Our royalty is an imitation of yours, modeled on your good purpose, a copy of the only Empire; and in so far as we follow you do we excel all other nations.”505

“Procopius, the main Byzantine historian of this era, describes Theoderic as popular and dignified. The Gothic king, we are told, ‘was exceedingly careful to observe justice, he preserved the laws on a sure basis, he protected the land and kept it safe from the barbarians dwelling round about, and attained the highest possible degree of wisdom and manliness.’ Though in time Theoderic himself could be considered ‘in name a tyrant’, Procopius goes on, ‘in fact he was as truly an emperor as any who have distinguished themselves in this office from the beginning.’”506

505 Theoderic, in Heather, op. cit., p. 3.
What could be wrong with obeying a ruler who, though not a Roman, consciously modeled himself on Rome? He was an (Arian) heretic, yes; but he did not persecute the Orthodox in the way the Vandals did. And in any case, Anastasius was also a (Monophysite) heretic. So the question who was the legitimate ruler of Italy was not so clear to the Roman population of Italy, in spite of their presumed natural sympathy for the Empire. If they had lived peaceably enough for more than one generation under Arian Ostrogothic rulers, why should they rise up against them now? If that pillar of Orthodoxy, the Roman Pope, recognized King Theoderic as legitimate, who were they to treat him as illegitimate?

However, things changed after the ascension to the throne of the New Rome of the strictly Orthodox Justin I, and then, after the death of King Theoderic, of his nephew, the famous Justinian I, in 527... We have seen that Justinian wanted to reconquer the West for Rome and Orthodoxy, and that he had found a clear casus belli for going to war with the Vandals in their persecution of the Orthodox. Such a casus was more difficult to find in relation to the religiously tolerant and pro-Roman Ostrogothic kings. However, he found one in the murder of the pro-Roman Ostrogothic Queen Amalasuntha in 534 by the new King Theodahad.

Led by the famous generals Belisarius and Nerses, Roman armies reconquered Italy, and “the ancient and lesser Rome,” in Michael Psellus’ words, was returned to the dominion of “the later, more powerful city”. A Byzantine governor ruled Northern and Central Italy from Ravenna; Byzantine titles were lavished on the Roman aristocracy; and the Pope commemorated the Emperor at the liturgy. Tactfully, Patriarch John Kappadokes of Constantinople continued to recognize the primacy of the see of Old Rome (which, however, he declared to be one church with the see of New Rome), and Pope John II responded by exalting the emperor as high as any western bishop had ever done: “The King’s heart is in the hand of God and He directs it as He pleases’ (Proverbs 21.1). There lies the foundation of your Empire and the endurance of your rule. For the peace of the Church and the unity of religion raise their originator to the highest place and sustain him there in happiness and peace. God’s power will never fail him who protects the Church against the evil and stain of division, for it is written: ‘When a righteous King sits on the throne, no evil will befall him’ (Proverbs 20:8).”

Italy was again Roman and Orthodox. The famous frescoes of Justinian and Theodora in the church of San Vitale in Ravenna, the former Ostrogothic capital, are superimposed on the earlier frescoes of Theoderic, thereby commemorating the restoration of Romanity. And although the wars had lasted a generation and been exceedingly costly, and the north was soon

---

507 Heather, op. cit., p. 59.
509 Meyendorff, op. cit., p. 214.
510 A. Gerostergios, Justinian the Great: the Emperor and Saint, Belmont, Mass.: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 1982, p. 82.
overrun by another Arian Germanic race, the Lombards, the leaders of Roman society, such as Pope Gregory I, were convinced it had all been worth it.

In the longer term, however, Justinian’s wars in Italy, far from consolidating Romanity in the province, laid the foundations for its eventual alienation from New Rome. The bitterness of the vanquished, the increased vulnerability of the devastated province to external invasion, the bad treatment that even the Popes sometimes received from the Emperors, all left their mark... And so after Justinian’s death, no ruler in continental Western Europe continued to acknowledge the authority of the Roman Empire over himself; and his ideology of “One Faith, One Church, One Empire” began to weaken there, as it was already weakening in the Monophysite East.

Thus, as King writes, “no writer testifies to the currency of the old ideology. Though this was still maintained by imperial subjects [in Italy], it could not have carried its earlier conviction. It had been the closeness of correspondence between universalist ideality and political, cultural and religious reality which had endowed the former with the great strength of its grasp upon men’s minds. That correspondence was now lacking, as Jordanes, writing in 551, acknowledged. To him, the res publica (destined on Daniel’s authority to last until the end of the world) still indeed held what it had once subjected (‘almost the entire earth’); but it did so, when not actually, then – the word is an exquisite choice – ‘imaginarie’. Time served only to widen the gap which had opened up. It is not clear that any western regnum recognized imperial authority after Justinian, while the incongruity of identifying the Christian world and the empire grew ever more patent. The calamitous reverses suffered by the seventh-century empire at Muslim and pagan hands made matters worse. Moreover, westerners were deeply alienated by the character, real or perceived, of the contemporary empire. Fear and hostility on the political and military fronts played a role, while in imperial Italy resentment at high taxation and inadequate defence fuelled animosity towards what was seen as a foreign regime. Throughout the west as a whole, indeed, the empire was regarded as essentially a Greek affair... Closely related was enmity in the theological sphere; the age was full of controversies which confirmed the widespread – and again traditional – western distrust of easterners as intellectual conjurors, given to unorthodoxy. In turn the theological disputes were bound up with the fundamental papal-imperial conflict, usually latent but occasionally exploding into violent life; this and its concomitants, including the ill-treatment of some popes by some emperors, brought further hostility…”

Yet none of this argues for repudiation of the political universalist ideal; and the fact is that this was not denied, even implicitly... The only exception to this rule, as we have seen, was the Vandal kingdom of North Africa. But in Europe the ideal, though battered, survived...

511 King, op. cit.
“The Visigothic King Euric (466-84),” writes Chris Wickham, “was the first major ruler of a ‘barbarian’ polity in Gaul – the second in the empire after Geiseric – to have a fully autonomous political practice, uninfluenced by any residual Roman loyalties. Between 471 and 476 he expanded his power east to the Rhône (and beyond, into Provence), north to the Loire, and south into Spain. The Goths had already been fighting in Spain since the later 450s (initially on behalf of the emperor Avitus), but Euric organized a fully fledged conquest there, which is ill-documented, but seems to have been complete (except for a Suevic enclave in the north-west) by the time of his death. By far the best documented of Euric’s conquests, though not the most important, was the Auvergne in 471-5, because the bishop of its central city, Clermont, was the Roman senator Sidonius Apollinarius. Sidonius, who was Avitus’ son-in-law, and had been a leading lay official for both [Emperors] Majorian and Anthemius, ended his political career besieged inside his home city, and we can see all the political changes of the 450s-470s through his eyes. A supporter of alliance with the Visigoths in the 450s, by the late 460s Sidonius had become increasingly aware of the dangers involved, and hostile to Roman officials who still dealt with them; then in the 470s we see him despairing of any further help for Clermont, and contemptuous of the Italian envoys who sacrificed the Auvergne so as to keep Provence under Roman control. By around 480, as he put it, ‘now that the old degrees of official rank are swept away… the only token of nobility… will henceforth be a knowledge of letters’; the official hierarchy had gone, only traditional Roman culture remained…”

The archiepiscopate of Arles was a bastion of Roman traditions in France, and for a time played the role of a metropolitan centre on a par with Rome. Thus St. Hilary, Archbishop of Arles (430-449) became “de facto head of the whole of the Gallican Church and presided over Episcopal councils in Riez (429), Orange (441) and Bezons (442).” Again, St. Caesarius of Arles (503-542) “introduced a series of disciplinary reforms in the spirit of Romanitas (Romanity), which confirmed the independence of bishops from the local civil and juridical authorities, proclaimed the inalienability of church property, introduced disciplinary rules for clergy (including celibacy for the priesthood) and established sacramental obligations for laymen (regular communion, conditions for marriage, etc.).”

A threat to the continuance of Christian Roman Gaul came from the Arian kings – the Ostrogothic Alaric of Toulouse and the Visigothic Theoderic of Ravenna. However, as we have seen, these were not intolerant of Orthodox Christianity, and St. Caesarius was able to establish good cooperative relations with both of them. Another threat was originally posed by Clovis,
first king of the Franks, who in 486 defeated the last representative of Roman power at the Battle of Soissons.

However, the conversion and baptism of Clovis to Orthodoxy under the influence of his wife, St. Clothilde, and the stunning victories he won over the Arian kings, was a tremendous boost to Gallic Romanitas. St. Avitus, Bishop of Vienne, congratulated him on his baptism in terms that showed that he regarded Clovis’ kingdom as still part of the Empire: “Let Greece rejoice in having chosen our princeps”.514 Again, St. Gregory of Tours wrote that he received letters “from the Emperor Anastasius to confer the consulate on him. In Saint Martin’s church he stood clad in a purple tunic and the military mantle, and he crowned himself with a diadem. He then rode out on his horse and with his own hand showered gold and silver coins among the people present all the way from the doorway of Saint Martin’s church to Tours cathedral. From that day on he was called Consul or Augustus.”515

Actually, since the Emperor Anastasius was a heretic, Clovis was the only major Orthodox Christian ruler at this time, if we exclude the British King Arthur. Moreover, he consciously stressed the continuity of his rule with that of Rome. As Fr. Andrew Louth writes: “Like most of the barbarian kingdoms that appeared in the Western Roman Empire, [the Frankish realms] inherited something of the administrative structure of the Roman Empire, and could claim to rule as representative, in some way, of the true Roman emperor, who resided in New Rome, Constantinople. This understanding was fictional in several respects: the Roman or Byzantine emperor had no choice over his Merovingian representative in Gaul and, although taxes were still being collected, the dynamics of political society in the West were changing in the direction of a society ruled by military warlords, who gave protection to those who lived in their domains and rewarded their followers with booty from fighting amongst themselves, and further afield, and who accepted the overlordship of the Merovingian kings. The fiction was nevertheless significant, not least in the way it articulated political legitimacy in terms of the ideals of the Roman Empire.”516

Clovis defeated the Arian Visigothic King Alaric II at Vouillé in 507. Then in 511 the Franks’ allies against the Visigoths, the Burgundians, were converted from Arianism to Orthodoxy. And although the Arian Theoderic profited from the Visigoths’ defeat to incorporate their kingdom into his (the Franks took Aquitaine), the revival of Orthodoxy continued, receiving its strongest boost in 518 when the Monophysite Emperor Anastasius, died, and was succeeded by the Orthodox Justin I. In 526 the Ostrogothic King

514 St. Avitus, Letter 4; in Cohen and Major, op. cit., p. 118.
515 St. Gregory of Tours, The History of the Franks, II, 38, p. 154. During the coronation of the Russian Tsars, too, the bystanders were showered with gold and silver, symbolizing the betrothal of the Tsar with the State. See Fr. Nikita Chakirov (ed.), Tsarskie Koronatsii na Rusi (Imperial Coronations in Rus’), New York: Russian Orthodox Youth Committee, 1971, p. 22.
Theoderic died, and his kingdom lost its hold on the Visigoths and Vandals, leaving the Franks as the most powerful force in the West. The Gallo-Romans now set about working with their Frankish king to create the Merovingian Orthodox kingdom, the most glorious period in the history of France.

“Established at Paris, Clovis governed this kingdom by virtue of an agreement concluded with the bishops of Gaul, according to which [Gallo-Roman] natives and [Frankish] barbarians were to be on terms of equality... All free men bore the title of Frank, had the same political status, and were eligible to the same offices. Besides, each individual observed the law of the people among whom he belonged; the Gallo-Roman lived according to their code, the barbarian according to the Salian or Ripuarian law; in other words, the law was personal, not territorial. If there were any privileges they belonged to the Gallo-Romans, who, in the beginning were the only ones on whom the episcopal dignity was conferred. The king governed the provinces through his counts, and had a considerable voice in the selection of the clergy. The drawing up of the Salian Law (Lex Salica), which seems to date from the early part of the reign of Clovis, and the Council of Orléans, convoked by him and held in the last year of his reign, prove that the legislative activity of this king was not eclipsed by his military energy.”

Our main source for Frankish history, The History of the Franks by St. Gregory of Tours, confirms this account. As Wickham writes, St. Gregory, “although of an aristocratic Roman family, seems hardly aware the empire has gone at all; his founding hero was Clovis, and all his loyalties Frankish.” Nowhere does he dispute the legitimacy of Frankish rule; and the rebellions that take place are of Franks against Franks rather than Gallo-Romans against Franks.

One exception to this rule was the attempt of Bishop Egidius of Rheims to kill King Childebert (V, 19). But St. Gregory shows no sympathy for the bishop, and records his trial and exile by his fellow-bishops without criticism. As for the independence of the bishops in the Frankish kingdom, this is demonstrated by the completely free election of St. Gregory himself to the episcopate by the people, with no interference by the king.

Gaul, therefore, was the great success story of Romanity in the West. Without a drop of blood being shed, Gaul remained loyal to Constantinople, preserving both the faith and the political forms of Romanity more closely than any other continental nation.

---

518 Wickham, op. cit., p. 200.
38. THE WESTERN KINGDOMS: (4) VISIGOTHIC SPAIN

In the fourth century Spain had been an important part of the Roman Empire, producing such great Christians as St. Osius, bishop of Cordoba, and the Emperor Theodosius I. Its recovery from the hands of the Arian Visigoths was therefore an important part of Justinian’s strategy of reuniting the Empire. By the 550s the Roman armies had carved out a province in the south-east of Iberia called Spania.

Now it might have been expected that the Roman inhabitants of the peninsula, who constituted perhaps 90% of the population, would have risen up in support of the Byzantines against their foreign rulers. However, many of the Hispano-Romans fled inland from Cartagena when the Byzantines invaded, including even the most notable Spaniard of the age, St. Leander of Seville. As a result of this loyalty of the Roman Spaniards to the Visigothic regime, the restoration of Orthodoxy in Spain came about, neither through the might of Byzantine arms from without, nor through the rebellion of Hispano-Romans from within, but through the conversion of the Visigoths themselves.

It began in 579 when the Visigothic King Leovigild’s eldest son and the ruler of Seville, Hermenegild, married the Orthodox Frankish princess Ingundis. Not only did Ingundis stubbornly refuse to become an Arian even when subjected to torture by the Queen Mother Goisuntha. On arriving in Seville, she and St. Leander succeeded in converting Hermenegild to Orthodoxy. Then several thousand Goths were converted in Seville.

Now Arianism was the national religion of the Goths: every Goth was required to be Arian, just as every Roman was encouraged to remain Orthodox. Intermarriage between the two sub-nations was illegal – but this was not so much a matter of faith, as of national identity. The Goths did not try to convert the Romans because that would have meant a confusion of the races, and they discouraged conversion by insisting on the rebaptism of converts from Orthodoxy. Already, however, some confusion was taking place through the Goths’ adoption of Roman manners and dress. If they adopted the faith of the Romans as well, what would distinguish them from their subjects?

And so, writes Scott, “in the political situation of the kingdom the transference of the allegiance of the heir apparent from the Arian to the Catholic confession involved and proclaimed a withdrawal of his allegiance to the king. This ecclesiastical defection was necessarily accompanied by a political rebellion.”

Indeed, as David Keys writes, “Hermenegild’s conversion was a massive challenge to the political system as a whole.”

However, the rebellion of Hermenegild, though aided by the Orthodox Sueves in the north-west (they converted from Arianism to Orthodoxy in the 550s), and the Byzantines in the south-east, was crushed by King Leogivild (the Byzantine general was bribed to stay in camp). Hermenegild himself was killed at Pascha, 585 for refusing to accept communion from an Arian bishop in prison. He was immediately hailed as a martyr by Pope St. Gregory, the writer of his Life; and St. Gregory of Tours also treated the civil war as religious in essence. Moreover, his brother Rekhared, who became king after the death of Leogivild, “commanded that the body of his elder brother, Saint Hermenegild, be given all the honors due a martyr of Christ”. However, the Spanish sources, both Gothic and Roman, speak of him as a rebel rather than a martyr. And “it seems evident,” writes Aloysius Ziegler, “that the Spanish Church did not espouse the cause of the Catholic [i.e. Orthodox] prince against his Arian father”.

So it is clear that those within and outside the country attached different priorities to the purity of the faith, on the one hand, and the integrity of the kingdom, on the other. For the Franks and the Italians (and the Orthodox of other nations who inscribed St. Hermenegild’s name among the saints), the triumph of Orthodoxy justified even the horrors of civil war. But the Spaniards, who, as St. Gregory of Tours wrote, “had adopted this detestable custom of killing with the sword any of their kings who did not please them, and of appointing as king whomsoever their fancy lighted upon”, preferred the peaceful status quo.

And yet putting the faith first bore rich fruit; for within a very few years, at the great Council of Toledo in 589, the new king, Rekhared and the whole of the Gothic nobility accepted Orthodoxy, and Arianism never again lifted its head in Spain. Thus, as St. Demetrius of Rostov writes, “the fruit of the death of this one man was life and Orthodoxy for all the people of Spain”.

Led by the Church, Spain now entered perhaps the greatest period in her history. The two law-codes, one for the Romans and the other for the Visigoths, were fused into one. There were frequent councils in which the king and the bishops took part, and at which an extensive programme of

---

522 St. Gregory of Tours wrote that Hermenegild “joined the party of the Emperor Tiberius, making overtures to the Emperor’s army commander, who was then invading Spain”, but that “as soon as Leovigild ordered his troops to advance Hermenegild found himself deserted by the Greeks” (History of the Franks, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974, V, 38).
526 St. Demetrius, op. cit., p. 17.
527 See Siedentop, op. cit., pp. 138-139.
legislation was enacted. “Gothic law” was clearly related to the imperial code of Theodosius II; and although the Byzantine province of Spania was reconquered in 628, “it is fairly clear that the late seventh-century Visigoths had the contemporary Byzantine empire as a point of reference,..., at least as a model for ceremonial, and for a close identification between the episcopacy and the king.”

But the kingship completely dominated the episcopate in Visigothic Spain. As King writes, “nothing lay outside the purview of the king. Far from there being an autonomous body, ‘the church’, authority over which belonged to others, society and the church were conceptually equated. It was precisely because fact did not correspond to idea that such savage action was taken against the Jews, whose presence within the territorial but beyond the ideological confines of the kingdom affronted the Christian, unitary premisses of the Visigothic standpoint. The king’s authority over clerics and religious matters, inherent in his God-given responsibility for the health of society, was fully accepted by the sacerdotium itself. Kings nominated bishops, judged metropolitans, summoned councils, established agenda and confirmed rulings. They even provided excommunication as a legal penalty.”

At the same time, the kings insisted on bringing the Church right into the process of civil legislation, allowing bishops to take part in the election of kings. Thus “the decisions of the council,” writes Ziegler, “had the strange character of being partly civil and partly ecclesiastical, with the important distinction, however, that the ecclesiastical as well as the civil had the force of statute law for all living within the kingdom... It cannot be denied that the presence of the bishops at these councils had the result of placing the legal code of Visigothic Spain on a philosophical basis and of resting it on principles which expressed to a very large degree the social doctrines of the Christian religion. The enactment of laws by the synod did not have the necessary result of making the Church an integral or essential part of the civic administration, but it did introduce into the laws principles of morality and justice which must ultimately have resulted in the greatest benefit to all the people of Spain...”

The Church’s glorification of St. Hermenegild established the principle that legitimate political power was either Roman power, or that power which shared in the faith of the Romans, Orthodoxy. A heterodox power could legitimately be overthrown as long as the motive was the establishment or re-establishment of Orthodoxy. This did not mean, however, that Christians were obliged to rebel against pagan or heterodox régimes; for civil war is one of the worst of all evils and is to be undertaken only in the most exceptional circumstances...

---

528 Wickham, op. cit., p. 136. This is confirmed by Heather: the kings “drenched themselves in a Roman and Christian sacrality, which determinedly echoed that of the emperors in Constantinople” (op. cit., p. 214).
529 King, op. cit., p. 144.
530 Ziegler, op. cit., p. 54.
39. THE WESTERN KINGDOMS: (5) CELTIC BRITAIN AND IRELAND

It was not only in the Mediterranean provinces of France, Spain and Italy that the consciousness of Romanity survived and re-established itself around the Church. The distant province of Britain was in a sense more committed to the new order of Christian Rome than any other for the simple reason that the first Christian Emperor, Constantine the Great, had been proclaimed emperor for the first time precisely in Britain, and had taken the title Britannicus Maximus, “the greatest of the Britons”, in 315. However, in spite of some impressive architectural remains at Bath, York and Hadrian’s Wall, signs of Romanization are fewer in Britain than on the continent even after four centuries of Roman rule. Romans writing about Britain exhibit a certain antipathy towards this province. And the Britons retained, with the Jews, the reputation of being the least assimilated people in the Empire.

Perhaps for that reason Britain became the platform for several rebellions against the central authorities in the late Empire. Thus in 350 a British officer called Magnentius donned the purple and was acclaimed by the army at Autun, only to be defeated the next year. Again, in 383 Magnus Clemens Maximus, leader of the army in Britain, seized power in the West and killed the Western Emperor Gratian. Now Maximus, unlike Magnentius, was an Orthodox Christian, a champion of the Church and a fine defender of the Western frontier against the Germans. Moreover, his usurpation of the empire 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”.

St. Ambrose of Milan rejected Maximus and remained loyal to Gratian’s co-emperor Valentinian II (in spite of the fact that his mother, Justina, was an Arian and his resolute enemy). He travelled to Trier in the winter of 383-4 to meet Maximus, but refused to give him communion, warning him that “he must do penance for shedding the blood of one who was his master [the Western Emperor Gratian] and... an innocent man.” Maximus refused, and according to Paulinus “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.” In 388 he was defeated and executed by the Eastern Emperor Theodosius.

---

531 In York. The place under York Minster where this hugely important event took place has now been excavated by archaeologists.
533 Sulpicius Severus, Dialogues, I (2, VI).
534 Paulinus, Life of St. Ambrose, chapter 19, in the translation by E.R. Hoare.
The way in which Ambrose could reject the British usurper Maximus, although his credentials were as good as many a pagan emperor, was a tribute to the way in which Christian Rome had transformed political thought in the ancient world. In early Rome a “tyrant” was a man who seized power by force; and in Republican Rome tyrants were those who, like Julius Caesar, imposed one-man rule on the true and only lawful sovereigns – Senatus PopulusQue Romanorum, the senate and people of Rome. During the first three centuries of the empire, many generals seized power by force and the senate and the people were forced to accept their legitimacy. However, this changed with the coming of St. Constantine, who became the source and model of all legitimate emperors. Constantine, of course, had seized the empire by force; but he had done so against anti-Christian tyrants and was therefore seen to have been acting with the blessing of God. Now legitimate rulers would have to prove that they were in the image of Constantine, both in their Orthodoxy and in their legitimate succession from the previous emperor. As for who the real sovereign was – the emperor or the senate and people – this still remained unclear.

In the years 406-410, British troops attempted to place the “tyrants” Marcus, Gratian and Constantine III on the throne of the Western Empire. Thus Gratian was given “a purple robe, a crown and a body-guard, just like an emperor,” according to Zosimus. In 410 the Roman legions left Britain and the British found themselves outside the Empire. As Procopius wrote: “The Romans never succeeded in recovering Britain, but it remained from that time on under tyrants.” St. Gildas the Wise, writing in the 540s, blamed his countrymen, saying that they had “ungratefully rebelled” against “Roman kings”, and had failed in their “loyalty to the Roman Empire”. It is difficult to argue with that judgement: the British began as they continued to be thereafter - innovators, even revolutionaries, in political theory and practice… The land formerly known as “the Roman island” became, from the beginning of the fifth century, “a province fertile in tyrants” (St. Jerome), thus reverting to its rebelliousness under Carausius and Allectus in the late third century.

And yet the distinction between true kings and tyrants continued to be made here. Thus St. Patrick, the British apostle of Ireland, called the Scottish chieftain Coroticus a “tyrant” because he did not fear God or His priests; “for the sake of a miserable temporal kingdom [regnum]” he would face God’s judgement on “wicked kings” [regibus]. Patrick’s use of the terms “king” and “tyrant” is not clear; his definition of the word “tyrant” seems to be a mixture between the old, secular meaning of “usurper” and the newer, more religious, Ambrosian meaning of “unjust or immoral person in authority”.

---

536 Zosimus, New History, 6.2.
537 Procopius, The Vandal War, 3.2.38.
538 St. Gildas, On the Ruin of Britain, 4.1, 5.1, 15.1.
541 St. Patrick, Letter to Coroticus, 21, 19.
St. Gildas makes the distinction between kings and tyrants still clearer. Among past rulers in Britain, Diocletian, Maximus, Marcus, Gratian, Constantine, Constans and Vortigern were all “tyrants”. On the other hand, there had been legitimate rulers, such as Ambrosius Aurelianus, “a modest man, who alone of the Roman nation had been left alive in the confusion of this troubled period... He provoked the cruel conquerors [the Anglo-Saxons] to battle, and by the goodness of our Lord got the victory”. His parents even “wore the purple”.

And then, at the turn of the century, came the famous King Arthur. He won twelve victories over the Saxons, fighting with a cross or icon of the Virgin Mary on his back, and halted the pagan advance westwards for at least a generation, until his death in 519. David Miles writes: “It is possible that Artos/Arthur – ‘The Bear’ in Celtic, was the signum, or nickname, of Aurelianus himself. A bearskin cloak would have been a distinguishing element of his uniform as a Roman general.” In any case, Arthur of Britain, with Clovis of France, was the first great king of the post-Roman West, and became the stuff of innumerable medieval legends.

In general, however, Gildas was withering about the kings: “Britain has kings [reges], but they are tyrants [tyrannos]; she has judges, but they are wicked. They often plunder and terrorize the innocent; they defend and protect the guilty and thieving; they have many wives, whores and adulteresses; they constantly swear false oaths, they make vows, but almost at once tell lies; they wage wars, civil and unjust; they chase thieves energetically all over the country, but love and reward the thieves who sit with them at table; they distribute alms profusely, but pile up an immense mountain of crime for all to see; they take their seats as judges, but rarely seek out the rules of right judgement; they despise the harmless and humble, but exalt to the stars, as far as they can, their military companions, bloody, proud and murderous men, adulterers and enemies of God... They hang around the altars swearing oaths, then shortly afterwards scorn them as though they were filthy stones...”

Thus by the sixth century it looks as if the problem of formal legitimacy had been solved, at least in the eyes of the Britons themselves. The kings Gildas were talking about were both Christian and “anointed” – they had that link, at any rate, with the anointed kings of Israel and Christian Rome. But they did not fulfill their vows; they were a terror to good works, but not to the evil – and by that criterion they were not true authorities (Romans 13.3), being linked rather with the tyrants of old, the Ahabs and Magnus Maximuses.

542 St. Gildas On The Ruin of Britain, 25. Bede interprets this to mean that they were “of royal race”.
544 Graham Phillips and Martin Keatman (King Arthur: The True Story, London: Arrow, 1993) have made an excellent case for the historicity of King Arthur.
545 St. Gildas On The Ruin of Britain, 27.
So the break with Rome was still keenly felt. Celtic Britain had many great monks and hierarchs, but very few great, or even powerful, kings. And by the middle of the sixth century there was little to link the Britons with their Roman heritage - with the important exception of the Church, a Roman institution which was now stronger than ever. Thus Simon Young writes that “in the west... there are various Celtic successor states but those too have left Rome far behind them. No surprise there. The west had, after all, always been the least Romanised part of Britannia and it was the very fact that they had primitive tribal societies instead of sophisticated urban ones that allowed the Celtic kingdoms to come through the storm in one piece. They were better able to fight off the barbarians. Indeed, the only Roman thing that survived there was Christianity – that had been the official religion of the later empire – and, closely connected to Christianity, Latin writing...”

Fr. Gregory Telepneff notes that “early Celtic monasticism was Byzantine in character, i.e., a manifestation of the Eastern Orthodox Faith. The cultural hegemony of the Roman Empire, which extended beyond its political borders, decisively shaped the spiritual environment of ancient Hibernia [including the Celtic lands on the mainland of Britain].”

However, Telepneff also provides evidence of the strong influence of the Coptic Church on the Celts. And William Dalrymple has pointed out a very close resemblance between a seventh-century rock-carving from Perthshire depicting Saints Anthony and Paul of Egypt with an icon in St. Anthony’s monastery in Egypt, and cites the words of the seventh-century Antiphonary of the Irish monastery of Bangor:

The house full of delight
Is built on the rock
And indeed the true vine
Transplanted out of Egypt.

“Moreover,” he continues, “the Egyptian ancestry of the Celtic Church was acknowledged by contemporaries: in a letter to Charlemagne, the English scholar-monk Alcuin described the Celtic Culdees as ‘pueri egyptiaci’, the children of the Egyptians. Whether this implied direct contact between Coptic Egypt and Celtic Ireland and Scotland is a matter of scholarly debate. Common sense suggests that it is unlikely, yet a growing body of scholars think that that is exactly what Alcuin meant. For there are an extraordinary number of otherwise inexplicable similarities between the Celtic and Coptic Churches which were shared by no other Western Churches. In both, the bishops wore crowns rather than mitres and held T-shaped Tau crosses rather than crooks or crosiers. In both the hand-bell played a very prominent place

in ritual, so much so that in early Irish sculpture clerics are distinguished from lay persons by placing a clochette in their hand. The same device performs a similar function on Coptic stelae – yet bells of any sort are quite unknown in the dominant Greek or Latin Churches until the tenth century at the earliest. Stranger still, the Celtic wheel cross, the most common symbol of Celtic Christianity, has recently been shown to have been a Coptic invention, depicted on a Coptic burial pall of the fifth century, three centuries before the design first appears in Scotland and Ireland.”

However, as Wickham writes: “Fewer and fewer people in the West called themselves Romani; the others found new ethnic markers: Goths, Lombards, Bavarians, Alemans, Franks, different varieties of Angles and Saxons, Britons – the name the non-Anglo-Saxon inhabitants of Britain had given themselves by 550, the Romani having left, and a word itself due soon to be replaced by a Welsh term, Cymry, ‘fellow countryman’. Even in a part of the former empire unconquered by invaders, that is to say, the Romans were not the Britons themselves, but other people, earlier invaders, who had come and gone. And although of course the huge majority of the ancestors of all these peoples were men and women who would have called themselves Roman in 400, the Roman world had indeed gone, and Roman-ness with it.”

Moreover, even when the link with Rome was re-established, through St. Augustine’s mission to the pagan Anglo-Saxons in 597, the old British tendency to rebellion manifested itself again – and led, this time, to the first formal schism on nationalist grounds in Church history (if we exclude the Jews and the Armenians at the other end of the empire, which had dogmatic underpinnings). Unlike the neighbouring Irish Church, which had always expressed willing obedience to the Pope of Rome (from whom it had received its first missionary bishop), the older Church of Wales strongly asserted its independence. Thus when the Roman St. Augustine, first archbishop of Canterbury (+604), sought union with the Welsh, asking only that they adopt the Roman-Byzantine method of calculating the date of Pascha, correct some inadequacy in their administration of the rite of Baptism, and co-operate with him in the conversion of the pagan Saxons, the Welsh refused.

---


Most recently, a papyrus has been founded attached to the cover of an early Irish psalter, which is the first tangible proof of links between the Irish and Coptic Churches (Philip Kosloski, “Irish Worker Discovers Ancient Manuscript that Links Irish Church to Egypt”, November 30, 2016, http://aleteia.org/2016/11/30/irish-worker-discovers-ancient-manuscript-that-links-irish-church-to-egypt/?utm_campaign=english_page&utm_medium=aleteia_en&utm_source=Facebook#link_time=1480489892).

549 Wickham, op. cit., p. 200.

550 As the Irish saint, Columbanus of Luxeuil, wrote to Pope Boniface IV: “All we Irish, inhabitants of the world’s edge, are disciples of Saints Peter and Paul and of all the disciples who wrote the sacred canon by the Holy Ghost” (G.S.M Walker, Sancti Columbani Opera (The Works of St. Columbanus), The Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1970, p. 34).
In 664 the Synod of Whitby united the Celtic and Roman traditions in the British Isles. It was rejected by the Welsh, who went into schism for a century. Both the Anglo-Saxon and Irish Churches regarded them as schismatics. As an Irish canon put it, “the Britons [of Wales] are... contrary to all men, separating themselves both from the Roman way of life and the unity of the Church”. Again, St. Aldhelm of Sherborne, wrote about them: “Glorifying in the private purity of their own way of life, they detest our communion to such a great extent that they disdain equally to celebrate the Divine offices in church with us and to take course of food at table for the sake of charity. Rather... they order the vessels and flagons [used in common with clergy of the Roman Church] to be purified and purged with grains of sandy gravel, or with the dusky cinders of ash. Should any of us, I mean Catholics, go to them for the purpose of habitation, they do not deign to admit us to the company of their brotherhood until we have been compelled to spend the space of forty days in penance... As Christ truly said: ‘Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees; because you make clean the outside of the cup and of the dish’.”

Some have argued that the Welsh were in fact making the first major protest against the Papist heresy. Thus according to one, somewhat suspect source, the Welsh said to Augustine: “Be it known and declared that we all, individually and collectively, are in all humility prepared to defer to the Church of God, and to the Bishop of Rome, and to every sincere and godly Christian, so far as to love everyone according to his degree, in perfect charity, and to assist them all by word and deed in becoming children of God. But as for any other obedience, we know of none that he, whom you term the Pope, or Bishop of bishops, can demand. The deference we have mentioned we are ready to pay to him as to every other Christian, but in all other respects our obedience is due to the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Caerleon, who is alone under God our ruler to keep us right in the way of salvation.”

However, this is an anachronistic argument. For the Pope of St. Augustine’s time, Gregory I, was vehemently opposed to any idea of a universal “Bishop of bishops”, and the Roman Church in the seventh century was as Orthodox as any in the oikoumene. In fact, the Welsh rebellion, motivated by pride and nationalist hatred, had nothing to do with Papism as such, although it did demonstrate the fruits of that anti-conciliar and anti-Roman spirit of which Papism, paradoxically, was to be the most disastrous example.

---

551 The Welsh Church remained in schism until Bishop Elbod of Bangor restored the northern Welsh to unity in 768 (the southerners followed in 777). Iona was brought into line early in the eighth century through the efforts of the holy Abbots Egbert and Adomnan.
While the Celts were preserving the faith in the north and the west of the British Isles, the south and east, the heart of the old Roman province of Britain, had been overrun by the pagan Anglo-Saxons. By the end of the sixth century, Old Rome, restored to ecclesiastical and political unity with New Rome, was recovering its power and influence in the West. The crucial figure in this revival was Pope Gregory I – “the Great”, as he is known in the West, “the Dialogist”, as he is known in the East. As well as restoring the power and influence of the papacy throughout continental Western Europe, he determined on recovering Britain, “the Roman island”, where the heirs of Christian Rome in Britain had been driven to the West or absorbed into the pagan Anglo-Saxon settlements that dominated most of the island.555

To this end, in 597 St. Gregory sent a band of forty Roman monks, led, as we have seen, by St. Augustine of Canterbury, to England to convert the Anglo-Saxons. The Roman missionaries tried hard to reconstruct the few bridges that connected the land with its Romano-British past, heading straight for the former Roman centres such as Canterbury and York, London and Dorchester. Thus three churches in Kent were built over late Roman mausoleums; the memory of the first British martyr Alban was faithfully kept at Verulamium; and the first wooden church in York was built in the middle of the vast Roman praetorium where St. Constantine had been hailed as emperor in 306.556

Place-names in “eccles-“, coming from the Brittonic *ecles, “a church” (ultimately from the Greek ecclesia), in some parts of Southern Scotland, the Midlands and East Anglia probably indicate the continuity of church life there from Romano-British into Anglo-Saxon times.557

In general, however, the missionaries found a virtual cultural tabula rasa amid pagans who knew next to nothing about Rome.558 This makes the enthusiastic embrace by the English of Romanitas, both in its religious and political aspects, the more remarkable. Thus by the 680s the last English kingdom, Sussex, had been converted to the faith. Thereafter references to paganism in the sources are remarkably few.559

558 “Augustine of Canterbury began his mission with an almost clean slate” (Blair, op. cit., p. 25). Nevertheless, many Byzantine finds have been found by archaeologists in the early Byzantine period. See Dr. Caitlin Green, “A Very Long Way from Home: Early Byzantine Finds at the Far Ends of the World”, http://www.caittingreen.org/2017/03/a-very-long-way-from-home.html?m=1, March 21, 2017.
559 Blair, op. cit., p. 168.
The enthusiasm of the English for Christianity may be explained by the fact that, unlike the other Germanic tribes who, for generations before accepting the faith, had been settled within the boundaries of the Empire, they were newcomers whose conversion to Romanitas, the world of Roman Christendom, was the stronger in that it was fresher, less hindered by historical hatreds. They had been called by God from darkness into light by Pope Gregory and his disciples; and their gratitude to St. Gregory, “the Apostle of the English”, was boundless. As we read in the earliest work of English hagiography, a monk of Whitby’s *Life of St. Gregory*: “When all the apostles, leading their Churches with them, and each of the teachers of separate races, present them to the Lord on Judgement Day in accord with Gregory’s opinion, we believe he will wondrously lead us, that is, the English nation, taught by him through the grace of God, to the Lord.”

From that time English men and women of all classes and conditions poured across the Channel in a well-beaten path to the tombs of the Apostles in Rome (to whom almost all the English cathedrals were dedicated). English missionaries such as St. Boniface of Germany and St. Willibrord of Holland worked as the legates of the Roman Popes. And the voluntary tax known as “Peter’s Pence” was paid by the English to the Roman see even during the Viking invasions, when it was the English themselves who were in need of alms.

As the English were absorbed into Christian Rome by the Roman missionaries, the symbolism of Romanitas reappeared in the English land. Thus St. Gregory compared the newly enlightened King Ethelbert of Kent to St. Constantine and Queen Bertha to St. Helena, and according to Fr. Andrew Phillips they “had, it would seem, actually emulated Constantine. Having made Canterbury over to the Church, they had moved to Reculver, there to build a new palace. Reculver was their New Rome just as pagan Byzantium had become the Christian city of New Rome, Constantinople. Nevertheless, King Ethelbert had retained, symbolically, a royal mint in his ‘Old Rome’ – symbolically, because it was his treasury, both spiritually and physically. The coins he minted carried a design of Romulus and Remus and the wolf on the Capitol. Ethelbert had entered Romanitas, becoming one of those numerous kings who owed allegiance, albeit formal, to the Emperor in New Rome…”

---

561 A whole quarter of the city was called “Il Borgo Saxono” because of the large number of English pilgrims it accommodated. Peter Llewellyn, *Rome in the Dark Ages*, London: Constable, 1996, p. 254 writes that, during the pontificate of Pope Pascal (early ninth century) “the English colony of the Borgo, near St. Peter’s, which followed its native custom of building in wood, lost its houses in a disastrous fire, the first of many to sweep the crowded quarter around the basilica. Pascal, roused at midnight, hurried barefoot to the scene and supervised the fire-fighting operations himself; ever solicitous of pilgrims, he granted the Saxon community estates and money for rebuilding, with woods for a supply of timber.”
562 Phillips, *Orthodox Christianity and the Old English Church*, English Orthodox Trust, 1996, p. 15.
The Romanization of England was greatly aided by the appointment, in 668, of a Greek from Tarsus, St. Theodore, as archbishop of Canterbury. He created a single Church organization and body of canonical law, and convened Councils that formally recognised the Ecumenical Councils and rejected the heresy of Monothelitism. Bishops like SS. Wilfrid, Egwin and Aldhelm strengthened the links with Rome by frequent trips there, and abbots like SS. Benedict Biscop and Ceolfrid imported books, icons and even the chief chanter of the Roman Church to make sure that even in the furthest recesses of the north things were done as the Romans did them.

In Church-State relations, too, the English followed the Roman-Byzantine model. Thus King Ethelbert and Archbishop Augustine (in Kent), King Oswald and Bishop Aidan (in Northumbria), and King Cynegils and Bishop Birinus (in Wessex) enjoyed “symphonic” relations. A striking example of such “symphony” was to be found in eighth-century Northumbria, where Archbishop Egbert ruled the Church while his brother Edbert ruled the State:

So then Northumbria was prosperous,
When king and pontiff ruled in harmony,
One in the Church and one in government;
One wore the pall the Pope conferred on him,
And one the crown his fathers wore of old.
One brave and forceful, one devout and kind,
They kept their power in brotherly accord,
Each happy in the other’s sure accord.563

The acceptance of the symphonic pattern of Church-State relations in England may well have been aided by the fact that sacral kingship was a traditional institution among the Germanic tribes even before their conversion to Christianity. With the coming of Christianity, writes Chaney, there was “a separation of royal functions, the sacrificial-priestly role of the Germanic tribal monarch going to the Church hierarchy and that of sacral protector remaining with the king. This separation of power manifested itself not in the obliteration of the religious nature of kingship but in the establishment of a sphere of action by and for the ecclesia apart… from that of the regnum.”564 According to François Guizot, this separation of powers is the source and guarantor of one of the most fundamental principles of Christian, and especially English Christian civilization, liberty of conscience. “The separation of temporal and spiritual power is based upon the idea that physical force has neither right nor influence over souls, over conviction, over truth. It flows from the distinction established between the world of thought and the world of action, between the world of internal and that of external facts…”565

The English Church retained close links with Rome, and Canterbury never made claims for autonomy in the manner of Arles or Ravenna. Nevertheless, the English Church remained de facto independent of Rome administratively. Between 669 and 1050, according to Dvorkin, there were 376 episcopal ordinations in England, and not one of them required papal intervention...\textsuperscript{566}

\textsuperscript{566} Dvorkin, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 477. However, papal legates presided at the Council of Chelsea in 786.
41. THE SACRAMENT OF ROYAL ANOINTING

The rite of royal anointing appears to have originated in the West, although it is not certain where. According to one tradition, Clovis, first Christian king of the Franks received the sacrament (if it was not in fact the initiatory rite of chrismation) in a miraculous fashion after his baptism by St. Remigius, Archbishop of Rheims, on Christmas Day, 496: “When the moment came for anointing the newly-baptized King with holy Chrism, the Bishop saw that it was lacking. Raising his eyes to Heaven, he implored God to provide it, whereupon a white dove came down from Heaven with a vial of miraculous oil.”

Early in the sixth century the Italian archbishop Gregory anointed the first Christian King of the South Arabian kingdom of Omir (or Himyar), Abraham, in the presence of St. Elesbaan, king of Ethiopia: “Raising his eyes and mind and hands to heaven, he prayed fervently and for a long time that God, Who knows the life and thoughts of every man, should indicate to him the man who was worthy of the kingdom. During the prayer of the archbishop, the invisible power of the Lord suddenly raised a certain man by the name of Abraham into the air and placed him in front of King Elesbaan. Everyone cried out in awe for a long time: ‘Lord, have mercy!’ The archbishop said: ‘Here is the man whom you demanded should be anointed to the kingdom. Leave him here as king, we shall be of one mind with him, and God will help us in everything.’ Great joy filled everyone on beholding the providence of God. Then King Elesbaan took the man Abraham, who had been revealed by God, led him to the temple of the All-Holy Trinity which was in the royal city of Afar, put the royal purple on him and laid the diadem on his head. Then St. Gregory anointed him and the bloodless Sacrifice was offered for the kings and all the people, and both kings communicated in the Divine Mysteries from the hands of the archbishop…”

It may be that royal anointing originated in Britain; for St. Gildas, referring to events taking place in the fifth century, wrote: “Kings were anointed

567 The Synaxarion, Convent of the Annunciation of our Lady of Ormylia (Chalkidike), 1998, volume I, October 1, p. 254. Harold Nicolson, tells the story as it was recounted some 300 years later: “On that occasion there was such a crowd in church that the priest who arrived with the holy oil with which the king was to be anointed was unable to push through the throng. The bishop, having no oil available, paused; a state of embarrassed tension descended on the king and the congregation. At that moment a dove fluttered into the cathedral bearing in its beak a lekythion or phial of scented oil brought straight from heaven. It was with this sacred oil that Clovis was anointed and the lekythion was thereafter preserved in a reliquary shaped like a dove. This precious relic, known as la sainte Ampoule, was jealously preserved by succeeding Archbishops of Rheims, who insisted that no French monarch could claim to have been properly anointed unless the ceremony were performed at Rheims and the oil of the sainte Ampoule (which had the magic property of renewing itself at every coronation) poured over his head and hands. Even Joan of Arc refused to recognise Charles VII as King of France and always addressed him as Dauphin until he had been anointed at Rheims.” (Monarchy, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962, p. 23)

Not long after this, in 574, the Irish apostle of Scotland, St. Columba, consecrated the first Orthodox King of Scotland, Aidan Mor, who was to become the ancestor of all the Celtic kings of Scotland and, through James VI of Scotland and I of England, of the present British royal family. The seventh-century Abbots of Iona Cummeneus Albus and Adomnan both relate how, when the saint was staying “in the island of Hymba [probably Jura], he was in an ecstasy of mind one night and saw an Angel of the Lord who had been sent to him, and who held in his hand a glass book of the Ordination of Kings. The venerable man received it from the Angel’s hand, and at his command began to read it. And when he refused to ordain Aidan as king according to the direction given to him in the book, because he loved his brother Iogenan more, the Angel, suddenly stretching out his hand, struck the saint with a scourge, of which the livid mark remained on his side all the days of his life, and he added these words, saying: ‘Know thou for certain that I am sent to thee by God with this glass book, that according to the words which thou hast read in it, thou mayest ordain Aidan to the kingship – and if thou art not willing to obey this command, I shall strike thee again.’ When, then, this Angel of the Lord had appeared on three successive nights, having in his hand that same glass book, and had pressed the same commands of the Lord concerning the ordination of that king, the saint obeyed the Word of the Lord, and sailed across to the isle of Iona where, as he had been commanded, he ordained Aidan as king, Aidan having arrived there at the same time.”

St. Columba then went with King Aidan to the Synod of Drumceatt in Ireland, where the independence of Dalriada (that part of Western Scotland colonised by the Irish) was agreed upon in exchange for a pledge of assistance to the mother country in the event of invasion from abroad.

It is significant that these early examples of Christian kingmaking come from parts of the world remote from the centres of Imperial power. Neither Ethiopia nor Ireland had ever been part of the Roman Empire, while Britain

---

571 St. Adomnan of Iona, *Life of Columba*. St. Columba is usually described as an abbot, but he may also have been a bishop. Hieromonk Gorazd (Vopatrny) of Charles University, Prague, has suggested, on the basis of John Ryan’s *Irish Monasticism*, that “bishops had a classical leadership role in the Irish Church until approximately the thirties of the 6th century. With the spread of monasticism the whole system of ecclesiastical control was affected. Jurisdiction was exercised not only by bishops whether they were also abbots or not, but also by abbots who were only priests. About one half of the main abbots were bishops and about a half were priests.” (private communication, November 7, 2012)
had fallen away from it. Perhaps it was precisely here, where Romanitas was weakest or non-existent, that the Church had to step in to supply political legitimacy through the sacrament, especially since here a new dynasty in a new Christian land was being created, which required both the blessing of the former rulers and a special act of the Church.

In continental Europe, if we exclude the doubtful case of Clovis, the sacrament of royal anointing first appeared in Spain. A possible reason for this is that Spain lacked a stable monarchy, and the sacrament may have been seen as helping to supply stability. Thus Collins writes that in the first half of the seventh century, “principles by which legitimacy of any king could be judged, other than sheer success in holding onto his throne against all comers, seem to be conspicuously lacking. Thus Witteric had deposed and killed Liuva II in 603, Witteric had been murdered in 610, Sisebut’s son Recared II was probably deposed by Swinthila in 621, Swinthila was certainly deposed by Sisenand in 631, Tulga by Chindaswinth in 642. Ephemeral kings, such as Iudila, who managed to strike a few coins in Baetica and Lusitania in the early 630s, also made their bids for power.”

The only generally recognized authority that could introduce order into this chaos was the Church. And so, probably toward the middle of the seventh century, the Orthodox Church in Spain introduced the rite of royal anointing. From now on, kings would not only be called “kings by the grace of God”, they would be seen to be such by the visible bestowal of sacramental grace at the hands of the archbishop.

Moreover, paradoxically, it gave some kind of justification for the deposition of kings. For, as King writes, “they never talked of deposition, and it was the fiction of abdication to which they resorted when Svinthila was in fact toppled by revolt. The introduction of the Old Testament rite of royal anointing, perhaps in 631 to make it visibly and ceremonially clear that Svinthila’s usurping successor ruled by God’s favour, confirmed and buttressed the loftiness of the monarchical status.”

In 672 King Wamba was anointed by the archbishop of Toledo. The ceremony was described by St. Julian of Toledo: “When he had arrived there, where he was to receive the vexilla of the holy unction, in the praetorian church, that is to say the church of Saints Peter and Paul, he stood resplendent in his regalia in front of the holy altar and, as the custom is, recited the creed to the people. Next, on his bended knees the oil of blessing was poured onto his head by the hand of the blessed bishop Quiricus, and the strength of the benediction was made clear, for at once this sign of salvation appeared. For suddenly from his head, where the oil had first been poured on, a kind of

---

574 King, op. cit., p. 144.
575 Wickham (op. cit., p. 130) regards this as a “novelty” introduced by Wamba himself.
vapour, similar to smoke, rose upon the form of a column, and from the very
top of this a bee was seen to spring forth, which sign was undoubtedly a
portent of his future good fortune."\footnote{576}

It was probably from Spain that the rite of the anointing of kings was
introduced into France.\footnote{577} And after Pope Stephen anointed the Frankish King
Pepin in 754 the rite became standard practice in kingmaking throughout the
West. Thus in 781 Pepin’s successor, Charlemagne, had two of his sons
anointed by Pope Hadrian as kings of Aquitaine and Italy. And in 786 King
Offa of Mercia had his son Egfrith anointed.

It was some time, however, before anointing came to be seen as \textit{constitutive}
of true kingship. As in Rome and Byzantium, western kings who were raised
to the throne by election or acclamation only were not considered illegitimate;
it was simply that anointing added an extra authority and sacred character to
the monarchy. The extra authority and grace provided by the sacrament of
anointing produced tangible results: in Spain, Francia and England the
introduction of anointing, accompanied by stern conciliar warnings “not to
touch the Lord’s Anointed”, led to a reduction in regicides and rebellions and
a strengthening of monarchical power. In Spain, this process came to an
abrupt end in 711, when most of the peninsula was conquered by the Arab
Muslims. In Western Francia (modern France), it was brought to an end
towards the end of the ninth century by the Vikings, in spite of the efforts of
such champions of royal power (and opponents of papal despotism) as
Archbishop Hincmar of Rheims; and France did not develop a powerful
monarchy until the twelfth century. But in Eastern Francia (modern
Germany) and in England, the monarchy survived and put down deep roots.

Janet Nelson writes: “If relatively many reigning Merovingians and no
Carolingians were assassinated, this can hardly be explained simply in terms
of the protective effect of anointing for the latter dynasty, at least in its earlier
period. More relevant here are such factors as the maintenance of a fairly
restrictive form of royal succession (and the Carolingians’ abandonment of
polygamy must soon have narrowed the circle of royals) and the growth of a
clerically-fostered ideology of Christian kingship.”\footnote{578}

However, all these factors were related. Once it became accepted that the
Church had an important part to play in kingmaking through the sacrament
of anointing, it also became natural for the Church to have a say in deciding
who was the best candidate for the throne, and then in administering a
coronation-oath in which the king swore to protect the Church...

\footnote{576} St. Julian, in Collins, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 41-42.
\footnote{577} Louth, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 68.
Theoretically, too, the Church could refuse to sanction a king, and even lead the people in rebellion if he did not rule rightly. Thus St. Isidore of Seville said: “You will be king if you act rightly; if you do not, you will not be”, which contains a play on the words rex, “king”, and recte, “rightly”, and an implicit threat on the part of the Church to withhold recognition of the king in certain circumstances. Moreover, in the Latin version of Justinian’s famous Sixth Novella, there is also a clear indication that, for the symphony of powers to be effective, the king must rule rightly (recte).

Joseph Canning writes: “The specific contribution which the anointing rituals made to the development of the idea of theocratic kingship appeared clearly in Hincmar’s ordines. Anointing had become the constitutive element in the king-making process: it was the bishops who as mediators of divine grace made the king. There was thus a relative downgrading of other, traditional aspects of inauguration: the consent of the great men of the kingdom, enthronement and the feast. The episcopal anointing represented the third stage of the elaboration of the notion of kingship by the grace of God, the first being the Pauline view that all rulership was divinely sanctioned, and the second that the monarch derived his power directly from God. Anointing transformed kingship into another, higher dimension, because such unction was understood to be a sacrament. There was thereby involved a crucial change in the meaning attributed to the ‘grace’ by which the medieval king ruled. Whereas previously, gratia in this context meant ‘favour’, thus indicating the source of his power (the possibly sacramental nature of eighth-century unction remains obscure), now gratia also definitely signified ‘supernatural grace’ infused into the king through the mediation of the bishops in order to enable him to perform his sacred ministry of rulership over clergy and laity within his kingdom understood as a church in the wider sense.”

St. Constantine had called himself “the bishop of those outside”, his ministry being understood as analogous to that of a bishop, but extending beyond the jurisdiction of any bishop into the pagan world and therefore subject to the Church in a moral, but not in a jurisdictional sense. In the West by the ninth century, however, when the boundaries of the kingdom and the Church were almost coterminous, the king’s ministry was seen as almost entirely within the Church, which perception was reinforced by his anointing by the Church, and by the fact that the symbolism of the rite, including the staff and ring and vestments, were almost identical to that of episcopal consecration. This served to increase the king’s sacred character; but it also enabled the Church to intervene more decisively both in the kingmaking process and in the definition of what the king could and could not do, and, if necessary, in his deposition…

579 St. Isidore, Etymologiae, 9.3.4, col. 342.
There was a contractual element between Germanic kings and their subjects. Thus “in 843 Charles the Bald swore to uphold the honour of both his clerical and lay fideles, and the respective laws under which they lived, whereas they swore to sustain the honour of the king”. And in 858 he promised “'like a faithful king' to honour and protect the persons and legal position of his fideles”. What was new from the ninth century onwards was the increased role played by the Church in this process, both in that protecting the Church’s rights was considered the most important part of the king’s obligations and in that it was the Church that administered the coronation oath. Also new was the hint, as we have seen, that the bishops might depose the king if he broke his oath, as Charles the Bald implicitly admitted at his coronation in 869, when he said that he could be expelled from his consecration “by no one, at least without hearing and judgement by the bishops, by whose ministry I was consecrated king.”

Now the fact that the king was anointed by the bishop did not mean that the king was thereby subject to the bishop, any more than Christ’s baptism at the hands of St. John the Baptist meant that He was subject to the Baptist. Nevertheless, the hint was there, and in 833 Louis the Pious, Charlemagne’s son, was in fact forced to abdicate by his bishops, even though he had been anointed by the Pope himself. Again, Archbishop Hincmar of Rheims, “subjected more than one king to harsh criticism, to penance and even to excommunication” As he put it in 881: “So much greater is the responsibility of the priesthood in that they must render account in God’s judgement even for the very kings of men, and by so much greater are the rank and prestige of bishops than of kings because kings are consecrated to their kingship by bishops, but bishops cannot be consecrated by kings.” Unlike later popes like Gregory VII, Hincmar was not trying to weaken monarchy, but to strengthen and purify it; for he saw that Christian society in his troubled age could not survive without the sacred power of the anointed kings...

---

581 Canning, op. cit., p. 63.
582 Canning, op. cit., p. 59.
42. THE DISSONANCE OF NATIONS: CHRISTIANS, JEWS AND PERSIANS

The degree of identity achieved by Justinian between the Orthodox Church and the Orthodox Empire was striking, but it was not, of course, complete. Not only were there Roman citizens who were not Orthodox – the Monophysite Copts and Syrians: there were also large bodies of Orthodox that remained outside the bounds of the Empire – for example, the Celts in the West and the Georgians in the East. Moreover, friction continued between the nations of the Byzantine commonwealth; and although nationalism as such is usually considered to be a modern phenomenon stemming from the French Revolution, something similar to it is certainly evident in antiquity.

Perhaps the clearest example is that of Armenia, which can lay claim to having been the first Christian kingdom, having been converted by St. Gregory the Illuminator in the early fourth century. However, in the middle of the fifth century, in the wake of the Byzantine Emperor Marcian’s refusal to support an Armenian revolt against Persia, the Armenian Church ignored and then rejected the Council of Chalcedon. From this time the Armenian Church was alienated from Orthodoxy, but not completely from Romanity. Thus in the council of Dvin in 506, they sided with the Monophysites who were being persecuted by the Persian government at the instigation of the Nestorians. After the Muslim conquest in the seventh century, the Armenian Church became more and more entrenched, not only in anti-Chalcedonian Monophysitism, but also in a kind of nationalism that made it the first national church in the negative sense of that phrase – that is, a church that was so identified with the nation as to lose its universalist claims. In this way the Armenian Church contrasts with other national Churches in the region, such as the Orthodox Georgian and the Monophysite Ethiopian.

Other cases in which national hatred has been suspected to lie beneath religious separatism are the Donatist Berbers, The Celts of Wales (with whom Justinian had relations\(^586\)), the Monophysite Copts and Syrians – and, of course, the Jews...

* 

The hostility of the Jews towards Christianity and Christian Rome had not waned since apostolic times. Sergius and Tamara Fomin write: “To the prayer ‘birkam za-minim’ which was read everyday against heretics and apostates there was added the ‘curse’ against ‘the proud state’ (of Rome) and against all the enemies of Israel, in particular the Christians… [The Christians were also

\(^586\) There is intriguing evidence that in about 540 the Emperor Justinian was sending subsidies to the kingdom of Gwynedd. However, after the great plague of 547, links between Britain and the East appear to have been cut off. See Michelle Ziegler, “Emperor Justinian and the British Kings, c. 540”, Heavenfield, https://hefenfelth.wordpress.com/2015/03/20/emperor-justinian-and-the-british-kings-c-540.
identified with] the scapegoat, on which the sins of the Jews were laid and which was then driven into the wilderness as a gift to the devil. According to rabbinic teaching, the goat signified Esau and his descendants, who at the present time were the Christians."\textsuperscript{587}

The Jews also called the Roman Empire “the kingdom of the Edomites”. Thus Rabbi David Kimchi writes in \textit{Obadiah}: “What the Prophets foretold about the destruction of Edom in the last days was intended for Rome, as Isaiah explains (34.1)... For when Rome is destroyed, Israel shall be redeemed.” And Rabbi Abraham in his book \textit{Tseror Hammor} writes: “Immediately after Rome is destroyed, we shall be redeemed.”\textsuperscript{588}

The teaching of the Talmud incited the Jews to terrible crimes against Gentiles, especially Christians. Thus “under Theodosius II,” writes L.A. Tikhomirov, “it was discovered that the Jews, on the day of the feast of the execution of Haman [Purim], had introduced the practice of burning the Cross. The government had to undertake repressions against the blasphemy, but the Jews were not pacified. Under the same Theodosius II, in the city of Imma, the Jews during one of their feasts took hold of a Christian child, crucified him on a cross and with scourges cut him into pieces. The disturbed Christians took to arms, and a bloody battle took place. This incident, as they said, was not unique. The Christian historian Socrates relates that the Jews more than once crucified Christian children. At that time it was not a matter of ‘ritual killings’, and in such acts only the hatred of the Jews for Christians and mockery of them was seen. In the given case Theodosius II executed those guilty of the murder, but at the same time the government began to take measures to weaken Jewry. Theodosius destroyed the Jewish patriarchate in Palestine and confiscated the sums collected throughout Jewry for the patriarchate. But all these repressions did not quickly pacify the Jews. Under the same Theodosius II there took place in 415 the well-known brawl in Alexandria elicited by the killing of Christians by the Jews. All this boldness of the Jews in the face of a power that was evidently incomparably greater than theirs seems improbable. But we must bear in mind that this was an age of terrible Messianic fanaticism on the part of the Jews. It often drove them to acts that were senseless, in which pure psychosis was operating. Here, for example, is a purely internal incident having no relation to the Christians. At about the same time, in 432, on the island of Cyprus there took place an event which shows to what an inflamed condition the Jews of that time could come. On the island there appeared a man who was evidently mad, called Moses, the same who had led the people out of Egypt through the Red Sea. He declared that he now had an order from the Lord to lead the Jews out of Cyprus into Palestine through the Mediterranean Sea. His preaching attracted crowds of Jews who did not hesitate to follow the prophet. These hordes went to the sea and, at a sign from Moses, began to hurl themselves from a lofty

\textsuperscript{587} Fomin and Fomina, \textit{op. cit.}, vol. 1, pp. 201-202.

\textsuperscript{588} Quoted in Rev. I.B. Pranaitis, \textit{The Talmud Unmasked}, St. Petersburg, 1892, Bloomfield Books, Sudbury, Suffolk, pp. 43, 80, 81.
cliff into the water. Many crashed against the rocks, others drowned, and only the forcible intervention of the Christians saved the rest: fishermen dragged them from the water, while other inhabitants forcibly drove the Jews from the shore. This mass psychosis shows to what lengths the Jews could go in the name of the idea of the re-establishment of the Kingdom of Israel...

“The [Western] Church had already quite early, in the sixth century, begun to take measures to protect Christians from the influence of the Jews. Councils in Orleans in 538 and 545 decreed the suppression of relations between Christians and Jews and, moreover, forbade the Jews from publicly showing themselves during the Christian Pascha, doubtless to cut off the possibility of any blasphemous outrages. But we can understand why these measures could not be maintained, nor were they systematic, and relations inevitably continued, having two kinds of consequences: some they spiritually cut off from Christianity and drew them into heresy, and others they filled with hatred for the Jews.”

In about 520, 4000 Christians were martyred by the Jewish ruler of the South Arabian land of Omir (or Himyar), Yusuf A’sar Yath’an. Again, in 555 the Jews supported the Samaritans in their rebellion against Byzantium.

*A new era began with the murder of the Emperor Maurice by the bloody tyrant Phocas in 602. Under Phocas, everything began to go wrong for Byzantium, and the resurgent Persian empire under Chosroes even reached Chalcedon, within sight of Constantinople. Sassanid Persia was the successor of the Parthian empire; the two empires had been the greatest enemy of Rome in the late pagan and early Christian periods, and had given Roma invicta her most massive and humiliating defeats. “Sassanid Persia,” writes Roberts, “was a religious as well as a political unity. Zoroastrianism had been formally restored by Ardashir [or Artaxerxes, the first Sassanid ruler], who gave important privileges to its priests, the magi. These led in due course to political power as well. Priests confirmed the divine nature of the kingship, had important judicial duties, and came, too, to supervise the collection of the land-tax which was the basis of Persian finances. The doctrines they taught seem to have varied considerably from the strict monotheism attributed to Zoroaster but focused on a creator, Ahura Mazda, whose viceroy on earth was the king. The Sassanids’ promotion of the state religion was closely connected with the assertion of their own authority.”

Thus “ultimately,” as Tom Holland writes, “in the spiritual dimension as well as the earthly, one protagonist mattered more than any other: the Shahansha himself. He alone could claim to have been touched by the divine. Asha – the supreme virtue of [the good god] Ohrmazd – could not possibly be maintained without him. Nor, indeed, could the privileges and pretensions of the priesthood. Ahrman [the bad god], in the malignancy of his cunning, had always been assiduous in his attempts to cultivate heresy and demon-worship. Not every corner of Iranshahr had been illumined by the light of Zoroaster’s teachings. While some of the Iranians’ ancient gods – the Lady Anahita pre-eminent among them – had come to be ranked by the Zoroastrian priesthood as loyal lieutenants of Ohrmazd, others, so Zoroaster himself had warned, were not gods at all, but demons. Their cults, idols and adherents all needed smashing. Only Shahanshar, in the final reckoning, was up to the job. If the religion of Zoroaster, instituted of Ohrmazd himself, self-evidently existed to serve as the protector of humanity, it was the function of kingship, in the opinion of the priesthood, to serve as ‘the protector of religion’.”592

However, Khodadad Rezakhani thinks the dominance of the Zoroastrian clergy has been exaggerated: “The existence of a Zoroastrian theocracy, presided over by a dominant priestly establishment, is based on fragments of evidence, some of which date back hundreds of years to around the sixth and seventh centuries. Apart from the absence of any ‘orthodox’ Zoroastrian doctrine in the Sasanian world, we have no evidence of the presence of a dominant clergy. Late Sasanian kings are known for making public overtures to their native Christian communities. Khosrow [Chosroes] II Aparviz (1. 591-628), the quintessential late-Sassanian king, married one, perhaps two, Christian wives and had a Christian chief minister. Likewise, in the course of mustering support for his campaigns against Byzantium, he supported the Nestorian Christian community within his domains, buttressed the Nestorians of Syria and, upon conquering and entering Jerusalem, moved the True Cross from Jerusalem to Khuzistan in south-west Iran in order to provide prestige for the Christians of his empire. The presence of a dominant Zoroastrian religious structure is unlikely to have allowed such relations with members of another religion.

“Christians, in fact, were the dominant population in the western regions of the Sassanian realm at this time. Mesopotamia, the heart of the Sassanian Empire (dil-i Iranshahr), was populated mainly by Aramaic-speaking Christians and Jews. South-West Mesopotamia was the realm of the Arab kingdom of Hita, the land of the Lakhmids, who ruled the Arab tribes of northern Arabia on behalf of the Sasanians. Eastern Arabia was also populated by Arabic-speaking peoples, who were controlled via the Sasanian administration of Bahrayn, which included all of eastern Arabia down to what is now Oman. Southern Arabia, the former kingdom of Himyar, had become part of the Sassanian Empire following its conquest around 570.”593

592 Holland, op. cit., p. 65.
In 602 King Chosroes II defeated the Byzantine armies under the bloody tyrant Phocas and conquered Antioch and Jerusalem. Then he wrote to Phocas’ successor, Heraclius: “Chosroes, greatest of gods, and master of the earth, to Heraclius, his vile and insensate slave. Why do you still call yourself a king?” But Heraclius patiently reorganized the shattered empire and the army; and in 622, the same year in which Mohammed fled to Medina, he embarked on one of the greatest feats of arms in Christian history, and by 629 had comprehensively defeated Chosroes, thereby finally bringing old-style pagan despotism to an end in the Middle East. In 630, the same year in which Mohammed conquered Mecca, Heraclius triumphantly returned the Holy Cross from Persia to Jerusalem. But the last ten years of his reign were miserable and tragic: disgraced by his marriage to his niece and his embracing of the Monothelite heresy, he saw all his conquests reversed by the new power of the Muslim Arabs.

In these wars, the Jews had taken the side of the enemies of Rome. This was partly because Phocas had persecuted them and compelled them to be baptised. But a long tradition of Jewish demonization of Rome also played its part. As David Keys writes: “The Jews viewed the apparently imminent collapse of the Roman Empire in the first quarter of the seventh century as evidence that the ‘beast’ (the formerly pagan but now Christian empire) was doomed, that the Devil in the guise of the last Roman emperor or Christian pope would be killed by the (imminently expected) Messiah. They saw the Persians (and a few years later, the Arabs) as the agents who would help destroy the ‘Roman beast’. Violent and often Messianic Jewish revolutionary attitudes had been increasing throughout the second half of the sixth century and went into overdrive as the Empire began to totter in the first quarter of the seventh. In Antioch in AD 608, Christian attempts at forced conversion, as the Persians threatened the city, triggered a major revolt in the Jewish quarter. At first the Jewish rebels were successful, and their community’s arch-enemy, the city’s powerful Christian patriarch, Anastasius, was captured, killed and mutilated. But the revolt was soon put down – and the 800-year-old Antiochian Jewish community was almost totally extinguished.”

The situation was no better in the Holy Land. The Jews appealed to all the Jews of Palestine to join the Persians, and according to the chronicler Theophanes Jewish crowds killed the Bishop of Tiberias and 90,000 Christians in one day. When the Persians conquered Jerusalem, most of the Christians were sent into captivity to Persia. However, “the Jews distinguished themselves at this point with a beastly cruelty unique in the history of the world. They spared no money to buy many Christians from the Persians with one purpose only – to gain enjoyment in killing them. They say that in this way they bought and destroyed 80,000 people. The Jewish historian G. Graetz glides silently over this terrible fact, saying only: ‘Filled with rage, the Jews of

course did not spare the Christians’ and ‘did not spare the holy things of the Christians’. Graetz reduces the number of Christians killed to 19,000...”

After he had defeated the Persians, the Emperor Heraclius turned his attention to the Jews of Jerusalem, banishing them to a distance of three miles from the city, and then repeated the error of his predecessor by decreeing that all the Jews of the empire should be baptized. But the pendulum swung again; in 638 the new power of the Islamic Arabs under Caliph Omar entered the Holy City; and the Jews rejoiced, saying that Mohammed was a prophet who had come to prepare the way for the Messiah. And “even when the Messiah failed to arrive,” writes Karen Armstrong, “Jews continued to look favourably on Islamic rule in Jerusalem. In a letter written in the eleventh century, the Jerusalem rabbis recalled the ‘mercy’ God had shown his people when he allowed the ‘Kingdom of Ishmael’ to conquer Palestine. They were glad to remember that when the Muslims arrived in Jerusalem, ‘there were people from the children of Israel with them; they showed the spot of the Temple and they settled with them until this very day.’”

Thus in spite of Heraclius’ heroic campaigns against the Persians, the first half of the seventh century was a catastrophic period for the Roman empire. Vast areas of the East – Egypt, Syria, Palestine - were lost, first to the Persians, and then to the Muslim Arabs. Not only were the territories lost, but also the loyalty of most of the local populations, Semitic, Coptic and Armenian, whose religious differences with Roman Orthodoxy were compounded by anti-Roman nationalist feeling. And Heraclius’ attempts to heal the wounds by adopting the heresy of Monothelitism only made things worse. St. Anastasius of Sinai considered the defeats and defections that took place in his reign to be Divine punishment for his heresy...

The Jews continued to be persecuted by the Byzantine emperors. Thus Cyril Mango writes that “Leo III ordered once again the baptism of Jews and those who complied were given the title of ‘new citizens’, but they did so in bad faith, while others, it seems, fled to the Arabs. The failure of this measure was acknowledged by the Council of 787 which decreed that insincere converts should not be accepted; it was preferable to let them live according to their customs while remaining subject to the old disabilities. A fresh...
attempt was made by Basil I: Jews were summoned to disputations and if they were unable to demonstrate the truth of their religion, they were to be baptized. Remission of taxes and the grant of dignities were offered as rewards; even so, after the emperor’s death, most of the converts ‘returned like dogs to their own vomit’. The last recorded case of forced conversion was under Romanus I, but it only resulted in driving many Jews to the land of Khazaria north of the Black Sea. From then on such Jews as remained were left to live in relative peace; there was even a reverse migration of them from Egypt into the Empire in the late tenth and eleventh centuries…”

prayer, nor to church, but shall be Jews openly in accordance with their religion; and that neither shall their children be baptized, nor shall they buy or acquire a slave. But if any one of them should be converted as a matter of sincere faith, and confess with all his heart, triumphantly repudiating their customs and affairs, with a view to censure and correction of others, we decree that he shall be accepted and his children shall be baptized, and that the latter shall be persuaded to hold themselves aloof from Jewish peculiarities…” (V.M.)

Dagron writes: “In reply to Basil’s initiative came a pamphlet from the best theologian and canonist of the day, Gregory Asbestas, who did not content himself with defending the dogmas and the canons, but preached rebellion and threatened the imperial power with anathema” (op. cit., p. 207). (V.M.)

Mango, op. cit., pp 92-93.
St. John of Damascus (+749) says of the origins of Islam: "There is also the superstition of the Ishmaelites which to this day prevails and keeps people in error, being a forerunner of the Antichrist. They are descended from Ishmael, [who] was born to Abraham of Agar, and for this reason they are called both Agarenes and Ishmaelites. They are also called Saracens, which is derived from Sarras kenoï, or destitute of Sara, because of what Agar said to the angel: 'Sara hath sent me away destitute.' These used to be idolaters and worshiped the morning star and Aphrodite, whom in their own language they called Khabár, which means great. And so down to the time of Heraclius they were very great idolaters. From that time to the present a false prophet named Mohammed has appeared in their midst. This man, after having chanced upon the Old and New Testaments and likewise, it seems, having conversed with an Arian monk, devised his own heresy. Then, having insinuated himself into the good graces of the people by a show of seeming piety, he gave out that a certain book had been sent down to him from heaven. He had set down some ridiculous compositions in this book of his and he gave it to them as an object of veneration."  

By the time of his death in 632, Mohammed had established the dominion of his new religion of Islam over the whole of Arabia. He did not proclaim himself a king, still less a Persian-style “king of kings”, but a mere prophet – albeit the last and greatest of them. In fact, he was the prophet of one of the Arabian pagan demons, the moon-god Allah, whom he proclaimed to be the one true God. In spite of the clearly pagan origins of his faith, Mohammed claimed to abhor every kind of man-worship and idolatry.

The contrast between the beginnings of Christianity and Islam is enormous. Christianity was spread by 12 defenceless men not enjoying any political or military support and using no power except the power of preaching and prayer; it is truly the religion of peace. However, although Mohammed himself fought only relatively small-scale wars for the control of Arabia, his successors, the early caliphs, went with fire and sword throughout the Middle East and North Africa; and Islam in general has been the most violent religion in history.

---

604 Nektarios Lignos writes: “Allah, worshipped in pre-Islamic Arabia, is the god Muhammad’s Quraysh tribe worshipped, .... the moon god who was married to the sun goddess and they had three daughters – Al-Lat, Al-Uzza, and Manat. This is why we see the crescent moon symbol in conjunction with Islam.”
605 In Africa, the Muslims reached as far south as Makuria (modern-day Sudan). “During the summer of 642 AD, the Orthodox Christian Kingdom of Makuria defeated a Muslim invasion at the First Battle of Dongola. Ten years later the Orthodox Makurians would defeat a second and larger invasion force by the Caliphate. This resulted in a peace that lasted for nearly 700 years.” (Hieromonk Enoch, Facebook communication, July, 2016)
The despotic pagan civilizations place the rights of the collective over the rights of the individual, thereby giving the state a despotic power and discouraging freedom of thought. Western civilization, on the other hand, generally allows freedom of conscience and some autonomy to the religious sphere. Islam places religion above the state, and religious law above state law.

Roger Scruton has probed the difference between western and Islamic ideas in an illuminating way. The core religion of the West, Orthodox Christianity, grew up in the context of the Roman empire, and from the beginning gave the state a certain autonomy. The Christian was obliged to obey the state in all its laws that did not directly contradict the commandment of God: “Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22.21). For although his ultimate loyalty was to God, the Christian was also a citizen of the state. He did not rebel against the State, but gradually worked on its crude mores until it became Christian itself. Then Church and State worked in harmony with each other in a “symphony of powers”. The Church was universal, and had members in many different countries. The State, on the other hand, was territorial, being based on the feeling of a common destiny of all or most of the people on that territory, reinforced by commonalities of language, culture and religion.

Islam, however, did not encourage the growth of stable territorial nation-states or empires. There were tribes, and there was the universal religion, and very little of what we may call “political infrastructure” in between. There was shariah, the law of Allah, but very little in the way of state law, and certainly nothing comparable to the legal structures created by Constantine, Theodosius and Justinian. And so, while the Muslims considered “the People of the Book”, the Jews and Christians, to be higher than pagans and therefore entitled to some respect, there was no such thing as equality under the law for all citizens, regardless of their faith, a typically Roman conception.

The promises of the Muslims to “the People of the Book” have counted for little in practice. Thus in 638, writes Bishop Dionysius (Alferov), “after a year-long siege [of Jerusalem], [Patriarch Sophronius] handed over the city to Caliph Omar on definite conditions. The churches at the holy places (first of all Golgotha and the Holy Sepulchre) remained in the possession of the Jerusalem Patriarchate, half of whose churches were turned into mosques. The preaching of Christianity to Muslims was forbidden, and the Christian churches into which Caliph Omar entered were seized by the Muslims and converted later into mosques. Later, this agreement was often broken by the Muslims, and the majority of the churches were destroyed. Even the very church of the Resurrection over the Holy Sepulchre was destroyed more than once. And yet the agreement with Omar created a certain basis for the further

---

existence of the Jerusalem Patriarchate. It was recognized as a legal person, and the possessor of a series of churches and plots of land in Palestine. It was allowed to carry out Divine services, to look after the spiritual needs of Christians and even to judge the Christian population in civil cases. On the whole the Mohammedans did not interfere in the internal administration of the Jerusalem Patriarchate, although they often carried out external acts of violence and theft on the Christian population and clergy. The patriarch himself was elected by the Synod, although the Caliph confirmed him.

“The main feature of this agreement was the preservation of the earthly existence of the Jerusalem Church, the guarantee of its legal existence, possession of churches and property, the right to carry out open public services. The cost that had to be paid for this was not only complete loyalty to the Mohammedan authorities and prayers for the caliph and his army, but also – which is more important – the refusal to preach Christianity to the Muslims and their own children who had been seduced into Islam. But the Arabs by deceit and violence converted thousands of Christians to their faith – and the archpastors of the Church did not dare to protest against this, and did not dare openly to carry out anti-Islamic propaganda, which was punished by death at all times in Islamic countries.”

*  

What was the nature of Islamic power? Bernard Lewis writes that “the power wielded by the early caliphs was very far from the despotism of their predecessors and successors. It was limited by the political ethics of Islam and by the anti-authoritarian habits and traditions of ancient Arabia. A verse attributed to the pre-Islamic Arabic poet ‘Abid ibn al-Abras speaks of his tribe as ‘laqah’, a word which, according to the ancient commentators and lexicographers, denotes a tribe that has never submitted to a king. ‘Abid’s proud description of his people makes his meaning clear:

They refused to be servants of kings, and were never ruled by any.  
But when they were called on for help in war, they responded gladly.

“The ancient Arabs, like the ancient Israelites depicted in the books of Judges and Samuel, mistrusted kings and the institution of kingship. They were, indeed, familiar with the institution of monarchy in the surrounding countries, and some were even led to adopt it. There were kings in the states of southern Arabia; there were kings in the border principalities of the north; but all these were in different degrees marginal to Arabia. The sedentary kingdoms of the south used a different language, and were part of a different culture. The border principalities of the north, though authentically Arab, were deeply influenced by Persian and Byzantine imperial practice, and represent a somewhat alien element in the Arab world…

---

“The early Muslims were well aware of the nature of imperial monarchy as practised in their own day in Byzantium and in Persia, and believed that the state founded by the Prophet and governed after him by his successors the caliphs represented something new and different.”

However, the Ummayad Caliphs in Damascus, and then the Abbasid Caliphs in Baghdad, fell under strong Byzantine and then Persian influence…

Take the case of one of the best, and probably the most powerful, of the early caliphs, Muawiya, who in 661 became, as Simon Sebag Montefiore writes, “the Caliph of the vast empire that included Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Iraq, Persia and Arabia... He ruled through Christian bureaucrats and tolerated Christians and Jews alike, seeing himself as something between Arab sheikh, Islamic caliph and Roman emperor. He was tolerant and pragmatic, following an early, looser version of Islam, happy to worship at Christian and Jewish sites, and share their shrine.” However, despite his “tolerance”, he continued to conquer Christian lands such as Rhodes and Cyprus, and almost took Constantinople. Later he expanded the empire into eastern Persia, central Asia, the Sahara and today’s Libya and Algeria.

Living as he did in Syria, whose culture was Byzantine, Muawiya began to be influenced by Byzantine ideas and practices. “Byzantine influence on the emerging Islamic civilization, a tidal pull that now reached its high-water mark, went far beyond the caliph’s assumption of royal ways. It covered virtually all areas of life…” Thus he was criticised, writes Colin Wells, “for putting on royal airs. In defense he explained ‘that Damascus was full of Greeks, and that none would believe in his power if he did not behave and look like an emperor.’” And his public designation, before his death in 680, of his son Yazid as his successor constituted a break with Islamic tradition and the adoption of the principle of dynastic succession.

“Yazid failed to grasp the succession, facing rebellions in Arabia and Iraq. Muhammed’s grandson Hussein rebelled to avenge his father Ali’s death but was brutally murdered at Karbala in Iraq, his martyrdom creating the Shia, ‘the party’, a division that still splits Islam today. However, after Yazid’s early death, Muawiya’s old kinsman Marwan started to reconquer the empire, dying in 685 and leaving this troubled inheritance to his son Abd al-Malik, the second of the titanic Ummayad Caliphs. Abd al-Malik was less human and flexible but more ruthless and visionary than Muawiya. He first mercilessly crushed the rebellions, retaking Iraq and Arabia; in Jerusalem he built the Dome of the Rock…

611 Wells, *op. cit.*, p. 129.
612 Wells, *op. cit.*, p. 132.
“… Abd al-Malik saw himself as God’s shadow on earth: if Muawiya was Caesar of the Arabs, he was a mixture of St. Paul and Constantine the Great – he believed in the marriage of empire, state and god. As such it was Abd al-Malik who collated the book of Islam – the Koran – into its final form (the inscriptions in Jerusalem’s Dome of the Rock are the first examples of the final Koran text), who defined Islamic rituals and who unified Islam into a single religion recognizable today with the emphasis on Koran and Muhammad, expressed in the double shahada: “There is no God but God and Muhammad is the apostle of God’. Abd al-Malik and his son Caliph Walid expanded their empire to the borders of India and the coasts of Spain. Yet their dynasty remained part Islamic theocrats, part Roman emperors, often living in a distinctly unIslamic decadence. This led to the family’s downfall in the revolution of 750, when they were replaced by the Abbasid caliphs who ruled from Iraq and blackened the reputation of the Ummayads. To the Shia, they remained heretics and sinners because the Shia believed the real Caliphs were the twelve descendants from [Muhammed’s cousin] Ali and [his wife] Fatima: indeed the Shia of Iran still await the return of the Twelfth…”

It was Abu Muslim, a manumitted Persian slave, who raised the standard of revolt, defeated the Umayyads and created the Abbasid dynasty. A few years later, Al-Mansur (754-775), having moved the capital of the empire to Baghdad, came under the influence of Persia with its strong despotic tradition. And so Muslim “democratism” soon passed into a despotism no less fierce than the monarchies that Islam had destroyed. The caliphs of the ninth century, particularly Mamun (813-833), believed their authority to be unlimited. And the Fatimid ruler Al-Hakim even believed he was god…

Despotism in politics leads to the persecution of all non-State religion. Thus when Caliph Mutasim, Mamum’s brother and successor, conquered the Byzantine fortress town of Amorion, he executed forty-two prisoners who refused to renounce Christianity and embrace Islam. That Muslim statehood should become despotic was a natural consequence of the lack of a separation of Church and State, which gave an absolute, unchecked power to the Caliphs, embodying as they did both religious and political authority.

“The increasingly authoritarian character of government”, writes Lewis, “and the disappointment of successful revolutionaries is vividly expressed in a passage quoted by several classical authors. A certain Sudayf, a supporter of the Abbasids, is cited as complaining of the changes resulting from the fall of the Umayyads and the accession of the Abbasids to the caliphate: ‘By God, our booty, which was shared, has become a perquisite of the rich. Our leadership, which was consultative, has become arbitrary. Our succession, which was by the choice of the community, is now by inheritance.’”

615 Lewis, op. cit., pp. 143-144.
There were differences between the Sunnis and the Shias on the nature of Islamic power. One of the questions dividing them was whether the caliphate should be elective or hereditary. “The Shia maintained that the caliphate should be hereditary in the line of the Prophet, and therefore that all the caliphs, except only for the brief rule of Ali and of his son Hasan, were usurpers. The more generally accepted view of the Sunni Muslims was that the caliphate was elective, and any member of the Prophet’s tribe, Quraysh, was eligible.” 616 Al-Mansur in Spain made the caliphate there hereditary, but thirty years after his death the people abolished it altogether.

Another of the differences between the Sunnis and the Shiites was that the latter believed in a certain separation, even antagonism between the imamate and the State. “The myth of the Hidden Imam... symbolized the impossibility of implementing a truly religious policy in this world, since the caliphs had destroyed Ali’s line and driven the *ilm [the knowledge of what is right] from the earth. Henceforth the Shii ulama [learned men, guardians of the legal and religious traditions of Islam] became the representatives of the Hidden Imam, and used their own mystical and rational insights to apprehend his will. Twelver Shiis (who believe in the twelve imams) would take no further part in political life, since in the absence of the Hidden Imam, the true leader of the ummah [the Muslim community], no government could be legitimate.” 617

The Sunnis, on the other hand, tended to conflate political and religious power. Thus according to T.P. Miloslavskaya and G.V. Miloslavsky, they believed that the caliphate’s secular and spiritual powers (the sultanate and the imamate) were indivisible. 618 Again, Colin McEvedy writes that “the successors of Mohammed, the Caliphs, combined, as he had, the powers of Emperor and Pope”. 619 Again, Ninian Smart writes that Islam “demands institutions which cover the whole life of the community. There is nothing in Islam... corresponding to the Church. There is no place for a special institution within society devoted to the ends of the faith. For it is the whole of society which is devoted to the ends of the faith.” 620 And again, Bernard Lewis writes: “It is sometimes said that the caliph was head of State and Church, pope and emperor in one. This description in Western and Christian terms is misleading. Certainly there was no distinction between imperium and sacerdotium, as in the Christian empire, and no separate ecclesiastical institution, no Church, with its own head and hierarchy. The caliphate was

---

616 Lewis, op. cit., p. 139.
always defined as a religious office, and the caliph’s supreme purpose was to safeguard the heritage of the Prophet and to enforce the Holy Law. But the caliph had no pontifical or even priestly function... His task was neither to expound nor to interpret the faith, but to uphold and protect it – to create conditions in which his subjects could follow the good Muslim life in this world and prepare themselves for the world to come. And to do this, he had to maintain the God-given Holy Law within the frontiers of the Islamic state, and to defend and, where possible, extend those frontiers, until in the fullness of time the whole world was opened to the light of Islam...”

However, this indivisibility of powers resulted in a gradual undermining of the quasi-democratic ideal of early Islam by the reality of the caliphs’ almost unlimited power. On the one hand, the caliphs wanted to create an order in which, “as ideally conceived, there were to be no priests, no church, no kings and no nobles, no privileged orders or castes or estates of any kind, save only for the self-evident superiority of those who accept the true faith to those who willfully reject it – and of course such obvious natural and social realities as the superiority of man to woman and of master to slave.” But on the other hand, they were military leaders, and success in war required that they should be able to command no less obedience.

As François Guizot points out, the separation of spiritual and temporal power is a legacy of Christianity which the Islamic world abandoned: “This separation is the source of liberty of conscience; it is founded upon no other principle but that which is the foundation of the most perfect and extended freedom of conscience. The separation of temporal and spiritual power is based upon the idea that physical force has neither right nor influence over souls, over conviction, over truth. It flows from the distinction established between the world of thought and the world of action, between the world of internal and that of external facts. Thus this principle of liberty of conscience for which Europe has struggled so much, and suffered so much, this principle which prevailed so late, and often, in its progress, against the inclination of the clergy, was enunciated, under the name of the separation of temporal and spiritual power, in the very cradle of European civilisation; and it was the Christian Church which, from the necessity imposed by its situation of defending itself against barbarism, introduced and maintained it... It is in the combination of the spiritual and temporal powers, in the confusion of moral and material authority, that the tyranny which seems inherent in this [Muslim] civilisation originated.”

Another reason for the despotism inherent in Islam is the belief that all people are bound to obey Allah, and that those who do not obey – with the partial exceptions of the Jews and Christians - have no right either to life or freedom or property. The whole world is divided into the “House of Islam”

---

621 Lewis, op. cit., pp. 138-139.
622 Lewis, op. cit., p. 72.
(which means “obedience”), on the one hand, and the “House of War”, on the other. Therefore the natural state of relations between the two “Houses” is one of struggle, or “jihad”, interrupted only by temporary periods of peace permitted for purely tactical reasons. Thus the Koran says: “Kill the unbelievers wherever you find them” (Koran 2:191). “Make war on the infidels living in your neighbourhood” (Koran 9:123). “Fight and kill the unbelievers wherever you find them, take them captive, harass them, lie in wait and ambush them using every stratagem of war.” (Koran 9:5; cf. 8:60). “O believers, make war on the infidels who dwell around you. Let them find firmness in you” (Sura: 9; Ayat: 123). “Fight those who believe not... even if they be People of the Book [Jews and Christians] until they willingly agree to pay the tribute in recognition of their submissive state” (Sura: 9; Ayat: 29). “You will be called to fight a mighty nation; fight them until they embrace Islam” (Sura: 48; Ayat: 16).

The Islamic scholar Ibn Khaldun summed up the difference between the Christian view of war and the Islamic view: "In the Muslim community, jihad is a religious duty because of the universalism of the Muslim mission and the obligation to convert everybody to Islam either by persuasion or by force. The other religious groups did not have a universal mission, and the jihad was not a religious duty for them, save only for purposes of defense. But Islam is under obligation to gain power over other nations."

Thus, as L.A. Tikhomirov wrote: “In submitting without question to God, the Muslim becomes a spreader of the power of God on earth. Everyone is obliged to submit to Allah, whether they want to or not. If they do not submit, then they have no right to live. Therefore the pagans are subject either to conversion to Islam, or to extermination. Violent conversion to Islam, is nothing prejudicial, from the Muslim point of view, for people are obliged to obey God without question, not because they desire it, but because Allah demands this of them.”

Again, as Kenneth Craig writes, holy war, or jihad, “was believed to be the recovery by Islam of what by right belonged to it as the true and final religion but which had been alienated from it by the unbelief or perversity embodied in the minorities whose survival – but no more – it allowed....”

And if it allowed their existence, this was not because they had the “right” to survive, but because, for the time being, it was not advantageous to the Muslims – or beyond their power – to kill them...

* 

---

625 Tikhomirov, op. cit., p. 296.
A particular aspect of Islamic despotism that is of particular relevance today in view of the activities of ISIS is its practice of slavery and the kidnapping and raping of captive women. This is an extract from an interview conducted by Kevin Allen conducted with a former Muslim, “George”, who became an Orthodox Christian:

“‘But wasn’t it Muslim slave traders who actually went into Africa and then enslaved Africans for sale to the Europeans and so on?’

‘‘Yes, what is known as the Arab slave trade begun in the seventh century, with the rise of the Islamic Empire and lasted well into the twentieth century in some places such as Saudi Arabia, Somalia, and the Sudan, where there are still reports of slave trading to this present day. The Arab Muslim slave trade reached a vast area including the Sub-Saharan east and west Africa, which was the major supplier, then there was central Asia, the Mediterranean region, Eastern Europe including the lands of the Slavic peoples.

‘‘There are even reports of the slave trade extending as far north as British Isles and Iceland. America at the time of its infancy fell victim to the Muslim traders to what was known as “Barbary States,” which were independent Islamic states that run along the coast of north Africa.

‘‘One thing I’d like to note is that in Islamic law it is not permissible to enslave free-born Muslims. Therefore only those born into slavery and non-Muslim captives are allowed to be taken as slaves. This could account for the fact that the vast majority of the people enslaved were those who inhabited the regions that bordered the territory of the Islamic empires and in particular the Christians were targeted.’

‘‘But we see radical Islamic groups now like ISIS regularly kidnapping and enslaving and selling women and others. Is this practice of enslavement approved of in the Quran and the Hadith?’

‘‘Yes it is. It’s not a very popular notion but I mean it definitely has been sanctioned by the Quran and Hadith. Groups such as ISIS look at the atrocities that they are committing as a holy war and as such any non-Muslim women captured become their property, even if these women are married. In the Quran such captives are frequently referred to as “ma malakat aymanukum” or “what your right hand possesses.” One such reference can be found in the Quran in Surah or chapter 4 verse 24, and it says, “And also forbidden are all married women except those whom your right hand possess. This is the law’s ordinance to you.”

‘‘What I just quoted is a part of a longer section that speaks about the women who are lawful for a man to have sexual relations with. In connection to these verses the Hadith, the tradition from the life of Mohammed that gives the reason or circumstances in which this verse was revealed, it says,
“...The apostle of Allah sent a military expedition to Awtas on the occasion of the battle of Hunain. They met their enemy and fought with them. They defeated them and took them captives. Some of the companions of the apostle of Allah were reluctant to have intercourse with the female captives in the presence of their husbands who were unbelievers. So Allah, the Exalted, sent down the Quranic verse, ‘And also are forbidden, all married women except those whom your right hands possess. This is the law’s ordinance to you.’”

“...And then there is another example that can be found in the Quran, Surah 33 verse 50, where it is actually speaking through Mohammed himself personally. It says, “O Prophet, indeed we have made lawful to you your wives to whom you have given their due compensation and those whom your right hand possesses from what Allah has given of you of the captives ...”\(^\text{627}\)

* 

In 1180 a Synod in Constantinople anathematized “the god of Mohammed”, affirming that Allah, the god of Islam, is not the same as the Holy Trinity, the God of the Christians, the one True God.

44. THE DISSONANCE OF POWERS: (1) MONOTHELITISM

Justinian’s doctrine of the Symphony of Powers, the unity of kingship and priesthood in one State, echoed the Chalcedonian teaching on the unity of the Divine and human natures in the one Christ. It is therefore not surprising to find that under later emperors who renounced Chalcedonian Orthodoxy and embraced heresy (Monothelitism, which renounced the human will of Christ, and Iconoclasm, which rejected His full incarnation), the Symphony of Powers was also renounced – or rather, reinterpreted in such a way as to promote the prevailing heresy. The emperor, from being a focus of unity in the religious sphere, became an imposer of unity – and a false unity at that.

In the seventh century the Monothelite heretics wanted St. Maximus the Confessor to acknowledge the power of a Monothelite emperor over the Church, as if he were both king and priest like Melchizedek. But Maximus refused. When his interrogators asked: “What? Is not every Christian emperor a priest?” the saint replied: “No, for he has no access to the altar, and after the consecration of the bread does not elevate it with the words: ‘The holy things to the holy’. He does not baptize, he does not go on to the initiation with chrism, he does not ordain or place bishops, priests and deacons, he does not consecrate churches with oil, he does not wear the marks of the priestly dignity – the omophorion and the Gospel, as he wears those of the kingdom, the crown and the purple.” The interrogators objected: “And why does Scripture itself say that Melchizedech is ‘king and priest’ [Genesis 14.18; Hebrews 7.1]?” The saint replied: “There is only One Who is by nature King, the God of the universe, Who became for our salvation a hierarch by nature, of which Melchizedech is the unique type. If you say that there is another king and priest after the order of Melchizedech, then dare to say what comes next: ‘without father, without mother, without genealogy, of whose days there is no beginning and of whose life there is no end’ [Hebrews 7.3], and see the disastrous consequences that are entailed: such a person would be another God become man, working our salvation as a priest not in the order of Aaron, but in the order of Melchizedech. But what is the point of multiplying words? During the holy anaphora at the holy table, it is after the hierarchs and deacons and the whole order of the clergy that commemoration is made of the emperors at the same time as the laity, with the deacon saying: ‘and the deacons who have reposed in the faith, Constantine, Constans, etc.” Equally, mention is made of the living emperors after all the clergy’.628 And again he said: “To investigate and define dogmas of the Faith is the task not of the emperors, but of the ministers of the altar, because it is reserved to them both to anoint the emperor and to lay hands upon him, and to stand before the altar, to perform the Mystery of the Eucharist, and to perform all the other divine and most great Mysteries.”629

628 Dagron, op. cit., p. 181.
629 The Life of our Holy Father Maximus the Confessor, op. cit., p. 12.
St. Maximus fled to Rome, where, as we have seen, Pope St. Martin convened a Council in the Lateran in 649 that anathematized Monothelitism. In the second session of the Council a special libellus was composed by the eastern monks living in Rome (of whom there were many, including the future St. Theodore, Archbishop of Canterbury). Later, Saints Martin and Maximus were arrested by Byzantine officials, and transported in chains to Constantinople.

During St. Maximus’ interrogation, when Bishop Theodosius of Caesarea claimed that the Lateran Council had been invalid since it was not convened by the Emperor, St. Maximus replied: “If only those councils are confirmed which were summoned by royal decree, then there cannot be an Orthodox Faith. Recall the councils that were summoned by royal decree against the homoousion, proclaiming the blasphemous teaching that the Son of God is not of one essence with God the Father… The Orthodox Church recognizes as true and holy only those councils at which true and infallible dogmas were established.”

Both St. Maximus and St. Martin suffered for the faith from the tyrant emperor Constans II, dying after torture in distant exile. And it was St. Maximus who summed up the causes of tyranny as follows: “The greatest authors and instigators of evil are ignorance, self-love and tyranny. Each depends on the other two and is supported by them: from ignorance of God comes self-love, and from self-love comes tyranny over one’s own kind…”

Although Rome under Pope St. Martin clashed strongly with the Eastern Empire on religious matters, the West Romans remained loyal to the Empire in the political sphere. And from the time of Pope Vitalian Rome and Constantinople drew steadily closer as invasions by Arabs from the south and Lombards from the north demonstrated to the Romans how much they needed Byzantine protection. Religious differences were underplayed; Constans II received communion from the Pope on a visit to Rome; and Eastern influence in the Roman Patriarchate steadily increased. An example of this was Pope Vitalian’s sending, in 668, of a Greek, St. Theodore, to be archbishop of Canterbury, and another Greek, St. Hadrian, to kick-start English ecclesiastical education, together with a Roman chanter, John, to introduce Roman Byzantine chant into England. Indeed, from the time of Pope St. Agatho (+680), who was a Sicilian Greek, until Pope Zacharias (+752), all the Popes were either Greeks or Syrians; the Roman Church, now filled with eastern refugees from the Muslim invasions, became a thriving outpost of Byzantine faith and culture.

630 Andrew Ekonomou, Byzantine Rome and the Greek Popes, Eastern Influences on Rome and the Papacy from Gregory the Great to Zacharias, AD 590-752, E-book, pp. 176-177.
631 The Life of our Holy Father Maximus the Confessor, pp. 22-23.
632 St. Maximus, Various Texts on Theology, the Divine Economy, and Virtue and Vice: First Century.
633 Thus the iconography of Rome in this period is unquestionably Byzantine. See Daniel Esparza, “The ‘Sistine Chapel of the Middle Ages’ is back in business”, Aleteia, May 5, 2017.
Although the main opponents of Monothelitism - St. Sophronius of Jerusalem and St. Maximus the Confessor - were Greek, all the four Eastern and Greek-speaking patriarchates - Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem - fell into the heresy, leaving only the Western patriarchate of Rome to uphold the Orthodox faith. Thus in 649 a Local Council in Rome attended by St. Maximus anathematized the heresy and the four Monothelite patriarchs. And so, with the East sunk in heresy and overrun first by the Persians and then, more permanently, by the Muslims, the West became briefly the savior both of Orthodoxy and Romanity.

The pattern of Greek theological leadership fortified by Western hierarchical constancy continued until the final extirpation of the heresy. Thus at a Local Council in Hatfield in England in 679 led by St. Theodore “the Greek”, Archbishop of Canterbury, and at another Local Council in Rome under Pope St. Agatho in 680 at which the decision of the English Council was read out by St. Wilfred of York, Monothelitism was formally anathematized. This was confirmed for the Eastern Churches at the Sixth Ecumenical Council at Constantinople in 681, at which St. Agatho’s epistle played an important part.

Unfortunately, however, traces of the still dormant heresy of papism are evident in St. Agatho’s epistle, notably the assertion that the Orthodox teaching rests on the rock of the Roman Church, which “remains foreign to all error of every kind” and “by the grace of God has never departed from the way of truth”. Agatho passes over in silence the uncomfortable fact that in 638 Pope Honorius died in the Monothelite heresy. The Fathers of the Sixth Ecumenical Council, together with Agatho’s legates, anathematized Honorius as “a pillar of heresy”; and this anathematization, as Dvorkin points out, “was repeated at the Seventh Ecumenical Council and proclaimed by all the Popes at their enthronement right until the 11th century.”

Nevertheless, this period represents the high-water-mark of Western Orthodoxy. In the seventh and early eighth centuries the West entered probably its most truly Christian period, its golden age. It was united ecclesiastically under a patriarchate that was more consistently Orthodox than any of the eastern patriarchates, with a vigorous monasticism on the Benedictine model, and with national kingdoms in England, France, Italy and

---

634 Dvorkin, op. cit., p. 515. Excerpt from the Profession of Faith required upon the Consecration of a new Bishop of Old Rome, used from the late 7th century until sometime in the 11th century: "Also the authors of the new heretical dogmas: Sergius, Pyrrhus, Paul, and Peter of Constantinople, together with Honorius, who paid incentive to their depraved assertions." (Patrologia Latina, Volume 105, fol. 52, Liber Diurnus). Additionally, Pope St. Leo II (+683), in a letter to the Emperor states: "We anathematize also even Honorius, who did not purify this Apostolic Church with the Doctrine of the Apostolic Tradition, but by wicked betrayal sought to subvert the Immaculate [Faith]." (Letter to Emperor Constantine IV, (Patrologia Latina Volume 96, fol. 408)
up to a point) Spain consciously basing their administrations on the Byzantine model of Church-State relations. Spain fell to the Moors in 711, but in 732 the Muslims were defeated for the first time by the Frankish leader Charles Martel at the Battle of Poitiers. This victory saved Christianity in the West, and significantly relieved the pressure on the Emperors in the East. At the same time, the Byzantine Emperor Leo III’s repulsion of the Arabs outside Constantinople some fifteen years earlier could be said to have saved the Balkans and Central Europe from the Muslims.

These events demonstrated the interdependence – for the time being - of the two halves of Christendom... However, the linguistic and cultural, as well as the doctrinal, differences between East and West were beginning to widen. St. Gregory the Great (+604) was the first Pope who did not speak Greek, although he had served in Constantinople, and remained loyal to the Byzantine Empire. In the sixth century Latin was still regularly spoken in Byzantium635, but from the time of the Emperor Heraclius the East stopped using Latin even in its official documents, although it always retained the title of “Empire of the Romans”. The last emperor who came to Rome did so in 663 and the last pope to go to Constantinople went there in 710.636 Moreover, the patience of the West Romans was tested when the Council in Trullo (692) rejected certain Roman customs, such as fasting on Saturdays.

This did not mean, however, that the Romans began to submit to Constantinople in the religious sphere. After a short period of theological equivocation from the death of St. Martin to the Sixth Ecumenical Council in 681, the Roman Popes resumed their traditional role of critics of Eastern waywardness in the faith. This was particularly evident during the period of the iconoclast heresy.

For over a hundred years, from the 730s to 843, the iconoclast heresy ruled in Byzantium, with only one Orthodox interlude from 787 to 815. At the beginning of the first period, Emperor Leo III espoused the heresy and began to persecute the iconophiles, which sent streams of Orthodox refugees to the West, where Popes Gregory II and III anathematized it. In 733, Leo took the whole Roman diocese of East Illyricum, including the bishoprics of Sicily, South Italy, Crete, mainland Greece and the Balkans into the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The period of Western Christendom’s political and cultural orientation towards the Eastern Empire was coming to an end...

Leo’s quasi-Muslim understanding of the nature of icons went hand in hand with a resurrection of the pagan model of the imperator-pontifex maximus. In fact, insofar as the Muslim Caliph considered himself to be both a king and successor of the prophet, Leo could be said to have borrowed his theory of kingship (“I am both king and priest”), as well as his iconoclasm, from the Muslims. It was therefore eminently fitting that his main critic in both spheres should have been St. John of Damascus, a functionary at the Caliph’s court.

“What right have emperors to style themselves lawgivers in the Church?” asked St. John. “What does the holy apostle say? ‘And God has appointed in the Church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers and shepherds, for building up the body of Christ.’ (I Corinthians 12.28). He does not mention emperors... Political prosperity is the business of emperors; the condition of the Church is the concern of shepherds and teachers." 637

Again, the Seventh Council (convened in Nicaea in 787) decreed: “God gave the greatest gift to men: the Priesthood and the Imperial power; the first preserves and watches over the heavenly, while the second rules earthly things by means of just laws”. 638 The epistle also produced a concise and inspired definition of the Church-State relationship: “The priest is the sanctification and strengthening of the Imperial power, while the Imperial power is the strength and firmness of the priesthood”. 639

637 St. John of Damascus, Second Apology against those who attack the Divine Images, 12. It may be pointed out, however, that I Corinthians 12.28 includes among the spiritual gifts that of “governments” (κυβερνητησις), which could plausibly be interpreted as referring to political government. But of course, this gift was that of governing the State, not the Church...
638 Seventh Ecumenical Council, in Fomin and Fomina, op. cit., vol. I, p. 91. As Gervais Dumeige points out, the Seventh Ecumenical Council in Nicaea was freer than the Fifth Council, “which felt the strong pressure of the Emperor Justinian, and more even than Constantinople III [the Sixth Council] where the presence of Constantine IV risked imposing on the conciliar debates... At Nicaea the men of the Church dealt with the affairs of the Church, under the direction of a man of the Church who knew the desires and wishes of the sovereigns. It was on a path prepared in advance that the bishops were able to advance freely” (Nicée II, Paris: Editions de l’Orante, 1978, p. 195).
Some years later, in a document probably written early in the ninth century in Constantinople, but ascribed to the earlier Orthodox Pope Gregory II, Leo III’s claim to be both king and priest is fittingly refuted, while it is admitted that true kings are in some ways like priests: “You write: ‘I am Emperor and priest’. Yes, the Emperors who were before you proved this in word and deed: they build churches and cared for them; being zealous for the Orthodox faith, they together with the hierarchs investigated and defended the truth. Emperors such as: Constantine the Great, Theodosius the Great, Constantine [IV], the father of Justinian [II], who was at the Sixth Council. These Emperors reigned piously: they together with the hierarchs with one mind and soul convened councils, investigated the truth of the dogmas, built and adorned the holy churches. These were priests and Emperors! They proved it in word and deed. But you, since the time that you received power, have not begun to observe the decrees of the Fathers.”

The Pope also wrote: “You know, Emperor, that the dogmas of the Holy Church do not belong to the Emperor, but to the Hierarchs, who can safely dogmatize. That is why the Churches have been entrusted to the Hierarchs, and they do not enter into the affairs of the people’s administration. Understand and take note of this... The coming together of the Christ-loving Emperors and pious Hierarchs constitutes a single power, when affairs are governed with peace and love”. And again: “God has given power over all men to the Piety of the Emperors in order that those who strive for virtue may find strengthening in them, - so that the path to the heavens should be wider, - so that the earthly kingdom should serve the Heavenly Kingdom.”

One person in two distinct natures: one power in two distinct functions: the Chalcedonian basis of the symphonic doctrine of Church-State relations is clear. And just as the symphonic doctrine of Church-State relations reflects Chalcedonian Orthodoxy, so the absolutist theory of Church-State relations reflects both Monothelitism and Iconoclasm. Just as Monothelitism denies that there is more than one will in Christ, so the absolutist theory denies that there is more than one will in the government of the Christian commonwealth, declaring that the will of the emperor can take the place of the will of the hierarchs. And just as Iconoclasm destroys the proper relationship between the icon and its archetype, saying that icons are in fact idols, so absolutism destroys the proper relationship and distance between the earthly type and his Heavenly Archetype, so that the emperor becomes, in St. Maximus’ words, “another God incarnate” - that is, an idol.

For this, no less than for his iconoclasm, Leo III is called “forerunner of the Antichrist” in the service books, and was anathematized by the Church as “the tormentor and not Emperor Leo the Isaurian”.

---

641 Pope Gregory II, in Fomin and Fomina, op. cit., vol. I, p. 82.
642 Menaion, May 12, Service to St. Germanus of Constantinople, Vespers, “Lord, I have cried”; Fomin and Fomina, op. cit., vol. I, p. 88. In two hagiographical texts, Theosterict’s Life of Nicetas of Medicin and St. Methodius’ Life of Euthyymius of Sardis, Leo is given the apocalyptic
emperor, Constantine Copronymus, was also anathematized and denied the title of emperor: “the tyrant, and not Emperor”. Even more emphatic was the anathematization of Emperor Leo V the Armenian: “the evil first beast, the tormentor of the servants of Christ, and not Emperor Leo the Armenian”.  

And so, just as the Seventh Council brought to an end the period of Christological debates, so it brought to an end the debates over the role of the Emperor in the Church. The Emperor was an icon of Christ the King, but only so long as he remained Orthodox; he was in the Church, but not above it. For, as the Council declared: “The priest is the sanctification and strengthening of the Imperial power, while the Imperial power is the strength and firmness of the priesthood”.

However, while the role of the Emperor in the Church was now defined in iconographic terms as an icon of Christ the King, and as such necessarily Orthodox, in the second phase, or renewal of the iconoclast heresy that took place from 815 we see an interesting new argument put forward by the iconoclasts: that an emperor that is truly an icon of Christ must necessarily be victorious in battle, having the blessing of Christ on all his works. But the unfortunate fact was that the iconoclast emperors Leo III and Constantine V were on the whole victorious in battle, while the iconophile emperors Constantine VI and Irene, Michael I Rangave and Nicephorus, were defeated. So this spoke in favour, according to the iconoclasts, of the iconoclast emperors having the true faith...

Of course, this was not a theological argument. The success of an emperor or king in battle may or may not be a function of the Orthodoxy of his faith. Sometimes God allows an Orthodox king to be defeated for quite different reasons. Saul fell at Gilboa because of his impiety, and David triumphed because of his piety. But Josiah, though righteous, was defeated and killed in battle, as were St. Oswald of Northumbria and St. Lazar of Serbia. Again, in the life of the sixth-century St. Elesbaan, king of Ethiopia, we read that he “lived when Arabia was ruled by Dunaan, the oppressor of Christians. The pious Elesbaan was unable to look on indifferently as believers in Christ were being massacred. He declared war on Dunaan, but his military campaign was unsuccessful.

“Wishing to learn the reason for his defeat, Elesbaan, with prompting from above, turned to a certain hermit. He revealed to the emperor that he had proceeded unrighteously in deciding to take revenge against Dunaan, since the Lord had said, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay!’ (Hebrews 10:30).
“The hermit counselled St Elesbaan make a vow to devote his final days of life to God, to escape the wrath of God for his self-willed revenge, and then to defeat Dunaan. St Elesbaan made a vow to the Lord, and marching off with his army against the enemy, he defeated, captured and executed him. After the victory the saint resigned as emperor, secluded himself within a monastery and for fifteen years he dwelt in strict fasting and asceticism.”645

If we are to speak of Orthodox kings as icons of Christ the King, we must nevertheless remember that they were sinners who, with their peoples, were very often chastized by God… Moreover, God’s merciful chastisement of His sons explains why the history of the Orthodox peoples is so often a history of wars and suffering. Not that the other peoples did not suffer also. But God especially chastises those whom He loves, His sons by grace and adoption. For “if you endure chastening, God is dealing with you as with sons. For what son is there who his father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons…” (Hebrews 12.7-8).

645 Life of St. Elesbaan, Holy Cross Monastery.